Australians at War Film Archive

Clement Barrey (John, Bush) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:44 **Thanks John for joining us today and sharing your story with the Film Archive. I'd just like to start with a very brief history of John Barrey from where you were born to where you were posted. And where were you**

01:00 **born John?**

Thirteenth of December 1919.

Where abouts?

West Croydon, South Australia.

Okay, and when did you join the RAF [Royal Air Force]?

In November 1939, sorry, I was born 1919, did I say when I was born?

Yeah.

I joined the Royal Air Force in December, ah, November 1939, '38, sorry, '38.

01:30 **And where was that posting?**

I was, then I started training as an Observer.

Where abouts?

In Prestwick in Scotland.

Okay, and then from there where were you posted?

From there I went down to, we only did our initial training as civilians, we went down to Uxbridge in London to get our uniforms and do our square bashing. And then did our bombing and gunnery at Northcote in Lincolnshire,

02:00 in England. And on finish, and when I graduated I asked for a posting out the Middle East or in hot country and I got posted to Heliopolis in Cairo, 113 Squadron.

Okay and then how long were you with 113 Squadron?

Well initially I was only with them for about six months or

02:30 yeah...

That's fine John.

about six months then I, when the war started in England, the Middle East air forces was reinforced by squadrons from India and Singapore and Iraq. And I was attached to one of those of those squadrons to lead them into flying in the Middle East, for a short time. And then I've,

03:00 when I finished that I went down to join 45 Squadron, they went down to, in the Sudan to bomb the Italian installations in Massawa, in Eritrea. The Abyssinian War was on with Italians and they were, they didn't have a port to import all their

03:30 supplies in, so we went down and bombed the fuel tanks, knocked all the fuel out for them and then came back to the Middle East, back to Egypt again.

And so where did you go from Sudan?

Back to Cairo, at Helwan, and then I got put, got posted back to the squadron, 113 again after that.

And where did you go from the Middle East?

Middle East, I

04:00 stayed in the Middle East then until December 1941, sorry, December 1940 and the squadron was assigned to go to Greece.

And then from…?

And we were in Greece when the German invasion started and had to evacuate Greece along with everybody else. And we were told to go, if we got out of

04:30 Greece, to go to Palestine where the squadron was gonna reform, those who survived, and take it from there.

And once the squadron reformed, where did it…?

It reformed at Aqir in Palestine.

And where did the squadron go from there?

It went back on the desert again, Western Desert.

And…

And tracked to an airfield at Sidi Barrani, near Sidi Barrani in Egypt.

05:00 **And what operations did you undergo after, once you were based there?**

Well we were just normal, well initially when the war first, cause the war first started...

Let's not go into too much detail here, I'm just trying to get a chrono, a time line of where you went from, once you were in Palestine again, where did you go from there?

Went back to, on the desert, we took over aircraft from another squadron and we, the aircraft was split then from Fighter

05:30 Blenheims, half squadron Fighter Blenheims, to half squadron bomber Blenheims. And when the second offensive advance in Egypt to Libya we moved down to Giarabub Oasis, right down, right south, about a hundred mile, fifty miles inland from the coast and then I did operations from there and we were strafing

06:00 and attacking enemy airfields.

And where did you go once you left 113?

113 Squadron was withdrawn from operations in November 1941 back to Cairo for R&R [rest and recreation] and then to pick up new aircraft and carry on operations. But

06:30 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the whole complex was changed and the squadron was assigned to go to the Far East. And as I'd done two tours of operations and I was one of the oldest in the air crew there, they said, "You've gotta go and take a rest and go and be an instructor."

And where did you go to instruct?

I went down to Kenya down to 70th OTU [Officer Training Unit] in Kenya, in Nakuru. That was in

07:00 January 1942.

And then from Kenya you went to…?

I went, when I got recommended for pilot training after my incident in the Blenheim, I went down to Rhodesia for my pilot training and I graduated there in April 1943.

And once you'd graduated

07:30 **as a pilot, where were you posted?**

I was then posted back to England. I got the choice of whether I wanted to be an instructor or go back to England and I didn't want to be an instructor so I went back to England.

And what squadron were you with in England?

I went back to England and I went back to air crew reception to be then assigned a squadron. But I was lucky enough to be, of all the pilots that were with me on the interviews, only wanted me [(UNCLEAR)] fighters,

08:00 cause they wanted star fighters and it was a, there was a six month waiting list to get on to OTUs in England.

And who did you get, what squadron did you get posted to at the end of that waiting period?

I was sent on refresher flying in Scotland and during that refresher flying I applied for posting back to Middle East, cause there'd be a long wait to carry on with fighters. Cause I knew in Middle East all my friends were there, I knew where the right contacts to get on the squadrons.

08:30 **Sure.**

So I went back to the Middle East and then I did my conversion on to fighters, on to Kittyhawks at, in the Suez Canal in Egypt and then from there I posted to 450 Squadron in Italy and arrived there in about November 1944.

Great. And then what squadron did you, how long were you with 450 Squadron?

09:00 Until the war finished in May 1945. And when the squadron disbanded and came back to Australia, then I had to go back in the Royal Air Force and I joined another squadron on the same wing, 250 Squadron and stayed with them until January 1946.

Great. Well that pretty much covers your pre and your war and then we'll explore your post war later

09:30 **in the interview. If I may, I'd like to go back and start at your childhood, where you grew up in West Croydon, and what was the house like that you grew up in?**

My father built the house, he was a foreman carpenter and he worked for Teacle Joinery Company in West Croydon and they built

10:00 our house and he took a major part in that project.

And what was the house like, how many rooms were in the house?

It was a three bedroom, two bedroom house with a sleep-out, bungalow, yeah, quite comfortable.

And did you have any brothers or sisters?

I had one brother Ray, my brother older, three years older

10:30 than I was, Raymond Barrey.

And did you and Raymond share a room?

Yes, yes, yeah.

And what school did you go to?

Croydon Central. For all my education, one school.

And when you were at Croydon Central, what were your aspirations, what did you want to be?

Engine driver. Initially, then my

11:00 brother and I started to build aircraft, model aircraft and I got interested in flying.

And what was it about flying that interested you both so much?

I don't, just, I suppose children or boyhood ideas and thoughts.

Flying wasn't as popular then as it is now, so what kind of, how would you involve yourself with other enthusiasts?

11:30 Well we didn't actually we just, there was just my brother and I just together and we didn't associate with any... I had one friend that I spoke to and then he'd been over to England and he'd associated with the RAF for a while, that was the only thing outside from that.

And what magazines and publications were around that looked at aircraft?

12:00 Well in 1937 the Adelaide Advertiser newspaper ran a scholarship for a young, oh, for Commonwealth people to learn to fly and so my brother and I both applied for the scholarship to fly. Which meant we went to Parafield, to the aero club and had a thirty minute

12:30 instruction flight, and on the report from the instructor, who then took our, what we were going to do. And we got very good reports from the instructor, he said, "We think you should try and join the Royal Australian Air Force."

And how old were you then?

Eighteen.

But before that, going back to you growing up with your brother, what other things did you get up to apart from sharing your enthusiasm for flying?

13:00 Just normal boy, I suppose, things, I didn't do anything specially, I left school when I was fifteen, sixteen and I worked with People's Stores in Adelaide.

But before we talk about your first job at People Stores I'm just trying to get a picture of what West Croydon was like when you were growing up?

Well there were very few houses in the area at the

13:30 time and there was a lot of open spaces around and we, to get to Parafield we used to walk out there from West Croydon. And my father had a bike and sometimes he'd loan it to us but not very often, we used to walk from West Croydon out to Parafield.

And how long would that take?

Oh, all depends what we were doing on the way out, probably a couple of hours.

What time

14:00 **would you leave in the morning?**

Oh, I don't know about eight or nine o'clock in the morning. Stop for the, the liquorice root farm by these workshops on the way out to pick up some liquorice root on the ground and then just carry on walking out to Parafield. Spend the day in Parafield at the airport just with the aero club pushing aircraft around, hoping that we might get a ride.

And where there any other kids in the street or any other children that you'd play with in

14:30 **your area?**

Yes there was one other person who, another lad lived about three doors down, he was interested in flying as well and he joined the Royal Australian Air Force actually but was killed in Singapore there.

So did he come walking to Parafield with you?

Yeah, a couple of times yes, yeah.

And what, I mean this was during the Depression this time, wasn't it?

No, no, just after the Depression

15:00 actually. I left school early because when the Depression on my father, like many others, didn't have any employment and my brother was three years older than me and he was much more intelligent than I was at school, he got five grades, in fact he was Dux of the school for two years, the last two years at school.

Well it sounds like the Depression might have been quite hard on your family then if...?

It was very hard, yes,

15:30 yeah, my father never worked for about five years but he and we had to, we didn't have a lot of money and we just lived as best we could I think.

Well how did your father supplement the income into the household then?

He got, I think he got some allowances from the Government and also he did work for the council, used to get some money.

16:00 But things were pretty difficult in those days.

What kind of work did he do for the council?

He would clear drains and help road work.

And what was your mother doing during this time?

My mother was, luckily she was a very good dress maker and she made dresses and she was, also helped in the income of the family. Without that income I think we would have been in very, in

16:30 very bad shape.

And how did she make the meals stretch in, during that time?

Oh I don't know, we seemed to survive all right. We had, we had to have a, we didn't have any finances for a gas stove or electric light, we just bought a, had an old wood stove to cook on and oil lamps in the house.

And what kind of meals was she cooking for you on the stove?

Very good, very good yes, yeah. We

17:00 seemed to survive all right.

Do you remember what you actually ate during then?

Well one of our favourite things was Sour-sops [fruit of tropical tree, Anona muricata]. Not too favourite but I also went and sold newspapers on West Croydon Station when I was at school to try and get some money. I used to go to, get up at five o'clock in the morning, go over and pick up the papers and go and sell them at West Croydon Station until about

17:30 quarter to nine and then rush home and then go to school.

And do you remember how much you got paid for doing that job?

Well all depends how many papers I sold, I got, I think it was about, the maximum I got was about 11 shillings a week.

So it would have been interesting to see the different kind of people going through the station at that hour of the morning?

Very good, yes, very good.

What kind of, what signs were you seeing around you that there was a Depression on?

Well there was just no, nobody, employment

18:00 for anybody and there was just, it was, well the atmosphere was the same and only people that really had regular work was Government employees.

And what was the atmosphere?

Oh fairly happy I think, you just made the best you could do at the time.

18:30 Yes, it was, it wasn't all, in those days children made their own enjoyment and you just played games and just amongst yourselves, just made your own, kept yourself busy.

Did you notice changes with the other kids at school that, you know showing that there was a Depression?

19:00 No, I think everybody was the same. At Croydon School there was not a, wasn't a lot of rich people in the area, we're all the same class I think, and all working people that didn't, you know, all the families never had any employment.

And just back in the home...?

My father's two brothers were both Government employees and they never suffered at all during the Depression, they just went to work every day

19:30 and his oldest brother was the Mayor of Penning Grainsford for about ten years. But they were...

And were they able to help your family during the Depression?

No, I don't think so, I don't think, Dad was too proud I think. Dad being, Dad was the only skilled man to work, they were all, his brothers were all college

20:00 people and academic people and he was a tradesman. And during the Depression he made clothes horses and ladders and that just to sort of get some income. Had a little workshop at the back of the house and all the tools, in fact he could make anything that was in the wood line.

And how would you describe your father?

20:30 Fairly strict, I didn't get on too well with him, my brother I think was more... well my father was very disappointed in what we did cause I'm sure he would have liked us to carry on with some, with a trade, that's why we stayed at Croydon Central. He said, "You're, I want you to learning something to use your hands, rather than go to academics in colleges."

21:00 And we, cause Croydon Central had a wood working section and also a sheet metal section so we learned those two trades. And I think my father really wanted us to carry on with the wood work you know, he's a carpenter because he had a nice workshop to work in. And when I first asked him about going away he was very, very, didn't like it at all, in fact he refused to give

21:30 me any help at all. And my brother he was much, he was very good at woodwork and he did some very good work and he stayed.

And your mother who was making her lovely dresses...

Dresses yeah.

at this time, how would you describe her?

Very good person, very, well I suppose, very good, a good mother.

22:00 I got on well with, better with mother than I did with my father. Maybe a bit of a rebel. But no I was

much, I got with my mother much better than my father. And she was the one that actually in the end, because I was under age when I wanted to leave home, I had to have parents' consent. My father refused to sign my papers and, to leave home and my mother eventually realised that

22:30 I was so keen to go that she signed for me, and without her signature I couldn't have started my whole career.

And why were you and your mother so close?

I don't know, I think it just, perhaps I was the youngest, it was just the two of us, I don't know, just got on better with her. No, I can't remember no.

How would you describe her if I was to have an

23:00 **image of your mother?**

Oh a very, very quiet lady and didn't say very much but with her skills at dress making she, you know, difficult to explain. Wasn't a tall person, my father's very short and my mother was bigger than he was. And I think

23:30 yes, I don't know whether she took all sort of household duties, I can't, yes, I just was much closer to my mother than I was to my father.

And what social activities did you do with the family?

Nothing at all real, my father was a Freemason, and that's all I think, all we did really and usual friends.

24:00 They had a men's club, used to go up to the Murray River every Easter for, camping every Easter, that was it.

And what was the Murray like during those times?

I never went, I went once and I, just to see where they went, a place called Mypolonga, used to go to every Easter, for Easter and I went up one

24:30 Easter with them to their camp just to see what it was like.

And what was it like?

Very good, they were just camping on the side of the river for about four, five days, fishing and general socialising, it was very good.

And was there a wireless in your home?

25:00 Yeah we had one wireless, yes, yeah.

And what programs did you listen to?

Well whatever's going. Well first we had were crystal sets, my brother made a crystal set at school and we had a crystal set first, and then I don't know how we got a radio but we got a small table radio.

And what did you listen to on the radio?

Whatever was going. There

25:30 was, I think there was only one commercial station 5KA I think was the only one, then 5CL was the... my mother's wife married Dick Coombe and he was a person that started the first, I think, he was the first private radio station in South Australia. He formed a boys' club, 5VK

26:00 I think it was, was his call sign, and he formed this boys' club in South Australia and he visited, he was a First World War veteran , bed ridden and used to broadcast from his bed at home at Mile End.

And what was the boys' club?

It was just a boys' club where we did, had, organised meetings

26:30 every now and again, there was quite a number of them at the time.

Were you a member of the boys' club?

Yes, yes, yeah.

And what did you do at the meetings?

Oh just played games and nothing too particular, it was just to get together a lot of boys. But...

What kind of games did you play?

Oh rounders and cricket and

27:00 the usual games I suppose that you'd play when you're kids, bit of football in the winter time.

And what sports did you play?

I was a very good tennis player, that was my favourite. I played tennis for the air force in England and also baseball, that was my two favourite games.

27:30 **And just going back to your time at, that you would spend at Parafield, what would you get up to down there?**

We would just sit around outside the hangars and if the aircraft were being pushed around, and we just volunteer to help push the aircraft out and line... and wasn't very many aircraft in those days in 1937-38, just the flying club and a few other private

28:00 aircraft. There was a couple of pilot aircraft used to do flights and we, I think we got five shillings for a ten minute ride in the, and I think we did a couple of those rides once. But that's all we did, just sat round and just waited, just watched the aircraft flying, the flying club flying and just talking to the pilots.

That must have been very exciting being able to talk to

28:30 **the pilots, what were they like?**

All just youngish chaps, well just nice people to talk to but they weren't, most of them weren't qualified to carry passengers, they just doing solo flying. There's one aircraft we flew in was by a chap called Roy Groppler, he had a German Klemm Eagle and he had,

29:00 qualified to carry passengers in it, and we used to fly with him on our trips.

And what was it like the first time you went up?

Very good, very exciting and it was so short, it was just, you get up, get airborne and experience the flying.

Oh, that would have been a very exciting day, how did that come about?

29:30 We just went, asked him to come for a ride, he offered, you know, the aircraft was just sitting there, just anybody wanted a ride he just take you up for ten minutes and pay five shillings for the ten minute ride.

And where did you get your five shillings from?

From my newspapers, from my selling newspapers.

Where did you fly to?

Just flew round Parafield.

30:00 Didn't fly anywhere, I think just did a few circuits around Parafield and then back on the ground again. But I'd learned to, I had read books about navigation and I could read a compass and that was the main thing in flying that when we did our scholarship flying, we were just asked to keep the aircraft steady, flight level

30:30 and turn on to headings of the compass and dive and climb and general handle you know, handle the aircraft smoothly.

And what can you remember seeing from being up there at that time?

Just, I don't know, just looking round at the area. In those days Parafield was on its own, it was, there was not very many houses around Parafield,

31:00 it was just open paddocks.

And what did you go up in?

In a Clem Eagle, it was a German low wing mono plane which he'd flown out from England actually and using it for joy rides. But in those days Parafield, it was really out in the open, there was no houses around it hardly at all and all those, all the

31:30 area like Parahills now, it was all just a great mass of Salvation Jane [Patterson's Curse – noxious weed] and Sour-sops, it was open fields.

That would have made for some very beautiful colours?

It was, it was a very good tourist attraction in those days, people going up the Main North Road all the way from Gepps Cross to Salisbury was just, was all just great masses of

32:00 Sour-sops mixed in with Salvation Jane, the two contrasting colours made very good scenery.

And what was that like from up in the air?

Very good, I can't remember too much, I was so interested in trying to fly the aeroplane or just sitting and watching.

So where were you seated in the aircraft?

Well it, when I did the joy rides, there were two seats in front of the pilot, the pilot sat at the rear of the aircraft

32:30 and the two passengers were sitting in the front seat which was modified to take two people in.

And what controls did you have, what was the panel like in front of you?

We couldn't fly it, we just sat in there as passengers. Only when I did the scholarship flying with the air force, with the Adelaide Advertiser scholarship, that's when we had a dual control Tiger Moth, or Gypsy Moth's they were then, and we just flew normal

33:00 instrument panel, altimeter, SP indicator, altitude indicator and a compass.

Let's talk about the flying competition that you were in, what did the advertisement in The Advertiser say?

It was advertised for young boys that had, you know, had interest in flying and if you were good enough at flying when you did your trip

33:30 with the instructor at Parafield, then if you got the top marks you got free instruction to start your pilot's training.

And what were the marks that you got?

I can't remember now but was 'highly recommended' to try and join the Royal Australian Air Force.

So what was, what did the competition consist of?

Just take off,

34:00 took over controls, I forget what height now but we just flew the aircraft on headings and turning and diving and climbing and then the, reading a compass, turning on to headings, the points of the compass.

And what was it like flying?

Oh very good, very good. Yes, it was, yeah I enjoyed every minute of it, it went to quickly.

How long were you up in the air

34:30 **for?**

Thirty minutes.

And how did your brother go during this competition?

He did very well as well, he got very good recommendation and so we were both recommended to go and join the Royal Australian Air Force.

And how did you prepare for the competition?

Just hoped we could do all right, nothing, just went out there thinking about, I don't know, the preparation, we just get in the aircraft and go and fly.

35:00 Making the model aeroplanes you know, was a great help in knowing, you know, what the various controls were and so on, but we didn't have any sort of pre-instruction at all, just got in the aircraft and flew.

And what were the other boys in the competition like?

I can't remember, I can't remember no.

35:30 It was a number of them went in for it. I was interested I think in myself and how I made out and I was very pleased I got the recommendation to go, which I then applied to join the Royal Australian Air Force. But they, it was only twenty-five pilots a year required in those days and there was, I think about five hundred applications for those positions. And I sat the exam, the entrance exam but

36:00 I couldn't have done too well in that because I didn't, I wasn't accepted.

Well we'll talk more about that in a moment. You mentioned earlier about your first job at the People's Store, what was at a, what is a People's Store?

Well it was a, it was one of the, it was in Gouger Street in Adelaide and it was a big departmental store for just general

36:30 merchandise, and I was employed initially as a message boy and then in a packing department and then I graduated into working inside the store itself as a, serving in the shop.

And what responsibilities does a message boy have?

Oh just taking parcels, delivering parcels mainly and picking up goods from various parts of Adelaide.

And what were the goods

37:00 **that were sold at the People's Store?**

Everything, all merchandise, all clothing and millinery and, like a general store, a miniature John Martins or miniature Myers, store like that.

Where abouts on Gouger Street was that?

Just right next door to the Central Market and it's now a part of China Town, the Chinese eating section.

37:30 **And what were the customers like at the People's Store?**

Well they were all people really from that part of town, it was a, it was a quite different sort of, I think, type of customer we had down in Rundle Street or in the centre of town. They only, a lot of foreigners, a lot of Italians in that part of town. The People's Stores main business was country, they were very big country orders

38:00 system and they sold a lot of goods by catalogue.

And how did you get to work from West Croydon?

I rode a bike, or train initially. I went up to Adelaide and then walked to Gouger Street from there, but when I got enough money I bought a bicycle and ride a bike up to Adelaide.

38:30 **And how long did that take you every day?**

Oh half an hour, forty minutes.

So what were the hours that you worked?

We started at eight o'clock in the morning and finished at normal time, six o'clock at night. The first thing we did in the morning was sweep the shop out, all the message boys you had to sweep , clean the floors of the store and then carry on with your job and then knock off when the shop

39:00 closed at six o'clock at night. And on Friday night's it was late, nine o'clock shopping, because it was right next door to the market and on Saturday's it was eight o'clock til one o'clock.

And what was your boss like at the People's Store?

Very good, very good firm to work for.

Who was your boss at the People's Store?

39:30 Well the Williams family owned the store and I think that was, he, although we didn't see much of him. There was another chap, the Floor Manager's a man called Carruthers and actually I got on well with his daughter.

And what was her name?

Gee whiz, got me,

40:00 I can't remember now.

Was that your first girlfriend?

Yes, yes, yeah.

Well I'm intrigued to know what, how you dated at that time?

I don't know, it was pretty, because he was the Manager and I was just a message boy, it was a bit difficult. But eventually, just before I left home, I managed to go out to, invited out to their house for one, for a meal. But

40:30 no it was very, very off the cuff.

So where did you go for the meal, to their family home?

St Peters, they lived at St Peters.

And what was St Peters like compared to West Croydon?

Well it was up market, it was on the sort of, as much as the upper echelon of the population in there.

And do you remember what you had for dinner?

Oh very nice meal, Sunday meal, usual sort of roast beef and,

41:00 very nice meal. But my brother, he had a motor bike and I got to ride that, and I used to take her out for a ride on the motor bike.

Okay, we just gotta swap tapes.

Okay.

You can't remember your first girlfriend's name John?

Tape 2

00:36 **John, we were just talking about your first girlfriend, can you remember her name?**

Norma.

And you also mentioned that you used to go out on bike rides with Norma, where did you go?

Down the beach mainly, just round the neighbourhood and then down the beach.

Which beach?

Down at Grange was the nearest beach to home and occasionally Henley beach.

01:00 And also Semaphore sometimes, they were the three beaches where we used to go to.

And what did you do once you got down to the beach?

Just swim, just swim, yeah, just lay on the beach, nothing too venturous. Once again in those days, the beaches were pretty, was not very much down there

01:30 just a few houses and but no, just went for a swim that's all. But it was great just to go, it was a motorbike and Ray was, he was keen on motor bikes, and it was nice to get out and ride it. I can't even remember whether I had a license or not but I used to just ride it.

And what was the furthest away you went on your bike rides?

That was the furthest away, was just locally and also down the beach,

02:00 didn't go any long distances.

And did you take any family trips at this time?

The normal family holiday was, we had a special one at Christmas time, went for a day's run down to Victor Harbour by train from Adelaide and that was the annual picnic.

And how long did the train take to get down to Victor Harbour?

Oh, I forget now, a couple of,

02:30 two hours, three hours, spend the day and come back again in the evening.

And what did you do down at Victor Harbour there?

Just what everyone did, went over on to the islands where the horse tram, and that was it, that was it, yeah.

And did you climb the bluff?

No, no, no. Didn't get down to the bluff, we just went out to the island.

And what was Granite Island

03:00 **like then?**

Oh just, I suppose like any sort of holiday place, a lot of people around in the summer time. The tram ride was the real attraction, on the tram, we went out by tram and walked back. That was THE day of the year. We, there was not,

03:30 finances were very, very tight in those days and you didn't look for holidays because you couldn't afford them, in our family anyway.

And you and your brother were sharing a very strong enthusiasm for flying at this point, what publications did you read?

Flight Magazine, and there were two magazines from England called Flight and Aeroplane. And that's where

04:00 I saw the advertisement for Commonwealth lads who had the education and the medical qualifications to go to England to fly with the Royal Air Force.

And what standard of education were they looking for?

Normal, I had Central School certificate and that was equivalent to what was required in England.

04:30 I had to sit another exam in England before I, when I applied to join the Royal Air Force and I passed that all right.

So the Central School certificate, what…?

Grade seven, grade seven certificate and then senior school, two years in senior school on top of that. But I had all my qualifications I took with me when I went to England.

What were your favourite subjects at school?

History, history and

05:00 wood work, sheet metal work and drawing. History and geography and drawing, woodwork and sheet metal work.

You also mentioned earlier that you were making model aeroplanes, what planes were you making?

I made a Leopard Moth

05:30 actually, a Leopard Moth, and my brother made a GB Racer. And they were both flying models but only had elastic for propulsion, so you wound the prop up and you just launched the aircraft in the air and hope it didn't crash when it landed.

And what did you make them out of?

Balsa wood.

Did you use your dad's workshop?

Yes, yes.

What

06:00 **tools were you using?**

Well you only needed a knife really because balsa wood's being very soft you could just cut it with a razor blade really and string and that was all come with the kits that, you bought a kit and you assembled it.

And what was in the kit?

Just the wood and the wheels and propeller and rubber bands. And my aircraft I made unfortunately had a

06:30 tragic end cause my mother, when she was dusting the house, one of Dad's, Dad made all the furniture in the house when he built the house. He even built all the tables and chairs and everything in the house and one of the chairs he had was a collapsible back on it. Put this aircraft on the seat of the chair but she knocked the back down and it fell flat on top of the aircraft and that was the end of that. Didn't

07:00 fly any more after that.

What happened to the plane?

Oh it was just match wood, just flattened it yeah. Yeah she was very unhappy about it. A lot of work just went up just like that.

And what did you make next?

That's was the only one I made I think, it took so long to make it and I didn't have enough money to buy any more,

07:30 any more money for the kit cause it had, you know, all the money I had was from my selling my newspapers on West Croydon station.

And what models did your brother make?

I think he made another, made a Leopard Moth and he had also this GB Racer which was quite a complicated aeroplane to build.

Can you describe what they looked like?

Well the Leopard Moth was a single,

08:00 single wing with a, mono plane, one engine, I think it carried four passengers, or the pilot and three passengers. And my brother's aircraft, they were out, racing planes, American speed planes, just single pilot, one engine. Looked very sporty.

So out of all the planes that you were seeing in the

08:30 **magazines and making as models, what was your favourite?**

I can't, I don't think there was any special one at all, it was just the military aeroplanes. Aircraft Magazine was a, specialised in military type of aircraft and it was just flying, looking at those.

And did you have any clubs that you belonged to?

Only the boy's club, that was the

09:00 only club we belonged to, yeah.

And were there other enthusiasts in the boy's club?

Yeah, I think there was quite a few thousand actually in the club, it was quite a going concern. I can't think of the number but it was quite large.

But were there any other

09:30 **boys who were into aircraft's like you and your brother?**

I don't think so, no, I think we were rather different, we were thinking differently I think in those days, I don't know why but we just talked aeroplanes most of the time and hoped one day that we might be able to fly.

Well after you left the People's Store, what job did you take next?

10:00 Well when I was at People's Store I was then I, at the same time was, you know, applying for the scholarship and flying and I was bent on leaving Australia and going to join the Royal Air Force if I could, when I was refused in the RAAF. But the trouble was, to get to England. And I did a voyage on

10:30 on the Yandra, a small steamer, a thousand ton steamer which used to run out from Adelaide up to west coast of South Australia up to Thevenard and, on the west coast. And did a trip with that and then on that one trip I did, on the way back we called in at Port Victoria, the last port before we came back to Adelaide. That's where I saw the windjammers [fast schooner-rigged sailing ships], the barques loading wheat there and I,

11:00 suddenly thought, "Ah, is that a chance I get to be on one of those", cause I didn't have money to, cause Dad wouldn't give me any money to help and I had to make my own way. And I thought well if I get a ride on, if I get a passage on or work my passage on a sailing ship to go to England. That started me off on thinking about how I was gonna get to England, cause I didn't have enough money to get to pay for normal passenger ship berth.

11:30 **So did you, so when you saw the windjammer, what were you thinking?**

Oh, to go over to England on the windjammer.

And was there anyone that you knew who was working with it?

Yeah, my cousin had just gone to England in 1937 and he'd come back from that trip

12:00 to England on the windjammer and he arrived back in early 1938. So I thought well if I can go and talk to him and talk about what the conditions were like and make my mind up whether I could do it or not.

And what did he tell you about the windjammers?

Well he told me quite a lot, particularly in type of equipment to take and the clothing to take on board and what conditions were like and that sealed it.

12:30 **Well what clothing did you have to take on board?**

Well mainly was the sea, the clothing that you used when you're working. Things like who you see in papers advertised seamen wearing sou' westers and things like that, it's useless on a sailing ship. More practical things, keeping water, keeping dry is one of the big problems on those things. And he just told me the best thing to

13:00 take was a motor cycle helmet, something that was fitted tightly over your head and the strap under your chin so it wouldn't blow off when you're up working in the rigging. And to keep the water from getting up into your water proof clothing, use a, get an old motor cycle tube, ah, car tube and cut it into strips, about two inches wide and use that as an elastic

13:30 band to put on your, on the outside of your overalls, your oil skins to keep the water from getting up into your inside. That was the big problem trying to keep dry.

So how did you apply for a job on a windjammer?

I went up to Crosby Manns who were the agents for handling all the sailing ships in South Australia, Crosby Manns Shipping Company and they were the agents

14:00 for handling the cargoes and general crews of ships when they came in to Australia for loading. Just put my name down for a ship.

And how long did it take?

I think it was about three weeks I think I had my name down, I was notified there was a berth on a sailing ship for me. It was a mad rush to

14:30 get, to get ready.

And what did you have…?

The biggest problem was getting my, getting clearance, cause as I told you before my father wouldn't sign my papers, cause I was underage, he wouldn't sign my papers to get on board the ship.

Yeah, I was about to ask what your father's opinion was?

He just refused to do it, he said, "No, you're not going." He knew then that I would have to come to him when I first approached him about going to England and he knew damn well that

15:00 being underage I'd have to have parents' consent. And I'm sure he knew then that as far as he was concerned, he wasn't gonna sign my papers.

And why did your mum sign the papers?

I think she could see I was just hell bent on going, just to make life better for me, which I'm eternally grateful for.

And what was your job on, what was the name of the ship that you were on?

15:30 The Lawhill [a Finnish four-masted barque, shipping wheat], it's a Finnish, they were nearly all owned by Finnish person and he ran the sailing ships between Australia and England and carrying grain most of the time carrying grain back from South Australia to England. Owned by Erickson Line, the Finnish shipping line.

16:00 **And were there many Finnish crew on board?**

Yeah we had, when we sailed we had twenty-six or, complete, that was a captain and the officers, and twenty actually working members of the crew, two watches, ten per watch. And we had three mates, the captain and a steward and a cook and six pigs, for fresh meat.

16:30 **How were the pigs killed on the ship?**

Oh shoot, shot them, yeah. Kill one, about one a month, one a month in, well we had six pigs and we killed the last one just before we hit England.

And how long did the meat last from the pig?

A very, very short time because we had no

17:00 refrigerators on board, we just ate pork every day, three meals a day until it was all, didn't last probably a couple of days. The big thing about that was it was fresh meat, you know, something fresh and you just crave for anything like fresh vegetables or… Everything was dehydrated or dried and anything fresh like the pigs were, it was good, it just,

17:30 pork was very, very good. And the delicacy was the pig's blood pancakes, when the pig was shot we cut its throat and put a bucket under his throat then pumped his back legs til he make the blood come out before it congealed. Then rush down to the cook house, down to the galley and mix, and put flour with it and mix it into a big, like a loaf of bread and put it on the stove until

18:00 it cooked then cut in slices and put treacle on it and that was a delicacy, it was something fresh. Cause all the food on board was pretty rough.

And so was all of the pig cooked up?

Everything, nothing was wasted yeah, yeah. Yes we didn't have much to throw over the side.

What other meals did you make from the pig?

Just pork, just had pork,

18:30 fried, put it into bacon some part of it, and then just ordinary cooked.

Did you make sausages from the intestines?

No, had no way of doing that. The sailing ships were very, there was no electricity on board, there was no communications at all to the outside world. Once the ship sailed, then that was it, you had to rely on

19:00 other ships to report you to Lloyds, which in our case was a hundred and five days at sea before we saw the first ship.

And what was that like?

It was great excitement because it was a passenger liner that was, we were off the coast of South America going up near Brazil. And the, it came off it's course,

19:30 it was on its way, we were on the shipping lane between the Mediterranean and South America and it was just going across somewhere in South America and just came and circled the ship. And they took a lot of focus I suppose off us and we asked them to report us to Lloyds in London so that we, somebody knew we were still afloat.

So where did you stop in South America?

We didn't see land at all the whole way from South Australia to England. A hundred and thirty days.

20:00 **Well what was, well firstly what was your job on board the ship?**

I just work in the crew, crew member just doing all the work, the big trouble, one of the big problems was language, didn't speak English, they all spoke a Norwegian or we call a bastard language between, it was a mixture of Norwegian, Swedish and Danish. But all the orders were given in foreign language as far as I was concerned and I had to learn all the ropes and all the

20:30 running of the ship in a foreign language, very quickly.

Can you remember any of the language that you used then?

Yeah, mainly swear words. Yeah.

What were they?

Forra-bunda-bay

What's that?

What the hell...

21:00 No, no, the swear words generally came out in English if you did something wrong, all the officers knew, well they spoke English but they give the orders, cause that's, the crew spoke their language it was always in a foreign language, but when I was involved and I did something wrong, I got all the usual swear words.

What were your crew mates like?

Very good, my crew members were very good.

21:30 And I think that's what gave me a good start in life that I learn, I had to learn to live and work with people in a confined space and had to be, work as a team all the time. Because on those ships you gotta work as a team cause it's, all the work's involved with other people and with foreign people as well and it was a great experience, and I wish it could carry on now for some of the

22:00 young people around these days, it would be good

And what was the weather like on the journey?

Sometimes very, very bad and sometimes very good.

Well what was very good?

In the tropics in the warm weather. But there only, from Adelaide to, Adelaide to Cape Horn was very, very bad, very rough, there was,

22:30 I think it was fifty days before we got to Cape Horn and I think for 45 of those days I was wet. There'd just, when you sail on those ships you, they uncouple the anchors from the anchor chain and the anchors were stowed up on deck, so that you couldn't stop. Once you started, you couldn't stop and the anchor ports were the same, went out into the

23:00 water, that was all plugged up with a big wooden plug to stop the water from rushing in there when you know, when you're in bad weather. And so that was it, that's why, one of the reasons why they kept so far out away from land because they weren't very manoeuvrable and there'd be the big wooden plug in the anchor port just reduce the amount of

23:30 water coming on deck. There was enough water come other ways as well as coming through the bow of the ship.

Well what was the weather like when it was bad?

Yes, well it was very cold to start off with, we went due south of South Australia to about forty degrees south and then turned east, cause the prevailing winds from west to east, and the ship just went all the way getting further and further south until we got down to fifty-five

24:00 south to get to Cape Horn. And during that time the wind, the weather was sometimes quite reasonable but most of the time it was very, very rough. And down near Cape Horn there was snow, ice, ice bergs, it was very, very hard working in the ship up in the rigging a hundred and fifty feet above deck. And snow and hail,

24:30 wet, sails wet, trying to, and you, only your hands to work with. And the trouble with my hands that I, like they are now, they're very, very shore man they had all nice and smooth but working in wet conditions and pulling, and the ropes and working, it just tore all your nails off, you didn't have any nails and your hands were all cracked and blistered and bleeding.

25:00 And you had to, that was your only way of working, always with your hands

Did you have any gloves?

Couldn't wear, you can't use gloves, you can't work with gloves when you're tying ropes and working in rigging, gotta be all, gotta be your hands.

So what were your responsibilities on deck?

Just working with the rest of the crew, working up on the rigging. And the system they worked, the newest member of the crew

25:30 was started from the top and then we worked our way down the mast of the yards, and top was a hundred and eighty feet above deck so I worked with another lad who, an experienced crew, deck boy, and just worked in the rigging. And just as you got more experienced you worked your way down to the lower sails.

And you said this was your first time where you were forced to work in confined

26:00 **areas?**

Well I'd never been, never left home before, never worked with anybody apart from People's Stores, but working in those conditions where you gotta work as a team all the time and know what's going on, understand what's happening, quickly. Cause up in the rigging when you're working, you know, when the wind's blowing, the noise of the wind is howling and you hear screaming through the rigging, the noise and the,

26:30 you just gotta be you know, alert to what's going on.

And what was it like working with all these men in such a confined space?

Bit difficult initially but we got on very well eventually, you had to, you couldn't be an individual on a ship like that. You had to work as a team all the time and get on with each other, and that's I think what I said previously, is it stood me in great advantage

27:00 later on in life, particularly in the air force.

So how did you overcome the language barrier?

I think I learned most of the names of the ropes in the language that they spoke. I taught them English as a, something to do as well, or tried to teach them English as best I could, cause nearly all the crew were, in the working crew were all in their, going for their

27:30 Merchant, Finnish Merchant Navy or Merchant Service and to be captains. And there they were doing part of their training for that particular profession was, had to do two years at sea before, under sail. So they were doing their sea time and then two years and then go back into their exams and on land. So they did have to know English cause it's like in the flying business that the

28:00 universal language is English in all these places.

And after your hundred and thirty days at sea, where did you land?

At Falmouth in England.

And what were your first impressions of England?

Well, like, I only had twenty pounds in my pocket and on a Sunday morning and I went ashore, they rowed me ashore on the,

28:30 on the life boats and just dropped me on the shore and said, "Right you're on your own now," and that's it. And I had to get to London, I had an address to go to in London, a friend of the family. And luckily I got a, I thumbed a lift, got a ride in a car from Falmouth straight through to London, the family I was with

29:00 they were going straight up there, dropped me at Hammersmith in London about eight o'clock on a Sunday night.

And who was the family that picked you up?

I can't remember now, just people that were on holiday going back to London and they just luckily stopped and picked me up and took me up to London.

So what cities did you go via to get to London?

I think we stopped at Exeter on the way up just for something to eat and carried on there. But I just had this one address to go

29:30 to in London.

And what were you thinking as you were driving through the south of England?

Oh just pleased to be there and looking forward to joining the Royal Air Force.

And what about the environment, the fauna and the country side, what did it look like?

Well it was very nice, nice and green in England and it was just nice to be on land again, after all that time at sea.

30:00 And thinking about, where I've gotta find this family I was gonna stay with.

And what was the weather like when you landed?

Oh it was very good, yeah it was quite nice, it was in August 1938, '39, '38 yeah.

And when you got into London, what was that like?

Well to get, they dropped me at Hammersmith, Hammersmith is on the

30:30 west side of London and the place I wanted is on the north side of London. And at that time of night on a Sunday night and the best way to get there was by Underground train. And I'd never seen Underground railway system at all and I, and the people told me that it was easy, all you had to do was change, I had to change trains at Tottenham Court Road and then catch the Northern Line up to on the inner Circle, there's a Circle Underground train that goes round and round all the,

31:00 in a Circle. And they said two stations up from Hammersmith you'll come to Tottenham Court Road and get out the train and change trains and I finally got to my destination about 11 o'clock at night I think it was. I'd, so they said it'd only be a ten minute ride but after about half an hour I thought, something happened, cause I didn't realise it was going round in a circle. And they said, just look up on the,

31:30 you'll see the diagram and see where the stations are, I was so busy looking around, I must have missed where the station was, did about three circles of London before I got to pick up, change trains.

Well I'm just curious, because in Adelaide you'd be catching over ground trains, then suddenly you had to go under ground, what was that like?

A great experience, well you can imagine I mean I'm

32:00 eighteen year old, going to the other side of the world going into a completely different environment, things were happening and I kept always thinking now, particularly this time where I was gonna stay. And being on a Sunday night there wasn't all that many, when I finally arrived at oh gee, the station now, Highgate, it, I just, there was just nobody around. I got, I just went up

32:30 the stairs back on to the road and luckily there was a post box just near the station and a post van came along to clear the letters and I thought I'll ask him which, where I can find this house I was gonna go to. So I went and asked him and he pointed me to just down the road sort of five minute walk away so I walked down to this house and by this time it's after midnight. And I thought this is lovely, somebody

33:00 from Australia, and I knocked on the door and nothing happened for about five minutes, eventually they came to the door and they, and I announced myself and the person said, "Oh I'm sorry but they moved six, ah, three weeks ago." But they knew where they'd gone to, the people I was gonna meet there. It was, the people I was gonna stay with, Barling family, they were very

33:30 famous pipe, smoking pipe makers, Dunhill's I think were the top brand of smoking pipe, Barling was the next in the sort of favourite pipes. And they lived at Hampstead Heath and luckily it was only about ten minute car away. So they rang up, they got on the phone and rang them up and told them that I'd arrived and they came around and picked me up and took me around their, eventually there so it was quite a traumatic experience,

34:00 coming from the sea to get to there

And what was the family like that you were staying with?

Very good, very good, very, very rich people, they had servants and gardeners and it was a very big, nice

big house right on the edge of Hampstead Heath.

And who, how were you connected to this family?

Mrs Barling was the niece of a great friend of my mother.

34:30 And so he gave me a letter of introduction to take over when I landed in England so I had this address to go to. And the lady of the house, Mrs Barling was very, very nice and she just took me round, they'd lived in London all their life and knew London like the back of their hand and she took me down to Australia House and

35:00 they found me accommodation, Notting Hill Gate.

And where were you staying in Notting Hill Gate?

Portobello Road which was a pretty rough end of the town. Oh, just a bed and breakfast place there.

And what was Portobello Road

35:30 **like?**

Oh it was very, very rough. It's, I think you've probably heard of the big parades in there, Jamaicans or the West Indians and that was like it was a pretty rough part of London.

So what other cultures were living in that part of London?

All working class, all working class.

Cause Notting

36:00 **Hill Gate is quite, as you mentioned, quite popular with...**

Notting Hill Gate

yeah, West Indian and Indians?

All foreign, lot of foreign people in there.

And how did you find that experience of coming from Adelaide and suddenly Notting Hill Gate surrounded by all these cultures?

Well I think we, Mrs Barling family they were, they had, you know, fairly well to do people and they, I, as I was a good

36:30 tennis player, she was also a good tennis player, belonged to a very good club so I used to play, go and play tennis most of the times there. But I mean, when I went down to join the Royal Air Force they, I had to wait for a while to sit the exam first and take a medical and then wait for instructions whether if I was successful or not. And that was in August

37:00 1938 and I was accepted and started training in November 1938.

And what was the position you were accepted in?

Well I tried to join as a pilot, cause the advertisement in the magazine in Australia said they wanted air crew, pilots and air crew, gunners and observers. But because the ship took so long to get to England, a hundred and thirty days, by the time I got to England they'd recruited

37:30 all the pilots they wanted and they still had a few vacancies for observers, which observe means that you're a navigator, bomb aimer and air gunner.

So how did you...?

And so I took second best, I thought well I come here to fly, I can't be a pilot I'd be an observer, or trained observer.

And how did you feel about missing out on a pilot's position?

I was very unhappy about that but I just had to accept what was, there was noting else to

38:00 do. If I hadn't of joined the Royal Air Force I'd have gone back on, back to Australia on the ship, eventually when it came back for the next year cause it did one trip a year, went round the world in one year.

And what was pre-war London like?

Yes, it was, I was very lucky actually being with, knowing the Barling family, I was, you know,

38:30 I didn't mix with the sort of upper class of people most of the time, they were very, very well known people and lived pretty well. And I was lucky enough, in Portobello Road, right next to Cannington, very close to Cannington area and there was a huge block of flats, they got very up market flats very close to me. And I can't remember how I met this South American boy but his

39:00 father was the agent for South American beef trade and they had a flat in one of these block of flats. And I got to know him and used to all, mix with him all the time and again I's living way above my means, I only had twenty pound when I arrived in London. That was the only time I had to,

39:30 started to run out of money so I wrote home for, hoping I'd get some money and I think, Mum sent me ten pounds to help me out until I joined the Royal Air Force, until I got in the air force, which helped me.

So what were the rumblings of war like?

Well the Munich Crisis had just occurred about that time and it was, they were gearing up, you knew there was gonna be some

40:00 gonna be something happening in the future. And they were starting to think very much about, in fact I think they issued the first gas masks just when I finished the, had my training, everybody got issued with gas masks for a possible war.

And what was the media saying, what were the newspapers and radio announcements…?

That was very much, always emphasis, well emphasis

40:30 but it was always inclined to talking about what probably could happen.

And what were they saying could happen?

Well you know, when they invaded Poland and that sort of thing it's, but there was, the Munich Crisis was a turning point I think when old Chamberlain came back and...

And what did you think when you heard news of the Munich Crisis?

Well, I just wanted to get on with flying, I didn't think about what the

41:00 consequences might be, but my terms of engagement was four years active service and six years reserve, that's what I signed on for. And as I went to Scotland for training for a navigator it was, the winter of '38-'39 in England was one of the coldest they had for about fifty years and I just, I froze up there. And that's why I made my mind up when I, if I graduated, I'll volunteer

41:30 for posting overseas.

Well we'll talk about that more in a moment, we've got to swap a tape now. And I notice during that, you were…

Tape 3

00:34 **So John, how did your brother react to you leaving?**

I think he was surprised but he didn't have, he just wanted to stay home, he didn't want to go, to leave home, and I think Dad influenced him quite a bit on that cause he wanted one of us to carry on with the trade, you know, which we'd learned at school. And carpentry was,

01:00 he was a carpenter and he stayed at, stayed behind. But he was, he didn't seem to mind too much when I wanted to go, as far as I remember. He got a, his, when he left school, as I say, he was a fairly well, more intelligent than I was, he got, was Dux of the school for the last two years at school. And he got a job with a good, Murray's in Adelaide,

01:30 the big clothing warehouse and then he was there when I left but after I left he went to Holdens and joined Holdens in the office then, Holdens down at Woodville. No, he didn't seem, didn't mind, he was surprised that.

I'm just wondering if you had talked to him about the possibility of going together?

02:00 No he didn't ever wish to come with me, I was having so much trouble, you know, getting away myself with Dad not agreeing and bit of a tension there.

Well you mentioned when we were having a break that

02:30 **one of the big highlights of that trip overseas was the Crossing the Line ceremony, can you tell us about that?**

Well everybody, you know, when they travel from the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere have to go across the line and on those ships, obviously you're not a passenger ship so it is, you know, an occasion, but on those ships they didn't pull any punches, it was fairly rough. And it started

03:00 off with me, and I was just taken in the heads, toilets on those things there and put in there until they'd

prepared the deck for the ceremony. And when they came to collect me they put a rope round my neck and I was dragged along the, to the doctor, because I was sick and I had to take medicine to see, to meet

03:30 Father Neptune, eventually. So I had to take medicine which was pills made of paint oil and plasticine and plaster of Paris, and washed down with a bit of lime juice. And then after doing that I was then taken back in the toilets again while they got all the final

04:00 preparations for the ceremony, all got dressed up. And I, into, while I was in there they put a rope across the deck, about knee high, and they blind folded me and they took me out the second time and they walked me along the deck, of course I didn't trip, I didn't see the rope, because I tripped over it so that was Crossing the Line. And then I met the captain who was dressed up in his

04:30 Father Neptune and to get to him I had to go past the whole crew and they had paint and oil and tar and I was naked and they just covered me with all that, all that sort of grease and what have you. And I finally got to the captain and he was Father Neptune, welcomed me aboard to the northern hemisphere and then there was a big barrel which they filled with sea water and I was thrown in the barrel and so I could see the, check the mermaids

05:00 out down there. And that was it, that was the Crossing the Line ceremony, and then they cut the southern cross in my hair because I was from Australia and that was it. It was quite a...

And how did you survive that rather gruelling...?

Oh about a week later I got, finally got some of the tar off me and so on, but no it was just part of the

05:30 ceremony, it was all good fun, everybody enjoyed it. Yes, it was quite a day.

And how much was part of that ceremony proving yourself as a young man?

Well I was officially then a sea man, you know, until that time I was still a land lubber and once you'd crossing that line and done that ceremony then I was officially, in terms of

06:00 sea faring, I was a fully qualified sailor.

Even though as you've been telling us, your real destination and focus was to fly?

Well the journey was a means to an end really. I mean I wanted to get to England to join the Royal Air Force and that by going by windjammer was the only way I could get there, and luckily it all turned out all right.

06:30 Thinking back on it now a young lad of eighteen, never left home before, hadn't been further away than fifty miles from home, going to sea, never had that experience before, gone through that, arriving in a foreign country, not very much money, just, it was a, quite something when you think about it I suppose.

And how would you have described yourself, what type of character were you?

Probably

07:00 adventurous. Just thinking, you know, just being, being adventurous and that sort of thing, I just wanted to fly, that was my... I'd do anything to get to flying and luckily I was able to do that. But not as a pilot unfortunately but that came later.

It's quite an extraordinary story of determination to get to your goal.

Mmm, must have been, yeah.

07:30 **When you arrived in London without much money in your pocket, what kind of experiences did you have living in a bed sit?**

Pretty, once again very strange, I mean this old gal she was very strict on, I had to be in the house or back in the accommodation by ten o'clock at night, that sort of thing and living that sort of

08:00 life it wasn't easy. But meeting this South American lad which I mentioned, I spent a lot of time with him over in his flat with his family and it was good, it was different, put it that way, yeah. And not having much money either I was always having to think about what I was gonna do and eat and so forth.

And what other types of people were living in

08:30 **the same boarding house that you were in?**

Very rough, like myself, unemployed, just living there day by day, yes it was pretty low market, it wasn't a great luxury at all. And that part of Portobello Road in the old days it was a lot of mews, I mean, a lot of

09:00 small side streets off, which in the old days was, they were the coach houses for the horses for people in their carriages, and right behind the place I was living was a big coach cul de sac where in the old days was where the stables were for the horses.

Just mindful of your microphone there…

Oh sorry yeah, yeah.

09:30 Yeah so it was, and again living with that Barling family, I was lucky enough not to have to experience too much of the low, real low rough part of London.

And what did you do for a visa or your paperwork?

That, I can't remember, I don't think I had a passport even, all I had was permission to leave Australia from my father, or from my mother

10:00 and I don't think I had a Passport, I never had a Passport at all, I can't remember if I had that. Cause joining the air force straight away, I can't even remember going through Customs, cause when they dropped me on the beach at, I think the Customs man came along just before I got the lift to London. But it was just a, not official, it was just a, "Oh you're here are you, oh fair enough," you know, there was it, there was no documentation required. I never had a Passport all the time

10:30 in the air force, I just, I used on, I travelled on service documents. I can't remember that at all whether, I don't know whether in those days being underage, parents consent was required to travel anywhere. No, I just can't remember.

11:00 **Well you were telling us earlier on that you eventually did enlist but you had to wait, where did you go to enlist?**

In London, Kingsway in London was the RAF Recruiting Office and that's where I applied to join the Royal Air Force. And from then they, I then sat an exam, entrance exam for the

11:30 air crew and the medical in the central medical place in London. And then having passed that then, and all the exams, the exam, I just waited then to be called up as it were, and that happened on the seventh of November 1938. Then went up to Scotland then for training

12:00 on navigation, just did navigation only for three months and then down to Uxbridge for the, to get our uniform and up to Northcote to do our bombing and gunnery training.

Sorry, did you say Northcote?

Northcote yeah, that's the RAF Base at Northcote in Lincolnshire.

And how disappointed were you that you couldn't do what your heart wanted to do which was to fly?

Well I's, naturally

12:30 I was disappointed but as I said I took second best, I was gonna be flying at least and some time later I might be able to become a pilot. And when the war started in England, you see, the war in England was September 1939 but didn't start in the Middle East until May 1940. In that time the air force again, through the air force media was looking for people

13:00 within the service for air crew training. And I applied again to be a pilot but I didn't get accepted because I, having just been trained, the Stage Commander when I went to see him for an interview he said, "You must be joking, we've just spent some thousands of dollars training you as a navigator and you want to change, we've gotta get some time out of you." So I didn't get a chance then to be a pilot again.

13:30 I did try again to get to be a pilot because I really wanted to be a pilot, although a flying navigator was very nice but I wanted to fly.

Well you mentioned earlier that you could read a compass at a fairly young age, but tell us what sort of training you underwent as an observer?

Well I was, I went to the library in Adelaide and was looking at navigation

14:00 books and learning about compasses and things like that and charts and so forth, that's how I learned to read a compass by reading books and things. And again on the ship, you never had a, they never gave you degrees, you never saw, like in the air force you have, you work it out, it was always by the points of the compass, you know, the three sixty degree points you had, north by north by east by north

14:30 and that. So that when you took over the wheel of the ship they always passed it as, half by north by quarter north, and you look at the compass and you steered on that, not degrees, didn't use degrees at all. And when I've, my first helm on the ship was after only a week on board and I was put in to do an hour time, to steering, I just watched the

15:00 compass all the time and tried to keep the heading going. And it's difficult on a sailing ship, it's like a yacht, the wind isn't always blowing in the right direction and you gotta then, what they call, sail by the wind. And what you're doing then you're looking at the, on those ships you're looking at the mizzen sail

on the top of the mizzen mast and when you keep the ship up to the wind,

15:30 so close until it, the sail starts to flap, in other words getting on the other side of the sail and you just back off and let it head. And so you're steering what they call, by the wind, and not by a course at all, you're just steering how the wind's gonna affect the ship.

Well at Northcote, what was the flying school like?

That was bombing and gunnery,

16:00 all our bombing training and then our gunnery training. That was just firing a gun in the back seat of an aircraft, using First World War gun, Lewis gun, which was pretty basic but it was just getting used to using, operating the equipment. And then the

16:30 bombing was just learning the basic things of reading a bomb sight and dropping a few practise bombs and that, all that, all actually working properly came later on when I got in the squadron but just learning how to operate the equipment really.

And what were your instructors like?

Very good. A lot of them were civilians, were ex-service people but had been, they were civilians but contracted by the

17:00 air force to train. The navigation was all ex-naval officers, training was all... again, as it was pre-war there were, and we're in civvies [civilian clothes] we're just like an all civilian working conditions.

And what did

17:30 **you learn about navigation at this school?**

Oh, all things required, plotting, meteorology plays a big part in it and just working on charts, you know, working out routes, flying, types of charts, yeah it's, that's actually a pretty complicated business when you're, but meteorology's a very play a

18:00 big part in learning about the weather conditions and so forth.

And what sort of practical applications?

We did flying as well as our, the, we flew Avro Anson aircraft and two navigators a time on cross-country trips. But again it was good experience because it, in England, a lot like Australia, the weather conditions, particularly in

18:30 Scotland in the winter time, it's pretty rough and it was good training really, and most of the navigation was done by dead reckoning. In other words plotting, you know, you just plotted your course and you were flying above cloud you couldn't see the ground and so you just worked on speed and distance all the time. And turning points when you planned to be at certain places.

19:00 **And why is it called dead reckoning?**

I don't know, it's just a navigation term I think, it's dead reckoning, I don't know. You plan it that way and you hope it's gonna be, work out that way if the weather's right, if you used all the right winds and so forth. I chummed up with a Scotsman actually, I used to always fly with him and

19:30 we'd be on one navigation trip for about two and a half hours and flown over cloud the whole time, and hoping we're gonna be where we should be when we finished. As we got near our destination we came to a break in the clouds and there was, we could see the ground for the first time and I said to Jock, "Geez" I said, "I can't recognise it." And luckily he said, "God," he said, "thirty thousand English men lay dead down

20:00 there." I said, "Yeah, so what?" He said, "The Battle of Bannockburn in Sixteen something," he knew exactly where we were. Old Jock, yeah, the Battle of Bannockburn.

Well how did your colleagues, like Jock, take to having an Aussie,

20:30 **a young Aussie... ?**

It was different yeah, different, I was like the black sheep in the family, but I was the only foreigner on the course. And I think, I think that was the journey on the Lawhill, it taught you to learn to mix with people and work as a team and I didn't find any difficulty at all, I found that right through my whole service life that I never found difficulty talking to people and

21:00 managed to established a rapport that promoted conversation both sides. Unfortunately most of our, the course I was on, they were dead in the first six months of the war, they were all prisoner of war they were. The three of us that were posted overseas from that course only survived for six months. Sorry, the ones

21:30 behind most of em were either killed in the beginning, the early days of the war or they were taken

POW.

What happened to Jock?

He, I don't know, he was just someone that was left behind. But a lot of them were killed in the early days of the war in, you know, in France when things weren't going too good for the air force.

Well on the Avro Ansons, the training flights that you did, what did you see of any accidents?

22:00 No we didn't have any accidents luckily, no, everybody survived them all right, yeah. We didn't do very many air, only towards the end of the course, most of the course was class room work in, for three quarters of the course was class work, and then towards the end we put into practise what we'd been learning about in the classroom, hoping it all worked out all right.

22:30 **And where did you do your passing out, was there a passing out parade or...?**

Not really, not in those days, you just, when we finished our bombing and gunnery school we just said, "Okay, now we're promoted, we're sergeants," of all things, which was a great... when I think about it now, six months in the air force we were sergeants. And we were the first of the, I think

23:00 first of which eventually turned out to be the Empire Air Training Scheme, but in those days it was just another normal course but the Empire Air Training Scheme was based on those courses when the war started and they had to, you know, find some way of training a lot of air crew in the shortest possible time. But no, there was, yeah, I got on very well with

23:30 most people I think, yeah.

Well you mentioned that you wanted to be posted to warmer...?

I froze up in Scotland, I'd never seen so much snow and ice in my life before and in being up there in the middle of winter, God, it was a bit rough.

24:00 **And how much of the countryside did you get out and see?**

Not very much, no, well I only had this one family of people in London to go to for any holidays and that was, I used to go back to London for any breaks we had at all. But it was so cold, God I had to get back in the warmth again and luckily I got posted to Egypt.

Well tell us about your posting

24:30 **to 113 Squadron? You mentioned you joined them at Heliopolis, how did you travel?**

Went out by ship, by the Orontes the Orient liner, on loan from England to Australia and we went out as civilians. Again pre war and we went as passengers on that out to Port Said.

25:00 We all thought initially that we were going to be further south because the Abyssinian War was on, the Italians were in Abyssinia fighting, and we thought we were gonna be down, further down the Suez Canal somewhere, but we finished up at Port Said, getting off the boat at Port Said and reported to the Middle East Headquarters in Cairo.

And how many from your course went with you?

Only with me, two

25:30 of us went to Egypt, one went to India.

Just mindful of your mic there.

Oh yeah, sorry, yeah.

So what was...?

And the big problem was that being such young sergeants, I think we were the youngest sergeants in the air force. I mean it was, I remember I arrived at Heliopolis, at the State Heliopolis on a Sunday afternoon

26:00 about four o'clock and I made my way to the sergeants' mess. And in those days, before the war, there's always in the sergeants' mess at lunch time Sunday there's always a bit of a party went on. And arriving at four o'clock in the afternoon, I walked in the ante-room and there's just all, all flaked out, all asleep in the chairs after having a good lunch they'd had in the bar. And

26:30 I'm standing there with my khaki and white knees and service type issues, all these snores were going, well I've gotta wake up somebody. And I picked up, the first I touched was the station warrant officer, the zip man, and he woke up and went, "Who the hell are you?" And I just,

27:00 "I'm Sergeant Barrey. Sergeant Barrey, Sergeant!" He said, "I've been in the air force thirty years and I'm only a bloody warrant officer." I wanted the accommodation you see. And anyway because I was a new, under-age sergeant in those, cause I got, wasn't allowed to live in the mess quarters, cause in those days the sergeants' mess and officers' mess were really

27:30 nice buildings then and you lived within the mess area. And I was sent into what they call Tin Town, it was a new tin shack that they'd put up for, you know, for any passing by, you know, transient people. So I got sent down there. Yeah, that was an experience. We...

How much, I guess,

28:00 **flak did you get for being so young and ...?**

Well I got all the flak you can imagine, everybody was about thirty years older than I was in the mess. And I got caught for all the extra duties, I was made permanent Escort Party to funerals and Guard Commanders and all that sort of thing, all administration jobs that nobody else wanted. But the squadron was very good actually, I was the only navigator or only observer, cause they were, it was a new

28:30 trade you call it, a new profession in the flying business They'd never had any course like being trained as navigators and wireless operator, gunner and bombing, it's really the dogs body of the aeroplane. And the aircraft we were flying only it was open two seater and there really was no way I could do all of, you know, proper navigation cause it being open cockpit, carrying all your charts and that sort of thing, it was almost impossible to do that.

29:00 **So those open two seaters...?**

Yeah, the Royal Australian Air Force had the equivalent type of aircraft called a Demon, a Hawker Demon. It was a bi-plane, single engine bi-plane with another model of that type was called the Demon and the RAAF had those out here and this was the same sort of aeroplane but called a Hind, and back in England. The Australian ones were modified for, you know, for flying out here but the same aeroplane

29:30 really. And we had those until a few months after the war started in England and they started to reinforce the squadrons in the Middle East with modern aircraft, we got Bristol Blenheims then. Which is a, you know, a two, a twin engine, a light bomber, single wing, retractable under carriage, quite different altogether, proper thing for me as a navigator, proper place for me to

30:00 in a cabin, sort of, to work in.

Well just, how often could you fly with the Hawker Hinds?

Oh every day, every day we flew, did something. We, between the, in peace time mainly, what we were doing, we were the fruit, the citrus fruit carriers for the station. We used to go up to

30:30 Palestine, from Heliopolis to Palestine to, out to Amman in Palestine to get all the oranges and the grapefruit for the station. And we'd fly up from Heliopolis up to Palestine, and I'd put about four or five sacks of oranges in the back, under where I should be sitting, sitting on top of those, on top of the heap, flying back with the station's supply of oranges and grapefruit.

31:00 That was one of the jobs we used to do. The air force in peace time was a fairly, fairly easy going organisation, it was quite good, very good.

And how many pilots were in 113 Squadron?

They had twelve aircraft, that meant twelve pilots and twelve people in the back seat which were nearly all, in those days they were nearly all ground crew

31:30 that'd been trained specially for, you know, nearly all the radio, the gunners were ex radio operators. And there was a certain number of sergeant pilots, because all the officers were commissioned before they remained in the air force. There was a few, what they call Other Ranks, NCO [Non Commissioned Officers] pilots, and they were nearly all tradesmen that'd gone through Halton, which was a technical training place

32:00 in England and they were given a chance to fly for five years as sergeant pilots then had to go back in their trade again. But I was the only, you know, full time back seat driver as they call it, at that time out in the squadron. All my other back seat people were all you know, ex ground crew of some kind, mainly flight,

32:30 flight mechanics or radio operators, wireless operators.

And during that time pre war, before war was actually declared, what was the main kind of function or...?

Social. No, flying normally started in, in peace time was flying, in the summer time was starting at

33:00 six o'clock in the morning and finish at one, cause it was so hot. In winter time you start eight and go through til about four. And then it was socialising.

And where did you do your socialising?

In Cairo, cause Heliopolis was a suburb of Cairo. I knew Cairo better than I knew Adelaide. Yeah.

Well you were young and you've already mentioned that

33:30 **you're quite adventurous, can you tell us how you came to know Cairo?**

Go to all the night spots, yeah, a lot of the night clubs there and casinos and so forth, it was a very good night, a very good place for social, to be in, yeah. Yes, weekends were lost weekends nearly always, look forward to the Friday nights in the bar and then down,

34:00 down town, jump on the tram then go down the, go out for the night.

And which night clubs did the RAF go to?

Well they had officers'... In those days it was always officers and NCOs or other ranks, in other words there was officers' night club and other ranks night club. Near Opera Square the, that's where we used to mainly go to.

34:30 Have a drink in a few bars, lots of bars there and then always go out. The normal routine for a weekend would be Friday night in the bar after you finished flying, for a couple of hours and then get dressed and then eventually finish up down town about midnight and then just stay there until you... and that went on Saturday night as well and come home on Sunday morning when they're all going to church.

35:00 It was a very good life actually before the war, it was very free and easy and there was not too much discipline and just, you just flew and did what you're supposed to do every now and again and enjoy it. Cause when the war started course it was quite a different ball game then, especially when we got to re-equip with new aircraft, a complete change of type aircraft than training on that done.

35:30 **And what did you get to know about the red light district?**

Sharri was the real Burkha. That used to be quite a good, there was a street called The Burkha, Sharri was a real Burkha, which was the red light district, the one street in Cairo and it was interesting. And in the First World War the Australian troops in Palestine

36:00 used to come down for R&R in Cairo and they, even in those days, and one of these trips when they came down there was a lad was murdered in this Sharri was a real Burkha. He, and when they went back to Palestine they got so incensed about it, they came back in force and they burned the bloody place down. And but that didn't stop the activities in Burkha, the, in Burkha Street.

36:30 They just put new roof on a few of the old stone buildings, just put new roofs on and carried on the same, traded as they did in those days, and all the steps up were all worn. No, it was very good and that was when, before King Farouk took over, King Farouk he came, he changed the whole night life of Cairo and one of the things he stopped was Sharri

37:00 was a Real Burkha operating as the brothel area of Cairo. Yeah.

And what were your experiences?

I was lucky, going out to, from England I, one of the, about twenty officers on the ship going out to, from England to the Middle East, a flight sergeant, was an older person, he was about oh, about 45 or so.

37:30 And for some reason or other he just, we just palled up and he took me under his gown and he led me through all the highlights, he'd been to Cairo before on one of his previous postings. And so he let me, taught me all the right places to go to and the right things to do, and that, I was lucky there. And he was one of the squadron flight sergeants on the aircraft, very good,

38:00 very good tradesman.

What was his name?

Brennan, Bill Brennan, yeah, he was very good. He was on his third overseas tour, he'd been to Qatar in 1930 he was, when they had the earthquake in Qatar in the RAF. And he was there when that was on so he was a pretty experienced sort of chap and a very good technician too, very good, Bill.

Well as a,

38:30 **still under age man, how nervous were you going to a brothel?**

Oh it was experience, yes, it was good. And there was, that whole life was quite different to what I'd experienced before, and it was, yes, it was, having Bill as a mentor if you call it, he just showed me all the right

39:00 you know, places to go to and things to do and so forth. And he, throughout my whole life on 113 Squadron we just were great friends, and being one of the technicians on the flight he, very nice chap to know, yeah.

Any more details?

39:30 Oh the things they usually get up to in those days, in the cabaret places, in the night clubs, we were

noted, our gang used to get up to all kinds of tricks. Like when the girls would come out we always sit down the first rows back from the stage and when they'd be doing their belly dancing and so on, we used to take pocketfuls of dried peas with us and then throw them on the floor so the girls come and dancing

40:00 with their bare feet and... we'd have a bit of fun like that. But all those sort of things that you, yeah, it was, we had a pretty good life, it was good before the war.

Okay well we'll just have to change a tape now.

Tape 4

00:32 This Flight Sergeant Brennan was my mentor and he said, "The golden rule," he said, "when you're going down the brothel," he says, "keep to the same girl, then if you do catch the [(UNCLEAR)], called catching the boat up, you knew exactly who you caught the combat from." It was all...

Hang on, just a minute, I've got to stop you cause you've...

It was organised, it was

01:00 services were allowed to use it, it was a proper, it was a medical attention, what they call an ET [Early Treatment] Centre there on the, in the street. So that you, when you went and had your visit to the girl, you went down and got treatment, then they got, they signed your chit. So that when you, if you did only catch the boat, then when you reported sick, that chit, you weren't, cause it was an offence to be, catch a sexual disease in those days, it still is now actually.

And how often

01:30 **did, well how much of a problem was it in the air force?**

Not very much no, no, occasionally but with this sort of treatment you could have in the early, they call it early treatment, it would, they got, didn't have much trouble with the diseases. It was highly organised and people would

02:00 go in the same building, the same girl every time they went down the brothel and that worked very well.

And how sort of clean, I guess, was the establishment?

Quite good, I mean there's a famous song called, you know, about the brothel, 'There's a street in Cairo full of sin and shame, Sharri your Burkha...' you've heard about it have you? It's about four verses about a chap, an air force chap

02:30 getting paid on a Friday night, going in to the brothel, unfortunately catching a disease then going to the sick bay and, it's all in a song. It's sung to the tune of, 'Abide with Me.'

\n[Verse follows]\n There's a street in Cairo full of sin and shame\n Sharri your Burkha is it's blinkin' name\n Russian, Greek and French bints all around I see\n Come all you air force boys, abide with me.\n

03:00 That's the opening verse to it, there's about five versus to it, that's a famous air force song in Cairo, Sharri was your Burkha.

And how, I guess, well what am I trying to say, I guess once you've had the brothel experience, how much did you feel like you were really

03:30 **growing up and becoming a man?**

Well I thought I grew up very quickly, I was very lucky having this old Chiefy Brennan as my mentor, I learned, you know, I suddenly went into, you know, manhood as it were very, very quickly, much quicker than I'd done if I was back in Adelaide I'm sure. And Cairo was a very good place to be actually, socially-wise there were so many things to do, I mean I played cricket and tennis and, in the clubs

04:00 down there and of course the air force had their own sections and places, you know, clubs to go to and it was very good, yeah.

Well when did you and 113 Squadron become aware of the war?

When we started to get our reinforcement of aircraft coming from England. I mean we knew the war was on over there and

04:30 the Intelligence people, I think they knew that time that the Italians were gonna be a part of the Axis Forces eventually. And we were then, the whole flying system changed, going in to war, our squadron was basically what they call a mobile light bomber squadron and specialising in photography. And we, one of our jobs was taking photographs of

05:00 all the Italian front, the defences along the border between Libya and Egypt. And along that fence line,

literally was barb wire fencing and anti-tank ditches right the way from the Mediterranean coast to about fifty miles south. And along that, those trenches were forts they'd built, you know, for protecting the people crossing, or

05:30 stop people from crossing in there. South of that line fifty miles right down to Giarabub Oasis which is about a hundred and fifty miles south there was just nothing, just open ground. But the Italian defences were just about, really only about fifty miles south of the coast. And so we were taking, when the war started in Egypt we knew exactly all about those sort of parts. And, also we were going around flying, looking for emergency landing grounds to use,

06:00 you know, when the war did eventually start, which I did a lot of work right down flying all over the desert there looking for places where we could properly use as landing grounds.

And what sort of photography equipment were you using?

F-24 camera, it was a big, bloody great big camera, it was in the back of the Blenheim, it was in the floor, just between the gunner and the bomb

06:30 bay and just pointed at the ground and it was what they call the F-24 camera and it normally flew at about five thousand feet, and just took shots or line overlaps from that. I could operate it from the front of the aircraft by button.

Well I'd just like to clarify, the war began, well officially the war was declared in 1939.

September '39 yeah. In June 1940

07:00 was when the Italians declared war

And when did you receive the Blenheims?

I think it was early in 1939, early 1940, sorry. Cause they reinforced the squadrons all, right throughout the Middle East and the far east, they reinforced the squadrons in Egypt, in Aden, in India, in Singapore, all the areas overseas that

07:30 that had all these old type aircraft, got reinforced with Bristol Blenheims.

Well before we talk more about you taking photos, can you just describe the Bristol Blenheim?

Twin engine, light bomber, carried a pilot, navigator or, and a rear gunner, three man crew.

08:00 Carried a thousand pounder bombs and internally were eight any size small bomb up to forty pounds on racks outside, on the fuselage. One machine gun on the port wing, two radial engines, bomber navigation position in

08:30 the nose, that was the short nose but then they got, they built one like that with the longer nose in. But there, normally in the short nose I just sat next to the pilot almost, just to do my work. And because it was a diff, a complete different aircraft to the Hind, whether it was a bi-plane, fixed under carriage, old aeroplane, when the conversion onto that type of aircraft was done in the squadron,

09:00 a lot of aircraft landed with their wheels up. Pilots forgot to lower their wheels when they landed and we lost the first three aircraft in the squadron for that very reason, just pilots forgot to put their wheels down. Easy to do I suppose. That started the, in the air force we never had, used to have control, airport control on the

09:30 end of the runway in a vehicle, and that started the first of the aircraft controllers on the runway, what they call runway controllers, for that very reason. He had a Very pistol with a red cartridge, and if an aircraft was coming to land and the gear was up he just fired a red cartridge over to the aeroplane to indicate to the pilot. And that started the whole system and now, which is still going today, the system

10:00 of a runway controller, a person there with a Very pistol to fire at the aircraft if he didn't have his gear down, cause they lost a lot of aeroplanes just for that silly reason, just forgetting to put their gear down.

And how many planes did you receive to get it up to…?

We got a full squadron, twelve aircraft at that time.

10:30 **What was the interior of the Bristol Blenheim like?**

Just well, just, had a bomb bay between the, well the rear gunner had a twin Browning guns to shoot and all his radio equipment was there. Between him and the bomb bay was the photographic section to put the camera in, then there was the bomb bay for, internal bomb bay, for four 250-pound

11:00 bombs, and then there was a slight petition and then the forward section of the cabin was this pilot and the navigator position. Two position seat, one for just the navigator and one little seat forward when I was bomb aiming, to aim through the nose of the aeroplane. That was the short-nose Blenheim then they put the modified they brought it out with a long- nose Blenheim, like that one is, and put a proper compartment for me to go up and have a table, a proper thing, a chart table to lay out my gear.

11:30 Before that it was just a big wad on my knees, doing all the work on that. Much more comfortable from a navigator's point of view than it was before.

And what was the internal communications system?

Normal radio, two-way radio, intercom, you could talk to, within the aircraft, the three people involved and also just

12:00 radio transmitting and receiving set on the outside. Very, very basic in those days, it wasn't like, anything like it is now, it was just, the set was tuned to just for two different frequencies that's all, get used, you know, general flying and also local control. There was no radar or anything like that, no.

And how noisy was it

12:30 **inside the Blenheim?**

Quite noisy but not, you wear a helmet and had an oxygen, always had a microphone in your oxygen mask. Quite noisy yeah, normal noise you have with an aeroplane. But with the helmet on it kept the noise down quite a bit.

13:00 Talk, I'm talking to you now, it was quite easy to talk to, through the microphone to other people in the cockpit or in the aircraft.

And how comfortable was it?

Well nice soft seat, strapped in, if you want to be strapped in, and that sort of thing. It was comfortable enough to, the earlier, the early models it was cramped, you were restricted very much in your movement,

13:30 you couldn't, there wasn't much space to move in. But in the long nose you could get out and walk up to the nose of the aeroplane and sit down in a separate compartment for me to do my navigation work in. You can't really say it's comfortable but it was, you know, it was acceptable, just a seat to sit on that's all.

Well how long was it before the long nose came in?

We didn't get long noses until we came back from Greece, when we got, that was back in

14:00 19-, that was, or the middle of 1942, middle of '41. Early ones that came through first in 1940 were all short noses and then they brought out the long nose afterwards to upgrade the aircraft. Cause the short nose was, well both the aircraft were pretty, they weren't very successful in the air force, they lost a lot of aeroplanes. They had no

14:30 protection underneath and that's what, they used to get shot down, fighters used to come underneath and just sit there and the gunner couldn't get his guns down. They did put a, what you call a scatter gun under the fuselage, it could be operated by the gunner but it was just a scatter gun full of, ammunition was only tracer and you couldn't aim at anything, it was just a scarer, you know, a scatter gun you call it, just to keep the aircraft away from underneath the aeroplane.

15:00 **And what was the distance that the plane could fly before refuelling?**

Oh it were anything up to I think five hours, five hour trips. You could do about five and a half hours I think, was about the best you could do in them, in range. When we went to Malta we used to, we went over to Malta to help out there, about a four and a half, five hour trip to

15:30 Malta.

Well just tell us a bit more about your work taking photographs and doing reconnaissance I guess…?

Just go off and we'd just cover an area and go and do a certain area of the desert and when we're doing the, just photographing all their defences along the border from Libya and Egypt, just go along.

16:00 And the big thing was, from my point of view was, after landing going to interpret the photographs, pick out the photographs and say, that's that, that's that and so on. Taking the photograph and all the pilot did was just fly over the set course on the heading and I operated the camera when the, looking you know, through the nose of the aircraft, when I thought the aircraft was over the top of the area we were looking for.

And what sort of film did it take?

Oh, I couldn't

16:30 tell you, it was called an F-24, it was a great big huge bloody thing, typical old fashioned, but it took very good photographs. In Greece it was really very good, we used it up there.

And how easy was it to interpret the photographs?

Oh very good, once I'd been over the area and I'd picked up the, you know, and taken the photographs, I

had no trouble in identifying the

17:00 hundreds and hundreds of photographs I'd have to go and identify and put together.

And who did you report to?

All those photographs went up to Headquarters and photograph interpretation section and they specialised in it and got them out and put great big maps and so forth and built them up. I remember in

17:30 Greece when we were doing the, our main job in Greece was doing that very thing was up in the, we were, when it became inevitable that they knew that the, like the Germans were going to invade Greece, we were doing line overlaps of the two big rivers coming down from Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Strumica was one of the two big rivers which the British Army thought the Germans might use as a means of getting their

18:00 their supplies down, cause it's very limited good roads up in north of Greece. And they thought the Germans might use the rivers and barges to bring the stuff down, so our job was to take photographs of the line overlaps of these, you could imagine these, doing line overlaps on that, taking hundreds of photographs and then going back and then lining them all up on the ground to get, to find out... The army wanted that because they wanted to find out what parts of the river was good enough to put, you know, barrages across

18:30 and mine them, things like that. Which turned out to be a fiasco cause they never used them, the whole thing was a bloody disaster in there.

Well we might come back and talk a bit more about that, but, I understand that before you went to Greece, you were attached to

19:00 **was it 45 or Forty-four Squadron?**

11 Squadron and 45 Squadron. 11 Squadron came from India, they, to reinforce all, as I mentioned before the, all the Middle East air force was reinforced by squadrons from India and the Far East and Iraq. And they came into Egypt and all those squadrons where the Middle East air crew were

19:30 selected to go to talk to these people and lead them in to flying in the Middle East. And I was sent to, I was picked to go to 11 Squadron, they came from India. And I did that, you know, I just went there, when they arrived just went and talked to them and showed, give them maps to have and generally sort of got them orientated into flying in the Middle East. And why,

20:00 I don't know why 11 Squadron, again, early days of the war there, an air crew, you were still subject to keeping all the station duties, you know, I was just like any, another sergeant, you know, I could be a Guard Commander for ground duty, off duty type of thing, we all had to do guard duty. And being a sergeant I was always in charge of the guard every night, when I was on, picked for guard duty, which meant

20:30 from six o'clock at night until eight o'clock the following morning, you were in charge of the guard, the whole guards for that night. And I was a Guard Commander one night at, this is Ismailia on the, where the squadron was at the time. And the normal thing was that about, you went on guard at six o'clock in the evening and about eight o'clock

21:00 the fire tender crew, which was part of the section of the guard, they were, they went down to the NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute], the services club to pick up the rations for the night's personnel, tea and wads and sandwiches for the, just for people to eat while on guard. And this night I, the crew had just gone down to get, pick up their rations and left the

21:30 driver and the fire tender by the side of the guard room. And they'd just gone down there and somebody rushed down, "The sergeants' mess is on fire!" And so I thought, "God, the bloody crew's down there, the driver's with the truck." And so I said to my corporal, I said, "Sound the fire alarm" and I said, "I'll get in the Jeep and rush down and pick up the crew and bring em back

22:00 so they can get down to the fire." And in the fire, in the guard room there was two buttons, there was a fire alarm and an air raid alarm by, about a foot apart, and guess which one the Corporal sounded, the air raid alarm. The first air raid in the whole of Egypt at that time, this is the early 1940's. Well right, unfortunately right next to Ismailia, there's a huge army barracks, Abassia Army Barracks [Cairo], had about a thousand

22:30 troops in it, and they also control the cinema, the open air cinema, so we both RAF and air force used to use the same cinema. Fire alarm goes, the air raid alarm goes, they shut the bloody cinema down, everybody rushed around and starting manning the ack-ack [anti-aircraft] positions and so forth. And the CO [Commanding Officer] of the army camp was a brigadier, one rank above a group

23:00 captain which was the CO of Ismailia. He rang up our CO and said, "What the bloody hell's going on?" Of course when he sounded the air raid alarm, I roared back to the guy, I said, "You stupid bastard, you got the wrong..." and he pushed the other, he then pushed the fire alarm button but it was too late, the panic had started. You can imagine the, and this brigadier rang up our group captain and he didn't half give him an earful,

23:30 he expressed his extreme displeasure, “What the shit’s going on?” You can imagine the phone, my phone in the guard room was red hot. And the same Adjutant said, he rang up he said, “The CO wants to see you first thing tomorrow morning as you come off duty, don’t even change, go straight in there.” So I went next morning, as I finished duty, I went and said, saluted and he said, “What the hell went on last

24:00 night?” And I told him the story, and his face was getting like the Sphinx you know, just glaring at me. And when I finished he said, “Barrey! Get off my station, you’ve got one hour!” I was posted out. It was the

24:30 shortest notice of posting I ever got, all the rest of the time my service, one hour’s notice. And that’s when I went and joined 45 Squadron, he said 45 Squadron was about to be detached down to Sudan to go and bomb Eritrea. So you can imagine.

But there was no demotion?

Oh no, no, no. You just, you got one hour to get off his bloody station and I was pleased to get out of it anyway cause 11 Squadron was a,

25:00 it was, oh, coming from India they were different breed altogether. All the officers were all Pukka Sahibs and they had servants everywhere, they never carried their parachutes and that sort of thing. And the first trip I did with the squadron was with a Flight Lieutenant and we finished our, I’d flown him all around the Suez Canal area and to show him all the places, and when we got out the aircraft we parked way away from the crew room, way across the other side of the tarmac.

25:30 He said, “Oh Barrey,” he said, “bring my parachute.” Cause that used to do in India, they had a bloody bearer out there by the aircraft, never carried their parachute at all, they just got out the aircraft and the old bearer carried his parachute back. I said, “Pigs arse, carry the bastard yourself.” And that was the attitude of the squadron, they were a different mob altogether. The air crew were, especially the pilots, they were all Pukka Sahibs

26:00 you know, they didn’t do anything at all, they all had a lot of servants to help them out. So I was pleased to leave the station I tell you, well I didn’t want to do it that way, that was one of things yeah.

Well that’s one way to get a posting?

Yeah it was, yeah.

And where was 45 Squadron based?

They were down at a place called Helwan, just south of Cairo,

26:30 they’d just a very bad accident, they’d written off about four aircraft and they were short of experienced air crew. And at the same time they were on detachment to go down to the Sudan to use it to, use it as a base to bomb Eritrea. And as I was in this bloody fiasco that I was sent there on the short list.

And how did the

27:00 **mob receive you knowing that this story had happened?**

Well the name got round pretty good. I took the, I led this section, we had to, took four aircraft down there to do the job. And we had to go down from Cairo to Atbara, which is north of Khartoum, refuel there and then fly to this place up in the hills, which was the hill-station for you know, the cooler part of the Sudan between the Red Sea

27:30 and Khartoum. And we used an airfield in there, well it was just a big old grass strip there and we had to bomb, they did a couple of raids and we did the job and then came back. And then luckily I got in contact with my mates in Headquarters and they said, “Back to the 113 Squadron,” and I went back and I joined them.

And what planes were 45 Squadron flying?

Blenheims again, short nosed Blenheims, all the squadrons in the Middle East got the same type of aeroplane, short nosed

28:00 Blenheims.

And how successful were those operations?

Very good, we did a good job, we, there was another squadron came from Khartoum, 47 Squadron but they were flying some Vickers Wellesleys, which was a different aeroplane altogether and they didn’t have very good top speeds or protection from fighters. They got shot down a bit

28:30 and they suffered casualties during these raids on, in Eritrea, but fortunately just had enough speed to get away from the fighters.

And what sort of, I guess, rousing or flak did you get from the boys that at 45 Squadron after

your stint with 11 Squadron?

Oh no, no, no problem at all, they were just pleased to get somebody

29:00 with experience to take them down there. Not to take them down there but to lead the, the detachment down there. Again, being just a young nineteen years old amongst, I was always working with much older people all the time, but they did give me the benefit of my experience and training and that sort of... there's no problem there.

29:30 **And how many Aussies by this stage had you come across?**

None. I was the only Aussie in the squadron. I was a foreigner, that bastard from the bush. That's was my nick name was usually called. I got that out there and it never left me the whole time in the air force of thirty-six years, it travelled around, that bastard from the bush.

And why do you think

30:00 **they Christened you, the bastard from the bush?**

Well I was from Australia, the bush, there's nothing else but bush and so forth. And I was fairly strict in my, later on in life, in flying as I had certain parameters I worked in and if people didn't conform to those parameters then I was a bit harsh but I always, you know, not over the top but I'd let them know that

30:30 if they weren't doing too well. I spoke my mind which caught me in trouble quite a bit later on in life, in the air force. I couldn't tolerate people that were saying things they didn't know what they were talking about. In, later on in life in Fighter Command when I got the experience I was able to be in that position, unfortunately

31:00 for me in many occasions but I just couldn't stand it, I couldn't take some of the remarks that were being made.

And how long did you stay with 45 Squadron?

Oh it was only three weeks, just three weeks and went back again, and then back in the desert with the lads.

31:30 **And what was going on when you rejoined...?**

Well when I rejoined the squadron they'd just, the first push had, the first advance into Egypt was started which was Christmas 1940 they just about half way through that, that's when I joined the squadron. And we just were bombing targets in Libya and until a decision was made by the military,

32:00 the generals in charge of the thing, that they wanted to reinforce Greece from squadrons from the Middle East which was a task that should never been done. And so we were pulled out, when the fight, when the advance got as far as just Agedabia which was just south west of Benghazi, that's when they stopped the advance any more going. And the air force was with, lot of the

32:30 air force was withdrawn from Libya to go to Greece, sent back to help, to back up the Greece campaign, which was a disaster.

Well we will come to talk about Greece, but before we get there you did quite a bit of work with bombing convoys and ports?

We did bomb, mainly was shipping ports like Tobruk and Benghazi and just bombing troops you know, convoys and roads, that sort of thing,

33:00 normal targets were given by Headquarters to bomb. Mainly doing bombing airfields, ports and any tank movements on the ground, and all the, nearly all night work, not much day work, nearly all night work.

And for those kind of operations, what sort of formation did you fly in?

33:30 All single aircraft at night time and day time was normally formations up to threes. In those days we only flew in flights of three, not fours like we did later on, but in flights of three, maybe three or six aircraft would be assigned to do a certain job and that sort of thing. But night time course, all single sorties.

And when you rejoined 113 Squadron after your Sudan

34:00 **stint, who did you then crew up with?**

I always flew with the CO, as I was the only fully trained observer, I always flew with the CO of the squadron, old Spencer.

Sorry, what was his name?

Spencer. Was killed later on which I just missed by a short head. Another one of my lives.

34:30 **Well how were you I guess responding, knowing that there was a war going on, I'm just wondering in your mind how were you feeling about being part of this war?**

Just doing a job, doing what we were asked to do, same as any force I think, you know, you take orders, you're given orders,

35:00 and if you don't do it, somebody else gonna do it. In some cases if you didn't do it you were penalised or even shot, if you didn't do. You just, I mean the actual physical seeing, killing people in my case it was very, very rare. I think only very few cases I actually saw people being killed by my actual, you know, bombing was just something that you didn't see. You drop the bombs and

35:30 you just saw the explosion and you took off, that side of it, didn't sort of experience that too much. It was only when we got in the desert when we got harassed by the Germans and that sort of thing, we got, you know, had more contact with that sort of personal side of it.

So the desert bombing that you were

36:00 **doing before Greece, what sort or encounters or action did you…?**

We didn't, luckily we never got intercepted by any fighters at all on our raids, we were lucky to get, not to be sort of intercepted. Very sort of mundane I suppose you like to call it, just took off, dropped the bombs and went back to base and landed and waited for the next sortie to come up.

36:30 The big problem in the desert was that unlike the operations in, flying in Europe, when you've, the air force in Europe and England, you took off and you did a raid and then you came back and you had a home, a place to come to and a home, go down the pub, have a drink, socialise. Well in the desert it was quite different, you went back, you landed and quite often there was something going

37:00 on, the army were moving forward or getting chased back again so you're always on the, always mobile, and it was quite different. And the chance of getting killed on the ground was just as great as flying in the air, which happened a few times.

37:30 **Well you were in the Middle East until approximately December 1940.**

Yeah, out in the desert yeah. And when the squadron was assigned to Greece we went back to the Suez Canal area to have the aircraft all serviced up properly and then we flew over to Greece in January 1941.

38:00 **And where were you sent?**

We were sent, we landed at Athens, a place called Tatoi, it was a Greek air force base, main base of their air force just outside Athens, about five miles north of Athens and that was their main training place for air crew there, a place called Tatoi.

38:30 And we were there just a short time then we went to do this assignment of all the photography work up in north of Greece when they could see there was gonna be a showdown. The other squadrons were dispersed, some up Parametria, there was four squadrons of Blenheims went over and two squadrons of fighters went over to Greece.

39:00 We were up, finished up at Larisa about a hundred miles north of Athens when, on about the, well the beginning of April. And, sorry...

Okay well I know that our tape's just about to run out so before we get into hearing the Greece story, we might just change the tape.

Okay.

Because I think it's really interesting that you, from the air, you could see the

39:30 **Germans…**

Tape 5

00:41 **Could I just clarify what you were doing with 113 Squadron in Greece?**

We, our main job, initially we were just doing, just watching, we did one, the Italian Fleet came out, not the fleet but a

01:00 lot of Italian ships, naval ships came out in the Mediterranean Sea for, they thought was gonna be a raid on Alexandria, and we were given one job to go off and bomb, bomb the fleet or bomb the ships that were going down. There was gonna be a big, eventually finished up in one of the battles of the Mediterranean, but we were just sent off just to be a, not to do really damage to the ships but to make them do zig zag, you know, courses. The,

01:30 the British Fleet was coming up Alexandria, going flat out straight and to intercept em, and we just went up to scare em really. And that, then that was only one job we did then we were sent on this job up north to do all the photography work on the river, on the Strimicka coming down from Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.

And what could you see from what was happening in the borders?

02:00 Well when we were doing the ones on the trips, we'd go across to the, fly along the Greece side of the Bulgarian border and you could see, you know, all the Panzer Divisions, all the troops, all moving you know, in a, which eventually turned out to be the build-up to the invasion, you know, to invade Greece. But we weren't allowed to fire on anybody

02:30 because we were officially, I mean we were in Greece but Greece wasn't at war with Bulgaria or the Germans so we couldn't fly over them.

And…

Well we weren't, we could do but unofficially.

And did you unofficially?

No, no, no.

And how many Germans could you see amassing?

Oh just a general movement of vehicles you could see on the roads and that sort of thing, more than would

03:00 be normally for normal circumstances. And Intelligence was also telling us you know, on the ground that there was movements of troops in, up in there. It was just a matter of just looking and coming, then coming back, landing.

And what was the mood in Greece at this stage?

Very, very casual. It was, the whole thing was an absolute fiasco that, the

03:30 British Headquarters, the Forces Headquarters was about a hundred yards down the street from the German Embassy. And the Germans had a very good Fifth Column [spy network] set up over there, a lot of Greeks were spying for them, and there were Greeks outside of the Headquarters, in our Headquarters in Athens twenty-four hours a day just watching what was going on. And

04:00 they obviously were telling the Germans what was happening so that when they did invade, they knew exactly what forces was required to overcome the small force of ours in Greece. Which turned out to be exactly right, and I'll tell you the story about that later on. Cause we shot down a Junkers 88 later on and the pilot of that came from Greece and he told us that...

04:30 **We will talk about that later.**

Yeah, yeah.

You said you ended up in Larisa in early April, and this was also around the same time as a major earthquake in the area?

Yeah they had an earthquake just the day after we got there, there was a big earthquake up in northern Italy and Larisa took a very heavy damage and it put, the airfield had huge cracks across, it was just a big grass, you know, grassed area,

05:00 and we had to evacuate that to operate from. And we went to a little emergency airfield about five miles down the valley from there, and that was about, I think that was about the first of April that was, early April now.

And how close were the Germans getting at this stage?

Well the invasion hadn't started then, they were still the other side of the borders, but on the sixth of April

05:30 was when the invasion started we were at this emergency landing which was just a big, open grass field with the aircraft just parked round the side of the airfield, had a few tents to live in, and we just waiting for orders from Athens to what we're gonna do.

And what were your next set of orders?

Didn't come. No, didn't come. Well, when the invasion started

06:00 they picked the perfect time for bad weather and the whole of our area was covered in low cloud and we couldn't fly. Not that we could do very much cause we didn't have any bombs, we had no ammunition for the guns, we were just in this field, you know, waiting for things to happen and things to, supply to come in. And we just sitting there and I don't know where it came from but we were asked

to go and do a sortie to find out where the, what was happening up on the German

06:30 forces . I think a couple of aircraft took off but they ran into the first parts of the German Panzer Division coming down about fifty miles north of Salonika. And when they came back and signalled back to Athens that that's where they were, they told us that, you know, that they weren't our troops, they

07:00 were our troops there in the road but there's no way that... We had lads on the squadron who'd come, who'd been through the Dunkirk problem in France and they knew exactly what was a German tank looked like and all. And they came, we had about four crews arrive on the squadron just before we went to Greece and they'd come from England and when they heard

07:30 this on the squadron they said, "No way you're gonna stop these blokes, there's gonna be disaster," which it turned out to be.

So what was the feeling amongst the crew?

Well we just sit there, hoping to wait for some orders, and the following day from when we first saw it, the German troops, the weather cleared and still waiting on the ground for orders from Athens, what we're gonna do. And it was

08:00 very, blue sky, and we heard this noise coming from the north and looked up we thought, "Gee whiz yeah. God they're bloody German aircraft." There was a squad of Heinkel-111s, six of them in formation and with some Messerschmitt 109 fighters escorting them, and they just flew right over the top of us on, and cause we thought they were gonna bomb us. And they flew over the top of us and they flew on to Larisa, just

08:30 up the valley as it were. And we watched em you know, the bloody explosions and they bombed Larisa and they all, they saw them all wheel away, they disappeared up north back to where they came from. And very shortly afterwards we heard this bloody awful noise of low flying aircraft, and what'd happened, the 109's had broken away from the bombers that'd gone home, and they came down low level and just fired our airfield up, just put all the

09:00 aircraft U/S [unserviceable]. And they stage, cause we had no ack-ack guns [anti-aircraft guns] we had no defences, they just did what we used to practise gunnery on the ground. They just burned half the aircraft right down and then put all the aircraft U/S in various ways and then went, then they went back home then came back again in the afternoon to finish the job off. And eventually all the aircraft were burned, half our MT [motor transport] was all destroyed, and

09:30 we still didn't get any orders from Athens. So the CO said, "Right, we're off, we're gonna get the hell out of here, get back to Athens," so we just took off with what was left of the transport and went back and retreated back to Athens.

And what was the...?

Well the problem was there that the road, was only very few major roads coming down from that area to Athens and it was being absolutely jam-packed with refugees all streaming in from northern Italy, from northern Greece and that going

10:00 down to Athens way. It took us two days to get down to Athens from there.

By road?

By road, yeah. The Germans had bombed all the bridges on these main roads to stop, to reduce the flow of traffic going down them. And we got to Athens and put in a big transit camp which was just north of Athens and said, "Wait for orders."

10:30 And the initial orders came through that we would go back to, be sent back, flown back to Egypt to, and pick up new aircraft and then come back into Crete and carry on the war, and fight the Germans from Crete. But the whole situation, the situation in Greece deteriorated so quickly that very

11:00 shortly that was, those orders were followed by general evacuation for the whole air force. And we were still in this transit camp north of Athens and we just grabbed a truck. And the Flight Commander of the, of our A Flight was one of these obnoxious buggers who'd been transferred to our squadron from 11 Squadron, which

11:30 I'd met when you know, earlier on there, bloody bloke called Blomfield. Real, still maintained his upper echelon and he, and without his help we wouldn't have got this truck, it was an under-weight truck, with five of us piled in this truck. And when they said, you know, "Air force retreat or evacuate Greece," because the German air force

12:00 had bombed Piraeus, the whole harbour area was absolutely alight and destroyed. They'd hit an ammunition ship in one of their raids and there was no British aircraft, every aircraft you saw was German, there was no British aircraft at all, anywhere. And you know, our experience about, already we'd had and we'd hit by Messerschmitt Me-110's and ground strafe and that sort of thing. And we just grabbed this truck and put,

12:30 and grabbed two boxes of rations, compo [composite] rations and took off to go to Argos which was the

port of embarkation for all, anybody could get down. And Argos unfortunately was on the other side of the Corinth Canal, south of Athens, about sixty miles south of Athens and to get there you had to, the main roads were going across the, near the canal. And we saw these German paratroopers

13:00 being dropped along the canal to stop this very thing happening, so we decided not to try and get down to Argus, if we could try and find some other way, either by boat or aircraft, that was only to bypass Piraeus to get down to the port where we, to go. And so we went, we made our way to a RAF airfield, it was a maintenance unit for

13:30 repair, repairing aircraft and that sort of thing. Which is now the main airport, it was called Menadione in those days, it's now the main airport for Athens, big civvy airport for Athens. But it was then just used as a place to take an air, if it'd been shot up or damaged or flying that sort of thing, needed major repairs and that, then take them there to repair them. So we went, we made for that place, hoping we might find an aeroplane. And we got there and there was nobody there, everybody had just shot, shot through.

14:00 Deserted and left all these Gladiators and some Blenheims on the airfield, that'd been sent there for repair. So we just, we went round the aircraft until we finally came to one that had, didn't seem to be too badly damaged and checking them for fuel mainly, see how much fuel they had, cause we worked out we wanted to get back to Egypt if we could. We eventually found a Mark I Blenheim which had been,

14:30 belonged to one of the Squadrons, to 11 Squadron had been written off actually in their raids. It was only for repairs and they, and we looked at it but not enough fuel in it, not enough to get us to Greece but we could get to Crete. So then the thing was to get it started cause it was sitting there with no batteries or anything. Eventually we got a battery from another aeroplane which we got in then

15:00 and it wasn't, it was almost flat, then we had to hand start the engines. Got the thing going eventually and so we just ditched the truck and set fire to it and all piled in this and jumped in and flew over to Crete.

Can I just ask, what was on, what personal belongings or what were you wearing when you escaped?

Nothing, like I sit here now, nothing, not even toothbrush and,

15:30 and tube and paste, what we stood up in we just went off. Because all our gear, we'd lost it initially up in Larisa and then anything was left, and they said, "No you..." we didn't even think about it. It was just a case of, you can't imagine, it was absolute pandemonium, chaos. Everybody was looking for a, to get out the country and looking after yourself as it were.

16:00 **Wow, I'm just trying to get an imagine of what the civilians were like to try and get out?**

Well the civilians, it was different for them because they could evacuate the place, but cause we had no aircraft there was no point in us being there so that's why they gave us the orders to get out as quick as we could. The army were being chased, coming down the country, being chased all over the place. The Germans were very, very cunning, they knew exactly, because the front line was

16:30 covered with Australian troops, New Zealand troops, they had Palestinians, they had Indians they had all kinds of different units in the area. And the Germans, when they decided to break through at their various fronts that they have, like, they didn't come through the British or the Australians or the New Zealanders, the came through the outside as it were, knowing that they wouldn't put up much resistance.

17:00 And of course when they broke the line, out, had to retreat to try and maintain contact, and it happened all the way down in Greece. But the situation just deteriorated so quickly, yeah.

So how many days was this happening over?

Oh five days yeah, about five days, from the time we left Larisa and we got there finally back was about a week.

17:30 In a week the whole show just completely folded.

And what was going through your mind at this time?

Get the hell out of there. Yeah, get the hell out quickly.

Did it ever get really hairy, like really close that you thought you may not get out?

Oh yes, yeah, very much so, especially when we saw, when we couldn't get across the canal to get down to Argos and our,

18:00 our, when I say, our last resort was either by air or by boat of some kind and luckily it turned out we got an aircraft to get out.

So you're flying to Crete at this time, and how was the plane that you had managed to salvage?

Flyable. No, it was, it didn't have any radios, it didn't have, couldn't have any, no radios in it.

18:30 Just enough fuel to get us to Crete. It'd been shot up and it had bullet holes, it'd been, obviously been attacked by something but that weren't in vital places, they, we could still fly the aeroplane in that condition.

What kind of a plane was it?

A Mark I Blenheim, a short nosed version of that one over there. That one on the wall there, that, the Mark I I'm talking, Mark I, the short

19:00 nosed one.

And how many people could fit into that plane?

Normally three, we put five in it.

So how did you fit five in?

Oh just, in the bomb bay. We climbed, they climbed up and sat in the bomb bay yeah.

Are you okay?

Mmm, just got, just rub my leg a bit, bloody seat's giving a cramp a little bit, yeah okay.

19:30 So when we landed at Crete course there was no air force there, there was just this air, now it's a big, it's the main airfield for Crete, a place called Heraklion, it's a big holiday, you know, place there. And the only army units there was a New Zealand ack-ack, one ack-ack gun position protecting the airfield. And when we landed there the, we went up and said, "Any air force?" They said, "No, air force here."

20:00 They said, "What are you gonna do?" "Oh I don't know what we're gonna do." "Okay, here's a rifle and fifty rounds, go and help the ack-ack crews in that gun position down there." So you can imagine our reaction to that was we weren't very happy about that sort of thing.

But you had had some gunning experience, what about the other crew?

Oh we were all air crew, we all had training some time, we all carried revolvers normally when we're flying,

20:30 38 Smith & Wesson, so we all knew how to press a trigger. But no, they just said you know, "Well, if you're gonna be here you might as well help out," which was the obvious thing to do and they just said, "There's a rifle and fifty rounds, go and help the lads down there on the ack-ack gun."

So who was attacking Crete at this stage?

Nobody, but the Germans were constantly patrolling over the top, doing, obviously photographing and doing recce-ing [reconnaissance] of all the areas. And luckily Heraklion

21:00 was in the middle of the island and they were concentrating on Suda Bay which was on the western end where we all, where the Naval Depot was and where the, most of the troops were concentrated on the west end of the island. We were in the middle of the island, I can't, on the, where's my map there? Yeah, just on the centre of the island away from all, where all the real activity was going on.

21:30 But they were patrolling you know, over the top, watching what was going on all the time.

And...

See there was no British aircraft at all, it was all German. It didn't matter what, if you heard a noise in the sky, it was only... Except for this one Hudson that which I, the day after we landed at Heraklion this Hudson came in that'd been shot by I don't know whether it was by, he'd been

22:00 damaged anyway in the air and he was making for Crete to get inland. And he had, he'd lost all his hydraulics, they'd, he'd lost his hydraulic fluid and he couldn't get the gear down, so he just came and landed on the airfield and just did a belly flop, skidded along the ground and finished up about a hundred yards from our aircraft.

Did the pilot walk away from that?

Oh they got all, they didn't catch fire but when they got out we thought ah, it didn't burn, is there any fuel

22:30 in it? So when we spoke to the crew they said, "Oh yeah we got half, still got half full of juice." So then big think: "Right, that juice there, out of there, if we haven't got any, how we gonna get it into our aeroplane." So we went round and found some old forty gallon drums and found an old rotary pump, we spent two nights transferring the fuel into these drums, running across to our aeroplane and

23:00 pumping it in to our aeroplane. Then we got that filled up about two days later, we all piled into our aircraft and took off and went back down to Egypt, with just what we stood up in. No documents, no personal documents or service documents, no flying equipment, no parachutes, nothing, like I'm sitting

here, now.

And what happened, well where did you land in Egypt?

Back

23:30 to Heliopolis, where we, I knew, you know, I was before. Cause that's the near, also was the nearest airfield to Headquarters in the Middle East, cause as far as the air force was concerned, I mean we were just, you know, just disappeared. So, and no documents so we had to go and first thing we did when we landed at Heliopolis was, well we were met by the duty crew and said, "The CO's not accepting any aeroplanes from Greece,

24:00 now get the hell out of here, we don't want you here, take the aeroplane away." And we said, "You can jump in the lake." First thing we gonna do is get some new clothes and also go back to, go down to Headquarters and book in again, join the air force again, cause we had no pay books, no nothing at all.

So was it like enlisting all over again?

Oh it was, it was

24:30 pantomime really, we went down to Headquarters and they said, you know, "Who are you?" "Oh we've come from Greece." "Where's your pay books?" "Haven't got one." "Why not?" So we had to get new pay books and the whole complete documentation again.

Did they know what was happening in Greece at this stage?

They didn't, the didn't know what was, the thing deteriorated so quickly that it was another world over there. And we were the first to arrive in, from those conditions and

25:00 spread the word as it were what was happening. And the CO at Heliopolis said, "Well go down and get your stores, get new clothes, go and get documentation and then come back tomorrow and somebody gotta fly the aircraft back out of here up to Aboukir," which was up the big Emmufarruge up by Alexandria. So they, amongst the pilots, there were three pilots

25:30 amongst the crew, the people that got with us, they tossed a coin to see who was gonna go and take the aeroplane up to...

Can I just ask why they weren't accepting any planes from Greece?

Because everything was going, coming into Heliopolis, the nearest big base from Greece. Anybody that was getting out of Greece that had an aeroplane were coming into, were making for Heliopolis.

26:00 Obviously the best place to go to, near Cairo, where Headquarters were so on, and the airfield was being cluttered up with all these aircraft. He didn't want em on the airfield, which I suppose was all right but we weren't about to volunteer to go quickly. And the next day when the old sergeant of the war had the job of flying the aircraft up to Aboukir, went out to the aircraft and there's a big pool of oil under

26:30 port engine. And they took the cowlings off and bloody hell, there'd been an oil leak in one of the cylinders, the bottom cylinder of the engine and couldn't start it. So he just took off and left the damn thing there.

So what was Heliopolis,

27:00 **Heliopolis, excuse me, what was it like at this time?**

Oh wasn't, they were still fairly, they were, the war was on but it was no tension there, it was a base you know, it was sort of behind the, you know, on, outside the line, like way behind the line as it were. And it was fairly busy but it was no panic at all there, it was just very peaceful, almost like it was before the war. Just being cluttered up by all these, any (buckshee UNCLEAR) aeroplanes coming

27:30 in from Greece at that time. And the CO was probably right saying I don't want em here, you take it to Aboukir. And we could have gone there initially but it wasn't near, anywhere near Cairo. I'd the choice, I was navigating the aircraft, we're on the deck going flat out on the way from Crete to Egypt, but no maps. And I said, "Hit south and we'll hit the northern African coast somewhere. When we hit the coast I'll know where we are,"

28:00 because I knew that place like the back of my hand. And we hit by Ras el Kenayis which is about fifty miles west of, or eighty miles west of Alexandria, so hit that and I said, "Right, turn left."

And why did you want to go to Cairo, why did you want to go back to Cairo?

Well Headquarters was there for starters, we had to get back in the air force again and also nice place socially to be. Coming out of that fiasco in Greece and knowing

28:30 all the spots to go to and that sort of thing. But then was, the trouble was to, the orders at, when we're in Greece we said, "If you get out of the country all right, the squadron's gonna reform at Aqir in Palestine, sorry, at Ramallah in Palestine. That's where we're finally trying to get to.

So where was the rest of 113 scattered?

Oh well eventually, well I don't know what happened in the mean time

29:00 but how, when we're told to go to Ramla and there we'd wait until any survivors that got out of Greece, you know, we'd go there. And we were there for a month in Ramla to allow for any stragglers, we got sixty blokes back out of two hundred and fifty, eventually got there.

That's quite a big loss.

Well I think it may, well

29:30 mainly probably POW's or got hurt on the way down but we got about a third of the squadron back.

And so what happened when the squadron reformed?

Well waited for this month for any people to get, could get out, could get

30:00 to Ramla and then they reformed the squadron. They had more people posted in but what they did do, they sent us back on the desert to replace a squadron that was being pulled out for R&R. In other words we went out with a few personnel, we took over their aircraft that they'd left behind, which was a bunch of rubbish and their, all their personnel went back to Cairo for rest and you know, R&R.

30:30 And they, then they, we always took over the personnel from the squadron as well that were due for, were due for R&R and we amalgamated the two squadrons, as it were, personnel to form 113 Squadron again.

And what were the planes you were now flying?

Now we went into the long nose Blenheims and the squadron was split into two sections. There was six aircraft, the fighter Blenheim, and the fighter Blenheim was

31:00 a special one adapted for night fighting and also for day work, you know, for long range low level air strafing airfields and things like that. And we had, instead of having bombs on, we had four point-three guns under the belly firing forward with the ammunition all in the bomb bay and a twenty millimetre canon in the nose which I had to operate as a navigator. And other

31:30 six aircraft were just straight bombers, so we had a split squadron, one half of the squadron was fighter bombers and others were straight bombers.

And where were you based now?

We went back on that time we were at, we went to an airfield just very near Sidi Barrani, Landing Ground 76, it was about ten miles inland from the coast of, in Egypt, Sidi Barrani, near the border. There was many, many airfields in that

32:00 are and they developed all these that, they were just flat pieces of ground really, that was good enough for aircraft to land on. And they built them, you know put tents around em and that, that was your landing ground, not an airfield really, it was a place to land on. But a lot of them in that area, they had about four or five of em bunched together.

So whilst you were waiting for the Squadron to reform, what…

Into Tel Aviv.

what did you get up to?

32:30 Same thing as Cairo. Well you can imagine coming out of Greece, after all that bloody fiasco and tension and that sort of thing and getting turned loose into Palestine which was real peace time. They had, there's no war in Palestine and yeah, it was a pretty hectic month we had there but it was good, in Tel Aviv, in Jaffa. But Jaffa is a sort of, the Arab side of Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv's split really the

33:00 Jews in Tel Aviv itself and then the Arabs in Jaffa.

And did Tel Aviv have a red light district?

Yep, they all have. Yeah, gee whiz.

And what was the red light district like in Tel Aviv?

Not as good as Cairo, It wasn't so well organised, cause it wasn't, see there was no military side to it, it was all civilian, and it was just more civilian orientated rather than service-orientated in there, yeah.

So

33:30 **when you say it wasn't as well organised, how was it organised?**

What do you mean?

The red light district?

Well it wasn't, there was no military presence in it. See in Cairo there was a military section within the red light district where you could all go for treatment. Where of course in Tel Aviv it was normal civilian, like Adelaide.

So what extra precautions would you take in Tel Aviv?

What do you mean?

Well if

34:00 **you didn't have the military there to kind of take care of any medical or VD [venereal disease], what happened in Tel Aviv, what did ...?**

Like we'd do in Adelaide. There was no sort of service help if you required it, which is normal civilian procedure.

So what precautions did you take?

Well just hope you never caught the boat up [contracted VD].

Did the same rule

34:30 **apply where you went to the same person every time?**

Oh we weren't so well organised as that no, no, no. It was, being a smaller section there wasn't so much, more individual you know, escapades or venturing in to Tel Aviv. But the same time there was, we're always thinking about the blokes that,

35:00 where're the lads all the time. No, I think from the social life of girls in Tel Aviv, it wasn't so easy up there as it was in Cairo.

What was the major difference?

I don't know just not going down there so often I think. In Egypt everybody had

35:30 their own special girl, be it French, Syrian or Russian or Greek. Yeah, no.

Well what nationalities were the girls in Tel Aviv?

Nearly all Jewish, Jewish, yeah. There were, well Jews of, from mainly sort of oh, anywhere in the world really in there. But

36:00 I mean down in Cairo it was any, all countries in there, mainly Syrian and Lebanese.

And what was the cost of the services?

Anything from, well, what would, what was the equivalent of ten ackers [piastres]? About two pounds I think, two pounds.

36:30 And the top one was about ten.

So what would you get for that two pounds?

Well you get, the top means you had the, always outside the room was an Arab with a bowl of Condy's Crystals, and that was your first treatment after you had a

37:00 session. As you went lower down you got no outside treatment at all there, you went straight down to the early treatment place, in there.

So how did you approach the girls?

Just sitting up in their, in the rooms. And it was, there was a ten acker house, a five acker house, all the girls in that house was all the one price. Yeah.

37:30 **So how did you shop around?**

By, only by talking to other lads and seeing where the best joints were and whose house to go to and that sort of thing. The best, but mainly with the nation of the girls, the Lebanese girls were the best, Lebanese and a few Russian, yeah.

And what were the girls like?

38:00 Very good, very good, yeah. Yeah, they were, yeah.

So in Tel Aviv without having...?

And they liked the air force better than the army.

And what set the air force men away, aside from the army men?

Probably a bit more gentle. And the payment was better, especially air crew, you know we got paid higher than...

38:30 Yeah, gee, yeah.

So what did the girls look like, what did they dress like?

Well, not very much. No, they're pretty well presentable, yeah.

And in Tel Aviv you didn't have the services there...

No.

to look after you if...?

No.

39:00 **Did anyone get caught out?**

I couldn't, I don't remember now, I can't remember right now. Everybody tried to you know, because it was a, it was a service offence to catch VD, and so everybody just hoped that they didn't fall by the way side.

And did, were condoms available?

Mmm, oh they're actually in the treatment centre,

39:30 so if you didn't have any you went in there and collected some before you went on the prowl, yeah.

So what were the night clubs like in Tel Aviv?

Good, good, yeah very good, it was just like civilian, I mean peace time, there was no sort of war going on there, up there and it was just, everything was there, all the sort of good food and the good, all the good drinks.

40:00 I remember Black Label Whisky, you know, Black Label Whisky, it was the first time we'd seen that for ages, it was about a pound a bottle you know. Yeah, really got tanked up on the old Scotch, yeah.

I'm just trying to get a picture of what these clubs were like in 1940-41?

Well normal cabaret's I suppose, I mean

40:30 there was always girls available to sit with you and drink with you and always put a floor show on. By ranks, there was officers' clubs and but the same, whether it was officers or NCOs or other ranks it was you know, the officers had a higher class you know, better looking girl and that sort of thing and so on down the line. But all the same had, you know, place where you could eat and then when they had a show come on you move into the area where the stage was

41:00 and just watch the show then carried on with the night drinking and what have you.

So what did you do during the day, during this time?

Go out the pyramids in Egypt, go out and see the old Sphinx and out to Giza at the pyramids or go down the Nile somewhere. There was plenty to do if you wanted to do that or just, you know, sleep.

41:30 No never short of any social activities. And also played a lot of sport too of course in peace time, played a lot of cricket and tennis and squash.

Our tape's about to run out.

Is it, okay, how do you know that, can you hear it can you, hey?

A little birdie comes and tells me.

Tape 6

00:31 **John, you were telling us earlier on that after you came back from Crete, you went to Palestine had some leave in Tel Aviv and we talked quite a bit about that, but when the second push began, where were you?**

We, the squadron had been reformed in Palestine and we'd gone out to this airfield, first at Sidi Barrani and when the push actually started , we went down to Giarabub

01:00 Oasis. And then from there we quickly moved to another airfield way behind enemy lines, about a hundred and fifty miles west of that, a place called LG [Landing Ground]125 and that was a hundred and, about ninety miles into enemy territory as it were. And we took the fighters down there, the fighter

Blenheims down there. And our job was to operate from there

01:30 right behind the enemy lines and strafe airfields and troop movements so forth and use that as an advance base and then go back to Giarabub which was our base really. That LG 125 was an advanced airfield, it was only just a clay pan, a dried up clay pan which they used in the desert for airfields.

And what strength was the squadron at this point?

At that time we had twelve aircraft,

02:00 six fighter Blenheims and six bomber Blenheims.

Well can you just take us through one of those typical operations that you were doing during this time?

Well on, we, I was on the fighter Blenheim side of it only, and we, our normal sortie would be taking off at first light in the morning, flying right across to the other side of the Libyan coast

02:30 south west of Benghazi and ground strafing troop movements and MT convoys or any airfields that were in the area. And then go back to this LG 125 and then back to our base at Giarabub after that, it was just a forward refuelling place really to operate further behind the enemy lines as it were.

And what was it like for the squadron to be behind enemy lines,

03:00 **what did that mean for your squadron?**

Well it just meant that we were way out in the never-never, in the blue as it were and just operating in, from enemy territory. We were way away from, the actual war was taking place way up north in Tobruk you know, the actual active war was going on there but we were just right down, away from the war front but still operating way behind enemy lines.

And what news did you

03:30 **receive from what was going on in Tobruk?**

We didn't have any, didn't have any news at all. There's no communications like down there, you just got your targets from the Group Headquarters which was back in Egypt somewhere. And they, then they'd signal to you through or radio through what your target would be for the next day and you'd plan your trip and then go out and do that trip and come back again.

04:00 There was no, we didn't have any radios at all or anything like that, that was going on in the outside world as it were, although we were behind enemy lines. It was quite often used to happen like that in the desert you know. There'd be, there was an army unit called the Long Range Desert Group and their job was going around, from the army's point of view, with a small fighting unit, right down below, right down in the desert in the Libyan

04:30 Desert and then coming up to the coast line, hitting the coastline about last light at night time. Getting to an airfield, putting demolition charges on aircraft and then running back in the desert, going, having caused all the trouble, and that was, they were a specialist group like the SAS [Special Air Service]. And when they were doing these sorties they would, if they came across a huge, dried up salt pan which was ideal for using as a landing area, they'd

05:00 mark the position on their maps and send the position, by latitude and longitude, back to Headquarters and say this is a possible advanced landing ground to use by the air force. And LG 125 was one of those airfields that was a dried up pan that we were using, it was nothing, just real big flat surface, ideal, smooth as a billiard table, to use as a landing ground.

And how easy was it to navigate in that area?

With

05:30 difficulty, no maps, there was nothing to read, all you could do was your knowledge of the countryside. When I went to find this LG 125, having been given the position from the army they said, "There's a big clay pan, a hundred and twenty-five miles west of... that could be used," and they gave the latitude and longitude, I had to plot it on my map and then say, now how the hell can I find that place. And all, when I did find it eventually, I just took a quick note of what was outstanding features in the area,

06:00 so that when you're going there you could say, "Oh that, there's that brown sand dune", the other ones were all white so you could pick it out as a reference point. And then steer, heading from that, to go to, somewhere for the next position, or next outstanding point, features on the ground you used as sort of turning points. There was no maps at all, there was just, looking at the map was just a big expanse of brown with a few tracks, caravan

06:30 tracks used in the old days, something like that. It was very difficult actually, maps weren't much good at all.

And how easy was it to get lost?

Very easy. Well don't say, not, you, it wasn't easy to get lost, because you, all you had to do was just turn left and hit the coast. I mean you always, you're not so far away from the coast as you're going along there. But when you say lost, you mean not find the target, yeah, that was very easy.

07:00 And they had, visibility, you know, if it wasn't very good at all you, quite often you'd take off and there'd be a sand storm somewhere you know, and you'd have to abort your sortie because you just couldn't see. Cause when the sand storm, they used to call em Cam Scenes that was the weather feature, it was more than a sand storm which was very, very dense but it only about a thousand feet deep, so you could fly above it and all you could, all you would see was this great patch of brown. In fact when we came back from Malta there was a huge

07:30 one on all the way from the Libyan coast line, was, you couldn't tell the coast line proper because you could see the outline of the coast because the sand blowing out to sea was forming the same contours of the shore line. But the actual land was miles in, miles south of that.

And what was the operation at Malta?

We were protecting, doing-anti submarine patrols for the convoys that were coming in from Gibraltar. You know, when Malta was crying out for supplies, they used to have these

08:00 special convoys which had, you know, merchant ships surrounded by naval ships to escort them through in to Malta. And they took a terrible, terrible beating and our job was to patrol the areas around the convoy, anti submarine patrols and shoot up airfields. We had fighters because shoot up any airfields in southern Sicily or Pantelleria which was an island which the Italians had at the time.

08:30 And they called that area between Sardinia and Sicily and Malta, 'Bomb Alley', cause as soon as you'd hit that area, that's when the German air force and the Italian air force came in and really gave the convoy a hard time. And when the convoy arrived in, what remained of the convoy getting to Malta, then we'd go back to Egypt again. Just reinforced the units on Malta because they were suffering terrible losses over there in the air,

09:00 in fact everything, and civilians, and the bombing was unbelievable there, it was safer to be in the air than be on the ground in Malta. There was so much, the airfield, wasn't had runways it was a big dirt area, and cause there was so many ack-ack guns on Malta and the shrapnel, when there was a raid on the shrapnel'd come, it was almost raining down. And all the shrapnel falling on the ground, in the soft ground, you

09:30 couldn't see it, and when you were taxiing you'd run over shrapnel and bang, you'd blow a tyre and that was a big problem. And there's no trees on Malta and the aircraft shelters were away, far away as they could possibly be from the airfield because that was what they're after all the time. And when you landed at Malta, there were sign posts, 'Spitfires this way' and 'Hurricanes this way' and 'Hamdens this way' and 'Blenheims this way.' And you taxied about half a mile off the airfield before you got to a place

10:00 where they had big stone walls around where the aircraft was gonna be. It was, the people that were based on Malta went through one hell of a time.

And how many operations did you do at Malta, or just roughly, just off the top of your head?

Oh five,

10:30 say five off hand. Just in that time the convoy was in Bomb Alley, and luckily we were able to get back out of it again, and I was always happy to get out. And after coming back from the last trip that's when I got notified that I was awarded the DFM [Distinguished Flying Medal].

Well tell us about that and why you were awarded the DFM?

Well I'd done fifty operations, fifty, and during that time I went for, what do they call it now,

11:00 it's, "efficient and courageous work carried out during fifty operational missions", that was the official citation for it.

And who was your pilot?

I was with the Squadron Commander, Squadron Leader Spencer.

And when did you receive notification of that award?

August

11:30 1941.

And how important was an award like that to boost morale?

Very good, yeah, cause DFMs were very rare. It's the most, I'd say, of the three decorations I got, I think it's the one I prize more than any cause it's the most difficult, well there's five thousand DFCs [Distinguished Flying Cross] and only fifty DFMs awarded, in that

12:00 ratio type of thing. Although I got both of them, the DFM was the one that I worked hardest for I think. I

don't know that ‘worked hard’ is the right word but I pride that one more of all, anything. And the squadron, when the squadron got decorations there was always a party, so, you know, yes.

Why do you pride that one more than the DFC do you think?

Well I wasn’t commission, as a non commissioned officer

12:30 and they weren’t awarded so often as what DFCs were given to commissioned officers. And of the three decorations there was only five, I think five air crew in the whole of the Royal Air Force, that got those three decorations in that order. And I’m the last one that’s alive now with those

13:00 decorations. I think the trouble is it’s with a, with the DFC and the AFC [Air Force Cross] and the DFM, people don’t get em in the right order all the time And if you think about crosses before medals, the DFC is given for a similar thing as a DFM but when you’re an officer, when you’re commissioned. And Air Force Cross really is a peace time operation, but because my incident happened in a non-operational area, that’s when I was awarded the AFC rather than the

13:30 DFC.

And was that award for one particular operation or was it for the general fifty operations that you did?

What the DFM? For the whole lot I think. I did some good raids and did some not so good raids, but over all, the worked unit. I carried on and did more, I did eighty-one altogether in the end but that was just up to that time.

14:00 **Well congratulations on your awards.**

Thank you. Thank you.

Would you like to put that book down now? Yeah.

Oh yeah, sorry.

Well after Malta, I believe there was an attack by Junkers bombers on the airfield a bit later, can you tell us about that?

Well this is when we went back on the second trip, you know, when the second push

14:30 started, operating from LG 125, we were there landing to refuel to do a raid as I mentioned just now, away behind the enemy lines. And while we were there a recce, a German recce aircraft, a Heinkel 111 came over the top of us, he looking, now obviously looking for somebody that was operating behind, of the range we were operating at, they knew that it was somebody had been working inside enemy territory as it were. And there, they must have sent an aircraft over to find, somewhere

15:00 to find out who we were or where we were and they just came down, they found us down there this recce first. That was when we were down, just after landing from one sortie, we were refuelling, this Heinkel 111 came over late in the afternoon we said, “Jesus, they’ve seen us, they’ve seen where we are, look out.” And sure enough next morning, about 11 o’clock, this bloody roar and there’s a

15:30 gang of, a flight of Junkers 88s and Me 110s came over and really did us over. And they bombed the airfield and strafed the area and they put all the aircraft U/S, luckily none of them burned but they put all our aircraft U/S. But during the raid there was one army Bofors gun, a defence for defending the airfield and they, they hit one of the Junkers-

16:00 88’s when it was on its dive down the, and amongst all the noise and the dirt and smoke, we just saw it go away low level. And then it, when they’d gone we looked in the distance and there was this black pall of smoke about three or four miles away from the area. So we obviously knew that the aircraft had crashed there so we all, we jumped in a jeep and drove over there. When we got there, there was a Junkers-88 had crashed,

16:30 it was burning and the crew was standing, the bottom gunner had been killed in the crash but the navigator and top gunner and pilot had survived and they were just standing by the aircraft watching it burn. And we arrived and they just became our POW’s, our prisoners.

And how did you approach them?

Just went up to them and they could, there’s nowhere they could go, I mean we were miles in the

17:00 desert, miles from any help at all. And there was nothing they could hide, there was just flat, there was just nothing, no place to go and hide anywhere. We just went up there and just said, you know, “Hello, tell us all about it.” So we took them back to our airfield and because our aircraft were all U/S but they were repairable, we couldn’t get,

17:30 couldn’t leave straight away. So took em about two days to repair the aircraft to get em to fly again. In that mean time we, each of, I forget who it was, but I looked after the pilot, he was in my care. And I, I say look after him, we had, we’re just living in the open on the ground, and blankets and had our rations and water and just you had those, you know, to survive on.

18:00 And I shared my blankets and my rations with this, with the officer, he was an Under Lieutenant, a Leutnant in the German air force. A young lad of about twenty-one, in immaculate grey uniform, we were just in dirty old khaki shorts and no badges or rank or anything. And here's this polished boots, flying boots and bloody, had the Iron Cross around his neck and he, you know, looking a bit like

18:30 he'd come out of you know, Bond Street or somewhere in London. And but he was a very nice lad, he spoke English perfectly, and during those two days I was with him we talked, had quite a long chat. And he was just like one of us, he was doing his job and unfortunately got shot down. And from him I found out what the Greece fiasco was. He'd come from Greece, the squadron he was with had come from Greece to Benghazi to do that

19:00 particular job of attacking us down there. And he said in Greece, they knew exactly to every man, to every aircraft, every vehicle almost that the British Forces had or the enemy had in Greece, they knew exactly what sort of, types of aircraft, how many aircraft they're gonna use for the whole invasion, before it started. And that confirmed my suspicion about what I said about the German Embassy in Athens and Headquarters.

19:30 The troops in Athens, they knew exactly what was going on. And also during that conversation, I approached him about the German invasion of Russia cause this was just about three of four months after the invasion of Russia by the Germans. And at that time the Germans were going through Russia with no trouble at all. And I said to him, "What do you think about that?" And he said, "Well," just off the cuff he just said, "I'm sorry, it's the death of Germany." And I thought, "Gee

20:00 whiz". I said, "How did you surmise that then?" And he said, "Well Russia's a big country," he said, "we haven't got enough forces to fight on two fronts, East and Western Front, and the Eastern Front's gonna be the biggest problem." He said, "We will never beat them." And he said, "It's a shame that we are fighting as enemies," he said, "because after the war's over, the big problem's gonna be Russia." This is in July 1941.

20:30 **Well what an opportunity for you to suddenly be face to face with your enemy…?**

Yes it was a rare, very rare because the RAF weren't allowed to hold prisoners, so as there's nowhere to take him he stayed with us until we could get, make, you know, a place where there's any British soldiers. So when, after the

21:00 aircraft were damaged, took us two days to get them back ready to fly again, they weren't fully serviceable. My aircraft that I flew in had, couldn't use any hydraulics, no flaps, no under-carriage so we had to fly back to Giarabub, which was our base down at the oasis with our undercarriage down and couldn't use flaps for take off or landing. And the German pilot sat in front of me in the cock-

21:30 pit on the way back. And when we got back to Giarabub, I then had to hand him over to the British Army for POW treatment, which was, it was unreal. I lived with the chap for, you know, two, three days, talking to him like I'm talking to you now and next, and he changed into being treated as a prisoner of war in the army. It was an Indian Regiment that was down there and all the officers were British,

22:00 and typical bloody Indian Army they were oh, Pukka Sahibs. And this person that, I was walking across from our tents, across to the army unit that was the other side of the airfield at Giarabub. And as I approached the army unit, I thought, "I wonder where the Headquarters Tent tent might be?' And there's a big EPIP tent {English pattern, Indian product] semi-sunk in the ground, that was normally, and a body came up from down below and saw us coming and,

22:30 "Halt!" he yelled out. Typical army, "Halt!" And I stopped and, he said "Who, where, what do you want? Where are you going?" And I said, "I got a German air force officer I want to hand over to you." And this, it was the sergeant major of the regiment of all people, he just yelled out, "Fall in two men!" And two army blokes appeared with rifles and so forth, and the last thing I saw this poor lieutenant he was being

23:00 marched off into the desert, escorted by two army blokes with rifles. Yeah, what a transformation, yeah. He finished up in Palestine cause that was the POW camp for German air force people. But he had the Iron Cross which he gave me as a souvenir and his Luger pistol which they all carry, we all

23:30 after souvenirs, but I lost those in the moves.

And what did you give him?

My good, my rations and my blanket. He was married, had a little baby about twelve months old, back in, I forget, I think he was down near Stuttgart, I think his home was. But he was just like, you know, an ordinary person, spoke perfect,

24:00 in fact the whole crew spoke English. And they were a specialist squadron in the German air force that was operating in, over our areas that could understand English or speak English, and also the radio operator was au fait with all our radio frequencies and so forth, listening to our radios being used. Yeah, he was just unfortunate, he was just like all of us, I mean I

24:30 could've been in the same boat many times myself but he was just unlucky, but survived the crash. He,

and what happened, the Bofors gun crew had hit him in the elevators, the elevator's the controls that controls the aircraft in the elevation. And hit him in the elevator and he lost control, full control of the, so it was doing yo-yoing and eventually it hit the ground and the bottom on one of these yo-yo's, skidded across the ground caught fire, and the bottom gunner was killed,

25:00 and we buried him by the side of the aircraft before we went back to the airfield. Yes that was a rare and unusual experience, it was very nice to have experienced it there. Kept thinking to myself, I could have been in the same boat, many times, in fact everybody was who would have got shot down.

25:30 The war in the desert was quite different to Europe in many ways. Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, the German General in charge of the Panzer divisions, he fought the war exactly according to the Geneva Convention rules, there's no dirty work at all and there was no real hard core Gestapo or SS [Schutzstaffel] troops. There were SS troops there but they were a different breed I think than the European ones. And there was no

26:00 nasties, there was very good camaraderie between the, although enemies, that we treat each other according to the good book.

And how did the rest of your squadron deal with having POWs?

Well they never saw him, well they saw them in those few days they just said, "Oh," a bit of a, you know, unusual thing to have,

26:30 but no they just, they all fitted in so well. As I say they just air crew doing jobs like we were doing. And I can't remember who looked after the navigator, was an absolute bastard, he was a real Nazi and he didn't speak one word of English the whole time he was with us. And when he heard the officer who was in our company when he was talking about the Russian Campaign, he nearly went berserk in German, oh, he called his under officer all the bastards in the world,

27:00 for talking like that Cause he was a typical Deutsche, you know, no neck, big, real bald head, a real typical German. So after that episode then the squadron, cause we'd been in operations ever since the war and had a pretty rough time of it,

27:30 they withdrew us out the desert to go back to Cairo for R&R. The plan was to take us back to Helwan which was a base just near Cairo, there for a month's R&R, get new aircraft, then come back and start fighting again. But during that time Pearl Harbor started and course the whole concept then of the war and that changed. And overnight, the

28:00 squadron was, whole orders were changed from getting new aircraft and going, we got new aircraft in which we went east, squadron went out to Burma but didn't get, got the same treatment by the Japanese air force that we had in Greece. We got to the place eventually in Burma and was ground-strafed by the Japanese and were wiped out, almost identical to what the situation was in Larisa. And luckily for me I was posted

28:30 overnight, because I was the senior air crew on the squadron and had been, done two operations, two tours of operation, they said, "You've got to go away and much against my..." Cause I'd been down to Cairo to get briefed for the whole, for the flight out the Far East and picked up all the maps and all the briefing material required to go there. And I got there not to be greeted with the maps but, "Here's your posting notice Barrey, you're posted to Kenya." Which I was very unhappy about,

29:00 but there it was. So I was posted down to 70 OTU.

Well before we talk about Kenya, it was around about this time, I mean after the Japanese entered the war things really did change dramatically and you received news about your brother, can you tell us what sort of news you received?

I got it through newspapers, we got the

29:30 newspaper, the Gyppo Gazette, used to come occasionally to us out in the desert, and in that said that the HMAS Sydney had been sunk. That's how I found out. That was in December, that was about a month after the actual action took place. And he, as I mentioned earlier on, when the war started he'd got his civil pilot's license, but the air force then

30:00 said, "You come," you know, "we want you in now." So he went, did his training at Parafield, pilot training, graduated and then he volunteered for service in, overseas. But in early 1940 there was only one Australian squadron out of Australia and that was number 10 Squadron flying Sunderland Flying Boats from Pembroke Dock in Wales. There was a six month waiting list to get over there.

30:30 So the air force said, "Okay, well go over to Rathmines, do your conversion on a Walrus to get your flying boat experience and then we, we'll post you. Well the posting was delayed and so in the mean time they said, "Well go and fly the Walrus over Sydney Harbour towing targets for the ack-ack gunners to practice." And he was doing that when the HMAS Sydney came back from the Mediterranean being, working with the British

31:00 Fleet in the Mediterranean since the war, beginning of the war, came back to Sydney to refit and re-crew. And they said, "Ah, we've got a pilot over here that can fly Walrus's," Ray got posted on the HMAS

Sydney not to the Far East and he was on there when she had the incident with the old Kormoran. He was the pilot of the Walrus.

31:30 I'll never know to this day why he wasn't launched. Cause the Kormoran was one of two raiders that set out from Germany at the same time on the job of sinking merchant ships. And they both came down, they'd set out from Kiel in Germany, went right round the north of U.K. and right down the Atlantic and sank a few ships on the way down to Cape Town.

32:00 And when they got to East London [South Africa] they split, the other ship was called the Pelican, the Pelican and the Kormoran. And the Pelican went due north to catch all the ships coming back going through the Suez Canal and the Kormoran came east to Australia. Because the captain of the Kormoran was a navigation officer on the Sydney, on the German cruiser called the Kohen, which came out to Australia in 1936 on a good will visit. And he was the navigation officer on the Kohen,

32:30 he knew all about what was going on, shipping lanes, and that's what they were doing on the side, a good will visit but they were charting all the shipping lanes out in Australia. And because he knew that Australian area he came east and the Pelican went north. The Pelikan got caught by a British cruiser up near Madagascar and was sunk. And when the HMS Cumberland saw the Pelikan they launched their Walrus

33:00 and flew over to the Pelikan, challenged it, it couldn't answer the right codes, so the HMS Cumberland would just opened fire and just sunk it, which was the exact thing should have happened to the HMAS Sydney. But why Ray wasn't launched I don't know. But that's why they were on there for, to keep out of gun range of any ship they saw, launch the Walrus aircraft, flies over, challenges the ship. If it doesn't know the right codes you know it's a blanket, okay it's not one of ours,

33:30 go back, okay, now sink it. That's what should have happened but the captain was, in my book, the captain was not war- orientated. Had it been the previous Skipper, the one that had the HMAS Sydney when she was working with the British Fleet, it would never have happened, I'm sure of it. Cause he was involved in a couple of battles in the Mediterranean with the Italian Fleet, in fact he, the HMAS Sydney sank a German cruiser in one of the battles.

34:00 **Well how did you feel reading that news in the newspaper? How much did you want to get back to Australia to fight this new enemy?**

Well I couldn't because I was in the Royal Air Force. See it was different, being in the RAF was quite a different organisation to being in the RAAF, but there was no

34:30 RAAF people in the Middle East at that time, although they were there but they were all fighter squadrons in there. I couldn't do anything at all about it, but then as I just said, it shouldn't have happened.

Well you'd been in the RAF for a while by this stage, how are you, I guess

35:00 **I'm just wondering, how were you sort of getting on with the RAF?**

Oh very good, I didn't have any problems there. My luck was, not lucky but, knowing people in the right places to do certain things and get certain areas. That helped a lot, if you know the right people as you probably... I don't know if you've experienced it yourself but if you know people in the right places, you know how to get things what you, you know,

35:30 what you want to do. And that kept me on right throughout all my career that I've managed to always know people in the right places to get me certain jobs which I was hoping to get.

And when did you receive news about your CO, Spencer?

Well I'd been down to Cairo, we went down, just after we went back on the desert for the second time and I went back out for a few day's leave in Cairo. There's a place,

36:00 Hurricane House they used in Cairo as a rest house for air crew and I spent a few day's leave down there. And I was due back on the first day, I don't know what it was, but I was due back, when I left, it was in the afternoon I got back on the squadron and I went over to the Ops Tent and said, "How are things going?" And they said, "Oh, you won't believe this but the boss hasn't returned last night from a raid."

36:30 And if I'd have been there I'd have been with him. He took off on a raid on Benghazi and obviously got shot down. So that was the second time I was lucky enough to be still talking to you now. Missed it by that.

And how did you react to the news?

Just thankful, lucky,

37:00 yeah. No, it'd be another, when we, from, when we, I took the POW back down from LG 125 back to Giarabub in that incident, we were then bombed again by the Germans in Giarabub, they knew that we were there and we got done over pretty well down there one day.

37:30 Got caught, and again we're caught in the open air, there was no places to run if, you just had to run away from the tent or from aircraft to try and get away from the obvious targets they were after. And these-111s that bombed us from about six thousand feet, they did their bombing run, we're in a little wadi, a little gully just north of the airfield or the tent area was. And they stick a bomb,

38:00 started at the airfield and worked its way up the wadi, and it was a very well planned raid but unfortunately it landed amongst a lot of our tents and that, and we were just caught out in the open. And one landed, very close to me that the crater, the shrapnel from the crater just went over the top of me. I was right next to it but some other lads along, just next to me almost were badly hit and one died of his wounds.

38:30 Again, just to be in the right place at the right time.

And do you think you ever got used to being in those air raids?

Oh I think you accepted it I think, I mean we did the same to them and they expected us, I mean often we got raided by the German air force, some other times we got, they'd come over and they'd drop, they'd come over just

39:00 after dawn mainly, out in the desert. They'd come along and they'd come in, we were always so close to the coast line that, no more than about five minutes flying time from the coast, so they'd go to the sea and then come low level, come over and drop bombs low level, and it was one of those things you had to, you took in your stride for the day.

What was the knack of surviving those raids?

39:30 Just being careful, being very careful. After those sort or raids you wouldn't walk anywhere where there hadn't been, where there were no footprints in the ground because they'd drop, they used to drop what they called butterfly bombs, in containers. In containers under the wings they had these butterfly bombs were only about that big and that round. And in the container they were all compressed and once they left the container a spring came up and undid a little metal air screw, unwound and then it,

40:00 the bomb was live. So that when they hit the ground, and they always, that being sand and very fine, it would sink below the surface, and you would walk along, you'd kick one and lose a leg, like a land mine. And they'd be scattered all over, we did the same thing to the, only we used to drop spikes. The spikes were stainless steel spikes that was always, when you've dropped it always stick with the one point out, we dropped those over their airfield as well. But

40:30 I mean that was not so lethal as that but same idea trying to keep the aircraft on the ground.

Okay well our tape is just about to end so we'll just swap our tape.

Okay.

Tape 7

00:35 **So then you were posted to Kenya, how did that happen?**

How? Or why?

We just covered the why didn't we?

Oh yeah, why, cause I was 'operationally expired' in a word, yeah. How did it happen? When I went down to Middle East Headquarters to pick up the maps for the briefing down at the Far East then I was told I was posted.

01:00 **And how did you feel when you heard the news that you were posted?**

Very unhappy, very unhappy. I didn't want to go, I was almost frog-marched on to the aircraft and that was a nice ride, I went down by Empire Flying Boat because BOAC [British Overseas Air Corporation] were still operating their normal flying boat service between England and Johannesburg. So I got a ride down in one of those, very nice ride down the Nile right from Cairo, landing at Wadi Halfa first and then over night at Khartoum.

01:30 And then further, right down the Nile to Djuba and then to Lake Victoria. And then Lake Victoria over to Kisumu and the Kenya side to Jollebb I changed to finish my travels to Nakuru in Kenya which was an RAF Base there.

02:00 **And what were your orders or what were your instructions for your position in Kenya?**

Staff Instructor on OTU was a base where air crew were forming up to fly on bomber aircraft for squadrons. In other, we had you know, people coming from all over the world there to convert on to the type of aircraft they were gonna fly on the squadron which was a Blenheim, crew up there and then from there go join the squadrons up in the,

02:30 in the Middle East.

So what was it that you were teaching them in the course?

On the ground side, mainly meteorological lectures and latest techniques and navigation in the desert cause that's where they were gonna fly, that was the ground side mainly. Run air crew, aircraft recognition meetings,

03:00 and on the flying side it was, well, on the flying side you were a crew, a staff they call a staff crew, a screening crew which was assigned to a formation of students you know, or people just doing the conversions, on dummy bombing raids. And what we'd do, we'd go off on say four aircraft or six aircraft into formation on a three hour cross country, simulating

03:30 a bombing raid loaded with bombs and then coming back, having done the cross country to the ranges and then drop your bombs and then land, just like a normal raid would be. These were just flights that get the crew together to work together, you know, pilot, first time they've worked, navigators and gunners and pilots to work as a crew. And the staff aircraft , the one staff aircraft, we'd just float round in the area like a sheep dog with sheep, you know in,

04:00 just making sure they were doing the right thing and at the right time, and doing all the navigation, turning point out for their flying.

So what were you preparing them for?

Operational flying on the squadron. See, they came from New Zealand, Canada, Australia, South Africa, maybe one was pilot trained in Australia, navigator was South

04:30 Africa, gunner could have been anywhere, anywhere where you knew The Empire Air Training Scheme was operating. And they were coming, the big problem with The Empire Air Training Scheme at that time was that it was a wonderful idea to get air crew trained quickly for flying, but the bottle neck became, the initial training was for pilots anyway, you might be at one, in fact one of em we heard started their training in Australia

05:00 carried on training in Canada and then went, sent to England for their final OTU which, before they joined a squadron. The bottle neck became the OTU's, they could train the pilots up to operational standard but they couldn't get them through in the final stages, and a big bottle neck happened all over the world. And they opened up extra ones then in Kenya and South Africa and all other places to try and alleviate the problem.

05:30 And it was quite common to have a pilot that started in Australia, been to Canada, been to England then had to be sent out to Africa to join as a crew on a bomber. And that period of time, it could have been up to a year, and when you're in your initial training and flying like anything, you've gotta have continuity, you can't have breaks between your stages of your training.

06:00 And they only had five hours available to, I think it was ten hours maximum to convert on a new type of aircraft, and if they didn't do it in that time they were given, they were grounded and probably, quite often the jobs going as a navigator or air traffic control. But not, it was a problem which was sad because it wasn't a person's problem, it was the organisation's problem. Because the,

06:30 the lack of continuity, they just couldn't get the groups were going with a new type of aircraft in the number of hours available to do it.

And…

Sorry. So that OTU training was a, you know, a very important part of their flying career. And on these flights, and so we would just hover around and make sure they did all the things at the right time and so on. And it was during

07:00 one of those flights that I got, I did the, had the aircraft experience.

We will talk about that in a moment, I'm just a bit interested in your experiences in Kenya. You were now working with Australian pilots, and how did it feel to be amongst Australians?

It was very good, very good. So that was the first time I'd, we had one Australian on 113 Squadron because he was a navigator, in fact Jeff Canon,

07:30 he died just recently but he was the only other Australian I ever had any contact with before then. But working down in Kenya, working with the lads it was, you know, the same language and it was very good.

And had these Australian's, pilots and, or crews, seen any operations?

No, no, cause that was their, during their actual training to become operational, had to go through

08:00 these phases of training, and the OTU was the last place before they got to the squadron.

What were you telling them about the war and…?

Well just telling them what conditions would be like flying in the desert, having been there in all that time, and I could brief them on what the conditions were like and the area was like and types of navigation required and that sort of thing.

And what were the conditions like to fly in, in Kenya?

Very good, very good, It was, I mean it was very nice country to fly

08:30 in, it's a, we were operating in unusual conditions in as much as that the airfield was five thousand feet above sea level for starters and that could cause a bit of problem weather-wise. And also the airfield was located right at the foot of Mount Kenya, which is seventeen thousand feet high, and at certain times of the year the weather was, could be pretty nasty. Cause the prevailing wind was always coming from the west

09:00 at height, the cloud used to build up against the, until eventually it got so dense it'd start raining. And it'd rain like mad for about three or four hours of a day and then just, everything'd just fade away. Next day the same thing would happen, be blue skies until about 11 o'clock, a few clouds would appear by three o'clock, it overcast and by five o'clock it was weeing down for about two hours and then it'd all blow away and next

09:30 system would come through.

And what was your, with weather like that, when were your flying times?

Well the big, the one beauty about that type of thunder storm that used to form that it was a very extensive one up to about thirty, you know, thirty-five thousand feet quite often, but it wasn't very wide, see it was only that one big mountain that was causing it. And once the rain fell and the cloud disappeared then it was

10:00 all right. But it wasn't like a normal thunderstorm in a flat, in a sort of lower territory where it was a huge area of cloud, and it takes a while to move, there it was just in one spot and didn't last very long. Once it started raining the moisture go, so if you were caught in that situation what we would do, we'd fly around it, you know, cause we'd see the both sides of it, it was only just a big, like a big vertical

10:30 bank cloud about fifty miles wide but you could still see horizons both sides. So the ordinary, the way that to do it was to, if it was in your flight path you just divert around it and fly around it and wait until it cleared, the area where you want and land and go out and land. And that was a normal what they call SOP, Standard Operational Procedure for flying in those conditions.

Well I'm expecting that Kenya would have been quite different to the Middle East where you had spent

11:00 **quite a lot of your time.**

Yeah.

What, how did you spend your R&R in Nakaru?

No, we used to go, I done all right in Nairobi. Nakuru's about a hundred miles north of Nairobi and we used to go down Nairobi for... And there was quite a common saying in those days in Kenya, because it's a, very much a, when I say a free and easy country, the local saying was, "Are you married or do you live in

11:30 Kenya?" Cause a lot of British people out there, lovely farms and I met some nice Australians too, two Australian families I got to know very well, up in, one up in Molo, so I used to go and visit them quite a bit. But it was very nice, very nice country to be, although it was right on the equator, being five thousand feet above, it was, you know, reasonably cool,

12:00 it didn't get really hot. It was just getting used to the difference, height took you about three or four months to get used to the different altitude, working at, cause the air's a bit thinner and you gotta be careful when you're exercising, playing sport and that sort of thing, you start to run out of puff, until your lungs got used to it there.

Where abouts did you live in...?

In Kenya, oh, on the airfield. Very nice, it was just a big

12:30 green, big green field. Kenya's a, I think probably, oh Nakuru where we were is famous for flamingos in the world, it's where they got these series of salt lakes and there's literally millions of flamingos that inhabit these lakes there. And very green, you know,

13:00 yeah very nice to fly in, and particularly when the flamingos were migrating from one lake to another. There's about a series of three lakes run just west of Nakuru and, we always used to take off fairly early in the morning and first thing, must go and fly over the lake to stir up to the flamingos. And there'd be this great big pink blanket get airborne, thousands in the water, you're so close it's like a big pink blanket getting

13:30 airborne. And when the sun was coming up you'd see the sun shining on all the birds, quite a picturesque sight to see them. Go and stir the flamingos then get on and start flying.

And what were local Kenyan's like?

Very good, very good, the air force lads they got to know the local farmers and that. And I say, I got to know two very good, very nice Australian families.

14:00 One, Molly Ryan, used to live at Molo up in the Mountains between lake Victoria and Nakuru and she had a lovely property up there. Had all kinds of wild animals in her keep, she was a bit of an animal freak, baby elephants and baby baboons and God only... yeah it was good.

And having come from the, coming from Australia and Adelaide that

14:30 **would have been quite a sight seeing the different types of animals, how would you describe the fauna there?**

I don't know, I suppose it was lots of greenery but also lot of brown as well, I mean being the sort of sub-tropical area, you get the in the sort of the cooler times, there'd be very good crops grown there.

15:00 In the summer time it'd dry off and they'd organise these burn-offs, what they'd call burn offs, you know burn off all the grass so they'd get ready for the next season and that sort of thing. And trees were not very tall trees but they're a lot of thick, scrubby type trees, lot of umbrella trees and things like that, and plenty of animals. And the airfield because it was just a big green open field

15:30 amongst the, a lot of undergrowth, you know, thick, these trees. At night time when we'd finished flying, they'd all come on to the, and especially when they were burning off, all the farmers were burning off, all the animals would come over to the airfield for a feed, it was the only green grass around for miles. And then course the trouble was when we wanted to fly, had to, first thing in the morning to take a convoy of vehicles and go right down the airfield and shoo all the deer off the airfield before you

16:00 start flying.

Well that's what the animals were eating, but what were you eating?

Oh good food, oh no trouble about rations out there were very good, yeah. And all had pets, I mean monkeys, everybody has a monkey. Like a dog you'd walk the, you'd see a bloke going to work with a monkey on a lead you know. And when the, these little spider monkeys, and they'd go to work with em and when they got up to the hangar,

16:30 if they were ground crew just bung these little monkeys, run up in hangar, in the rafters somewhere and muck around. And when they got time they used to whistle them and they'd come down, put the lead on them and take them down and back to the messes for food.

And did you have a pet?

Yes, I had a baby dik-dik, which is a very small gazelle type, little tiny gazelle. And we only got those because sometimes when we were chasing all the animals

17:00 off the ground in the mornings, the mums and babies get separated. And this one that I got was, he got lost amongst all the sort of deer that were going off the ground, and I picked him up and took him back and I had him as a pet down there. He was a, yeah, we all had little gardens down there, just something to do growing lettuces and tomatoes and that sort of thing. And because of these animals

17:30 we had to always put wire mesh around to keep them off there. And I'd, my little dik-dik he was on a, I had him on a lead down by my bunk and he got loose while I was there and he got into the garden and he'd eaten all my lettuces when I come back one day. And I, he saw me coming and he jumped out, jumped over the, cause they could jump six feet without any trouble at all, on the run they could, standing jump they could do it about

18:00 four feet, and he jumped out, jumped out where the lettuces were. And the accommodation was concrete and they're just rooms only and between the rooms there was always long grass with one concrete slab for walking on. And they had the ablutions for say, little box of four of these rooms for the ablutions block. And my little dik-dik jumped out and he run down this,

18:30 down this concrete pathway and that pathway led to a corner which led, that led to the ablutions, and right at the end of that pathway was an opening to the toilets. And the dik-dik ran down from beside my bunk, turned the corner and as he turned the corner there was an Alsatian, one of the guard dogs was around the corner, and they sort of met like this,

19:00 on the corner. And the dik-dik being so, you know, they're so quick and they can turn literally ninety degrees in mid-air to get away from the dog, and it jumped in the air over the top of the dog and then ran, kept along this concrete pathway. Well by the time the dog turned around and started chasing him, he was about, a few yards behind him and the dik-dik went straight through this door to the entrance of the toilet and it actually was a thunder box. And he, the dik-dik went, was going flat out

19:30 and he literally he turned ninety degrees and parallel, instead of going through the door he went

parallel the side of the wall and the dog just went straight through and bang, against the old goose neck, and the dik-dik got away. You know, the survival for animals is really quite something.

Well were there any training accidents?

Yeah,

20:00 we lost a lot of, unfortunately, we lost many, many... accidents yeah, mainly at night time, night flying was a bit of a hazard. When you get these thunder storms build up at times and they had to go off on cross countries at night doing practise bombing raids. And yeah, we lost, yeah. We found some, most times they were just run out of petrol, they'd

20:30 do their sortie and then get lost or nowhere to go to land and they'd just run out of petrol. Yeah, we did have a lot of casualties down there unfortunately.

So if they lost, if they ran out of petrol and got lost, how did the search party, what...?

Well what we'd do, we would look and see what their flight plan was gonna be over the night and just

21:00 go back and try and work out the winds. Cause mainly it was, you know, a weather factor that caused the prangs, wind was, played a big part in that, you know, using the wrong winds for navigation. And we just go and fly over the route that they would have been flying and then expand that, either, eastwards or northwards or southwards of those tracks, to take care of any

21:30 possible wind problem. And I found one crew, they were a hundred and fifty miles off their track, at one stage when they got lost and just landed in the, luckily in a fairly level part of the jungle, and they survived the crash and we found em about three days later. But some were never found, in fact they only just found one about six months ago, from 1942 in the foot of Mount Kenya disappeared,

22:00 up in the, half way up Mount Kenya they found it, found the wreck of it.

And were you every involved in any training accidents?

Touch wood, never had one accident in the whole of my flying career.

But you did have a few mishaps?

Oh I've had a few, yeah a few damage with shrapnel and that sort of thing

22:30 but no, I was very lucky that way.

But I understand that when you were in Kenya and flying that you and your pilot on one of the, on the staffing plane ran into a bit of trouble. Can you explain to me what happened?

Well I was on one of these flights where we had a formation of crew doing this dummy bombing raid. And we were coming back to base, we'd done three parts of the navigation, we were on our last leg back to the

23:00 bombing ranges and we were approaching one of these big, vertical thunder storm areas. And I was sitting in the, up in the nose of the aircraft, doing my navigation and I said to the pilot, I gave him a course to steer to fly around the... And he said, "Oh," he said, "I think we'll go through it today." And I thought, that's funny, I didn't question it, I could have said, "Why?" but he said, "I think today we'll go

23:30 through it." "All right," and so I moved from the seat in the front, navigate, to sit back by the side of him which was the normal place for take off and landing in the aircraft. And we're at fifteen thousand feet and I knew a bit about meteorology but I know a lot more now since I've been flying. But at that time I knew thunder storms weren't a good thing to go in to and particularly at fifteen thousand feet, it's the most turbulent area of a thunder storm, according to how

24:00 severe it's been developing. But it's not a very nice height to be in, to go into conditions like that. And also that if you're not been current in your instrument flying, in other words you've done a lot of instrument flying and done it recently, it's quite easy to get, to start, what we call, fighting the clocks. In other words not believing what the instruments are telling you. See you're senses are always behind

24:30 the instruments, the instruments on an aeroplane tells you instantly what's happening, but your senses, your balance is about, just a split... But when you're relying on instruments to tell you what to do, but your brain tells you not, for just a few seconds, you start getting confused. And also when you're flying instruments you've gotta be very, very slow and deliberate and you can't have sudden changes of altitude of the aircraft.

25:00 That starts the, what we call, the instrument tells you you're turning left but your senses still say you're flying straight and level. And if you start correcting you've got to be very deliberate, movement slowly, correct it back to the air which the instrument's telling you. If you start doing this or that, sharp changes of altitude of the aircraft then you just, you never catch up with it. Cause you're always behind the eight ball, the instrument's saying this, but your brain is

25:30 that much far behind saying, you're that, if you're going that way, by the time the instrument tells you you're going right the brain's still say you're going left. It's difficult to explain really but you gotta be

very, very slow and change of altitude of the aircraft and must believe the instruments. Don't, forget about what your brain thinks, just what the instruments are telling you. And I think this is what caught the pilot out, we'd been flying in clear weather for about three hours, and being down in Kenya we hadn't done much instrument flying,

26:00 he was a bit out of touch you know, with instrument flying. And when we went into cloud at fifteen thousand feet, it didn't take long before it started to rain like mad and got very turbulent you know, with the wind gusts and the thunder storm with the down flow of the air. And he, we went into the cloud and I'd moved back and sat by the side of him and he said, "Oh," he said, "God," he said, "this is bloody rough." I said, "You…" you know, I was bouncing around, I was strapped in but the air, still,

26:30 the aircraft was buffeting with all the turbulence. He said, "We'll go back out of it," so we turned and during that turn he just lost it, you know, he… In the turn he, he got, started over correcting and the aircraft started to dive, then climb. And then again he was behind the eight ball, he was, obviously his, I know this now from pilot training that you gotta, gotta

27:00 believe what the instruments tell you and do what it tells you, what you see on the clock, don't believe what your senses tell you, just for that fraction of a second. And that's what happened, I think he just lost control of it, and he just yelled out, "Bail out!" And in a Blenheim the pilot escape is just that Perspex hatch above, you're sitting in the cockpit and above you there's a Perspex slide, hatch, which you'd get into

27:30 the cockpit when you're first getting in. And you just have to slide it and you just jump out and just leap off through the hole in the roof as it were. And that's what he did, he just bailed out and just slid the hood back and off he went. I was sitting by the side, I'm strapped in, no parachute. My parachute, cause when you're a crewman you don't wear your chute, it's under, always strapped in somewhere in the fuselage under two rubber bungy cords to keep it safe. And my

28:00 parachute was down underneath my navigation seat, above the escape hatch which I would have to normally go out And it was impossible for me to do that cause the aircraft was going down in a tight spiral dive. And G-Forces, because we were turning, I just couldn't move, I was just, I couldn't move down, definitely looking down this way, it was bad enough just to be sitting by the side of him. So just in, I suppose, sheer

28:30 self preservation, I thought well I think I know what he's done and I can understand what the instruments are telling. I just climbed into the seat and just corrected the aircraft and managed to do the right thing at the right time and got control of it. But we lost about fifteen thousand, we almost hit the deck.

How did you know what to do?

Well it, when I was, as a navigator, for my own, well I suppose, again, thinking of things that might happen,

29:00 I'd done a few rides in a Link Trainer. A Link Trainer was a pilot's, it was a ground training thing for pilots to do instrument flying in. And I'd done a few hours in a Link Trainer which I knew were what the instruments were telling you all the time. And that's the only thing I think that save my life, I just quickly read the instruments and did what the instruments told me and I managed to get control of it.

And

29:30 **what happened to the pilot?**

Well, I say, when I got control of it we were down to a thousand feet and I broke out the cloud, it was still, I was in cloud all the time while I was doing this. And we broke out of cloud eventually, it was raining like hell and I had so, all I could do was put my feet up on the bottom of the instrument panel and pull like mad on the control column to stop the dive. And I had so much back pressure and adrenaline, we'd been flying so much, I froze in that position and when we came out the cloud

30:00 did a big back… I couldn't release the pressure quick enough for the aircraft to go level and we went back into bloody cloud again. And eventually I got, I settled down and got below the cloud, but then I couldn't think where we were. My brain just, the adrenaline had just, you know, the old clocks were still, my brain was just swirling, I couldn't think, cause we were still a hundred mile from base. And I didn't know, I couldn't think which way to turn, I was flying, did a big circle

30:30 and trying to think now where were we, which way do I go now to get back to base. And this tap on the shoulder, and the gunner had crawled through from the gunner, from the rear seat through the bomb bay and banged me on the shoulder and said, "Where's the pilot?" "Where's the pilot!" And I said, "You're looking at him." He didn't say that, he said, "Where's the bloody pilot!" He tapped me on the shoulder, and I said, "You're looking at him." Cause by this time I had no, see the pilot, the

31:00 pilot seat is shaped to take the parachute, cause the pilot always sits on his parachute in British aircraft. And so when he, when the pilot went he had his chute already attached to his, so all he had to do was jump, pull the rip cord and he was away. But in my case I had no parachute, I'd just had the harness on and I was sitting in a bucket seat with a big deep, you know, shape of the, and I was sitting down, I couldn't see above the side, just hanging on

31:30 the aeroplane flying along. And when the tap on the shoulder came I was just starting to then realise where I was to head back to base.

Where was the pilot?

He bailed out and he hit the tail plane when he went out, and he'd smashed his leg, he had bad leg and an arm injury and bad head injuries. We were lucky to pick him up actually about two days later

32:00 in the jungle.

And how did you know how to land the plane?

Ask that bloke upstairs. Well I'd done a number of, I'd done oh many, many hours flying in the Blenheim and I'd watched it so often, you know, every time you land and take off, I was sit, watching. Cause in the Blenheim it was the navigator's job to change the petrol cocks over after take off and it was on my side of the,

32:30 of the fuselage so I was always sitting there watching all the time, which I did do all the time. And once again that was the thing that saved the day for me. I knew exactly what he was doing, speeds, what the, for landing and that. And when I eventually found, realised what, I said to the nav, to the gunner, he crawled through eventually and sat next to me in my seat where I'd be normally, sitting normally. And found some, oh, covers in

33:00 the bomb bay to make a cushion for me so I could sit up and see what was going on. And on the way back I said to him, "I'm gonna land it, do you want to bail out before I go?" And he said, "No bloody way." After all this, cause he'd been thrown round like a pea in a drum in the back, he didn't have an idea what was happening, all he knew there was something unusual happened and the aircraft was now flying normally. He said, "No, I'll stay with you." So I went back

33:30 to base, and course back to base all the students, all the new crews had done what we should have done, flown around the thunderstorm, dropped their bombs and landed at base, but where was the staff crew? They hadn't appeared, where's the missing, the people with all the experience on board. And I turn up you know, suddenly out of the blue and with no radios, no navigation at all, just the, no means of communication with the ground. And the normal thing for air force if you haven't got

34:00 communication you waggle your wings, fly over across the top of the patrol tower, waggle your wings, to indicate you can't talk to anybody on the ground. And I did that for two reasons, one for that very reason and also to alert the crash crew and the fire tender in case I'd made a mess of the landing. Went, did a circuit and came in and landed. And by that time, the Station Commander and the Wing Commander Flying and the doctor

34:30 and all, you know, all the people that were expecting their crash, were following me behind and the fire tender and the ambulance and the CO and, in their staff cars, following me down, behind the aircraft as I was running through and halt. Cause I just let the aircraft run to the end of the field and just switched, just cut the engines.

And when you did find the pilot, what was the first thing you said to him?

I never saw him. I wasn't allowed to speak to him because you know, when there's, it was

35:00 a Board of Enquiry was formed straight away and you're not allowed to communicate with anybody and I only saw him at the, when the Board of Enquiry sat about three months later, but I wasn't allowed to talk to him. He was still in a wheel chair, when he got fit enough to come out of hospital and sit for the, to attend the Board of Enquiry and that was in Nairobi three months later.

So

35:30 **what was his reasoning at the board of enquiry?**

I don't know. What could've have happened is what, it's in that report, said he could have been thrown out by the turbulence. But that's not true.

Did you give evidence at the enquiry?

Oh yes, yeah, I was the prime witness.

36:00 I will say it was highly unlikely that he was thrown out.

So this was your first time actually flying a plane, how did it feel?

Unusual but I was just lucky there, I did the right thing at the right time I think and survived it. And after it was all over I heard the very welcome words that, "You better go away and be a driver now." That was about the best thing

36:30 I heard since I joined the air force.

So were you awarded any medals for this bravery?

Mmm, Air Force Cross for that. That came out actually in the 1942, ah 1943 New Year's Honour's List on New Year's Day. That was later, I was recommended for it by the CO but it wasn't awarded until the and sort of on the New Year's Honours List.

And what

37:00 **was, how was the present, let me say that again, how was the AFC presented to you?**

That's one of the, what shall I, I can't sort the right word for it... the things I loathe the air force for, but all three decorations I never got any of them, I didn't even get the chance to go to Buckingham Palace for any of the, to be presented with them. I, they all came through the post.

37:30 And the reason the air force told me was that because every time there was an investiture carried out at the Palace I was overseas, and they didn't lay on special vestiges for me, which I don't believe but that's how it happened. I don't think anybody else in the air force got, had the same treatment. I know it was difficult during

38:00 the war and I was always overseas during the war but after the war they had a number of investitures for that very reason, that people coming back. But unfortunately I didn't get back to England until 1947, that was two years after the war finished.

Why do you think you were overlooked for...?

I don't know, just, victim of circumstances I think.

38:30 That, the official reason I think was, I didn't hear it first hand but it came through the grape vine that when, they had two a year and on those occasions I was out of the country at the time. But I'll never forgive the air force for doing that, but I got my own back in the end, on them, which I could tell you about later on but...

Okay, so then after the, this,

39:00 **the episode with the flying instructor and flying your own plane, you were then sent to become a pilot?**

Yeah I went down to Rhodesia. I flew down to Rhodesia in a Junkers-52 from Nairobi down to Bulawao in, well it's now called, gee, what's, what's Rhodesia now called, it's called oh,

39:30 Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe. That's where the RAF had two, all their training schools in Rhodesia, they had them at Bulawao and up at Salisbury, two areas where they had training air crew, navigators and pilots.

And what did the pilot's course consist of?

Just normal training, first going to initial school, ground school and then going to flying site at,

40:00 up in sort of Tiger Moths and then on to, if we're going on to fighters, going on to single engine aircraft, if you're going on to bombers a twin engine aircraft to train. And from there when you, that's when you got your wings and you graduated you went either up to the Middle East or back to England, or to England.

And so how did you react to the news that you were going off to become a pilot?

Very happy, big party.

40:30 But I had to wait you see because of the Court of Enquiry. Had to wait until the pilot became fit enough to come, to attend it and then I was away within a week of that, I was off down south.

So how long did you know that you were being sent away to become a pilot, how long before you actually had...?

Almost immediately, within a week I was told by the group captain, he recommended me for pilot training and that was

41:00 agreed almost, you know, straight away. So I knew a long time before I went, I left Kenya that I was going, you know, I was on the pilot's course at some time in Kenya, in Bulawayo.

Okay well our tape's run out...

Oh gee whiz, how many more have you got?

Just a few more, how are you going?

Tape 8

00:34 **Well before we move on, what sort of instructor were you, how would you have described yourself as an instructor?**

Good at practical but not very good at theory. I was never good at

01:00 any sort of type of book work at all. Doing the job, yes, very good but I wouldn't have made a good instructor, as a flying instructor.

What do you think you, I mean, what qualities do you think you really needed to be a good instructor?

Oh I think you've gotta be able to, at

01:30 first, be able to translate what the good book says into talking to people, explaining things very thoroughly. Tolerant, accepting people's mistakes, a silly mistake, which I find it difficult to do, especially if they've been warned once. I would, my, when I became an instructor, not

02:00 on the ground side, I used to fail more people because of my standards I set were so, not so high, but what I working was good, was a bit hard on some people. And when I went on, later on in one of the very rare ground times I did, I knew what I, what type of person I, that

02:30 was expected to be on the squadron and wasn't prepared to let, to lower my standards, to let some of them get through.

And what sort of students were coming through the school at Kenya or the OTU at Kenya?

All air crew, and training up to that particular point. But as I explained just now, the pilots particularly they had some, very much difficulty in overcoming that gap between the stages

03:00 that they're flying. It's, in service flying you've gotta be current, you've gotta be, have the, you know, what they call the hands on. All the different types of equipment you gotta use, consistently, you can't have breaks like they were having, you couldn't afford to have a break in learning. You gotta know what you're doing and have done it then you can afford to have a bit longer break before you go back to it again. Like on the squadron,

03:30 to do all the things like op, gunnery and bombing and rocket, that sort of thing, you had to do that a number of times during, you know, during a month to keep practising.

And how many students at Kenya would you have failed?

Oh this is only when I'm talking about now in the pilot side, from the navigation side I didn't fail anybody. If we didn't, it wasn't so important as far as the navigation side, in fact

04:00 from the pilot's point of view it was very, very important he had to, you know, to be very competent on the aircraft to fly it. And it was because the system that I explained earlier on there that the bottle neck that was created between the SFTS's and the OTU's was just too great for some people to cope. And it was a sad thing because it wasn't their fault, it was the fault of the system.

Well I'm just interested in getting a bit more detail about the school at Kenya. What sort of school was it do you think, what

04:30 **sort of condition was the school in?**

Oh it was a normal training, I mean the condition, the system of training was the same as any school, OTU in the world but it was that time gap was the big problem. And as I said it wasn't the individuals fault, it was the fault of the system. Couldn't get people through quick enough to keep the flow going

05:00 all the time. In Bomber Command it was, see I was, in England it was fairly easy later on because they concentrated on training those type of people but on Fighter Command it was six months waiting list when I got back to England to try and fly there.

And how many students were coming through Kenya?

Oh, it would depend on, once again, how the flow. They'd collect at a place called Gil Gil the pilot, gunner and navigator would

05:30 get together, form a crew, prior to actually coming to fly. It, and the crew, we might, I'd say a course that'd go out once a month, probably maybe half a dozen crews in a month. They'd all go up to Egypt up to the Middle East area, you know to join the air force up there.

06:00 The pilot training was the worst, was the hardest part to keep, you know, keep crews together.

And how strange was it to have an Australian flying school in the middle of Kenya?

Wasn't Australian, it was RAF.

Or RAF but there were mainly Australians coming there, or a high proportion of Australians?

Yeah a high proportion of Australians.

06:30 I don't know it was just another base they formed overseas, the RAF had many bases all over the world.

I think they had bases in Singapore and India, you name it they were every, all countries, and they just, bases just formed and that was the same system as back in the U.K.

And what sort of condition were the Blenheims in?

Oh quite good yeah, they were, a lot of them were ex-squadron aircraft but were well maintained and

07:00 quite serviceable to fly, they weren't old wrecks at all, they were like normal aeroplanes really. But you didn't have the latest modifications probably for, you know, for bombing and gunnery but they could still, you know, do the job that we wanted them to do.

What sort of other aircraft were there at the OTU?

Only had one type, only, each OTU specialised in one particular type of aircraft. Later on, just before I left, they started to phase out Blenheims, they brought in aircraft called the

07:30 Baltimore, an American aircraft, and that was a much more difficult aircraft to fly. But only had normally one OTU for one type of aircraft, yeah.

Well you mentioned that after your incident, I'm gonna call it an incident and I guess promotion to driver...

I was commissioned also at that time,

08:00 I'd graduated in April 1943 and commissioned at the same time.

And how did you get back to the U.K.?

By a very devious route. I went down to Cape Town by train and then a boat eventually after I waited a long time for a boat and went to the U.K. via New York.

08:30 Another long story I could tell you but we wont... There was a big transit camp in Cape Town for personnel going back to U.K. About twenty thousand troops in the air force, army and navy were there, all waiting for ships to go back to the U.K. Because at that time, this is in 194-, everybody was streaming up the far east bypassing the Cape, you know, going straight through from the U.K. out to India or further than that. And they

09:00 were going on to Australia then to pick up troops then coming back to the Middle East, and there was very few ships going north as it were from Cape Town. And there was an air force section there, there was an air force, army and navy section and the air force was about three thousand. Of that three thousand there's about two hundred and fifty air crew, which had number one priority to get back to U.K. We were all stuck in there coming from all the training places in South Africa and Kenya waiting for a ship to go back to

09:30 U.K. And eventually after about three months, about two months, the Mauritania came in from on its way back from India and that took all the air crew in one batch. Except for five, they didn't have any accommodation for five officers. And the officer running the air force section of the transit camp was an old friend of mine who was

10:00 the station warrant officer, the person I woke up when I first went to Heliopolis as a warrant officer. He'd been promoted from, up to a flight lieutenant and he got down to taking charge of the transit camp, down in Cape Town. And every morning we used to go on parade for getting all the jobs to do and that sort of thing that was necessary and after that they'd say, "Okay, everybody go away, come back tomorrow morning and see if we've got any more news for you." This

10:30 went on for two months, every morning out for parade. And one of these mornings old Robbie, his name was Roberts, he said, "Hey Bush," he said, "I've got some news," he said, "I want five volunteers." And I said, "What?" In the service you never volunteer for anything in the service. And he said, "And I recommend you be one of them." And I said, "Why?" He said, "I can't tell you," he said, "but there's a boat coming in from

11:00 India gonna pick up all the air force air crew people tomorrow," he said, "and there's not enough room for five people so I want five volunteers." So you can imagine next morning on parade two thousand bods out there on the parade, he's up there on the thing, "Okay chaps, there's no boat, nothing to do except for there's a ship coming in." And, "Hooray!" "But there's only a spot there for, I need five people prepared to stay behind, I want five volunteers to stay behind." And

11:30 you can imagine all the back cries on that one. And there was two other lads with me, we always got called the Three Musketeers. There was another Australian, Jeff Lobb, and Jimmy, an English lad who'd done pilot training with me in Kenya. One had come from another, Jeff Lob had come from a squadron in Middle East like I did. And Paddy Newton, he come from

12:00 India, he was a ground manager, mechanic. And we all, we got together and they always called us the Three Musketeers. So when Robbie told me about, you know, volunteers, I spoke to Jeff and Paddy, I said, "Hey, how about being a volunteer?" He said, "Hey," you know, "no way!" I said, "Well," I said, "Robbie's assured me to be our advantage if we volunteer." He said, "All right, okay." So in front of this great two thousand, "I want five volunteers" and three bods walk out.

12:30 You can imagine all the calls and, “Hey, you’ll be sorry and... ” Anyway he did name two other bods to make up the five and next day the Mauri came in and cleared out all the air crew and we were stuck behind there. Robbie said, “Don’t worry,” he said, “ there’s a ship coming in about a week’s time.” And he said, “You won’t,” he said, “it’s American”. A liner, fifteen

13:00 thousand ton American passenger liner,” that was on the New York to ‘Frisco run in peace time. Hadn’t been converted to troop carrying, still in its normal passenger role and it’s coming in, it’s going via New York. And I said, “Oh, okay.” And anyhow the ship came next day and we went down, got our kit and went on board and it was beaut. It was called the USS George W. Goethals, I’ll never forget the name of it. And

13:30 I went up to the captain I said, “What’s the routine?” “Oh,” he said, “we gotta wait unfortunately,” cause there’d been a Liberty ship torpedoed off of Cape Town and they were waiting for the survivors of the crew to get to the transit camp cause they were Americans. And as he was going off to New York he had to wait to take them back to America. And we, these lads arrived, the survivors arrived off this Liberty ship. At the same time there was two

14:00 truck loads of Canadian nurses that had been working up in the Middle East with the British Forces of nurses, were going back to Canada to join their own and they were on the same ship as us. So you can imagine what went on, on that voyage of fifteen days from Cape Town to New York, and the name got changed from USS George W. Goethals to “George W. Brothels”. So a great time

14:30 was had by all for fifteen days, we were on our own, no convoy, just took off and sped across to the coast and just did a coast call up to New York. And we stayed in New York for two weeks, waiting for another ship to go, and lo’ and behold the Mauritania turned up from England. It’d gone to England and been a refit and come over to pick up some more troops. So we got to England eventually on the Mauritania but by... yeah.

And how much did you see

15:00 **of New York?**

Oh very good, two weeks, nearly three weeks we were in New York, it was great, great. We were in a fort, Fort Hamilton on an island in New York Harbour and had a great time, it was very good. We eventually sailed from there with fifteen thousand troops on, on the Mauri, geez, and rushed across to Liverpool in England. Got there in August 1944.

15:30 Sorry, August ‘43. And the war, the lads that trained with me to go onto fighters, I was the only one that got accepted, because of my past experience. See at that time in England they only wanted four-engine pilots for Lancaster’s and didn’t matter what you did before, what you trained on, you were going on to Lancaster’s. And because of my past

16:00 operational experience and I was given a bit of preferential treatment and was allowed to stay on, but was also, that was a good decision that delayed my, again there was a six month waiting list to get on, again OTU business. And they, I was sent up to, I went up to Scotland for refresher flying, flying twin-engine Oxfords. Again the

16:30 winter of ‘43, ‘44 was so bloody cold I said, “I want to go to the Middle East again.” And again knowing the right people at the right time, I got what I wanted. Most unusual.

Well what was that waiting time like, you had been anticipating being a pilot for many, many years now, how

17:00 **keen were you at this point?**

Oh gee whiz yeah, driving was much, was number one. Not sitting as a passenger, no. No I still, yeah.

Well can you tell me about the, your training to be a pilot, wen was the first time you went up?

Well when, what,

17:30 training as a pilot, in the...?

Your conversion to a pilot, from navigator?

Zimbabwe? Oh well again I was lucky, my instructor on my initial training school was a, I knew as a sergeant pilot up in Heliopolis you know, when I first went in to Egypt. He was a sergeant pilot, been promoted to an officer, commissioned, and did an instructor’s course and was then instructing on Tiger Moths.

18:00 He was my instructor when I went down to do my pilot training.

So sorry, going forward to Scotland, you were doing some training on Oxfords?

What they call refresher. Once again because the continuity that I was telling you about, you can’t be off the job for too long without losing the grip of what’s going on so they, just to keep your hand in, they sent me up. Although I was going to be on fighters

18:30 I was sent up to, I went up to Scotland, Fraserburgh, to fly on Oxfords just to keep my, make myself current. And while I was there, lucky again, the Wing Commander Flying was a friend I'd met, in fact he was a CO of 11 Squadron that I'd met in... I said to him, "Christ, can you get me out to the Middle East? I've had this place.

19:00 I don't want to sit here another two months without flying."

And during that six month's wait, where did you live?

Well I lived in the hotel in the air crew reception centre in Harrogate in England. It was two hotels in England for air crew coming from over-seas, you know, for those back in the air force being re-allocated. One hotel for officers and one for NCOs, and I was in

19:30 the officers' hotel and had to go on compulsory leave to make room for other people. Cause it was a transit, you know, people coming and going all the time and because there was more people coming in than going out they, but they want the beds in this hotel. And I was sent on compulsory leave a number of times, just to make room for somebody for the bed, cause I was still waiting to do fighter flying.

And where did you go on your compulsory leave?

Well back to this family

20:00 in London down at Hampstead Heath where I stayed initially.

And what was London like?

Oh, very interesting when the flying bombs were on, you know the, it was good, it was still, it was quite good actually. I mean the way the Brits took that bombing and that sort of thing, and the flying bombs,

20:30 it was, you know, it was quite reasonable really. The flying bomb was good because if it was coming your way and the engine kept on going you knew it wasn't gonna hit you, but when the engine stopped you were in trouble. And only one landed when I was there at one time, it landed in Hampstead Heath. And lucky the house I lived in was a very nice house, had all lead light windows

21:00 and that took the blast, and all the other houses around that had normal glass just shattered all the windows in the houses. But the lead light windows in our house just bent, they didn't shatter, they just bowed in with the forced explosion.

And what other signs of bombing did you see in London?

21:30 That's all, it was just the old buzz bombs, that's all.

And how did your posting to 450 Squadron come about?

Well when the, when I got, we finally caught the boat, the Orion, coming out from England to the Middle East again, one of the Orion boats used to come out to Australia.

22:00 I knew, once I got to the Middle East I knew the right people to get on the squadron. Once I got back to Cairo and we stayed at a transit camp there which they used in Heliopolis called the Heliopolis Palace Hotel. It was one of the best, five best hotels in the world, it was a huge place and we stayed there, they used that as a transit camp. Once I got there I went down to Middle East Headquarters and saw a few blokes

22:30 that I knew and they organised for a quick posting for me to go and do a conversion on to Kittyhawks in the Suez Canal at Fayad Air Base. I had a choice of going in, well I didn't have a choice, I could have gone either on to Thunderbolts, American fighters, which meant going to India or in the Far East for flying, or going, or Kittyhawks which was, I wanted to go in to Desert Air Force really, cause that's where I was before. And the Kittyhawks Squadron was one of the Desert Air

23:00 Force Wings, 59 Wing, so I did my conversion onto Kittyhawks at Fayad Air Base on the Canal.

And how did you find the Kitty's after the Blenheims?

Oh different, oh, it's a fighter not a bomber, very good, good aeroplane. Good aircraft for dive bombing, I was pretty good at it. I think again my navigator and bombing experience might have helped on that.

23:30 I didn't have any trouble with the Kittyhawk.

In what way did your navigation skills help your piloting?

Well I think in the type of work we were doing you know, we were specialise in ground support for the troops, close support for the army, which meant you had targets to pick up visually and bomb. Not like a bomber goes off on a raid and you only got a town or map or a dock yard or something like that to,

24:00 to hit, you had specific guns or tanks or troops to bomb. And that background of navigation and reading, map reading and round, picking up ground features, helped me a hell of a lot in that. That was the main part of our job was when the army was moving at all, we were given individual targets like tanks or guns

24:30 or, and you had to pick up those, you know, from the air, before you went down and bombed them. And that's, I think that's what gave me great help in it.

And what was it like joining an Australian Squadron?

Very good, my dream come true. 450 Squadron was a very good squadron,

25:00 in 239 Wing in the Desert Air Force, specialising in, as I say, close support troops for the ground forces. And during the, when they were off in North Africa, cause they went right through from North Africa right through to the end of the war, the Desert Air Force. They were nick-named by Lord Haw-Haw, he nick named them the Desert Harassers. And we were named the Desert Harassers actually for that, for our infliction

25:30 of damage on the German Forces within, in 239 Wing.

And what was the squadron motto?

Gee whiz, I don't know, I forget now, 450 Squadron. There's a song, there's a song.

There's a song?

Yeah. But I can't, I haven't got the words to it here now. Yeah, it's

26:00 yeah a song about the flying but... it's sung to the tune of Lili Marlene. Yes, yeah.

Well how did this squadron differ from...?

The bomber squadron?

Yeah.

Well it'd, it was very different in many ways, one of them was that we didn't

26:30 have, because in the Desert Air Force because you're always, nearly always mobile, you're moving, well, constantly. To reduce the amount of equipment required and the accommodation requirements, they had pilots' messes, they didn't have officers' messes or sergeants' messes, they were all in the one, Air Crew Mess they called it. So that was one big difference and also like many squadrons we had a variation of nationalities on the squadron, we had Canadians, South Africans,

27:00 Brits, Jamaicans, anybody that flew. And it made a very good combination, got very good camaraderie amongst everybody and being sort of NCOs and officers altogether there was no rank, rank problem at all.

And who did you crew up with?

What, as a pilot Nobody, I was just on my own.

Kittyhawks are a pilot only of

27:30 **course.**

But the squadron, it was Australian Squadron but only as much as they had all Australian ground crew, the air crew were a mixture. On Three Squadron which was another Australian Squadron that was all Australians, ground crew and pilots. But on our squadron we had CO and Flight Commander were Australians but anybody else could be a pilot, anyone in the forces, the Commonwealth Forces could be a pilot.

And who was the CO when you joined?

28:00 Jack Doyle, he's, lives in Toowoomba, still alive.

And what did you know about 450 before you joined them?

Well I'd come across in, not personally but they were out in the Middle East, you know, the same time, just after I left the Middle East actually they came into operation. But 3 Squadron in Australia was the first squadron out in the Middle East and then followed by 450 Squadron. But

28:30 450 came in to operation about the time I was leaving there, but I knew of them in the area, they were part of Desert Air Force.

And what was the strength of the squadron?

What, of aircraft? We had twelve, I think it was twelve aircraft and like most squadrons were. About twenty pilots

29:00 probably, I forget the number of ground crew, maybe a hundred and fifty.

You mentioned that the, it was a mobile squadron, moving around...?

Well all the squadrons were, I mean the Wing, because of was so fluid in the North African campaign particularly, you're either running, you know, advancing or running back, and that went all the way through. The

29:30 front moved, you know, all through North Africa, Tripoli, Italy, Sicily, Italy and then up, right up through the top end til the war finished. And so you're always on the move, you didn't like, back in England where you had one base and you went back to the base all the time.

And what were the advantages of being a mobile squadron?

30:00 Change of scenery I suppose, I don't know, advantages... From flying wise it was no difference at all, you'd do the same job whether you're in North Africa or in Italy. The tactics may be changing because of the different circumstances you're flying in but it was you know, we was always on the move, again you move as the front moves, so you,

30:30 being on that type of work you kept right up with the army. As the army moved, you were the first airfields available to fly out from the front line so you're always on the move, which made it very, very interesting. It was very, much more, quite different to fighter, you know, after the war finished and I went into Fighter Command. Fighter Command, it's all right to be a fighter pilot but you're sitting on the ground, waiting, you haven't got that instant sort of where you get your targets, you get your

31:00 briefing, you go and you fly your... you see your results straight away, you come back and it's done. Whereas a fighter pilot, you might be sitting down waiting for ages to be scrambled, you know, it's a quite different concept altogether. Much more interesting I think in the close support work, in the straight fighter.

And can you just take us through one of those ops with 450 Squadron, right from briefing through

31:30 **to...?**

Well if it was a close support, in other words you were immediately helping the army on a certain situation, you'd get a target come in from Group from Wing Headquarters, they'd say, they had a system, what they call, 'Rover.' There was a chap, an air force squadron, a lad from the air force on the ground with the army able to talk to you in the air when you got airborne. So what you'd do, they'd brief

32:00 you so you got a Rover Mission, you got to fly to a certain area then patrol and call up this person on the ground. And that person on the ground would say, "Okay I got a target for you." You'd have a map in the cockpit, in grids, and he'd say, "I give you target say G-H44," and you take the map, get the map out and look at it and G-H44 and look in that square. Now within that square there's a house or four guns or

32:30 some troops in there that are giving us some trouble, that's your target, go and knock it out. So as a leader, as I nearly always was a leader, I'd break away from the, we'd be just patrolling about ten thousand feet, I'd leave the formation and go to this area where the target was given and circle it and have a look and pick out the target. Then go back and join the formation then lead the rest of the formation into the target.

33:00 And as I was approaching the target, I'd talk to the rest of the pilot's was looking for the, that target on the ground, picking up the area's around to identify.

And how many planes would fly in formation at once?

All depends, maybe four, maybe, yeah, four was normally the, that type of target. If we're doing bridges, bombing bridges, it'd be nearly always, maybe a squadron, a whole squadron, twelve aircraft would go out

33:30 on it. And that target would be a bridge, you knew it was going to a certain bridge and you'd go in on it and dive bomb on that target. Houses, particularly when the army was moving, and they'd come up to protect one part of the front where the enemy had formed a strong point and they were holding up the movement of that type of front, and they'd call us in to knock out that house so the front can move forward.

34:00 And they'd be one of these four ship formations, four was about the best you could handle in those conditions. It might take maybe three flights of four aircraft, but one flight could, you know, if they were on the button could, they could knock it out.

And what was your payload?

All depends what the target was. We could carry three five hundred pounders or normally if we're knocking bridges out one one-thousand pounder.

34:30 And in long range trips we'd have to carry two five hundred pounder in the wings and one petrol overload tank on the fuselage. It all depends what the target was where you, what type of, always had your guns loaded of course but the type of bombs you'd carry would be, the target would determine what sort of tactics you'd use and the type of bomb you'd use.

And how did

35:00 **the plane handle after you'd dropped your load?**

Oh much lighter and I mean on that raid, I mean that's a thousand pound bomb underneath that load. And what you'd normally do is when you dropped your bomb, you'd start to dive from about nine thousand feet and aim to pull out the bottom at a thousand feet. And just kept low level weaving like mad to get away from, avoid the flak until you got out of the target end then climb back

35:30 up to height and rejoin the formation again if you could. But it was that, the dangerous time of course was when you were over target diving and then initially flying away from target, that's when people, most people got killed or shot down.

And how much action or flak from enemy did you encounter?

Lots.

36:00 Lots, yeah, very much. I think on, I think I saw four chaps shot down when I was in the squadron and some just disappeared in the, didn't make it. We had some trouble with bombs at one time, the fuselage, that fuselage bomb is very close to the gills on the radiator, for the, control the temperature of the engine.

36:30 And one of the things you had to do before you, as you rolled over in your dive, you had to close those gills right up. Because it was a chance of when you release the bomb, the bomb would, as it left the aircraft the gill would be like that and the bomb'd be there if it hit the, if you didn't retract the gill, you could hit the gill itself and cause an explosion. Cause once it left the racks

37:00 in the, it was live, cause the rack pulled out the propeller on the detonator and the bomb was, you know, the first thing it hit it would go off. And I know we lost, I saw two chaps just blown, just big, black ball of smoke in the sky and that's, there was no flak, so it must have been that sort of accident. We changed the type of bomb we were using and it eliminated the problem.

37:30 But flak was the biggest, because when the Germans invaded Russia they really drew most of the, the major part of the German air force out of Italy, but to counteract that they'd then increase the ack-ack defences of the army. And that was our problem, the defences on the ground that, when we're doing our sorties. Some of the targets they just absolutely,

38:00 well that, that raid there, that just, that, those black, that's the eighty-eight millimetre bursting, but over the target area it was just black palls of smoke from light anti aircraft just fired over the target. You had to fly through that to get to your target.

Well tell us about the Venice operation, what was…?

Well you read that, there was an agreement I

38:30 think earlier on in the piece when the Italians were in the war, that Venice would be declared an open city, because of its architecture and its historical sort of buildings. And they came to an agreement that they wouldn't bomb Venice. The Italians said well we won't use it, the port as a part of the war, that was a sort of unofficial agreement between the two sides.

39:00 But when the Italians surrendered and the Germans took over, it was a different ball game, they then started to use Venice as a main supply base for their troops in Italy. And what they were use, they were getting supplies from Yugoslavia, and Trieste and Yugoslavia and bringing it across the, into Venice into boats and then trans shipping into barges, smaller, to take up all the canals in Northern Italy for the troops to, for supplies. And so it was decided that the,

39:30 that we'd wait until we saw enough shipping in Venice Harbour to warrant one, we were given clearance for one raid only. And at that time had to be when there was, we thought was enough shipping in the harbour to knock out, which we did. And that was the Operation Bowler, and it was called Bowler because if anything went wrong, all the people that planned it got bowlered, you know

40:00 got asked to retire, in the Service Corps, bowler hatted. So they got Operation Bowler. And we went off, the whole Wing went off plus one American Squadron and we did, we went one sortie on it and did a good job on it.

Okay well our tape is just about to run out so we'll just stop there…

Tape 9

00:33 **John, 450 Squadron covered quite a vast area throughout the war, but where was the majority of your operations?**

In North Italy, north of Ravenna, north of Ancona in the Po Valley, Italy.

01:00 **And what was the operations consisting of?**

Close support to the, for the army attacking houses, troops, guns, bridges, trains, warehouses, all, general targets that were required to be knocked out by, at certain times.

From your position in the air, what could you see of the civilians?

None.

01:30 Very rarely saw any civilians.

Now during these operations you were also awarded another medal, what was it?

The DFC in August 1945.

What was that for?

02:00 Have a look and see, oh dear.

That's fine, it doesn't have to be the specific operation, what was it generally for?

Well no, it's for a series of ops which I was very good at bombing.

And what was the DFC awarded for?

For 'precision and accurate

02:30 dive bombing at enemy targets during the final phase of the Italian campaign.'

And as a, you're now as a pilot, and having previously as a navigator always worked with crews, how was it suddenly to be flying on your own?

Very good. Yes, very good. Your own captain, do what you wanna do,

03:00 and luckily I was able to do it pretty well.

And during the Italian campaign, could you, do you have any other examples of a typical operation?

What, like the Operation Bowler? No that was the only one we did of that type. But all the targets we had, we'd

03:30 comprise four aircraft flights, or six aircraft flights or squadron flights of aircraft, all depends again on the type of target you were attacking. Bridges, big bridges were nearly always a squadron effort, twelve aircraft or as many as we could muster at the time. But for small targets when we were doing close support with the army, we normally only worked with about four aircraft.

04:00 **And in your opinion, what would you say 450 Squadron is most famous for?**

Ground attack, ground attack and close support with army, nick named the Desert Harassers by Lord Haw-Haw.

But what was it about your tactics that were different to other squadrons?

04:30 I don't think anything out of the ordinary, we just did very good work on the type of operations. I always insisted that when you're doing any ground attacking at all or strafing, don't go back for the second run. If you're strafing, going for a train or an aircraft on the ground or the target you were after, if you didn't hit it in that initial dive, forget about it cause most people

05:00 that got shot down went back for a second run and that's when you got into trouble. If you couldn't have hit it the first time, forget about it and go on to the next target, but don't go, don't do a second run at it.

And would you go back and revisit that target at a later stage?

Later date. If the particular formation that you were in didn't knock out that day, another target would be, formation would come in and try and

05:30 knock it out.

And you were the formation leader, how influential were you over how the formations flew?

Pardon?

How influential were you over how the formations flew?

It was I, I was the leader, Flight Leader, what they call a Flight Leader. So whatever I said we would do, we'd do.

06:00 **And how did you find the men in the squadron?**

Very good. I found that the 'mixinations', the multinational pilots on the squadron mixed very well and

had very good expertise and got camaraderie amongst everybody, there was no

06:30 outsiders at all, very good.

And were there any typical traits of any of the nationalities?

In what way?

Well did the, how did the Australians stand away from the other nationalities that were there, say the South Africans?

Oh I dunno, I think everybody, in a fighter squadron everybody got the same attitude I think toward the other, bit airy-fairy sometimes,

07:00 and liked to have a good party and so on. I don't think they're, I think everybody had the same attitude towards it.

So did you have any rituals or good luck charms?

I used to wear a special, a red scarf all the time, I had it all through my flying. And it was very brilliant

07:30 fire-engine red, by the time it finished it was very, very pale pink. But I flew, I used that on every sortie.

Where did the scarf come from?

I think it was just a piece of material I picked up somewhere but I still got it now actually as a souvenir.

And what was the first thing you'd do after coming back from a sortie or strafing?

Kiss the ground. No, normally

08:00 just get out and go and join the rest of the lads for de-briefing, with the intelligence officer normally, tell him what happened and then record it. I've got official recordings of all the sorties I led in my log book.

And what do you recall of what you logged of the sorties?

Well some were very good, some were not so

08:30 good. like all things that happened. I think I was rather good at getting direct hits on targets, like on tanks or guns, that sort of thing. And that, again just, you know, experience, doing the right thing at the right time. But normally our flights I led accomplished very good results. And the big problem was picking, as I mentioned just

09:00 now, me as the leader identifying the target you were going for, cause quite often we're bombing within a hundred yards of our troops. That was what they call a bomb line, they give a bomb line of say a hundred yards south and so forth, and don't drop any bombs the other side of that line And in those conditions you had to be really very, very accurate in, when you're dive bombing. Cause dropping that size, type of bomb,

09:30 and the size of the bomb was quite a big blasting area, could cause a lot of casualties if it was dropped in the wrong place.

And were there any accidents with your army?

What?

You were just saying how close it was?

Well no, to my knowledge we didn't ever bomb our own troops at all. Civilian casualties, yes, I'm afraid may have some,

10:00 might have been killed but that's, that was part of the game, I guess there at the wrong time, and we tried to avoid it as much as poss. And the Germans were, you know, if they, if the front was moving and we were advancing, they'd, the Italians would normally get out of the area where we were

10:30 operating and any houses we were told to bomb would be only occupied by Germans. So if we knocked the house out we only killed, we hoped, only Germans, German soldiers.

And how far had the Germans infiltrated Italy at this stage?

11:00 Oh they were retreating all the way up, the invasion of Italy was way back in, oh, long before time I joined the squadron. And they were on their sort of way, retreating on the final stages of the war. They established certain lines as they went up Italy, up you know, hold up the advance of our

11:30 people, but when I joined them they were on the retreat all the time. They formed a sort of a line down the Po Valley as a temporary hold up but we, in the final push which we started, you know, just after the Venice raid, they just kept on retreating very rapidly.

And as an army and an air force, how were the Germans holding up under your attack?

I think they were doing

12:00 as well as they could do. They were running short of supplies in the end I think, that was the biggest problem, getting their supplies through because the Russian Front I think took the major part of the German army's supplies and equipment. The Italian Front was a sort of a secondary front I think, they didn't, they knew, but they, I think they realised they couldn't hold our 8th Army up,

12:30 and they just slowly retreated all the way up through, just trying to delay the inevitable I think.

And the inevitable did come, and where were you when you heard the war had ended?

Up in a place called Lavariano, just north of, well just near

13:00 Udine in North Italy, on the Adriatic Gulf. And that's where we were when the war finished and the squadron disbanded from there.

And how did you hear the news that the war had ended?

I just can't remember now really. I was detailed to fly, lead a flight

13:30 up to Austria, we were gonna go up on a ground strafing exercise, cause we were trying to catch the troops retreating out of Yugoslavia, they were always trying to get back in to Austria. And then the news came through that the war was going to end and don't do, carry out any more raids. I think

14:00 I'd just been on a sortie and I'd come back and the news come through there was no more ops to be done.

So had you finished your sortie or were you about to go out when you heard the news?

No it was coming back I think from the sortie. Yes. No, it just filtered

14:30 through the communications there, followed by a huge party and...

I was going to ask how you celebrated the end of the war?

Yeah, a big party and then after of course the, when the air force was withdrawing from operations, 239 Wing, because it was one of the original Desert

15:00 Air Force formations, we did a big, altogether, all the squadrons got together and flew a big fly past over all the hierarchy in North Italy and altogether in big formations and that was it, the last trip. And then I was posted from the squadron then for the coming back to Australia then I get back in the RAF again unfortunately for,

15:30 as I thought.

Well we'll talk about your transition back to Australia and then the RAF, I'm just, what, when you landed and the war had ended, what was the feeling at the camp?

Oh very much relieved, yes, very much relieved it was all over. Thinking about going home, that the lads did, the Australian boys anyway. But I knew I wouldn't be going back home, I knew I was gonna be posted to one of the,

16:00 one of the squadrons. Actually RAF Squadrons that were in 239 Wing, there was other RAF Squadrons as well as 450 in the Wing and I got posted to 250 Squadron, which is on the same airfield as we were at that time.

How did you feel having spent all this time with 450 Squadron knowing that the Australian crew that you had bonded with were actually going back to Australia?

I just thought they were very lucky, to go home, yeah.

16:30 Yes. Luckily, just after the war finished, the RAF bought out an order that Commonwealth personnel who'd joined the RAF before the war could go back to their home for sixty-one days' leave at home. So I had in mind, actually I was gonna apply for that and so I hoped that I would be going back

17:00 home for leave anyway. Which it was lucky it came through, but it came through sooner than I expected. Cause I'd left 450 and was promoted shortly afterwards to take over command of the squadron at 250 Squadron. And I was only with them for two months before I got my leave to Australia, which I did, I didn't refuse. But unfortunately you know, the, while I was away the squadron,

17:30 my squadron, 250 was disbanded so I never got back to the squadron again.

So what did it feel like to be Commander for that short period of time?

Oh very good, very good. Well you're, what you're really going for to be a Squadron Commander of a Fighter Squadron, yeah, it was good.

So what did you do with your squadron in that short time?

Well what, the big problem was trying to keep the lads, keeping fighter pilots busy when they're not flying and keeping them out of mischief is one of the hardest

18:00 things in the world to do. And we just flew around Italy doing all kinds of things and just to keep them, keep the lads out of mischief as it were.

So what were they doing flying around Italy?

Well we'd organised you know, various flights, competitions, flying on what we called 'treasure hunts' or the 'target flying hunt.'

18:30 We'd plan a, say a two hour flight with various types of targets to give you the next heading for the next target. Like a bridge, if a bridge was a target, it had so many spans in the bridge, multiply that by a figure then give to you the course for the next, head in for the next target, things like that. So that's what we did and unfortunately you know, some of these things, we had accidents,

19:00 and again that's flying, it's... one squadron almost got wiped out on one of those sort of things. Got trapped in the, over the lakes up in the north of Italy and cloud came down and trapped them down below. To get out the, get back up above they had to fly back through the cloud and some boys didn't make it.

19:30 **Did you lose boys in your squadron?**

Mmm, yeah, lost my number, well my Number Two was hit on a dive, one of the dive bombing raids and but he, his engine lasted til he got almost to the coast. Cause the normal thing you did if you got hit in a dive, and you were, because they're liquid cooled engines, once you got, lose your glycol which is a coolant, you only about five minutes engine time to go before she'd seize.

20:00 And the normal thing, you'd climb back up to safe height to bail out. And that, my Number Two, he called out he'd been hit and so I stayed with him until we got over the sea and he bailed out and I just circled him over the water until my fuel got low and I'd handed over to a Spitfire, to circle, until he was picked up by an air-sea rescue aircraft.

Was he

20:30 **alive or dead when you...?**

Mmm, he was okay, yeah.

Did you lose any men, like fatalities?

Oh, well we lost, I think when I was on the squadron we lost about five.

And what did you write to the families?

I didn't write to the families, the CO unfortunately has the job of doing that. Yes, one of those things that's, happens.

21:00 **And when you finally got your leave... are you okay?**

Yeah, I'm all right.

When you finally got your leave, and you came back to Adelaide...

I get the other side of the camera. Yeah.

how did you get back to Australia?

Big problem was trying to get a ship. Cause at that time all the ships, I went down to Egypt to try and pick up a

21:30 ship going through the Suez Canal and I sat in the transit camp in Port Said for a number of weeks waiting for a ship to pick me up. Cause all the ships were coming from the U.K. were being loaded up with troops going back home to Australia and New Zealand and there's no room for one, for a lone pilot who wanted to go back home. But eventually again,

22:00 my contact friends in the Middle East put the pressure on the movements people and then eventually I was offered a ride, a berth on an aircraft carrier, that was coming out to Australia. They used aircraft carriers as troop carriers when the war was over, they took all the aircraft off them and used the hangars and space on the aircraft carriers to put troops on, and we had oh, I think over a thousand troops on the aircraft carrier. And the,

22:30 they talked the captain into letting me get on board the ship when it got to Port Said. And I had to get on board but he wouldn't stop the ship, I had to go out with the pilot, you know, that was gonna take the ship through the Suez Canal or go out the same time as he was gonna go on board. And I went in an army amphibious duck, out to the ship and

23:00 she was still moving about five knots when I got aboard the carrier. And came home on the, that was

sixty-one days leave at home so it didn't start until I actually got back to Australia, so it was towards the end of April 1947, '46.

And where did you land in Australia?

Well we should've gone to Sydney

23:30 but when we got, we were half way between, we stopped at Cocos Islands on the way, on the way through to drop off some mail and supplies to Cocos Islanders. And on the way between Cocos and Fremantle they got a signal from the navy that, an aircraft carrier called the HMS Formidable was coming back, going back to U.K. from Sydney and was coming through the Australian Bight and got badly damaged with weather and had to go

24:00 into Fremantle for repairs. So they did a quick switch, our ship went into Fremantle, they took all of us off the ship, put the people on the Formidable onto our ship and the (indol…UNCLEAR) turned around and went back to England, and we came over to Adelaide on a troop train.

So travelling with the troops, I'm imagining they're mainly army?

No, there was a lot

24:30 of air force, they were just Australian Army and air force and a few naval, just service personnel going, coming back home after the war.

What was the feeling amongst the troops coming back?

Oh gee, that ride on the carrier was something. I joined the carrier at Port Said and we went through the Canal and we called into Aden. And when we were calling

25:00 at Aden, the Sultan of Yemen decided he was gonna pay an official call on the British navy to thank them for all the help they'd given Yemen during the war. And he picked on the aircraft carrier to come and pay his respects. And that was quite a thing, he arrived on board and he was given all the official sort of greetings and so forth and had lunch on board the ship.

25:30 And as a good will gesture, when he left, he presented the ship with a barge-load full of fresh fruit, which comprised pineapples and bananas and many, many watermelons. And course everybody on, all the troops on there saw this barge coming alongside the carrier and they, 'God, fresh fruit, gee, haven't seen bananas," like, everybody come from England they were gold over there and all these hundreds of water

26:00 melons. And I said to em, "For God… don't eat those water melons, they could be murder." They sell watermelons by weight and they cut the watermelons, the stem of the water melon about that far out from the actual melon itself, and they inject it with a syringe and they inject water into it, to make it, to make the weight. So if you bought a watermelon anywhere in the Middle East, you never bought it without shaking it first. And course some of the

26:30 quality of the water put inside the thing was pretty dubious at times and yeah, water melon was the greatest thing to get diarrhoea, if you had water melon. So this barge load of water melons came and of course, they just bowled, just got in to them. And all the way from there to Colombo in Ceylon you couldn't get anywhere near the toilets for six days on the ship, there was a constant passage to the toilets.

27:00 They'd eaten these watermelons, they were full of rotten water.

Well you had spent most of your war experience with English and other nationalities and suddenly you were surrounded by nothing but Aussies, and, how did that feel?

Well very good, very good, oh, to be with my own sort of nationality as it were, no it was good,

27:30 yeah. The aircraft, the trip on the aircraft carrier was really something with all those troops on that ship. And one important thing they did, they crossed the line on Anzac Day, and you can imagine the caper that went on that day. It was terrific, terrific ceremony went on, all the people that, going through the

28:00 water ducking and that sort of thing. And course that night there was a big party on in the Ward Room on the ship. Because there was so many people on board the ship, they had, in the Ward Room, the bar there was only, nothing more than a window in a wall, and only get about two or three people up at this window to order drinks. And they had a, to stop people hanging around that window, they put a white

28:30 line about three feet out from the window and you had to step over the white line to order your drinks. And the normal thing was to get your drink and go back, walk back over the line, because if they caught you drinking over that line, you had to buy a round for everybody in the Ward Room, and sometimes there was quite a crowd in there.

You keep referring to the aircraft carrier and being on

29:00 **the carrier with all the troops, what was it that made it so memorable?**

Well there's so many, the, so many troops on board and they were so crowded. I mean I was in a cabin that was normally for four officers, four officer cabin and there was sixteen of us in the thing. And it was just tiered right up to the, from the floor up to the ceiling, it was very crowded. But and of course living in the, under the naval

29:30 routine all the time. Every morning up went the Standard on the bow and everybody had to salute and church parade every Sunday, all those sort of things, yeah.

How long were you at sea before you got to Australia?

Oh, I think it was about two weeks I think, from Port Said out to Fremantle.

And who was at

30:00 **the train station in Adelaide to meet you?**

My family, yeah, my family. The train just stopped there then carried on to Melbourne, just dropped off the troops, just for a short time then pulled out again and then carried on to Melbourne and Sydney.

And what was the atmosphere on that platform?

Well on the train

30:30 itself, I mean you can imagine coming across from Perth to Adelaide on a troop train, gee, took us about three days to do it I think, and yeah, it was quite a party on that. Yeah, there was quite a crowd down in Adelaide when I got home of course and that sixty-one days turned in to be four months in the end.

31:00 Again I had trouble getting a ship back to the Middle East from the shortage of berths on ships. Eventually the Headquarters in the Middle East sent a special signal out to the air force in Australia, said, 'Get this man on the next ship or else.' Cause I kept on going down to Headquarters in Adelaide and saying, "I don't want to really go back to there." "Okay, we'll fix that." So eventually I finished up with four month's leave at home not sixty-one days.

31:30 **Let's go back to the beginning of your leave when you got to that platform, I take it your mother and your father were there to meet you?**

Yes, yeah, yeah.

And your father, who was very reluctant to let you leave, suddenly had a son come back who had a very successful career in the RAAF, oh sorry, RAF. How did he greet you when you got off that train?

I think

32:00 he was all right, but he never really got over, I don't think, the fact that I left home. Dad wasn't a traveller, Mum was, her ambition before she died was to get, go to England and try and find the farm house where her mother was born in Cornwall. Dad was a home-stayer, he didn't want to move at all, he didn't want to travel at all. And I think that's why he

32:30 didn't want me to go, maybe, I don't know, to leave home, but he wasn't a traveller at all, he was quite happy to stay at home all the time. No, I think, oh, Dad was all right, yeah.

And what about your mum?

She was a bit overjoyed I think, yeah. Although it was four months it went very quickly. There's always something to do when I was home but.

33:00 Eventually I was told to go to Sydney to pick up the ship to go back to the Middle East again. But in that meantime there, I then tried to join the Royal Australian Air Force again, and they did accept my application but I wouldn't be flying. They accepted me on a, what they called a Temporary Commission, I'd drop two ranks

33:30 and it wouldn't be flying. And just before I came, left Middle East the RAF had offered me a permanent commission, which meant as a GD [General Duties] officer I'd be able to fly until I was fifty-five if I maintained my medical category. And as I'd joined the air force to fly, I took, I accepted a permanent commission.

Just back at your leave in Adelaide, you'd shown

34:00 **us previously today quite a few articles written about yourself and your war experience. Was there any fanfare when you came back to Adelaide?**

I don't think so, not as such, only just relations. I spoke up at Legacy Club one day for, tell my misdemeanours

34:30 in the air force but I think that's all I did really. No really big celebrations.

And then you went back to the U.K. ...?

No, back to the Middle East.

Oh sorry, back to the Middle East, and where were you posted from there?

To Nicosia in Cyprus, flying Mustangs, in Cyprus. And at that

35:00 time the air force was involved in trying to prevent the Jews getting in to Palestine, they were all trying to stream into Palestine from Europe. And our job was mainly was patrolling the Mediterranean east of Port Said to try and intercept these ships that they were using to get, to come out of Europe and then... They run em aground at Tel Aviv and just jump off the ship and let it just go aground

35:30 and stay there. And the British navy, if we saw one of these ships, we just called up with the navy and they'd come alongside the and take off the refugees and sink the ship and then put them ashore in internment camps, in Palestine initially and then it became so many of them that they had to start opening them up in Cyprus. And then on one of those rides, and because all the

36:00 main supplies were in Palestine and we were in Cyprus and there was a ban on movement of air between the mainland and the island, we had to organise our own supply runs, with urgent spares for the aircraft. So we converted our petrol, hundred gallon petrol tanks into, carry stores in them.

Well you were with the RAF for quite a few years before you actually retired

36:30 **and took quite a few postings, when did you actually retire from the RAF?**

1974.

And from...?

Just before we start that, can I just tell you about what happened one flight when I did those trips from, I did one of those flights from Cyprus over to Palestine to get supplies. And that time the, I took over six turkeys for a party that the RAF were gonna have for their hand over control of Lydda Airport to the,

37:00 back to the civilians again. And these six turkeys I just put, tied their legs together and threw them in one of these tanks to take them over. And course over there, the flight over, a 45 minute flight, they just made a bit of a mess inside the tank, and when we opened the tank in Lydda to take them out there was S-H-One-T all over the inside of the tank. So we just you know, I gave the turkeys away to take

37:30 them and went and collected the stores. And when I got to stores there was only enough, only enough stores to put in to one tank and so the lads are loading the aircraft of course put all the stores in the clean tank and leaving the dirty tank empty. And when I went to the control tower to book my flight back to Nicosia, there was a Squadron Leader there who'd been there for three weeks trying to get back to Nicosia. He'd been back to England on leave and his family was in Nicosia

38:00 and he was stuck in Lydda. And he said, you know, "What are you flying Bush?" And I said, "I'm flying a Mustang." And he said, "God," he said, "I'm waiting for a seat." I said, "Well I've got a spare tank I think, if you wanna fly in a tank." And so he said, "I'll do anything to get back to Cyprus." So I said, "Well come out and we'll see what's happening." So we went out to the aircraft and the lads that'd loaded all the stores in the clean tank leaving the dirty tank empty.

38:30 Opened up the front of this tank and there was all this S-H-One-T inside. And I said to him, "There's your transport in there." Not really thinking he'd ever accept it but he said, "Yeah, I'll do anything." So we got some rag and cleaned out most of the mess and I slid him in the tank just like a, you know, a loaf of bread in an oven,

39:00 and he fitted in there just about right. And we put the nose back on again and I took out the filler cap on the tank and the drain plug to give him some air, and he was inside the tank, looking up through this hole. And I took off and flew back to Nicosia with him in the tank and landed there and I said to the ground crew who was unloading, I said, "The port tank's got the stores and the starboard tank has got some very, very important equipment

39:30 in there, be careful when you take off the nose of the tank.

Just to move along, I just want to ask you, what was it about the air force that you missed when you finally did retire?

Well I was, when I retired I was happy to go. But the air force changed considerably from 1960 onwards in the, on the flying side it got too,

40:00 too book-happy, we call book-happy. They were, if you did anything wrong and it wasn't in the book, they just threw the book at... and they just didn't give you any sort of leniency at all on things that could happen, and it happened many times. And they got stricter and stricter on, I suppose with aircraft being more complicated, but in that time I mean I flew twenty-two different types of aircraft

40:30 in the aircraft, you know twin engine, single engine, piston engine and jets, and jet fighters.

And looking back on the war, what would you say was your proudest moment?

Proudest moment? Gee. I suppose when I was awarded the DFM, when I bought the aeroplane back.

41:00 And, well, being in the raid on Venice.

And just very, very quickly, do you have any words of advice for future generations?

Oh gee. I wish that the young people could be put in the position of being on board a sailing ship

41:30 and doing the same trip as I did to England, working their passage in those conditions and learning how to live with other people and work well.

Well thanks very much John, for sharing your experiences with us today.

Just before we finish, I flew a hundred and seventy-one operations during the war,

42:00 eighty-one as a navigator...

Tape 10

00:32 **So John, can you tell us about the type of technological changes you saw in flying after the, after World War II finished?**

Well I think the changing over from piston engines to jet engine flying was quite a considerable change in the type of flying and the, and but the basic airmanship required in that role.

01:00 And in my experience I found that jet flying was a different style of flying in as much that you had to think further ahead when you're flying because the speeds that you were flying at. The fuel problem, because jet aircraft use fuel much quicker than what a piston engine did and flying in Europe particularly, being more conscious to the weather.

01:30 Again because of the aircraft fuel problem, you had to always be thinking of, when you're taking off, what diversions and aircraft, airfields would be available if the weather suddenly closed in on your home airfield.

And you mentioned when we were off camera that you were involved in the first Atlantic...?

Well yeah, when I went back to England in 1947, I

02:00 joined a Meteor Squadron flying and in 1948 the air force started to reduce the number of aircraft and they started to reduce the flying hours required because of the cost of running the air force. And I wasn't very happy about that situation

02:30 but at the same time in 1948 they started a scheme called the exchange, Pilot Exchange between the major air forces in the world. And they had open options for people to go over to America to fly in American air force from the RAF as well as other air forces in the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation]. And I applied for it and got it and got assigned to a

03:00 American Fighter Bomber Squadron in America, jets, F-84 Thunder Jets, stationed in South Carolina. And we flew all over the world literally while I was with them, they were one of the top squadrons in the U.S. air force on close support, operations for the army. And we flew all over America, Puerto Rico and also went, flew to

03:30 England to reinforce the fighter forces in England, and that meant flying across the Atlantic. And the whole group, 25 Bomber Group which I flew with, 25th Fighter Squadron and that was in the 25th Bomber Group stationed at South Carolina. Three squadrons and all three squadrons flew over to U.K. via Goose

04:00 Bay in Labrador, Bluey West One in Greenland, Keflavik in Iceland and into Manston in England. And that was quite an experience to fly, that was the first mass jet, single engine jet flying across the Atlantic took place. Was quite an organisation with, around seventy aircraft went, flew in that movement. And that was quite a thing to be involved in that, the organisation of

04:30 flying those aircraft. And while we're in England we just flew round England and Europe on various targets assigned to us by the Fighter Command England. We went over in the summer, in June 1950 and it was quite a nice flight across in that time of the year, the long hours

05:00 of daylight and good flying conditions. Except we lost one aircraft and one pilot between Greenland and Iceland when his engine failed and he couldn't re-light and he ejected and unfortunately was dead when they picked him up in the water. And we stayed in England til December and we then returned to America in December which was quite a different conditions altogether, being the middle of winter and flying up in those air, those areas

05:30 through that part of the world a fairly horrendous business to be, to do. And it took us nearly a fortnight, two weeks to get back there, cause the weather conditions were pretty awful in certain

places. And we were very lucky not to lose half the whole force on the leg from Keflavik to Bluey West One in Greenland.

06:00 We hit a jet stream at thirty-five thousand feet which wasn't forecast and it prolonged our flight considerably and when we landed at Keflavik we were very, very short of fuel. So much so that some, a lot of the aircraft, their engines failed as they touched down in Bluey West One. I came, when I came, finished that, I did three years over in America, I came back to England and I joined The Day Flight Leaders School at

06:30 West Raynham in England, as an Instructor there teaching the latest tactics to all fighter pilots in Fighter Command. And from there, I went from up there up to Linden House in Yorkshire, the RAF converter on to swept-wing fighters, F-86 American fighters. And I had the job of training the new pilots on the, or

07:00 pilots on the aircraft, having experience on all American aircraft I'd flown during the war and after the war.

And how easy was it to keep up with the technological changes?

Oh, I didn't find it too difficult, there was, they were still at that time fairly reas, I'm talking about in the 1950's, it was still fairly reasonable, not too difficult, didn't have the radar situations like we got now in all those kind of things,

07:30 missiles to worry about. It became more complicated later on when we went into Hurricane Hunters and then finally into Lockheed Lightnings, which was, really was a real complicated aeroplane to fly. But it was very, it was designed as a high speed, short range interceptor fighter and as such it was, nothing could touch it, it was really good. But it

08:00 was, you were, as it only a one man, what they call a one man band, you did everything, you flew it, you operated the radar, you fired the missiles. And from the time you pressed the button to start until you landed back again, it was never a dull moment, and that was the last aircraft I flew before I retired. And then I did a, from there I went out to Saudi Arabia when I finished that for a few years,

08:30 instructing out there on the flight simulator in Saudi Arabia. And altogether during my time in the air force, I flew twenty-two different types of aircraft, single engine and twin engine jet and piston engine fighter. And as I mentioned earlier on I did eighty-eight ops as an observer and ninety-one

09:00 as a pilot.

And what was the most satisfying plane to...?

To fly? I think in the piston engines the Mustang. Having flown Spitfires and Hurricanes and the Kittyhawks, I think of the piston engines, the Mustang was a much nicer, more versatile aircraft to fly. It was a good gun platform, a good

09:30 rocket platform and a good bombing platform to fly. And it had terrific range, you know, it was more versatile. The Spitfire was very good but it was very limited to what it could do, as a straight fighter it was second to none. Hurricane was a good aeroplane, again a bit more versatile than the Spitfire. And, but the Mustang was

10:00 the best one I think I flew, I enjoyed it very much. And of the jet fighters, the Hawker Hunter I think was the most likeable aeroplane I flew.

And what operations were you involved in during that twenty year period?

Well I, not really any operations at all,

10:30 Fighter Command England always had summer exercises where we exercised all the different sort of facets of interceptions and that sort of thing. And I did one ground tour out in Singapore, when the confrontation was on and I was in charge of the Operations Room in 204 Group Headquarters. We controlled all the aircraft, tactical aircraft in Borneo and in Malaya.

11:00 And I was in charge of that operation which was very interesting, handling Hunters and Javelins and trying to catch the Indonesians when they made incursions in the mainland in Malaysia.

And when was that taking place?

That was in 196-, I was there from 19-

11:30 '65 until '67.

Any other highlights from that time?

Well I think during incursion, when the Indonesians were invading Malaysia, one of their tactics they used is when the,

12:00 was when the full moon and high tide period coincided, they'd come across from Sumatra in high speed bomb boats, about forty or fifty in it, and try and land on the mainland in Malaysia on the east side

round Mersing. And one of our jobs was to fly up the coast every morning at dawn to try and find out if any of these bomb boats had landed on the

12:30 beaches in that area. And by the time we got there normally the tide had gone out but left a big arrow or big, an indent in the sand where the boat had gone ashore and they'd pulled it back out again, all we saw was a big line in the sand, so we realised it'd been a landing there over night. And the idea was to try and catch them quickly before they dispersed in the jungle. If we caught em within twenty-four hours it was quite an easy job to do but if they got

13:00 loose more, longer than that period, it was quite a job to catch them. And at one time we had a number of them that even got right in the gunning placements on Singapore, on the mainland in Malaysia, and we had a very uneasy time to get them out of there. And we, I organised, I targeted these gun pits from, Hunters from a station at Tinggi to

13:30 dive bomb and strafe these Indonesians that were holding up in the gunning placements. And we, they were so heavily fortified that we didn't accomplish very much but in, eventually we got the Gurkhas to go in there. Cause the Indonesians, because they had a very, a big battle in Western Borneo during the confrontation, and the Indonesians

14:00 came up against the Gurkhas for the first time and the Gurkhas just really hacked them to pieces. So the word got round in Indonesian Forces, don't try and fight the Gurkhas. So the routine up in, that the Indonesian people got in the gun placements that we couldn't get them out. We just thought, right, by the air, we just say we'll spread the word around to the locals who will then get word to the Indonesians that the Gurkhas were coming.

14:30 And they came out like rabbits out of a warren, they just surrendered straight away, didn't want to take any more chances with the Gurkhas. And that was a, you know, a lot of people don't realise that, but that's what actually happened at one stage of the confrontation. And I think that's about the last of the outstanding things I did when I was in the air force. And my final retirement was

15:00 something different. I applied for a job in BAC [British Aerospace] out in Saudi Arabia instructing on simulator and I was promised a job and I asked for early retirement in the air force which I was given but unfortunately the job in Saudi Arabia was delayed a year. And I applied to go back, and I was six months, I had another six months to do before I finished my full time in the air force. And

15:30 there was a delay on the posting so I wrote to the air force and asked could I come back in the air force for six months, because by retiring early I, you know, was quite a heavy penalty on the pension and that sort of thing, financially, and but the air force didn't allow me to go back in again. And my wife was very unhappy about the treatment I was getting and she wrote to the Queen.

16:00 Unbeknown to me she wrote to the Queen and I was away at the time she did it and when I come back she told me and I, my feet never touched the deck. I had to go and report to the Commander-in-Chief of RAF Germany who luckily was Air Chief Marshall Mickey Martin who was a famous Australian bomber pilot during the war. And he just couldn't believe his ears when I told him the story but anyway

16:30 after a lengthy delay, the Queen wrote to the Air Council and said, 'I think you should allow Squadron Leader Barrey to stay in the air force,' and that really was a one off.

And what was the cringe response?

Well the letter she wrote to them, 'I've commanded that the, your stay in the air force should be

17:00 allowed, you should be allowed to continue with your and complete your full service for a full retirement.' And you can imagine the shock waves around the air force when Bush Barrey's name was... I'd beaten the system. So I went out the air force under a huge cloud actually cause I was in Germany at the time and they, to get back at me they posted me immediately back out

17:30 of Germany, cause I still had another year to do in Germany, to Air Ministry in London for my last six months of service, which is one of the worst postings, in my book, to go to. And so I spent the last six months Air Ministry in London. So in a way, because the air force didn't present my medals I did give them a bit of a shake at the end, I got back at em through the Queen,

18:00 so I can thank her very much for the final departure from the air force. But unfortunately it had to be that way. I thought they were very, it wasn't my doing that it, I didn't get the job. It was just the Company, BAC, didn't give me enough information in time to stop my application to go out the service early.

18:30 **And who were you instructing when you went to Saudi Arabia?**

Saudi Arabian air force, they'd bought about four squadrons of Lightnings, Lockheed, ah, BAC Lightning's. And they wanted simulator instructors out there to, cause they bought their own simulator out, because before that we were training their pilots in England on our equipment. But they decided to buy a simulator in

19:00 a new base they started up in Saudi Arabia. And the problem became, the thing was delayed because the cost of the building, they weren't happy about the cost of the building. Had to be, you know, dust

proof, fully air conditioned and everything had to be double sealed and that sort of thing. And they were making a bit of noise about the cost of the building, and it took them a long time to decide whether they were gonna actually have a simulator in the end. And that was the delay and eventually

19:30 did agree to it and so I went out this senior instructor on the Lightning Simulator, at first at Dhahran then up to Tobruk.

And what did you miss about flying?

Everything. I still fly now with John Johansson, I'll always be happier in the air than on the ground,

20:00 and every chance I get I try and go flying, I hope I can still keep that going for some time. But I still fly now with John Johansson, he's a, have you heard of him at all, he's a local lad who's built his own kit aircraft and just flown over the South Pole and round the world three times.

And when you say you still fly, does that mean that you still pilot?

I don't pilot, I just fly,

20:30 you know, dual in the back seat or by the side of him. No I don't, I haven't actually, I only fly 'unofficially' when we're airborne.

And what do you think your very long and very, incredibly distinguished career has taught you?

Taught me? To be a good listener.

21:00 **And what do you think the war, what do you think you learned during the war?**

Oh, I don't know, I think as, it didn't achieve very much, the peace didn't come after the war. It was, we always find, there's been trouble throughout the world ever since and there will always be while there's a problem with religion. Religion

21:30 is a big problem now in the Middle East and in that area. And the episode in Israel while the Israelis are in, the Jews are in Israel, they'll never sort that out, until they actually do a Berlin Wall job, which they're trying to do now, it'll never be sorted out.

22:00 And big trouble is now that the people that started all these terrorist organisations, the suicide bombers, not so much them but the, like in Northern Ireland, the people that started all the troubles there they've grown up now and they want to get rid of it. But because it's been going for so long they, the younger generation have got their hands on guns and bombs and so forth and they don't want to give that.

22:30 **Well we've certainly covered a lot of ground today and it's been fantastic listening to all of your stories, what would you like to say in conclusion for today?**

Well I'm very grateful for the opportunity to talk cause I think my stories would be interesting for later life and later generations.

23:00 And I think any war experiences and that can only help in the back of the history of operating in war time. And I was very lucky to be able to do that right throughout the war, one of the very few people to be flying the day war started and to be still flying the day war finished.

23:30 **Well thank you very much for speaking with us today, it's been a real pleasure.**

My pleasure, thank you.

Thank you.

Gee whiz.

The boy from the bush.

INTERVIEW ENDS