Australians at War Film Archive

Henry Johnson - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:44 **Well, good morning Henry.**

Good morning.

Thank you for giving us your time and speaking with us today. It is good of you to do that. The first thing that I would like to ask you is if you can give me the place that you were born in, the place that

01:00 **you went to school and then if you can take me through the different postings that you had throughout your war experience without giving me any of the detail. Just give me the places.**

I was born at a place called Leeton in New South Wales, up in the irrigation area, on the 5th of July, 1918. My infant's schooling was done at Leeton

01:30 and then the family got moved over to Griffith which is not far away, forty-miles, in 1925 and I went to the primary school at Griffith and I was there until I was twelve years old when from there my high school started and I went to Yanco Agricultural High School where

02:00 I did four years' tuition. It was a school which went up to third form and I was in the first class when it extended to take on leaving certificate standard involving two more years. So I was in fourth year in 1934 when I went home for the Christmas holidays

02:30 and it was the Depression time and employment was very, very difficult and my father said to me when I got home, he said, "How would you like to go to work for a fortnight? I think there might be a job up in the irrigation commission," and I said, "Well that would be very nice. It would give me some pocket money." So he arranged for me

03:00 to meet the manager of the water conservation and irrigation commission and I found myself the very next day a junior clerk and I worked until the end of the month. They didn't tell me but they wrote me a letter offering employment for another month and I had to make my mind up whether to go back to school and get the leaving certificate

03:30 or take this opportunity of a job, which was only a temporary job. And my father said, "Well if you get your leaving certificate, look at all these blokes walking up and down the street, they've been to university. You have the opportunity to get a job now. You don't know what's in front of you; it may be extended, it may not. If you go back to school now, you'll do a full year. If you go back to school halfway through

04:00 you'll only do half a year and you'll have to repeat." So this was the first decision I ever had to make in my life. So I said, "I'll stick to the job," because I liked it. So at the end of the second month, or a month and a half, the manager said to me, "We still require your services. You are offered employment on a temporary

04:30 basis until the 30th of June." And I said, "Well, that's very good." So that's what I took because I'd already missed some schooling. So I worked with the irrigation commission as a junior clerk until the 30th of June. My father said to me in the early part of the month, "Now this is only going to be a temporary job; eventually it's going to end." He said, "If I were you I'd try and get

05:00 some employment." So I went down to the brand new Rural Bank which opened up in Griffith and I saw the manager and I lodged an application for employment. And they were expanding because they were brand new and anyhow, I was fortunate and they offered me a job but not at Griffith where I lived – they offered me a job at Leeton. I had to go over there.

05:30 So that's how I started off in the bank during 1935, and from there I was junior clerk, a messenger boy, changing the manager's pen nibs and getting him ink and general rouseabout. I was also put in charge of the stamp box where you used to have to post the mail – I never balanced it –

06:00 and the postage fortunately was only about a penny in those days for a letter. It's about the equivalent of a cent.

I would like to come back and talk a lot more about your early years in the bank but if you could then tell me where you enlisted and your different postings.

I enlisted in the militia in 1939, early in the year – I have forgotten exactly

06:30 when it was, and it was an infantry turnout in the old 56th Battalion and it wasn't very long before we were sent off to camp at Liverpool, I think for a fortnight. We got to Liverpool and in those days the military people didn't have much equipment; we had broomsticks for doing our parade

07:00 ground drill and so forth. Anyhow at the end of the fortnight I went back to the bank, and after that, in 1939, I found myself transferred to a place called Dareton, which is just on the New South Wales side of Mildura in Victoria, a tiny little place it was. And I heard that

07:30 on one Sunday night Robert Menzies, who was then the prime minister, I heard him declare war on Germany and it just happened to coincide with the end of my relief at this branch and I had to get back to Leeton. So in those days there were no aeroplane routes in the country. I had to go down to Melbourne and catch another

08:00 train back up to Leeton in New South Wales. Shortly after that, in 1940, I got transferred in the bank to Wagga, which was a much bigger town; it was only a town in those days – of course it's an enormous city now – and I was transferred. Also I had to make arrangements to transfer my

08:30 military base, which I did. The military base at Wagga was a machine gun crowd. I was called up into camp at the end of November, 1939, at Cootamundra where I think we did a month's camp at the show ground there. A lot of fellows from there joined the

09:00 AIF [Australian Imperial Force] 6th Division. I didn't, I stayed and at the end of the camp I went back to the bank to do some more work. This continued right through 1941 and I went to various camps: Wallgrove, Greta, back at Wallgrove again, and on August Bank

09:30 Holiday of that year, 1941, I got some leave for forty-eight hours and I went into Sydney intending to join the navy. I went into the naval office in Sydney down in Loftus Street and said to the fellow, "I'm going to join the navy. I want to go into the

10:00 supply section." "Full up. You can either be a cook or a steward." That didn't suit me very much so I went down to Plunket Street in Woolloomooloo and joined the air force. Well, they sent me home straight away because I got down there late – that was a Friday and I had to go back on the Monday for enlistment.

10:30 By Monday I was AWL [absent without leave] from the camp because I only had a forty-eight hours pass. So I didn't say anything and I went back on the Monday morning to the air force. I thought I'd be fairly safe in their building from the military police; they wouldn't pick me up, and I was surprised to learn that the medical examination took a whole day.

11:00 It's the most thorough medical examination I've ever had in my life, even to this day, at the end of which they said, "Well, congratulations. You've passed. We'll put you on the air force reserve." So then I came out and I said, "I'm AWL from my unit." So the fellow wrote out a certificate and said, "Well, go back to your unit and give this to your CO [commanding officer]." He said, "You're lucky. It will save your bacon." I went back and

11:30 I did that and the CO said, "Right, hand your gear in and go back to your civilian life." The bank, at that stage, I had to go and see them too, of course, or tell them that I had joined up and was on the air force reserve, and they very kindly transferred me back to Leeton where my parents had moved from Griffith to live, so I had six months at Leeton

12:00 before I was really called up into the air force. The chap at the medical exam when I had finished the whole lot, he said, "Take my tip and learn the Morse code before you get called up." He gave me some textbooks too to brush up on my arithmetic and so forth. So I went to the technical college at Leeton, which was the same as the school only at night-time, and did

12:30 my lessons there. The Morse code – I found a lady who lived only two or three doors from where my parents lived who was teaching Morse code, so I went down and asked her if she'd teach me and she did. She made a good job too. I was very, very thankful to this fellow at the air force for giving me this advice when I got called up at the end of January, 1942. The Americans had only just started to arrive

13:00 because they'd got the…The Japanese did the wrong thing with them at Pearl Harbour and they were arriving in Australia by the shipload full and it was at that time. My air force career started at Bradfield Park. It was just like going to a gymnasium

13:30 and going to school again. We had lessons on a lot of school subjects, lessons on navigation, lessons on meteorology, and all the time they were pretty severe on the discipline with us. We had jabs on the arm from the medical people and everything and we were pretty fit.

14:00 **And where were you posted after Bradfield?**

At Bradfield Park they decided what you would be: a wireless operator, a gunner or a navigator or a pilot. Most of the blokes with common sense who were well educated ended up as navigators; fellows like myself, who was a plodder, ended up as pilots. I was fortunate in ending up as a pilot and was sent to a placed called

14:30 Benalla down in Victoria to do my elementary flying. They didn't have Tiger Moths down there like all the other places; they had what they called Wackett Trainers, which was a single engine aeroplane, mono-wing and fixed undercarriage. It didn't have variable-pitch propellers; it was just a basic aeroplane driven by what they called a

15:00 Warner Super Scarab engine which was very, very unreliable, and the maintenance section at Benalla was absolutely chock-a-block with people fixing these aeroplanes up. I passed out of Benalla and I went down to do my senior flying down at a place called Point Cook which was well known

15:30 in Victoria and had been going for a long, long time because I think it was the first aerodrome in Australia which was a military aerodrome in Australia. Anyway, when we got down to Point Cook they were digging up the runway with ploughs and things and they were making it bigger. So we had to go out

16:00 to Werribee, Lara, and a place called Little River, which was out near Geelong, to do our training and we did it from there on Airspeed Oxfords, which was a twin-engine machine, fixed propellers, retractable undercarriage and it was a very, very nice little aeroplane.

16:30 It was an aeroplane which you couldn't take too much risks with, not like the old Anson – you could make all the mistakes in the world and you'd still survive but the Airspeed Oxford had a vicious stall. When I say stall, it wasn't the motors, it was the flying. If you get too slow you don't get any lift and that's called a stall, and those went down and

17:00 you plunged and it was a frightening experience but they taught it; fortunately they taught it. You had to do it a number of times to get the hang of it and that was very good training. Nearing the end of that flying experience we had a wings test, exam. It wasn't a written exam, it was a practical exam.

17:30 Anyway, I managed to pass that alright. I didn't end up with any flying colours. It was like my schooling. I was a plodder and that's where I stayed, and I got an average classification. I went on final leave in January, 1942, just after Christmas. We got, I think it was ten days leave and

18:00 after that I had to report to Bradfield Park again where not only was it an initial training school, it was also an embarkation depot. I went to the embarkation depot there. Each morning we used to have to go on parade fairly early and they'd call out a list of names and those people had to fall out and collect their gear because they were the ones that had been posted. And I had

18:30 a very pleasant three or four weeks there and if your name wasn't called out the day was your own. You could go on leave and if you had enough money you could have (UNCLEAR). We were made honorary members of the Killara Golf Club, not to play golf but so we could use their billiard table and perhaps buy a drink or two, so

19:00 that was a very popular spot. After that, three or four weeks, my name was called out together with a lot of others and we went down to Victoria to another embarkation depot, they said. When we got down there and were taken to this place it was the Melbourne Showground. We thought it was going to be another camp like

19:30 Bradfield, but no way – it was a showground. They'd been converted. I had a horse stall allotted me for my luggage and I was there for about four or five days, at the end of which I was taken with the others, by train, right down to Port Melbourne onto

20:00 the wharf – the train goes right down onto the wharf at Port Melbourne – where there was a big ship called the [SS] Nieuw Amsterdam, a Dutch ship, 'N-I-E-U [W] Amsterdam', and we embarked on that. We were unescorted and we set off. They told us that we were going to New Zealand. So we set

20:30 off and we got to New Zealand, pulled in at Wellington Harbour and berthed, no leave, and then we refuelled actually, and the next day we set off on the next stage of our trip. There was a blackout because Japan was in the war, and we steamed up the Pacific zigzagging all the way, and

21:00 we didn't dawdle either because if we were slow we got escorted. We're on our own and we zigzagged all the way up to San Francisco, crossing the equator for the first time I remember. I can't remember too much about what happened on that, whether there was a ceremony or not.

We can come back and talk more about that.

Where do you want me to go now?

If you can just give me a list of the places that

21:30 **you went to.**

San Francisco, across America in the train to a place called Thornton, which is near Boston, up to Boston, up to Nova Scotia where we boarded another vessel, which went across the Atlantic unescorted. I was detailed a member of a big six-inch gun crew on the back of the ship. We got to Liverpool

22:00 after four or five days, unscathed, and caught the train down to a place called Bournemouth, in the south of England, where there was a personnel depot, went on leave from there to people up near Manchester, came back, not to Bournemouth, to Brighton, where we were there for a little while,

22:30 and was posted to Oxfordshire to a little place called Little Rissington, where there was a peacetime aerodrome, and from there went out to a satellite called Windrush. We resumed our flying on Airspeed Oxfords and did an advanced course there on Oxfords. From there we went up to Gloucestershire, not very far –

23:00 that's the adjoining county – to a place called Moreton-in-the-Marsh. There we went to what they call an operational training unit, and we trained then for conditions which we obtained when we were fighting, drop bombing, and that's where I first struck Wellington aircraft. They were mark 1C's and they weren't much good. They were clapped out because the squadrons had no use for them.

23:30 They had miraculously used up their hours without being destroyed, so they said, "They are too good to throw on the scrap heap. We'll give them to the OTUs [operational training unit] for training." And this is one of those machines that I put in the drink. From Moreton-in-the-Marsh we were posted down to a place right at the foot of Somerset called Portreath where we had

24:00 an overnight stay and a brand new aeroplane we were in at that stage, a Mark 10 Wellington, which was a very, very beautiful aeroplane, and a much better proposition than a 1C, and we set off in the middle of the night past what they call the Scilly Isles, which are just out from England in the Bight, and from there down past Portugal and Spain – this is

24:30 in the middle of the night. We got down to the bottom of Spain and it was daylight. We went to a place called Rabat Sale, which is the aerodrome at Rabat in Morocco. We were there for several days. The day we were supposed to take off again I got bogged and was there for another day. I wasn't very popular either.

25:00 **That's really good. If you can just …**

Well I got bogged and got into trouble but after that we took off and we went 'round through the Straits of Gibraltar and followed the coast around to Algeria to the aerodrome there where we spent the night – my first experience of bed bugs – and the

25:30 aeroplane had to be tethered at the aerodrome while we went into the place to sleep. The next day we started off and we went down as far as Tunis, in Tunisia, where we stayed again and had the aircraft checked and the next morning we went off to Italy. We went past Sicily, Mount Etna,

26:00 right out across Italy, through Calabria, over to the east coast, which was on the Adriatic Sea, to a place called Foggia and our beautiful aeroplane, which we had come to love, got taken from us and put in the pool, what they called the pool. We were sent out to number 37 Squadron, which was out at a place called Tortorella

26:30 about four miles from Foggia, where we did our flying, but our accommodation was in Foggia itself in a bombed-out school. On 37 Squadron, I was there for about six months during which time I completed forty sorties, miraculously unscathed.

27:00 After that we got posted to a place called Portici, just south of Naples, and from there we got posted to Taranto, which is in the southern part of Italy, a port, and from there we embarked on the [SS] Princess Kathleen, a

27:30 small ferryboat, which used to do to the run between Vancouver and Vancouver Island on a ferry basis, and we went across the Mediterranean in that to Alexandria. From Alexandria we went to a camp in the desert and from there we went back to Alexandria and caught a train down to Cairo and from Cairo

28:00 we went to a place called Almaza, which wasn't far from Heliopolis, which was next door to the Cairo aerodrome and I was there for some time. Several weeks went past and I was separated from my crew and my crew was posted back to England in a ship and I stayed

28:30 on down at Almaza. I was posted eventually to what they used to call the communications flight, which is situated at Aden. I didn't know what it meant at the time but I went down by BOAC [British Overseas Airways Corporation], which is now British Airways,

29:00 and I went down through the desert and stayed overnight at a place in Eritrea, which is not now Eritrea of course; it's part of Haile Selassie [Ethiopian emperor] country. That's seven thousand feet up in the air and I had shirt and shorts on, and my feet did a freeze. They didn't tell us it was seven thousand feet up in the air. Anyhow we stayed there overnight and the next day

29:30 we went on to Aden. Aden is not a town; it's a settlement. It's a British protectorate, a district. The Aden district comprises several towns. The biggest is Steamer Point where, it's on the harbour foreshores but every ship that goes

30:00 there has to tie up out in the stream. It's too shallow and they have to come in by little ferryboat to Steamer Point. And I was posted to the aerodrome there, which was situated in a place called Khormaksar. It was a peacetime aerodrome and it was that way when we got there you wouldn't know there was a war on. I went to this communications flight

30:30 and I knew my capabilities as an airman and especially as a navigator, and I went with a chap who was going to show me the ropes. We used to do what we called the cabbage run. We'd take food, spares, mail, everything, out to these outlandish places in the desert and you used to have to do your own navigation –

31:00 I didn't have a navigator any longer – and after the first trip with this chap I said, "I can't carry on with this on my own. I'll get lost with all this desert and not only will they lose their supplies they'll lose a pilot and an aeroplane as well." He said, "Alright," he said, "tell the boss and we'll go home." So we went back to Khormaksar the next day after doing the cabbage run, and I

31:30 went and told the CO that I wouldn't be any help to him. He said, "Never mind," he said, "we'll find you a job." So they found me a job as test pilot to a big maintenance unit, which was there, and I was there for several months. Eventually in 1945, 'round about March or April, I got posted home to Australia.

32:00 I said, "Oh good, that's only just over there. I can almost swim that far." I was taken in a boat back up to the top of the Suez Canal and into a truck which took us back to Almaza and I was there for a week or so and I found that I had been given a commission way back in April of the previous year and I got some back pay. That was good.

32:30 Anyway, from there we went out to a point in the desert, a personnel depot called Kasfereet, which was not far from the Suez Canal but opposite a big air maintenance unit there called Shallufa, and from there we waited to catch a ship back to Australia. We were there for weeks and weeks.

33:00 Every ship that came back – the European war was over by then – every ship that came back was chocker-block full of prisoners of war and so they said, "Well, the only way you're going to go back to Australia is to go back to England." So we were sent back up to Almaza and from Almaza to Port Said, caught a boat, went back to England, was transferred to the air ministry

33:30 who sent us on leave immediately and I was on leave for several weeks. Eventually we got word to go to Liverpool and catch the boat, [HMS] Stirling Castle. Went to Liverpool, caught the boat and came home through the Panama Canal. That was an eye-opener, a very, very interesting trip.

And where were you at war's end?

34:00 At war's end I was on leave waiting to go back to Lindfield where the OTS [officer training school] was, the embarkation depot, Bradfield Park, and waiting to be sent up north because that war was still on, and from there…

34:30 But I was still on leave and, 'Hooray, Hooray,' the atom bombs were dropped and the Japanese gave in almost at once and the war was over. So I went back to Bradfield Park like instructed and they said, "Well, we don't want you any more. We'll discharge you on the spot." Well, being a commissioned officer you don't get discharged, you get put on the reserve.

35:00 So they put me on the reserve and that was the end of the war as far as I was concerned. I went back to the bank and continued my career, but there were some shocking events that occurred during all that time.

And we'll talk a lot more about it today. I'm wondering what about after the war?

After the war my fiancée and I got married. I didn't get married before I left

35:30 because I hadn't asked her but I knew who was for me, because I thought I would probably get killed and not come home, so I asked if she would marry me. Yes she would. We were engaged and we were married at Melbourne, or at Kew rather, which is a suburb in Melbourne,

36:00 and from there we went, after our honeymoon we went to Wagga, to the bank there, only because the staff officer of the bank said, "Well, accommodation is terribly hard to get. If you are just married you'll want somewhere to live. Your best bet is to go to a place where there has been a military camp because the war is all over now. These military officers they've been living with their

36:30 wives, in most cases, and they'll have accommodation which will be vacated." He said, "That's your best bet," so I went back and sure enough that's what happened. We got a flat on top of a shop, which these people had got moved out and we moved in. So…

And children?

We didn't have any children at that stage. We were several years before we had a child, and

37:00 fortunately we had a son when we were at Maitland in 1949, who was with us right up until – well he left home when he was a young man – until he was thirty-nine years old and he died suddenly. So that left us on our own again so that was a sad parting to have in life. They say, I don't

37:30 know whether you've experienced it or not, they say that time's a healer. Well that's a lot of nonsense. Time does help but there's not a day goes past that I don't think of that boy, you know.

Well, thanks. That's a really great, I guess, overview of where you've been. And now we are going to spend the rest of the day going back over that story.

Well I retired from the bank.

38:00 I was out as a country manager for a long time, ten years, and we got transferred into the city to the administration side of the business and I liked that and I did well. And in 1978 I retired and lived in a place just around here in Edgecliff Boulevard until I had a heart attack and I couldn't get up on the roof and

38:30 paint the place and look after it, so we decided we'd come in here. This was Cutler Village, it had only just started and they had a few buildings and we came into stage five. We were 101 to start with. It got too busy there and too noisy and Billy doesn't sleep all that well so we made arrangements to come down here where it is a lot quieter and we've been here ever since.

Tape 2

00:29 **Ok.**

00:30 **As Chris [interviewer] said we do have a lot to talk about but one of the things that we are quite interested in hearing about is your time growing up through the Depression. Can you tell me a bit about what it was like?**

Yes. I can tell you a lot about that. I was born at Leeton, as I said, and my father worked on the Irrigation Commission, and he got transferred on promotion to Griffith,

01:00 and of course we went with him and we occupied a house in Barellan Street and I was sent off to the primary school. I had my primary school training there and for pocket money I used to sell newspapers, rolled up newspapers,

01:30 to the butchers, and there were three or four butchers in Griffith, and providing they were the Heralds, nice big ones, and opened out and rolled up, they would buy them because all they had to do was cut the string and they'd unroll and they'd put them out. They are not allowed to use newspaper now; they've got to use proper paper, but in those days they were allowed to roll their stuff up in, not directly in newspaper, they had

02:00 greaseproof paper first and then they would roll it up and that would be your parcel. All the butchers did that. Anyhow, that's how I got my threepences and sixpences for going to the matinee to see 'Tarzan'. Anyway, when I got up to fifth and sixth class we got a new schoolteacher who was a great big fellow, tall chap,

02:30 and he was a good teacher too because he was a most unusual teacher. He was tall, he had the most wonderful command of the English language, and I was only a kid, you know, so much better than the other teachers and of course he was in the same boat with the rest of the people in the Depression.

03:00 He had a job with the education department and daren't get out of it because he wouldn't have been able to get another job. So what did they do? In 'round about 1928, '29, they got hold of this fellow and sent him up to Griffith – he was in Sydney – and he wasn't real happy. He stayed at the hotel in Griffith, the Victoria Hotel.

03:30 There were only two pubs, the Griffith and the Victoria; the Victoria was up on the hill, and this chap, at playtime, got hold of me this particular day – he hadn't been there long – and he said, "Have you got a pushbike?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Go up, would you? Go up to the Victoria Hotel and see Mrs Davis. She's got my lunch ready. Would you

04:00 bring it back for me?" And I said, "Yes." So I went up and this was a daily occurrence. This chap was a fellow named O'Reilly; his initials were W.J. He was a tall fellow and he played test cricket for Australia for many years and he made a great name for himself as a journalist. He used to have a column

04:30 in the newspaper equivalent to Neville Cardus in England and he wrote all about the cricket in the most wonderful language. He was never stumped for a word but his method of teaching was different from the others. He used to march in the…because he used to have to almost, like your friend here, bend under the door to get in it, and he'd say, "Morning boys and girls." And you'd say, "Good Morning Mr

05:00 O'Reilly." He'd go to the blackboard and he'd write a word. "Anybody know what that means?" None of

us did. “It means such and such and such and such. Now, get your book out and write it. Copy it from the board and then write beside it. When you’ve got it copied down I’ll tell you the meaning and you can write that down beside it.” Right. I’ve forgotten what the word was. We’ll say

05:30 it was…lemonade. Right, you’d write lemonade down and he’d say, “The meaning of it is a drink that you buy at the shop for sixpence.” You’d write that down. “Go home and learn it, not only the meaning of it but learn how to spell it because tomorrow when you come to school you’re going to have to come and write it on the blackboard for me.”

06:00 This is how we learnt English. We learnt words that they were teaching up in the high school and we knew words and what they meant before the normal education part. That was Bill O’Reilly. He was very angry with the education department for interrupting his budding cricketing career, because

06:30 up at Griffith he was a great batsman and really he was the best bowler. But anyhow he wasn’t there all that long before he organized a trip back to Sydney. He left the education department eventually and started a factory of his own out Liverpool-way somewhere, called

07:00 ‘The Lion Tile Company’ and he used to make roof tiles and things but he also was a journalist. So I think that’s how he finished up, Bill O’Reilly. A great man with a great…I say he had a great sense of humour because he didn’t tear into us so much with the cane. He’d give us a bawling out and you knew exactly what he meant. So that was a bit of discipline

07:30 that we learnt. Now from primary school in 1931 I went to high school at Yanco – am I making it alright? – I went to high school at Yanco first year. Being a first year student I was no better than any of the other first year students.

08:00 The bigger boys used to make you carry their bags and they’d give you a bit of initiation. That would last for several months, quite some time. You had to carry their swimming costumes and do little odd jobs for them, especially the prefects, and that was all under cover – the headmaster vowed and swore that he didn’t know what was going on but of course he did –

08:30 and this is the way life was, and the new blokes were the little slaves. So one day we went swimming at a swimming parade at Yanco High School on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River. And we went for a swim in the river and this big third year boy says, “You’re only a little first year fellow, take these up and hang them on the line when you go

09:00 so they’ll dry.” I didn’t want to have to do this. Do you know what barley grass is? Barley grass is a grass which, it seeds so that they’ve got a pig’s tail, a curly tail and they bore their way in, and so I dragged this through the barley grass just at seeding time and hung it up on the line. God he gave me a hiding,

09:30 I’ll never forget that. He chucked his swimming costume in the tin after that. I suppose he had another one, I don’t know. But anyhow, that’s the sort of things that happened. And then I can’t remember too much more about the school. I’d settled down and I enjoyed it. It was the property of Sir Samuel McCaughey, the father

10:00 of irrigation in Australia. He had the first irrigation system in Australia and he had the first irrigation canal in Australia. And I went back to the school several times after I left, but the recent time I went back I found that the school had expanded quite a lot. What they had done,

10:30 the education department, they had filled in the canal, which was a landmark in the history of Australia, they filled it in, they had taken out all the willows that Sir Samuel had planted along its banks, they had removed an old blacksmith’s shop that he had where the furnaces used to be

11:00 done with hand bellows and all this old stuff which was very valuable and should have been in the archives really. Anyhow, they were all destroyed, pulled down and replaced with buildings. The school itself was converted from a boys’ school to a multi-sex school and

11:30 its curriculum had changed. The emphasis was no longer on agriculture because agriculture was not the main industry of Australia, but they still taught it but academic subjects took the top role and it was sad for me to see that. There is a big oil painting done by McCubbin –

12:00 God knows how much it’s worth, it must be worth thousands of dollars. It’d be almost the size of that front door and a bit wider, hanging on the wall – an oil painting of Sir Samuel standing up there in all his glory in his uniforms and things. But that’s still there. The old building that he built as a homestead is still there.

12:30 **And what were the visible signs of the Depression?**

Visible signs of the Depression, from my memory, were the people who had no work looking for work. They brought in a system called the dole system. Old Jack Lang, the premier, brought it in where one fortnight you could go

13:00 and get a ticket from the police station or the court house, wherever, and that ticket would entitle you to go to a store and get sufficient groceries, depending on how many were in your family, and that

would be a bare pittance and that you'd take away and try and live on it for a fortnight. You couldn't get a dole ticket until you had produced evidence that you had travelled

13:30 four miles looking for work. You had these places where they went in and they signed their name and their address and that's how they got their dole tickets, and that went on for years. Now, the children of those people, down and outs I'd call them – well we'd call them these days but through no fault of their own – would come to school

14:00 and they'd go through the garbage tins, any crusts that were left, because kids hate eating crusts, they'd take out and put in their school bag. They'd take them home and you'd think they'd feed them to the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s or something. No, they ate them. That was the dreadful part of it. It was a shocking thing, the Depression.

And how do you think it affected you and your family?

My father was fortunate. My father had a permanent job.

14:30 His salary was cut in half. He reached the stage where he went a couple of times a week to work because he was laid off for the rest of the time, but he still had his house and he still was able to have his children wear shoes – a lot of them didn't – and we went on. Now that Depression lasted from 1930

15:00 right up until about the beginning of the Second World War, 1938. They were Depression times. The other thing that struck me after I left school was the number of people who had borrowed money from the bank to build houses and live in, vacated. They had just closed the door and walked out because they couldn't afford to pay the

15:30 instalments every month. They couldn't do it; they didn't have any money. The banks – building societies hadn't been invented in those days – the banks who had advanced money to build had no alternative but to take possession of their asset and usually they put in tenants at a peppercorn rent.

16:00 They at least got the thing occupied and at least some arrangements were made to look after it. Some of them were dreadful; they didn't do a damn thing. They burnt the fences in their stoves and things for firewood. But that was something. Now that happened to a great many people and it was very embarrassing for them because they lost their jobs. They had regular work and suddenly they didn't have any regular work.

16:30 If they had large-ish families they were in real trouble. Anyhow, that was the Depression. That was my impression of the worst part of the Depression as far as I was concerned. We were fortunate – my mother was a good cook and she manufactured things out of everything. We had sausages a lot mind you, that was the cheapest thing you could get from the butcher, sausages. The funny thing about it is I still like sausages.

17:00 Anyway, that was the Depression. It gradually started to lift, gradually.

And what games would you play?

Well at school we played marbles, we played spinning tops. You had a big ring, and the idea was to throw your top down spinning, hit the other top and knock it out of the ring and that became yours.

17:30 The same with marbles, that's the same principle. They were the two principal games because they were cheap. Marbles were made out of clay, most of them in those days. They weren't made out of glass. On top of that the soft drink bottles had marble tops – you would press them with your finger to open them. You put pressure on, pushed the marble down into the bottle, and then your drink was open. It used to get, if you drank out of the bottle

18:00 it used to get stuck in the thing. But what the kids used to do is have the drink, break the bottle and get the marble out and they used to put them with their marbles and they were about the size of a small cherry I suppose. Well that was one thing. The Depression started to lift and employment got a little bit better.

18:30 So it went on. That was the Depression as far as I was concerned. There were a lot of people who were affected. Primary producers were even affected. What actually happened during the Depression, was that the farmers, the primary producers, which were the life-blood of the country in those

19:00 days, primary production, the farmers who were growing the wheat were getting into debt by buying new materials and new implements, and they were buying them on this new system that hit Australia called 'time payment' , whereas you didn't have to pay any deposit.

19:30 You say, "I'll buy that new header," or tractor, or whatever it was, and you signed a document saying that you were the owner of it and you agreed to pay so much a month, right? Well, the Depression came along and they got a bad crop and they couldn't pay anything. And what was happening, the creditor would come along, he couldn't take the header back; his only retribution was to

20:00 bankrupt the primary producer and sell his assets and get his money back that way. And the government in every state at that time, Depression time, the Commonwealth government decided they couldn't have these primary producers being made bankrupt and put off their property because it was

20:30 our own life-blood. So they brought in an act of parliament called the Farmers' Relief Act, which prevented them being made bankrupt. It didn't prevent them from being made bankrupt, but once bankrupt it prevented any further action against them for the time being until the end of the legislation, which they renewed every year of course,

21:00 and that protected the primary producer, in exchange for which he had to hand over his management to an authority and this authority managed his place until the Depression lifted. That was what happened. Now the difference between time payment and hire purchase, which is on the go now, you buy things on hire purchase, you only hire the thing. You don't buy it,

21:30 you hire it so that if you default they can come back and take their own property back again which they couldn't do in the other system. That is the main difference. They can still bankrupt you of course. If they sell the thing and it doesn't meet the debt they can still sue you. So that was the difference. Time payment isn't very popular these days because hire purchase is very much better.

22:00 That's why it's gradually faded out but it's coming back. You read these things, you can usually find them, the time payment bit, because they don't require any deposit. 'No payments until next year.' That's time payment, usually, so be warned.

Thank you. Wise words. I'm just wondering if you can tell me a little bit about your mum and dad and how you got on

22:30 **with them.**

Yes, well. My mother and father were great parents really. My mother was a good cook, she was… My father was an employee of the irrigation commission in the very, very early stages

23:00 at Leeton, before he got transferred to Griffith, and it was usual … what was I saying? I've forgotten. What was I talking about?

Well I was just wondering

23:30 **if you could tell me just a little bit about how your relationship …**

Oh, my mother and father. He was working for the irrigation commission and it was usual in those days for the commissioned officers to be eligible to take an irrigation block – they were only five acres – so he put his name down and he got allotted with a block, Farm 434, Leeton, and he

24:00 grew plums for the prune trade, Angelina plums, and he and my mother used to do the harvesting at about this time every year. They would go out and get the plums and dip them – we had a big copper, and put them out to dry and he'd put them in boxes and sold them.

24:30 They all did that. Some of them had prunes, some of them had citrus, and some had pome fruit. He was a part-time farmer and a part-time worker but he was a full-time worker. And this is what happened in lots of cases. My mother and father got moved to Griffith and we lived in a house in Birrell Street, which had a fibro [fibrocement sheeting] slate roof. It's bad words these days because they are made out of asbestos.

25:00 I don't know what else I can tell you about my mother and father. My father was one of a large family and my mother was… Her maiden name was Garrard. The Garrards had, in England,

25:30 a big jewellery business, jewellers to Her Majesty the Queen, Queen Victoria. There were a big family of them in England, too many to be looked after by the one business, even though it had crown listing.

26:00 It was popular, they were good jewellers, but they couldn't all be supported. So the younger members were told they'll have to make their own way in life and not rely on the parent company. My mother's father was the son of one of these people at Garrard.

And did you have brothers and sisters?

I had a sister, yes. I

26:30 never had any brothers. My sister was also employed by the Rural Bank as a stenographer. She got married to a surveyor and didn't have any children. She died in the same year as my son, our son, in 1989, so it wasn't a real good year for us.

27:00 My mother and father, my father died in 1965. He was aged eighty-two and my mother died in 1973 aged eighty-four. I'm still alive at eighty-five.

And you mentioned earlier on that after

27:30 **the agricultural college you made one of the biggest decisions of your life and joined up with the Rural Bank.**

Oh yes. The Rural Bank was in its infancy. It was associated with the old Government Savings Bank of

New South Wales.

28:00 I've got to tell you this bit so you'll get the gist of it. The old Government Savings Bank of New South Wales was what I shall call a political bank because it was guaranteed by the New South Wales State Treasury, which was governmental, of course, and it was a bank which expanded

28:30 very quickly. It had many, many branches. It had many, many more agencies because every post office in the state of New South Wales was an agent of the Government Savings Bank of New South Wales. You could take your pass book up there to the post office and get the money out of your account no matter where you were providing you made the arrangements, and that was the

29:00 Government Savings Bank of New South Wales. The Commonwealth Savings Bank, in those days, was only a little tin pot show. It didn't have many branches at all. It had a few around about Canberra and not many in any of the other states. The powers that be of the Commonwealth Bank, including the politics of the thing, had their eye on the Government Savings Bank. 'If only we could get their business we'd be

29:30 home and hosed.' And this was the attitude during the Depression, and the opposition of the New South Wales Parliament got their heads together and said, "If we can get rid of this fellow Lang, we can have a run on the Government Savings Bank. We can organize a run and people

30:00 would pour out all their money. The Commonwealth Bank will then be able to take over." The stealth that went on at that time! Jack Lang was in power and the opposition went 'round its electorate and said, "Have you got an account with the Government Savings Bank?"

30:30 "Yes, I have." "You want to take your money out straight away and put it in the Bank of New South Wales. I'm a politician and I know. I'm just giving you the nod because you are one of my constituents." Right, up to the bank, take your money out and put it in the Bank of New South Wales. This went on from mouth to mouth right throughout the whole country and the city. It's hard to believe these days that that would happen but that's what happened.

31:00 And they had a run on this Government Savings Bank lasting a whole month with queues outside their front doors waiting to take their money out of this savings bank. At the time it was the second largest savings bank in the world and the most financial bank in Australia with its reserves. Right, when this run was halfway through they went to the

31:30 New South Wales State Treasury where their money was and said, "We need this money to pay our customers. The treasury's coffers were empty. This is what Jack Lang did, he spent it all. So what happened? It closed its doors. A lot of people got hurt, a lot of people, especially in the city. They had their money suddenly taken away

32:00 from them and all they had was a passbook. The Jews that had the businesses in those days in Liverpool Street and Bathurst Street and all those streets up near the Central Railway Station, a lot of pawnbrokers up there, and they bought these passbooks from these people at half their face value –

32:30 at least they got some money from them – hung on to them until the Depression lifted and the government said, "We will now honour these passbooks and we will pay you the full amount," and they went up and made a fortune, an absolute fortune, these moneylenders.

You mentioned earlier that when you first joined you were a bit of a messenger boy. Can you tell me what your first duties were?

33:00 My first duties in the bank were that I had to run the messages, I had to collect the mail from the post office, I had to answer the manager's bell. He had a press button bell and if that went I had to run in there and see what he wanted; whatever he wanted I had to do.

33:30 The accountant of the branch was also a person who you had to run to because he had direct control over you and you did what he wanted. He called me in one day and he said, "Look Johnson, don't bring all these things over to me in the mail. These are parcel cards and they're for the staff. Take the parcel card over to the post office and bring the parcel back. That's what they want.

34:00 It saves a trip over." So I did this and I came back with a packet about the size of a pound of butter or a bit bigger, and he looked at me and he said, "My goodness, did you bring this over on your own?" And I said, "Yes, you told me to." "Oh," he said, "I didn't mean this. Do you know what is inside this?" "No, I haven't the faintest idea."

34:30 "It is a registered parcel," he said. "I have to sign for it in the book. Just stay there and watch me open it." So he opened it and it was full of cash, notes that had come from Sydney, a weekly delivery to the bank. The rules of the bank were that they had to be collected in a cash bag with a wrist strap and a lock and one of the officers had to carry a revolver.

35:00 If they didn't do that and it got stolen the insurance company wouldn't pay. So that was my first lesson. I got no sympathy from them either, at all. The manager came out and got all the staff together, the whole twenty-six of them, and lined them up in the banking chamber and spoke about it. I felt about that big but it taught me a lesson. He said, "If I catch anybody else going over and doing this like this

idiot did here,

35:30 there'll be trouble." Banking in those days was discipline. You called everybody Mr and Miss and not by their first names, and you wore a coat and a collar and tie, hot or cold, and that's how it was in all the banks. They were a disciplined society and they were trained to look after the bank's cash and they were trained

36:00 to look after the bank's customers. Entirely different these days.

And what other duties did you have?

My other duties were to look after the mailing. I had to put the stamps on the envelopes and enter the name in a book, and put what it cost. I had to go out and buy stamps every now and again to enable this to be done. The manager used to buy these little books of stamps and I had to go over to the post office and buy them for him.

36:30 I got a few in so when he came along I just got one out of the stamp tin. He said, "Marvellous anticipation." He was a very hard man, old Goldie. And my other job, apart from assisting the records officer,

37:00 was just to be there. That was the first job I had. The records system, being an irrigation area, every customer had a file about his farm, who owned it, and his banking business and the letters that were written to him and so forth. And they were stored in a room in a pigeonhole. Now the pigeonholes extended

37:30 right up to the ceiling and they had a ladder, which worked on wheels and wheeled the ladder up to wherever you wanted it, and a big register to tell you where the file was. That was the theory of it, but of course muttonhead here used to go and throw them in the wrong pigeonhole and they were lost. You'd have to go through every one of them and find it, but everybody made that mistake, and then I was promoted to full time records clerk. Somebody else had to go and do my job

38:00 that was employed.

And did you have a copybook?

At school I had a copybook and I was such a bad writer when I went to the bank that this fellow, Goldie, the manager, he called me in one day and he said, "You're a shocking writer. Your banking career's finished unless you can improve that. Go up to the stationer's and buy a copybook and

38:30 I'll give you exercises to do every night and you bring them to me next morning like homework." He said, "You'll do as the book says to do but you'll write properly and you'll put your figures properly under one another so they are easy to add up. You won't be making fives like eights and threes like eights," he said, "you'll do them properly because it will pay off and it won't do your

39:00 career any harm at all." So I bought a copybook and I took my homework to him every day and my writing improved out of all … I think I've written on the top of one of those.

Hang on. Great, fantastic.

That's free-hand and I learned to do that and I did the ledger headings

39:30 and the figures were nice so I've got old Goldie to thank for that. But most of the banks had good writers, otherwise you didn't get a job.

Tape 3

00:31 **What did you know, growing up, about the First World War?**

Very little because it wasn't taught in schools and it was only what I read in the book of my next-door neighbour about it who was in the war, and that's the only really tuition that I got. And that was a part of

01:00 C.E.W. Bean's volumes and it was the only one in which his name was mentioned.

What about personal connections? Were there many people around Griffith who had served in the First World War?

Any amount of them I think because it was after the First World War the troops were brought back and they didn't have their jobs preserved for them like they did in the Second World War and there was a lot of unemployment.

01:30 On top of that there was a big raging flu epidemic which carried a few of them off. And this irrigation area hadn't been going all that long and the government said, "What are we going to do with all these people who are coming back? We'll give them a block up in the irrigation area," and that's how it

started off. And there were a lot of returned soldiers took up blocks, butchers, candlestick makers and the lot. They didn't know bees from…anything about

02:00 farming. They didn't have any idea a lot of them and consequently their efforts failed, and the Irrigation Commission, who was placed in charge, had problems right from the jump.

What do you remember, if anything, about Anzac Day before the Second World War?

Anzac Day in the country towns was equally as popular as the big

02:30 Anzac Day in Sydney, always was. They had their own marches and at Leeton they had a lovely cenotaph in the main street and everybody's name that went, well I won't say everybody went there but everybody named from the district who got killed was there, and on four sides of this monument were absolutely chock-a-block full of names.

03:00 It was a dreadful war.

What family connections did you have, if any, with that war?

My father's first cousin is the only one I can remember having an association on my father's side. On my mother's side a fellow named Dibs, who was also mentioned in C.E.W

03:30 Bean's books, was a relative of hers as a cousin. No direct relatives.

How important was the British Empire to you and your family in Australia, growing up in the thirties?

The British Empire was no more important to me than it was to the rest of the school kids. We were conscious that we were an empire, we were conscious that

04:00 we were a big empire and we were conscious that we were a powerful empire and I don't know that it went any further than that. It was the place.

Were you a British citizen or an Australian citizen?

I always have been an Australian citizen. I was born here.

When you left school and started working in the bank what did you know about the outside

04:30 **world? How far afield did your mind stretch at that time?**

I was virtually a country hick. I had been to Sydney, I'd enjoyed holidays at Manly as a schoolkid, I had envied the people who lived near the water but that's about all. My life was in the country and that's how I accepted it.

What were the impressions of a young country

05:00 **hick on going to Sydney for holidays?**

I loved the trams. I loved the calls of the bird life which you didn't get in the country. I liked the excursions into the big city – I thought that was fantastic, all these big buildings. I loved the ferryboats.

05:30 I reckon they were…I could've spent my whole holidays going backwards and forwards on the Manly ferry. I loved it, the rougher the better.

What sort of a young man were you? Were you itching for adventure? Were you a solid type?

No. I was a very retired person. I was shy. I didn't engage in conversation unless I had to.

06:00 I was very introverted really but that didn't expand until I had more experience of the world and that was during war.

Who were your best friends?

What do you mean? In Australia?

I mean before the war, say, when you were working at the bank. You said you were introverted but did you have many friends in the bank?

Yes. We had our little social group because in those days, to a large extent, you had to make your own enjoyment.

06:30 I belonged to the tennis club and I belonged to the cricket club in Leeton. I belonged to the tennis club when I was in Griffith as a boy. I was always a good swimmer and I belonged to a swimming club but it was just within the district. We had competitions and things like that.

What things did you enjoy outside…well sports obviously. Were there other

07:00 **past-times that you liked?**

I wasn't interested in the theatrical society that was there. They used to put on concerts and things and I used to like going to watch them but I had no interest in going to assist them.

Cinema? The pictures?

Cinemas, yes. I used to go like most of my ilk at that time.

07:30 Saturday night was the night to go to the pictures and if you had a little girl to take all the better but they were the times to go. Earlier on, in the silent picture days when I was at primary school we used to go occasionally to the Saturday matinee where they had a continuous serial which they used to bring you on every Saturday and bring you back the next week to see what happened. But that were all silent and the

08:00 things would be written on the bottom like they are on SBS [Special Broadcasting Service] here.

What were the picture theatres like in Leeton and Griffith?

The picture theatres in Griffith were like a big barn really, in Griffith main street, but the seats were fairly comfortable and it was

08:30 built as a cinema. It didn't have any upstairs; it was just all one level. The one at Leeton was a modern contraption; it had a dress circle and the rest of the trappings that went with cinemas in those days. It was a bit…what should I say…ostentatious

09:00 for the times. But you didn't take any notice of those things, you just looked at the pictures, and they were both first and second-class pictures, black and white, of course.

Were there any special girlfriends that you had at that time?

Any special girlfriends? I had one when I was about eighteen, my first

09:30 girlfriend. In hindsight I'm very pleased I had that experience because I've still got a bit of a soft spot for her. She lives up in Brisbane in a home at the moment and for some years we sent Christmas cards and that's about it.

What would you do together as a young man?

10:00 We both belonged to the tennis club and as I say we used to go to the pictures at the weekend, Saturday. Saturday was a big day in the country because it was a shopping day. Wednesday they had a half-holiday and the shops were closed.

What would you spend your hard-earned money on?

Mainly I gave most of it

10:30 to my mother for board. The little bit of pocket money I had was spent on the usual things that … mind you, two shillings, you could get a lot for two shillings in those days. I used to have to pay for myself to go to the pictures, and that's about it, and at the tennis club you had to pay for your afternoon teas and things like that.

11:00 You used to last the fortnight out until the next payday came along. Occasionally I'd have to tap my sister on the shoulder and say, "Can you lend me five bob?"

What was your sister doing at this time?

My sister was a stenographer in the bank. Where I was, in comparison, a bit of a spendthrift she was a bit more thrifty – always a good touch if you ran out.

What experience did you have

11:30 **growing up with aircraft?**

None at all. I had never been in an aeroplane until I joined the air force, because the fellow at Benalla, that was the first question he asked me, "Have you ever been in an aeroplane before?" I said, "No," and he said, "Good, you're easy." It's the people who apparently had had some experience and perhaps a little bit of tuition, which caused the problems with the instructors.

Were there many

12:00 **aeroplanes around in those days?**

No there weren't. Only military aeroplanes, of course, during the war – there were plenty of them, but civilian aeroplanes, no.

Who were your boyhood heroes? Do you have anyone who stands out?

If I had any, I can't remember who they were. Probably film stars, I'm not sure. I can't remember.

What about national icons?

Oh yes, Don Bradman.

12:30 That's right. He was always the one who was top of the list.

What interest did you take in Bill O'Riley's career?

Oh I took a great deal of interest. I lost touch when I was out in the country for a long, long time but when I discovered where he was I…As a matter of fact when I was at Crookwell,

13:00 he came to Crookwell on business and I heard he was in town so I went to see him. He didn't remember me but I told him he was always an idol of mine.

We had better move on because we have a lot to talk about. I could talk about your growing up longer, but you joined the militia in 1939 – this was before the war had broken out. What were your reasons for that?

13:30 I'll tell you why. The prime minister in those days could see, or the government could see what was likely to happen. Hitler was jumping over the traces in Europe and he was murdering people right, left and centre and it was generally expected that there would be a war and the government at the time thought it was time

14:00 to boost up our defences and they started on a recruiting campaign. That's when I joined the militia. I don't think that was the prime cause. I joined the militia because my best friend had already joined and he talked me into it more than anything.

What did he say?

Oh I can't remember his exact words. He said, "Why don't you join in? It's a good

14:30 lurk. It's lots of fun and there are a lot of good people there." That's about it.

And what did you have to do in the CMF [Citizens' Military Force] in those days?

You had to attend a parade once a week. I think it might have been on a Wednesday night. It was night-time parade which would last two hours in which you were taught parade ground drill mainly because they

15:00 didn't have any equipment. They used to produce a book of a Lewis gun and they'd make you look at the book but they never had their hands on one. They had some rifles, 303 rifles, which were left over from the First World War, which they bought into being. Most of us joined the local rifle club. They had never had it so good with so many members and we used to go out one day

15:30 at the weekend to the rifle range and shoot off these rounds which were supplied to us free because the rifle club had…that was their bit to teach people how to fire, how to use them, and they got their ammunition for nothing. The taxpayer paid for it and that's about it. We used to attend this parade once

16:00 a week. We got a uniform with britches and puttees and things, and you had your two hours' what they called training and that was it.

What was the discipline like in these militia parades?

Discipline – that was a big part of it. You had a captain in charge, several

16:30 lieutenants in the commissioned ranks and several…there was one warrant officer who was the sergeant major and a number of sergeants and a number of corporals and lance corporals – there were a couple of lance corporals, of which I was one. That's about it.

How was this discipline

17:00 **instilled in you?**

The discipline was parade ground stuff, you know. I can remember a lot of bellowing and telling you what to do but I don't remember anyone having to pay any penalty except in camp; when we went into camp that was a different proposition. If you got a penalty you found yourself in the cookhouse doing all sorts of horrible jobs.

We'll talk about camp in just a minute,

17:30 **but what was the level of seriousness about this? How seriously did you take it?**

In what regard? In regard to national?

Well you said before that the government had an idea of what was going on and why the militia was being started up.

I don't think anybody joined the forces with the idea of their country's honour in mind. I don't think there was one single person. They joined because their mates joined and

18:00 because it was a different way of life, and you got leave where you could enjoy yourself. They paid for your uniform and they gave you the equipment in exchange for which you had to do what you were told. That's about it.

When the war came, can you tell us about that announcement?

Yes I can. I was out at Dareton, this little place I was telling you about

18:30 near Mildura. There was no water and there was no electric light and the manager had only just moved in from being transferred from another branch somewhere, and his stuff hadn't been properly set up yet. He had a radio but it wasn't connected. He had one in his motor car

19:00 and this announcement was made that the prime minister would talk to the nation at eight o'clock that Sunday night so we piled into his motor car and turned the radio on and amongst all the static in the summertime in those days we heard him declare war on Germany. Now the very next day, on the Monday, that was the end of my relief and I was on my way home via Melbourne. And I got down to Melbourne and the newspapers' headlines, honestly,

19:30 without exaggerating, were that big. They took up half the page. 'War.' 'W-A-R.'

Obviously the newspapers thought it was direly important news. How did you feel about this news at the time, as a young man in the militia?

I didn't dwell on it. I didn't give it much thought. I thought, 'Well, there's a war on. I wonder what will happen?'

20:00 I had no intention of joining up in the AIF at that stage. I hadn't thought about it. I hadn't done anything in the way of camps except in peacetime camps and that was it. I thought, 'I suppose when I get back to Leeton I'll find out what they are going to do.'

And what did you find out?

I found out that we had to go almost to a month's camp at Cootamundra

20:30 and it was on the show ground there. The equipment that they had there were tents left over from the First World War, bell tents and they were round and they'd hold about a dozen people I suppose, lying side by side.

And how did the training change now that the country was at war?

The training didn't change much at all because

21:00 the equipment was pretty light-on still. What they occupied us with for more than half the time was long route marches. They would take out food in what they used to call a limber pulled by a horse with this big cookhouse on it and it was pretty basic I can tell you. You had to be pretty hungry to eat it.

What were the camps like as

21:30 **far as conditions?**

The camps were hard in this respect – no attention was paid to one's comfort at all. You were given a palliasse with straw and a blanket and you laid that on the ground on top of what they called a groundsheet, which was a rubber thing that you could use as a cloak as well to keep the rain off. This was what you had. There was no thought about

22:00 a pillow or anything like that. You used the clothes you took off and used that as a pillow or a kit bag or something like that.

You became an instructor?

This was later on.

So how did your militia career progress then? What happened after the camp at Cootamundra?

I went to a camp at Wallgrove and Greta and another one at Wallgrove.

22:30 By this time I was a lance corporal and they sent me to a school – I think they called it carder [early training] – and they trained me into being a drill instructor and I had to learn about the guns and things which we had in those days, the 1940s. We'd got guns and Lewis guns

23:00 and Vickers machine guns and bayonet practice and things like that. I had to learn all that, not only how to do it but how to teach it. This school, I suppose, lasted about three or four weeks, at the end of which I used to go out and drill people and do a corporal's job. That was it until I thought, 'Well, this isn't much chop.

23:30 I'll see if I can get into the navy or the air force.'

Can you tell us a bit more about those weapons when they finally arrived and how they were used?

Yeah. They were used…The Vickers machine gun was the same as the First World War Vickers machine gun. I dare say they were modernized a little bit – I don't know in which way. They fired shots, and they covered an arc of fire; every bullet that you sent didn't hit the

24:00 same spot – it was round like that so it took a bit of an idiot to miss really. They used to travel a long way, these 303 things. They used to have night exercises where they would substitute a tracer bullet for an ordinary bullet. With a tracer, of course, you could see it speeding through the air, and the others you couldn't. The Lewis guns were still in vogue.

24:30 They were a sort of a rifle that fitted into the armpit and it had a big round cylinder on top full of 303. As you pulled the trigger the cylinder would move around one spot and the other round would drop into the breach, and so you'd fire that and this was the way it went.

25:00 The only trouble is you got about three shots and the thing would jam somewhere and you had to pull it to pieces and if the other fellow opposite you, the enemy, was prepared to wait for you, you continued to fight.

Were there any other new weapons?

No. Towards the end, just before I joined up, the Owen gun had been

25:30 invented but we didn't have them. That was something out of this world, according to the newspapers. It was the new machine gun.

How well prepared did you feel for what you were being trained to do with these jamming guns and the equipment that…?

Well I thought it was a waste of time because the gun itself was outdated. I couldn't visualize the Germans using such an

26:00 implement. I thought they'd have up to date weapons, which they did, not this rubbish that was in Australia that nobody wanted, and left over from the First World War a lot of it.

During this period, a year or two, you were still working at the bank?

In between camps, yes.

So what took up your weeks or months? How much training and how much working?

Well, it wasn't a regular thing.

26:30 The bank was very good to its militia people. They continued to pay your salary whilst you were in camp in addition to which you got the pittance that the army people paid you, and they were very good in that way. The times of call-up to these camps were accepted by the bank, not that they could do too much

27:00 about it although our bank did. Being a government bank they had a little bit of influence and on one occasion I was permitted to miss about a fortnight of camp so that I could do the bank work and then go in later on. And that's what happened and you just, when you got your call up you went to see the manager and you said, "I've been called up on such and such a date," and he'd telephone head office and say, "Send somebody else up. This bloke's got to go to camp."

27:30 And this is what happened until the personnel got a bit short and they had to manage the best way they could.

During that time lots of blokes were joining the AIF to go overseas and there were also blokes in the militia. I've heard from others that there was sometimes some tension between those two groups. What did you experience of that?

Yes. I personally didn't experience it because I made it my business to keep out of the road

28:00 when I saw things brewing that way. I cleared out – I didn't want to be involved in all that because I thought it was stupid, one fighting the other. The whole thing started because the AIF, because they were the AIF, thought they were better, and in point of fact I think the militia people at that stage were much better trained, but a lot of militia people did go over. There was a

28:30 great bunch at one stage, and then there was a constant trickle from there on right throughout the whole war of militia people going into the AIF. Militia people were restricted to the defence of Australia, whereas the others weren't, and there was this gap and I expect that these dust-ups didn't occur until the pubs closed,

29:00 and this egged them on a bit I think.

What names were being used to describe the militia blokes?

Chocos ['chocolate soldiers' – derogatory term]. I don't know how that name originated but they were

called chocos, because there wasn't much substance to them, I suppose.

Were you a drinker?

No. I wasn't. I wouldn't have drunk it if that's what you mean. Yeah, I drank

29:30 but I was always within reason most of the time. Sometimes I got a bit stung but as a regular thing I didn't.

You mentioned when the pubs closed that everyone came out and there were dust-ups. Were you ever part of that kind of experience in Leeton?

No, I wasn't. No. Pubs had funny drinking hours. They had what they used to call a five o'clock swill.

30:00 People would finish their office work and they'd all go to the pub and have a drink on the way home and that's when it got busy. In the war, of course, that was one of the first things the production of which stopped, or virtually. It was very difficult to get any liquor at all, especially bottled liquor. The pubs in Sydney and I suppose right throughout the country towns were

30:30 serving beer at only certain times.

How else, in what other little ways did life change in the country as the war progressed?

Very little for a long time, very little. I think life went on at Wagga as though there was no war, I would say, for two or three years, apart from people joining up and leaving the place. But life in the township of Wagga went on the same.

31:00 The tennis club still operated and the football clubs and people turned up to watch the footy match on Sunday afternoon, much the same as in peacetime. Things did get a little bit tough in the shops; you couldn't buy what you used to be able to – it just wasn't available. This is before rationing. You noticed the pinch but as far as everyday life went on,

31:30 things were more or less the same.

You mentioned that beer was one thing that ended up being short. What other products could you not get hold of?

Clothing became short. You'd go in normally to buy a new singlet or a pair of socks you might have no trouble buying and later on you had to look for them. They were always available.

32:00 Some of the clothing, I can't remember which portions of clothing were rationed and you had to have permission to buy them. But I think it was just about the time I went overseas, and being supplied by the air force with all of my clothing requirements I didn't notice it.

It wasn't long before you joined up that the Japanese entered the war. What do you remember about that?

32:30 I remember the headlines in the newspapers saying: 'Pearl Harbour Disaster'. I didn't even know where Pearl Harbour was. When I read it I found out it was American and it was an American base, and the Japanese, according to the article, had come and done the dirty on them by coming and bombing the place without declaring war.

33:00 And that's the only thing I thought about it. I went on to other news and it more or less went out of my head. It didn't really hit until I saw the American air force here and that occurred in the early days of my ITS [initial training school] training at Bradfield Park. These Airacobras used to come over and shoot the place up, and the Americans did that,

33:30 and the stories that went around that the American army applied for telephones, which weren't forthcoming, so they just went to the public booths and took them; that's how they got their telephones. The Australian people stood up and took notice then, you see.

We'll definitely talk a bit more about the Americans as we go on, but one other event after Pearl Harbour that shocked Australia a little bit was the

34:00 **fall of Singapore.**

Yes. Well that was no shock because a fellow named Anderson, who was in the 56th Battalion in the militia, he was 2IC [second in command] and he was a soldier right from top to bottom. He was a South African and he was one of the first to transfer from the militia to the AIF, to the 8th Division,

34:30 and they went up and he had a platoon or a company – I'm not sure, I can't remember – of troops and he literally fought his way down to Singapore from where he was because he was trapped by the Japanese. The Japanese were reported to us as being little people with very bad sight, and not to take much notice of them

35:00 because they didn't know what they were doing, and that was a lot of hocus-pocus. They did know what they were doing. They travelled very, very quickly down that peninsula right down to Singapore. They

were so organized that Singapore gave in at once, and that was it. They were just absolute…like ants. They lived on the smell of an oil rag, they had

35:30 bicycles, they had everything strapped to their back, and they were dedicated. They were there to fight a war and they didn't give a damn whether they were killed or not.

How was that news received in Australia?

With doubt, with doubt for a while, from what publicity that had been given to them. It wasn't until the fall of Singapore and afterwards that the penny dropped, and the realisation was

36:00 that this was serious, nearly too late.

It was around this time that you applied to join the navy?

No. Before I joined the air force I tried to join the navy.

Well what were your reasons firstly for trying to join the navy?

Because I worked with a fellow who was interested in the navy. He was a ledger keeper with me in Wagga, and he said, "There's only one

36:30 section in the navy to get into and that is the supply section." He said, "That's the best." I didn't know anything about the navy. He said, "I'm going down to join the navy in the supply," and he said, "That was the best job in the navy. You'd get a square rig to wear," whatever that meant – I didn't know what that meant in those days –and he said, "You sit down to go to war, at a desk," and things like that. So I thought, 'Well that'll

37:00 do me', and that's the only thing. I went down to join the navy and, as I say, the bloke said, "You can either be a cook or a steward." So I went to Woolloomooloo and joined the air force.

What appealed to you about going to war sitting down?

I'd been used to sitting down. You wouldn't have to go on these route marches or anything like that.

Was it a bit sick of the militia?

37:30 **Was this what was drawing you out to the other services?**

Yeah. I was sick of going to camp and I was disturbed a little bit because the officers who were in charge of us, I think a lot of them weren't as competent as they could have been, and I suspected that they became officers through their friendship with people who

38:00 appointed officers, and whether their ability was correct for the position I doubted very much. And I thought, 'Well now, I couldn't possibly go into action with a fellow like that telling me what to do,' and that was one of the main reasons I thought, 'Well I won't join the army.'

38:30 But a certain amount of that did apply in the air force, of course, as well. But I think by and large the aircrew of the air force – I shouldn't say this but I think it's true – were of higher calibre in the brain than a lot of the army people, and I think that proved to be the case.

Tape 4

00:30 **We were just talking about the processes by which the air force selected their men. When you went down to join the air force, what tests did you have to go through and what was the process?**

No, you didn't have to do any tests. You had to go for a medical. The medical tests … I can't remember them. It took all day. I can only remember

01:00 the ones that were unusual. They put the stethoscope all over you and they hit you with hammers but the ones that I can remember that stuck out in my memory was, you had to blow up a tube of mercury and you had to hold it for sixty seconds. It was quite difficult to blow it up to the required

01:30 amount; it was more difficult to hold it there and you thought the sixty seconds would never come. When it did, that is it. Now why they gave you that test I haven't the faintest idea. The other one that sticks in my mind was, they had a book called a colour book and each page – it was only a small book – each page

02:00 on the left and right were a design like confetti, different colours, and you could see on one page there was a seven. On the next page there could be a cat's face. There were various things, and

02:30 if you were colour-blind you couldn't tell the difference. You might guess one or two of them correctly, but when you went through the whole book they could tell whether you were colour-blind or not. If you

are colour-blind, even in the civilian airlines, if you are colour-blind you don't get the job. So that's the two things that stuck in my mind and it sounds ridiculous not being able to remember the others. There was a certain amount of waiting,

03:00 I can remember that. But the other medical tests I don't recall because they weren't difficult. One of them, I remember, you had to look into this instrument and kind of go into a trace and look behind what you were looking at and tell the person what was there. I don't know what sort of a test that was but I do believe they give it

03:30 for some reason.

When you passed this medical, what was the process through which you were accepted into the air force?

You went to see this chap at the end there who was at the desk. You went though a series of doctors who did this examination, at the end of which you went into this room and saw a man behind a desk and he had all these reports

04:00 and he'd say, "Congratulations, you've passed," or, "Bad luck, old chap, you've had it. Such and such is wrong and we can't find a job for you," and that was it. At the end of it you were kind of not anxious but wondering what was going to happen, like waiting for an exam result. You think you did all right but you weren't sure.

04:30 So that was the outcome, and this fellow behind the desk was a nice fellow. He was very patient and polite.

What was your reaction when the result came though and you were accepted into the air force? What were your thoughts?

Oh my main thought was what was going to happen to me at the army camp where I was AWL. That was concerning me most,

05:00 and I didn't know that I was going to be discharged straight away and sent back. I thought, 'Gee, I wonder what I'll have to do? Even though I'm on the air force reserve they might take no notice of that. They might dock my pay,' or whatever.

It worked out quite well for you.

Yeah. As the bloke said, "You're lucky. I saved your bacon."

In that period of being on the reserve, you mentioned you learned Morse code. What else did you do to prepare?

05:30 I only, I think it was either once or twice a week, went to technical college and did the lessons, school lessons out of this book that covered it. I can remember learning a bit about navigation and a fellow mentioned the word 'vector' and I'd never heard of it before and had to ask him what it meant.

What did you know at that time about what was going on in Europe with the bomber command and things like that?

06:00 I didn't know anything at all. I didn't know anything at all about the procedures and I didn't know anybody who had been there because they were still there. I didn't know anybody who had been there and sent home, not until I got there. I knew that there were several people who were….One bloke had a motor accident and he was

06:30 sent home – he wasn't any use after that, but no, I didn't know.

Was there any news about the incredible death rate or the dangers of it all?

Very little news in that regard, because there was a period in England where the war more or less

07:00 came to a standstill, the Phoney War – I think it got the official name of being a phoney war – and that lasted nearly twelve months.

To move on again, when you went to Bradfield Park what were your first impressions of the air force?

Well having been in the army I was expecting to be regimented.

07:30 What I didn't know was that the first thing you did you went to the doctor and got jabbed about four times and the fellows that were there – you were in single file and you'd walk past – and the fellows who had already been there and done the course perhaps a week or two beforehand, they all lined up and said, "You'll be sorry."

08:00 Anyhow that was what it was and we got jabbed with these needles and sometimes there were reactions. Sometimes the reactions were adverse and sometimes they weren't. I can remember I had a vaccination mark on my shoulder for a long time from smallpox, which was one of the things they gave

you in those days.

What was the regimentation

08:30 **like as compared to the militia?**

Regimentation was more or less exactly the same only more intense, more fare dinkum, I'll put it that way. They had a series of drill instructors who were very, very severe indeed, and a vocabulary that made you know that

09:00 you weren't very popular. Where in the army you were lined up and learnt the right dress, in the air force you did the same thing but you were very, very much more accurate. More accuracy was expected of you.

09:30 We did have a stage where at random we were picked out to instruct instead of the drill instructor. We had to march the squad around the place and because of my previous experience I did pretty well at that. That was initial training and the other part which was

10:00 expected, although unexpected in the method, was the schoolwork we had to do. It wasn't necessarily on school subjects but navigation took up a lot of the periods, I remember, and weather conditions and things like that.

What was the mix of blokes like that were going into the air force with you at that time?

10:30 Oh well, the mix of blokes were much the same as in the army. Some were intelligent, some weren't. The ones that weren't up to scratch got scrubbed at the end of ITS. If they didn't come up and pass the exam at the end, they were re-mustered into the ground crew. I suppose the

11:00 percentage of satisfactory people at the end of the ITS was very much greater than those that failed, very much.

I've heard that the ITS could be quite competitive with everyone wanting to become a pilot?

Oh yeah. Everybody did want to become a pilot. Well naturally I wanted to become a pilot because everybody else did but as I'd never been in an aeroplane I didn't know what to expect.

11:30 I didn't like the idea of this ground slogging much. I thought, 'Well, it must be better in the air.'

Was it competitive do you think?

There was no competition as far as being classified. No, there wasn't any competition at all because it was right out of your hands. It was the COs' committee

12:00 that did the selection and you were called up and questioned on a lot of things. They asked the questions in such a way as to test your quick reaction and quick reply and correct answers and all that sort of stuff.

What did you do badly at in that period of training? What was your weakest …?

12:30 **Probably … I'm thinking. It is a toss up between the navigation and the advanced mathematics I think. They were both pretty crook but they were sufficient to pass I think.**

What did you get into trouble for?

I don't think I got into trouble for anything. They didn't…

13:00 that was different from school of course. You didn't get into trouble. If you disobeyed instructions you found yourself without a leave pass at the end of the week. There was no physical punishment at all.

You were sent, once you were classed as a pilot, you were sent to Benalla.

Yeah.

Can you tell us about Benalla and what was going on there?

13:30 Benalla was an aerodrome and an air centre where the instruction was teaching people the elementary things for flying. That was the prime cause, the prime object of it. That entailed going to classrooms and doing subjects like at school and also

14:00 involved practical flying tuition. The flying instructors that gave you the physical tuition were not the instructors that were operating in the classroom. They were qualified people, every one of them, about theory of flight, the

14:30 construction of aircraft, the different methods of making them strong, a lot of theory stuff like that that you learnt. I don't think there was any instruction at that stage in firing guns at all.

15:00 It was just simply flying, and warnings, what not to do and what to do and that was about it.

Tell us about your first flight?

My first flight? That was what they called an assimilation flight. The flying instructor I had –

15:30 the fellow that when he asked had I been in an aeroplane before and I said, “No.” he said, “Oh good, you’ll do.” – he took me up. He sat at the back. There were two cockpits, one at the front and one at the back, dual control, and he said, “You’ve come up for an assimilation flight. As you’ve never been up in an aeroplane we’ll fly around and have a look at it and see what it looks like.” So he took off and he went up to about three thousand feet and did a big circuit around the area.

16:00 “Have a good look ‘round and notice things,” he said, “because when you strike them again you’ll have to recognize them.”

That microphone should be there.

Oh did I, I’m sorry. “You’ll have to recognize them,” and so we just flew around and he showed me, he said, “Now, if you want to turn left, you put your control column over to the left and

16:30 you press with your right foot a little bit so that you don’t fall out of the sky, and you gradually turn and you do the same to the right.” He showed me how to do that. He said, “If you push the stick forward,” he said, “you go down. If you pull it back you go up.

17:00 You don’t do anything violently in an aeroplane. You do it gradually and gently.” He said, “You have to be a little bit more firm when you get onto bigger aircraft but these training aircraft,” he said, “you can fly with one finger.” So we did all this and when we got back he said, “Alright, what did you notice?” I said, “I noticed that there was a

17:30 cemetery just over there.” He said, “Yeah, what else did you notice?” And I couldn’t answer him. I said, “I don’t know what I noticed, but I think I’d recognise it when I saw it again.” He said, “OK. You’ll soon get used to it. There’ll be another lesson tomorrow.” That took up the half an hour and that was it. From there on he was a little bit more severe if I did things wrong but we practised the same

18:00 things over and over again until I got the hang of it.

What was your reaction to flight for the first time? What did you feel or think?

What was my reaction to flight for the first time? I thought it was a marvellous way to get about, because you covered such a big distance in a very short time. Touring around the circuit area, as we were

18:30 on that first day was nice and there was no bumps or anything. It was a lovely day, and ideal conditions. On other days when it was cloudy it was bumpy and uncomfortable. One thing he showed me was the demonstration of centrifugal force. He said, “I’m going to turn into a

19:00 …,” – this is not the first day, this is later on – he said, “I’m going to turn a little more steeply and severely than we did the other day and I want you to lift your foot off the floor.” So he got into this deep turn and I couldn’t move my foot, couldn’t move it. He said, “That’s centrifugal force that’s forcing you into the floor,” and he said, “You’ll learn this in your classroom,”

19:30 he said, “To each force there must be an equal and opposite force.” He said, “The opposite force to centrifugal force is centripetal force, which is pushing so that your foot won’t go through the floor. That’s the force there.” And those are the things he sort of used to explain to you, and in the classroom you found what action that had on your

20:00 mode of flight. When we first went into the classroom there was a piece of cardboard and the fellow said, “The theory of flight – this piece of cardboard – you’ve all done it when you were kids,” and he flicked it across the room and it went every which way, but it was floating. There was no control over it at all. It hit the wall and fell down.

20:30 He said, “That’s flight,” and he said, “as it goes through the air the air lifts it up. Don’t take any notice of the way it went because it wasn’t controlled. It was uncontrolled.” He said, “If you put a fin and a tail plane on it it will go straight. It might go down, it might go up but it will go fairly straight,” and he got hold of a bit of cardboard and he threw it and it did,

21:00 and that was the theory of flight, because the pressures and the lift that’s underneath the wings and the fuselage keep it in the air. He said, “The wings on top supply two thirds of the lift and on the bottom one third.” That was theoretical stuff but it

21:30 stuck.

What about then in practice? Was there any time where you felt a bit like you were inside a bit of cardboard flying against the wind?

No, because by the time he taught you, he was there, the instructor, in the air, he was at the back there and if you did anything wrong he’d tell you about it. Mind you, communication was poor – it was just a bellowing tube, that’s all it was – and

22:00 he bellowed into your ears. There was no proper intercom or anything like that, and he was able to correct you and put you on the right track all the time. He said, “Today we’ll go up and do turns,” or, “Today we’ll go up and do landings,” or today we’ll do this, that and the next thing, whatever he chose, and they had a schedule which denoted what…They were all numbered, one, two, three, four,

22:30 whatever it was, circuits and bumps. They all had a number. “We will go up and do number ten today.”

He sounds like a pretty inspirational figure, your instructor. Who was it …do you remember one particular…?

Yes. I remember this chap’s name. His name was Joe Douglas. He was a magnificent flier and he was a magnificent instructor. A lot of instructors were

23:00 very positive and had a pretty short fuse and those fellows would have upset me and I probably would have failed. But this fellow talked slowly and quietly all the time. If I did something wrong, “Don’t do that. Do this. This is not the way I told you to do it. You’re doing it wrongly. Practise it again. Do it again. Do it again.” And this is what happened. This is

23:30 how I learned anyhow, and then when he came down to land he had a little toy aeroplane like you saw on the wall there and he’d show me. “This is what we did today.” Joe Douglas was a wonderful instructor but he wasn’t a very good airman because he never rose above the rank of sergeant. He got promoted lots of times but he always did something and they took it away. He got drunk or something like that

24:00 at the wrong time or else didn’t attend parade.

What part of learning to fly frightened you?

Oh, mainly, without a doubt the stalling of the Airspeed Oxford. It was frightening. The aeroplane was a good aeroplane but

24:30 an aeroplane stalls when there is not enough lift in the wings – it is nothing to do with the motors – when there’s not enough lift to keep it up it falls down, and the motor being the heaviest part, naturally it falls down nose first with gravity. But when there’s an engine going and it stalls, it stalls viciously. You’d be

25:00 like this and within a split second you’d be like this, starting a roll – not a roll – you’d start a spin and you had to get onto that pretty quickly in an Oxford because it fell fairly quickly, and most of the aerobatics and things like that were done at a height above three thousand feet,

25:30 and it doesn’t take long to drop off three thousand feet. Now the old Anson aeroplane, it would stall and you’d just reduce the throttles. It would be like this and that’s all there was to it. It started to…it would give you plenty of warning and all you had to do is put on more throttle and that was it. But with the other one you had to put the stick forward and the opposite rudder. Otherwise you went into the ground.

26:00 That was the most frightening thing, I think, in the Oxford. The Wellington wasn’t as bad as that. No, the Oxford was the worst of the lot.

What was your closest call, perhaps in a stalling Oxford?

What, just flying? I think my closest call was when I got to England and flew into cumulo-nimbus cloud.

26:30 That was frightening.

We’ll take a moment and we’ll come back to that experience but I just want to ask you a few more questions about training. You flew on a Wackett to begin with. This is unusual because most people flew Tigers.

Yeah, that’s right. The Wackett Trainers were built for the purpose of taking over from a Tiger Moth, but it was not successful. It was not successful, and

27:00 I think there were only about two or three courses that used Wacketts at Benalla because later on the people coming through said, “No, we didn’t have Wacketts.” They had Tiger Moths there. They were passed out fairly quickly I think.

You mentioned its engine wasn’t extremely reliable.

A Warner Super Scarab, an American engine. The whole problem,

27:30 I think, was that when you design an aircraft you design an engine and then you design a fuselage to fit on that engine, not the other way about. You don’t design the fuselage and then look around for an engine to put in it, and this is what happened with the Wackett. The engine that it was designed for was far too powerful for elementary flying, but the powers that be out in Australia thought they knew better than the Yanks so they got the

28:00 fuselage out here and started to build them and put in these Warner Super Scarab things which weren’t

suitable and this was the cause of most of the trouble that they had with them.

What trouble did you have learning to fly a Wackett with an instructor?

Trouble? I don't know quite how to answer that. I found difficulty in landing.

28:30 The way you land is you come in over the fence with just enough speed, air speed, to keep you airborne, and judge a levelling out period so that when you are in the right attitude you stall the wing and you sink down onto the runway. That's how you land an aeroplane,

29:00 normally, and I found difficulty in judging that height to begin with. I had that difficulty practically all the way through at Benalla because it took me a little longer to go solo than the rest of them. And this is the most difficult part I found, although it didn't cause me any bother later on when I…

29:30 My judgement must have been all right. It was just finding out the exact spot as to when to touch down. I think that was the point, because later on in my career in the air force I was noted for good landings, especially at night time. That's a little bit more difficult than in the daytime.

30:00 **What was your first solo like?**

My first solo was rather frightening, easy, but rather frightening. You had to do exactly what you did when there was an instructor behind you. You had to take off, you had to climb up to five hundred feet, you had to turn left and climb up the other five hundred feet to a thousand feet, and then turn left again and fly on that

30:30 course and you'd go through all the actions of putting your undercarriage down and putting in the fine pitch and all the rest, but at the elementary stage those things didn't exist because the undercarriage was fixed and there was no pitch control on the engine, and you'd come 'round and you'd…powered approach, they used to call it. Your engine was going and you were going forward and then you had to judge the distance, and when you got to a certain spot you had to reduce the throttle,

31:00 so that it would fall a bit so that when you got down near the ground you didn't use up all the runway. You had to get down in time and you had to flatten out so that when it stalled you made a nice soft landing. That was the ideal and that's what you practised and practised and practised to do. That was fine when the instructor was there but there were psychological things when you went solo. You say, "God, I'm on my own now.

31:30 What the hell am I going to if such and such happens?" And you're thinking about this all the time until you get up, but once you got up to the height, the same as before, you're coming in to land and you take extra care, and usually your first solo is quite good.

What accidents were there at the schools you trained at?

Oh gee, I don't know that I can answer that. There was Benalla.

32:00 A fellow went low flying and hit a tree and got killed. I can't recall any others at Benalla. We went up to Deniliquin. It was raining. We went to Deniliquin for about a week or so and one fellow got killed there. He hit the fence on the way in – got down too low and hit the fence.

32:30 It was only a satellite aerodrome, a paddock. What happened then? At Point Cook I don't recall any casualties at Point Cook at all. I'm not saying there weren't any but I can't remember any.

Did you ever see any accidents yourself?

No.

33:00 No, I didn't witness any, no, not in the daytime but at night time I saw a few, but they weren't accidents.

What?

They got shot down. The Wellington is an aeroplane, which is fabric covered and the way they make the fabric suitable is they paint it with dope

33:30 and it makes it all tight. And it is very flammable stuff, this dope, and when the fighters got behind you to shoot you down they had tracer bullets the same as we did and the tracer set alight to the fabric, 'foop!' just like that, and it took all the power out of the aeroplane,

34:00 every bit of it because there was just nothing to hold it up. Down it went. You didn't have much time to get out. That was one thing. The other thing was that when that happened …or the flak – the flak was just as bad as the fighters – it would set alight to the petrol tanks and 'bang!' You're just gone.

34:30 That's one of the beauties, I suppose, of the war – if you were going to get killed that was the way to go because usually it was pretty quick.

What did that sight look like of the fabric-covered Wellington being hit? What did it look like to see that in the air?

All you could see was a glow, red, in the night time. They didn't do any operations in daytime.

35:00 Yeah. That was a sad part of it.

We definitely will come back to that and talk about that in some detail. I am just interested in the earlier training accidents, not necessarily if you didn't witness them but they must have had an effect on the students. What do you think that effect was?

Well people,

35:30 it is natural for people to disregard instructions sometimes. You go to a driving school to learn how to drive a motor car and they say, 'Don't do this and don't do that,' but you think you'll do it and it won't hurt, and this is what happens. Low flying is very dangerous, and your reaction

36:00 when it happens, I think mainly you think, 'Thank God it wasn't me.' That's what happens. It was different at OTU where the aeroplanes were clapped out to start with. That was very dangerous. You couldn't blame the maintenance. They did their best. There was one chappie,

36:30 I don't know what caused it but he was flying along at about four thousand feet, which was the popular distance, and all of a sudden 'bang', down, he went straight down. He didn't spin but 'bang', straight into the ground. I don't think he would have done it on purpose. It

37:00 shocked me. I didn't see it. Fortunately I didn't see it but this is what happened. His name was Ross and he came from a place called Aubrey. He and his crew got killed straight away and my reaction was, as I said before, "Thank goodness it wasn't me. Thank God I wasn't in the aeroplane that they allotted me to do this in."

37:30 **How many hours of flying did you do before you received your wings?**

I received my wings … I can't tell you.

I guess we can look up a number, but was it roughly six months? How long did it take?

Oh roughly six months. No, nine months. That wouldn't be right either.

38:00 Three, six, it would take about five months.

Can you tell us about receiving your wings? Where did that take place?

Point Cook. That was a compulsory parade we were on, called a wings parade, where the big shot from the Australian Air Ministry, an air commodore, Air Commodore Hewitt,

38:30 came down and we had this big parade and you marched up to him and he pinned the wings on you and saluted him and went back. Just a load of, I suppose hooey really, but that's the way it happened. I've got a picture there that was taken on our wings parade day, photograph.

What did this decoration mean to you?

It was just your…

39:00 the satisfaction in having completed your course, your instruction course. That was I think the main satisfaction. It was just a method by which you were recognized by people. We had a double wing as a pilot and a single wing for the other crewmembers.

How proud were you on that day?

39:30 Well I don't think I was any prouder than the others, but there was nothing outstanding about having them because you'd learnt how to do it and it was just the fact of relief more than anything. As far as being proud is concerned I don't think that was in it at all really.

Tape 5

00:31 **OK Henry. We'll just pick up the story. We do have a lot to get through but I just want to touch on one or two more things about your time at Point Cook. I'm just wondering if you could tell me the story of how you met Billy.**

Oh dear. Yes, I can't tell you the date, but my friend and I used to go to a,

01:00 what they used to call a Blue Cross place. That was for the females. It was like a YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] but for the female WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] and it was in Melbourne. I've forgotten exactly where it was but they used to invite some of the boys up there to play table tennis

01:30 and Housie Housie and all the rest, and so we went as guests and this WAAAF who was there happened

to be Billy's friend and so we played table tennis and had a dance with this person and she said, "I have a friend

02:00 and I'm quite sure that we could have a nice time together one day. If you'd care to come we could go down to the river and have some lunch." We said, "Yeah. We'll do that the next time we come in." So the next time we came in I let this WAAAF know we were coming, and so she turns up with Billy and we were attracted to one another more or less straight away and

02:30 so it went on. From there my time at Point Cook was limited because at the end of the course I went on final leave and by the time we'd finished I was pretty friendly with Billy by then and he agreed before we were finished our final leave, would she like to come up to Leeton and meet my parents?

03:00 And she said, yes, she would. But we got final leave so quickly, notification so quickly, that there was no way I could get in touch with her, so I had to set off on my own and things happened so quickly. It is only twelve days, you see, and as soon as my mother and father heard about this and the time being so short she had a party

03:30 to which all my friends were invited and they made me a presentation and the time went just like that and I didn't have time to get in touch with Billy again before we left. Now when I went to the embarkation depot and transferred down to the Ascot Vale embarkation depot I thought, 'Now this is the time I'll go and see her again.' And I went to see her and said, "Do you have time to come out tonight?" And she said, "No. I've got a date." or "I'm tied up here."

04:00 I didn't have another opportunity because I found myself on the ship going overseas. So that was the start of it and of course I didn't see her again until I got back. We used to correspond and that was about it.

So you were able to correspond by letters throughout the war?

Oh yes, you could write to who you liked. They couldn't guarantee delivery in wartime and they didn't say when it was going to be delivered

04:30 but there was a system that they worked out that you could send an aerograph, what they called an aerograph. Are you familiar with these air letters you buy at the post office? Well they were like one of those but then with the camera they'd take it and they'd minimise it and they could get half a dozen letters on a plate.

05:00 That's how they were sent and they were in miniature. At the other end they were blown up and delivered to the person and that's how that correspondence was done. There were also sea mail letters which took infinitely longer and that was it. Some of the letters I wrote never arrived and vice versa. I never got a parcel of food from

05:30 my mother – it must be twelve or eighteen months, twelve months, anyway – and when I got down to Aden they all caught up with me. I had thirteen Christmas cakes. I thought, 'I'm not going to eat thirteen Christmas cakes.' I think I kept one and I gave twelve to the hospital – they had a big hospital at Aden.

06:00 There were two squadrons there and the coastal command people. They were pretty busy. I donated these fruitcakes to them but they all came at once. I'm digressing a bit, aren't I? I also got a present from the Australian Comforts Fund at Aden including a pair

06:30 of gloves and a balaclava. It was so hot in Aden – it was right on the equator. You wouldn't want a pair of those things in a fit. So that was it.

Well after you received your wings, how keen were you to get into the action?

I wasn't very keen at all, I can tell you.

07:00 No, I wasn't looking forward to going into battle, no way. No, I wasn't looking forward to it. I wasn't even looking forward to going overseas in wartime because it's dangerous, and I didn't think looking forward to danger was very sensible so naturally I...I didn't rebel against it, I accepted it but

07:30 I didn't like it. Some of the other fellows were just the opposite. 'Get away and we'll have a good time.' I'm afraid I wasn't in that mould. Who was right and who was wrong I couldn't tell you.

Well what did you...You set sail in early 1943. What did you know about what was going on in the war overseas at that stage?

08:00 Not very much. I knew the Germans were winning the war, I knew that France had buckled up and I knew that the evacuation had taken place where they sent all the little sailing boats and got all the army back. But England virtually – I didn't realise it, but

08:30 England virtually was a defeated nation. And Hitler, being an idiot of course, he went and opened up a second front with the Russians, which saved our bacon. But as far as being au fait with the position in Europe, I'm afraid I wasn't. I was just in the air force and went with everybody else.

And what was your biggest fear?

09:00 My biggest fears didn't occur till I got to squadron.

Well can you tell me a bit about…You've mentioned a little bit about that trip on the Nieuw Amsterdam.

Well the Nieuw Amsterdam was a Dutch ship. Dutch emergency food is not very nice, I can tell you. The mess deck

09:30 consisted of a lettuce concoction mainly and some horrible soup that you couldn't…I used to have to leave mine. I never used to drink it. The breakfasts were better. The evening meal was virtually inedible, I found, and that was it. But we had a good time. The comforts' fund had supplied a person with several tins of biscuits –

10:00 I've forgotten what sort of biscuits they were, but they were Arnott's biscuits and they used to come in great big tins. I suppose there must have been seven or eight of these big tins of biscuits that were handed out after the evening meal to the Australians and so we did have something to eat which was palatable. It probably didn't do us much good but it sort of filled our tummies.

10:30 Anyhow we got used to it, we got used to it on the boat, after being there for a while so the food didn't worry us really.

And were you travelling with any of the men from your own class or …?

Yes, there were a number from Point Cook were there, quite a number,

11:00 and a number from a place called, I've forgotten, South Australia, there were a number from South Australia and I think that was the contingent. Yes, I think that was the contingent. I don't remember any army people being on board except the officer who was in charge of the troops. He was a

11:30 military man. I even can't remember what rank he was, probably a captain. But he was in charge of OIC [officer in charge] troops. I don't know if you made a complaint whether it got very far but that's how they ran it, and you had the option of sleeping up on deck or sleeping down

12:00 in the mess decks. I opted for up on deck, even though I had to get up early in the morning. The crew used to start at about four o'clock with the hose, and you only need to get wet once and you woke up before the hose arrived every morning. That was it.

And you mentioned something about a going over the equator ceremony.

Oh yes. There was a ceremony.

12:30 I just can't recall how vigorous it was or … It was my first crossing of the equator I know and it was a pretty mild celebration but it was recognized. Normally when you cross the equator for the first time they throw a big party – this is peacetime stuff and it's a real night

13:00 out. Not during wartime, and of course coming back the other way we'd already been over the equator once so it didn't count.

And what were your impressions when you got to San Francisco?

My impressions of San Francisco was first of all a relief, the fact that we'd got across the Pacific without any trouble, and the second thing that

13:30 I noticed particularly…now this was the first thing. There were these blimps that the Americans used to have, airship things, and they were all up and down the coast around San Francisco, and then the next thing that took my eye was going under the bridge at San Francisco. It was quite an experience.

14:00 And then of course we were interested in the little journey up to the wharves. We had to pass the big jail called Alcatraz, which was a jail from which, they professed, nobody ever escaped. Many attempts were made but either the sharks got them or else they were drowned or whatever happened. It's no longer a jail then, nobody

14:30 was there. I don't know what purpose it serves now. There is probably a museum there now, I don't know, but that was the naughty boys' place where the electric chairs were. That's how the Yanks used to put people to death – put them in the chair and give them a real hot seat. After that it was interesting tying up at San Francisco wharf.

15:00 I don't remember too much of what happened after we tied up. I think we were more or less straight away transferred onto the ferryboat, which took us under the Oaklands Bridge, which is a long bridge, not as spectacular as the other one. Have you been there, to San Francisco? It's not as spectacular but it carries a lot of traffic and is very essential, and we went across

15:30 the other side to Oaklands, which I suppose is a bit, likes what perhaps Parramatta might be and not as big, where the railhead was and we joined the railway train across America. It was a very interesting trip going across there.

And what was the train like?

The train

16:00 was a steam train, not coal, oil, diesel oil, but it was a steam-train engine. It looked like an ordinary coal-burning engine. It had a furnace underneath but no coal, only the jets of oil, and much cleaner travelling than coal. You put your head out of the window with a coal engine,

16:30 the train being pulled by a coal engine, and you get cinders in your eyes and hurt. No, it was an experience. We had seen on the pictures and cinemas in Australia before that time many pictures where rail journeys were concerned and they were all done in what they called Pullman carriages,

17:00 and these carriages had seating in them, which were ordinary passenger seating carriages like we are used to, even in electric trains. But at night time the porter used to come along and press buttons and pull them out in the middle and in no time flat you had a bed, two beds. He'd put up a framework and he'd do the same at the top

17:30 and converted it into a four-bedroom cabin with curtains. He made the bed and you got into it and slept like a decent person. It was a long journey but a very interesting journey, went to a lot of cities. When I say stopped at a lot of cities we didn't get out at every one but we got out quite regularly and

18:00 marched up the street to stretch our legs and things. Very interesting. The people there on the way across were interesting in the fact that they didn't know who we were. They had never seen an Australian before let alone a person in uniform – we had distinctive uniforms which were a darkish blue – they had never seen them and didn't know Australia and half of them didn't even know where it was.

18:30 This is how it still is in America. Australia is only a little country, it's hard to get to and it doesn't have very much trade with America, and so a lot of Americans, if you mention Australia they think it's up near England somewhere. But the American people are very, very hospitable. Very, very hospitable.

19:00 Yes. That was an experience in the train. I presume that it's much the same now as going over to Perth in the train. You have long expanses of desert and relative comfort from what it used to be.

And what was your destination? Where did you get off the train?

We didn't know our destination except that we

19:30 were going across America. We didn't know our destination 'til we got there, which was a place near Boston and we went to this American camp and were accommodated there. They had hot and cold showers and they were really luxurious in comparison with our camps. They were very hospitable too.

20:00 I remember seeing, for the first time in my life, a bowl, a plastic bowl of ice cream about the same size as … a bit bigger than you get your margarine in now, full of ice cream. You could have your pick because the Yanks love ice cream and you can have any sort. You could go and buy it at what they used to call the PX [Post Exchange – American canteen unit], the equivalent of our canteen.

20:30 You could get anything at the PX store and it was good that way. Their diet was completely different from our diet. You'd line up in the morning for breakfast and you'd get served up pork chops, potatoes or, I've forgotten what they used to call them but they were potatoes, really a dinner meal at breakfast time.

21:00 It was edible, very edible but we weren't used to that sort of stuff. Anyhow we weren't there for all that long I suppose. We went to a place called Providence, which is in the state of Rhode Island. It is only a little state but the places we went to there

21:30 which catered for their American soldiers, we were quite accepted into their dances and things like that. Very hospitable they were, and very polite and good, and Boston itself, of course, which is in Massachusetts. Boston is a big city. I can't tell you

22:00 it is a lovely city because I didn't see anything very lovely there, but I daresay there are lovely gardens and things. But it is a very busy city and on leave we went to this place at Thornton where the camp was but we got leave and we went into Austin and another little place on the way called Brockton. That was a lively little place,

22:30 that was very nice, and the Yanks had these roadside, what I would call a roadside stall, but they were little roadside cafés which catered for evening meals and things like that and they were dotted around all over the place. You didn't have to travel far to come up against one and there was a meal there you could go and have. We overstayed our time at one of them and the fellow ended up

23:00 driving us back to our camp, which was about twenty odd miles away.

And you said you went to a couple of dances. What were those dances like?

Ordinary. Well, not these days because you just get up and waddle these days. These were proper dances, not ballroom stuff, but you took hold of the girl like that and you didn't go like this like they do

nowadays.

23:30 They played tunes, which you had to keep step with, and there were various steps, and it was very pleasant.

I'm just wondering how you found the American girls?

The American girls? I didn't have much association with the women except they were, like in Australia they used to engage in voluntary work and they were

24:00 all associated with military enterprises. The girls themselves were, I suppose, the same as a lot of girls right throughout the world: some of them were nice; some of them looked at you and turned their snoot up and walked on, but most of them were, like the men, very hospitable, very nice. Of course in those days

24:30 sexual influence was perhaps the same as it is now but you were very much more careful. You didn't engage in these sort of things. That's all I can tell you about the American women.

Well, as you said you weren't in America that long before you…

No, we weren't there that long.

got orders.

We

25:00 got orders to go up in the train. They didn't tell us where we were going but it ended up at Halifax, which is in Nova Scotia, and from there we boarded a ship and went over to England. The ship was called the [SS] Louis Pasteur, which was a new ship, or a newish ship, and it used to run down

25:30 from France to South America and it was, in those days, referred to – whether it was or not, I don't know – referred to as a luxury ship because the fare was fairly expensive, and I presume the accommodation was good and the food was good and you paid a lot of money to use their services. But it had been in America to be converted

26:00 into a troop ship. When France gave up the ghost I think the British navy were pretty quick to go and take possession of any ships that were worthwhile taking possession of, and this was one of them, and they sent it over to America to be converted into a troop ship, which it was. I don't know that it had done any trips as a troop ship before we got on it or not. I don't know.

26:30 Anyhow, they had installed a six-inch naval gun at the back of the ship, what I call the blood den. They had it secured to the deck and there were two British naval fellows who had been allotted or appointed to the ship to look after this six-inch gun and to provide lookouts for submarines, which is

27:00 a very, very important section of a watch, and we set off under those conditions. There were a lot of American soldiers on the boat. They were going over to England, as we now know, of course, for the second front but we didn't know anything about that in those days. But all these

27:30 Yanks were arriving in England, and they were coming over practically in every boat. We were unescorted. It could scoot along, this Louis Pasteur, my word. They decided to have a test of the guns. They had Oerlikan anti-aircraft guns right up on the topmost deck near the funnels and things and they had this six-inch

28:00 gun down on the lower deck where they had made provision for a sick quarters. I don't think they had a doctor onboard but they had this section that was made for sick quarters where if you got sick you went in and the orderlies and things would look after you, and to block it off from the general bit they built this partition around it, you see. Blackouts

28:30 were in vogue in those days because in wartime you blacked your ship out, and this prevented the light getting out so that the enemy could see it. After a few days out they decided to have this practise shot and the six-inch gun went off. We were warned – I was one of the gun crew. This Pommy bloke told us, "Put cotton wool in your ears and lie on the deck." He said,

29:00 "There's a hell of a blast from these things. That's the safest place to be." So after we got the gun loaded and we were waiting for it to fire we were lying flat out on the deck, flat, and the thing went off, 'BANG!' and God it made a noise. It blew in all the partitions from the hospital that they had built and we thought it was funny but the two Pommy blokes, they

29:30 thought it was a disaster. Anyway that's the only practise they had. Their gun worked but whether they hit the target or not, I don't know. A flame float they used as targets, the same as aeroplanes. They use flame floats for navigation purposes. They hit the salt water and that would create a reaction, and a flame would light up and they could see it.

30:00 Yeah. Well that was ….

What was the real danger, do you think, on that trip over to …?

Oh submarines. Oh yes, Britain lost a lot of shipping to submarines. They were very, very professional, my word yes.

Well how imminent was that threat when you made that trip?

Well, it was number one priority

30:30 for defence of course, for lookouts, and you just took your chance. With a very fast vessel you ran less risk than if you joined a convoy, and that was the idea. They made their troop ships, where they could, they made them on fast vessels, newish, and most of the Strath boats

31:00 were converted to troop ships and they went solo, and the Orient line were the same – the [RMS] Orion and the [RMS] Orcades were both big ships – and you had to zigzag of course to beat the radars and things and the Germans invented these magnetic mines that they'd plant in the ocean and the ships being metal, if you got too close

31:30 to them they'd draw you in and as soon as they touched you they'd burst and make a hole in the ship.

And did your ship come under any enemy attack?

No. Well, as far as I know they didn't. I was on watch on that Atlantic trip – I think it was at least every day. I know at one stage in the day I had to have a lookout and several times at night

32:00 and they gave you a pair of binoculars and you could see…after you became used…If there was any light there it would ruin your night vision, but when you became used to the black you'd put these up and it was amazing what you could see through them. They weren't illuminated in any way; it was just people's eyes, which, I suppose, is a factor in young people. The older you get, of course, the eyes are not as

32:30 good.

And where did you arrive?

I think it was Liverpool. We arrived at Liverpool and went down to Bournemouth which was the reception centre in those days. Bournemouth is the south coast. I'm not sure whether it is in Sussex or the next county, but it's right on the water and

33:00 it was always a popular place to live in England and holiday in England, and we went down there where they had requisitioned a number of residences, usually big ones, for our camp and we got stuck into one of these. For the life of me I can't remember the name of the one that I was in. I've forgotten the name of it

33:30 and I didn't have it recorded anywhere, and that was just like a Bradfield Park embarkation depot. You just waited until you were wanted. They had a system in England in those days, in which a Lady Ryder, and somebody else was in it and I've forgotten who the other person was, and they arranged with country people to offer

34:00 accommodation for people like ourselves who had come from other countries, from British Empire countries, and we went to a place – there were two of us – we went up to a place near Manchester, and I think we had a week's leave up there. It was funny getting there. We were all given strict instructions

34:30 and detailed instructions how to go to these places because in England in wartime the names of the streets were all taken down. We had to go to this railway station – I've forgotten the name of it, where the trains to Manchester went from. The instructions were to buy a ticket to Moses Gate railway station

35:00 and at Moses Gate the host or hostess, there would be somebody there to meet us, you see, from this little place called Farnworth. So we got up to London all right and we went to this railway station and my mate and I bowled up to the ticket office and said to the fellow, "We want two tickets to Moses Gate." He says,

35:30 "Moses Gate? I think you're in the wrong spot. I think you need a church." We said, "No, no. It is a railway station." So he looked it up in his book and sure enough there was a little railway station at Manchester and we got our tickets and off we went, but I thought that was funny. We were met by this doctor chappie who was in Manchester practising, of course, and his wife. They were delightful people, and

36:00 we had a lovely week there; they looked after us as though we were the Queen of England. And we went to a little pub – every place had its little pub, non-residential, it's just a pub, and you could have your drinks there. They had funny hours – they're closed just when you were thirsty and when you're not thirsty they're open.

36:30 Every night they used to have a session. They wouldn't close until about ten o'clock at night. The doctor took us down there, introduced us to the publican and told him to look after us whenever we walked in. The publican said, "There's a big darts competition on tonight." He said, "Why don't you come and have a look?"

37:00 So my mate and I said, “We’d better go down to the pub. There’s nothing much else to do.” So after we’d had our tea at the doctor’s place we bowled down to the pub. The rules were that you were to wear a tie. Our uniform included a tie so it wasn’t any different for us but all these fellows, the darts players and the drinkers, are all there with a tie around their neck and no collar, because the collars in

37:30 those days didn’t come with the shirt like they do now, they were all separate collars, and they looked funny to us, but quite normal practice for them. A little mining settlement it was, a little town. There were lots of little places like that in Lancashire. If you could get used to their accent it was good. It was a very nice little spot. Manchester is a busy place, though. It is a bit like – have you been to

38:00 Newcastle? – no, Newcastle near here in Sydney. It is a bit like that, industrial.

And what was the mood in England when you …?

The mood in England in those days was, I don’t think they realized they were being beaten. I think the mood was that, ‘Anything that they could dish up we could take.’ That was it. And of course Churchill

38:30 was like that and he took every opportunity to espouse that attitude and keep it up, because in one of his famous speeches when poor old Neville Chamberlain had to bow out, he was no good, Churchill went in in his place and he said, “I have nothing to offer you except tears and hard work and sadness.” He said, “But

39:00 if you hang on we’ll win the war. Don’t give in.” So that’s the attitude that was going ‘round England when I got there and it was very noticeable, ‘Stick round until the last bit,’ and a lot of the little townships had their own defence mechanisms, their little armies of their own and

39:30 much like our militia, and they were prepared to fight the Germans when they landed with picks and shovels and anything they could lay their hands on. That was the attitude: hang on at all costs. That’s what won them the war, I think, because Hitler made a stupid mistake again. He went and opened up a front against the Russians in the wintertime. Of course, half of them froze to death.

Tape 6

00:33 **Henry can you tell us about some of the people you met in England, maybe through the Lady Ryder scheme?**

I can’t remember their names, apart form the host and hostess. I didn’t meet too many civilians. It was the same with most of us. We stuck amongst ourselves except when we went into

01:00 dances and things like that on leave, and the dances that they had when we weren’t on leave were all the WAAFs [Women’s Auxiliary Air Force] and I’m afraid I can’t remember, excepting the people I stayed with. Their names were Doctor and Mrs Laslett and the Thorpe family down in Sutton.

01:30 **We’ll talk a little bit later about a talisman that you had. Were these the family that made that for you?**

Yes. They were the ones down in Sutton.

I’ll bring that up in due course but we’ll just keep going here now. Your next major posting was to the OTU, is that right? Or you spent a little bit of time up in Brighton …?

No. We were up at Little Rissington.

02:00 After we got to England we went to Little Rissington first and resumed our flying. We were a bit stale because it was several months since we had flown and we went through a course to refresh, I suppose you could call it. There was a little bit more to it. We learnt a procedure called beam approach,

02:30 flying on a beam. We did quite a lot of night flying, day and night. For the night flying during the daytime they put a hood over you, black as pitch, and all you could see was your instrument panel, and the navigator was supposed to keep a lookout and things like that, and the navigator in lots of cases was the instructor. So that’s what we did.

This was still in Oxfords?

Still in Oxfords, yes.

03:00 **What about beam approach? Can you tell us how you followed a beam?**

Beam approach was an electrical radio thing and it was a beam sent from A to B. Now, in the aeroplane you had a receiver which picked up this

03:30 radio frequency. Now, if you flew to the starboard side of the beam it would go ‘ba, ba, ba, ba, ba’, in your ear. If you got to the port side of the beam it went ‘bip, bip, bip’, so you knew which way to turn and you

04:00 gradually closed in until you got a continuous note, 'beee…' all the time, without interruption. That's beam flying and that's how the Germans went from Germany to England to bomb. They followed a beam, and so they didn't have much problem in navigation and they were good, they were good fliers. So that is the beam approach and you were taught how to, at certain heights on

04:30 your altimeter, to lower or come down close and it was established that you were able to land your aeroplane on an unseen strip; whether anybody ever did it or not, I don't know. The training we received was good for your navigation perhaps, although

05:00 at wartime you had to be on constant move; if you stayed in one position all the time then somebody would get on your tail and shoot you down. Its purpose, whether it was successful or not, I don't know, but that's what it was. That's beam approach.

What other new technology were you exposed to when you went to England ?

No. We weren't exposed

05:30 in my course, in my time there. We weren't exposed to any new technology except an improved bombsight. The Americans got hold of the old one and I don't know how they rejuvenated it but they improved upon it so that their production was superior to the British, and I think that was the one that

06:00 was installed in all the aeroplanes. I'm not a very good navigator but the navigators swore black and blue by it; they reckoned it was wonderful in comparison with what they had. The Yanks themselves didn't do much night flying – they just did the daytime stuff and that's a different proposition altogether.

Is there anything else that stands out in your mind about Little Rissington?

06:30 Little Rissington was a peacetime aerodrome only because it was in close proximity to Oxford University. Now, I say that because the equivalent of our militia, only air force was that over in England before the war, and these Oxford University graduates were all keen on

07:00 flying, whether it be flying in a motor car – there was only two speeds to them, 'stop' and 'go' and when they went they really went, but of course the traffic wasn't like it is these days – and so the aerodrome which popped up was Little Rissington close by, and it was operated by the RAF [Royal Air Force] in peacetime,

07:30 so that when war broke out they were more or less, if you can call it that, fully equipped. But their aircraft were ancient but that's about what it was because their facilities were good. We went there and they had Airspeed Oxfords. I was only there for a little while. I did all my flying, not at Little Rissington but at a place called Windrush. It was only a few miles away.

08:00 It was a satellite aerodrome where the facilities weren't nearly as good. We had a lot of tents there and some constructed buildings as well for accommodation, and the little township of Windrush; it was a very quaint little place really, and we did our course from there, which was an advanced course – we still had Airspeed Oxfords – and

08:30 we did this course. Now, Windrush is named obviously after the Windrush River and this was a river, which was a tributary of the Thames, and in the wintertime, I presume, and the springtime when the snow's melted, it was a source of a good supply of water into the Thames River. That was only one of the tributaries but that was the one that was

09:00 near Windrush, and they told me, my mate and myself, when we went out to Windrush, we asked them what was there to do there on our leave and they said, "Go and see the Windrush River. It's just over there." So they pointed me over there and we went walking for quite some time and didn't find it, came back and told him and he said, "Didn't you cross over a little stream?" It was about that wide.

09:30 "Yes, we stepped over it." "Well, that was it." So that was the Windrush River and it emptied itself into the Thames and it was situated near a place called Burford, which was quite a nice little town, and also a delightful place called Burton-on-the-Water where there was a pub and I think

10:00 there might have been a general store but it was a magnificent little place, all on its own. Have you ever been to New Zealand? You know what that's like down on the South Island – it's just one expanse of lush pastures? Well that's what this was like in England, and it was a delightful place. There was quite a decent river at that stage flowing through the middle of it and it had a bridge over it and we could

10:30 go and look at it, and lovely foliage and trees and things. Now, the aerodrome was not all that far from there. So that was Windrush. Then we got posted over to, not far away from there, to another county, Moreton-in-the- Marsh, when we started the operational training.

At what point during your training did you get selected for multi-engine or bombers? When did that take place?

That took place when we left Benalla.

11:00 The old Wacketts were a single engine machine and we went straight onto Airspeed Oxfords down in Point Cook. They were twin engines.

So what were the aircraft that you were flying at the OTU?

Wellington twin engines, Mark 1C's.

What was your first impression of the Wellington?

I hated them because…They had the name

11:30 of being the 'Queen of the Air' to look at, and they were. The undercarriage used to disappear, including the tail wheel, and there was just this outline tearing 'round the skies and they'd look absolutely magnificent. No, I wasn't impressed to begin with. They had what they called Bristol Pegasus motors and they were the same

12:00 motors they had in the flying boats, Sunderland flying boats – Sunderlands had four of them and we only had two – and they wouldn't fly on one motor. When they were completely unloaded and without much petrol in the tanks, yes, they would, but you had to alter the attitude of them in the air and get exactly the right attitude – tail up or tail

12:30 down or nose a bit sideways or something like this – to make them maintain height and that took a bit of getting, and you don't have all that much time when you are close to the ground. So no, I didn't like them. Another thing I didn't like about them was when you are on the ground and taxiing 'round you've got to have brakes otherwise you just bash into things, and these brakes on the two

13:00 wheels were operated by an air cylinder, much like the big transports these days – you hear them pull up and they go 'pshhhh' – that's the air escaping. Well, they had the same system on the Wellington but the little reservoir was so tiny in comparison to what you needed it wasn't funny, and so that when you were taxiing round on the ground, amongst other aircraft, parked and so forth, and you suddenly

13:30 didn't have any brakes, it was a little bit scary so, no, I didn't like them for that reason. Another reason was that they had two throttles, one for each engine, and when you pushed them on there was no response at all, not for about two or three seconds. And then

14:00 suddenly they took over. So when you were taxiing around with this brake problem and this delay in the motors responding to your command, you were in real trouble unless you got really used to them but once you did get used to them you were all right. I didn't like them to begin with and they were underpowered, I thought.

For someone who hasn't seen a Wellington, looking at this in the future, can you describe the plane a bit for us and where the members of the crew

14:30 **were located and what the crew approximately was?**

Yes. Can I delve into my box for a second?

Perhaps leave that for a moment and can you walk us though the plane? How would you get into it?

There was a ladder.

The camera can't see that. Sorry. It's a bit difficult. At the front?

Yeah. At the front near the nose there was an entrance panel, a door, which we opened and closed like

15:00 the lid of a box, and it had this ladder that you used to put out and the ladder used to travel with the aeroplane, and when you landed and were ready to get out, down the ladder would go and stay in position and everybody would get out. If you had to tether the aeroplane and leave it, then the ladder went back inside and you closed the door.

15:30 You climbed up the ladder, and you were immediately onto the seat of the second pilot or the bomb aimer. In my case they didn't have second pilots. They started off having second pilots but the RAF dispensed with them and put in the bomb aimers instead. You had a bomb aimer sitting next to you.

16:00 The pilot was on the left. The motors were situated behind the pilot but at an angle so that he was sitting ahead of the propellers actually, in the plane. First of all there was the pilot and the bomb aimer and behind

16:30 them was what they called the main spar that goes between each wing and takes the weight. That's called the main spar. Behind the main spar on the port side, facing front, the wireless operator used to sit. He operated the radio. Right beside the wireless operator was the navigator. Now, the wireless operator

17:00 was the only member of the crew who could not be reached directly on the intercom. You had to go through the navigator. He had no plugs or anything, no facilities to plug into the intercom system, so any instructions you had to give the wireless operator would go through the navigator, which was a

fault, of course, but all the Wellingtons I flew were the same.

17:30 Then beside the navigator, right down at the tail, was the tail gunner. Five crew there were, and it can get pretty lonely down the back of an aeroplane. It's always moving, and so every now and again you got in touch with the rear gunner on the intercom and said, "How's it going down there?

18:00 Are you cold or are you hot? Have you seen anything? Is your gun alright?" or whatever. You'd make some little conversation and keep him happy. So that was the crew of the aircraft.

How did you move through the aeroplane or how did the rear gunner, for instance, get to his position?

He would move right thought from the ladder entrance, right through to the back of the aeroplane. When he had to bail out, if he had to bail out, he'd turn his turret 'round,

18:30 open the doors at the back and do a back somersault and he was out. He had to remember to put his parachute on first, of course.

What about for the rest of the crew? What was the bailing out procedure?

Bailing out was through the entrance hatch. You dived in as though you were diving into water.

Were there any other features of the Wellington's design that stand out?

Yes. The Wellington design was designed by the fellow who

19:00 designed the bombs that burst those dams, the German dams.

Barnes-Wallace?

Barnes-Wallace. He designed the Wellington aircraft and he designed it in such a way that it was stronger than most aeroplanes, because the air-frame was made of aluminium and it criss-crossed like that – what they call

19:30 geodetic construction – and this went all the way right from the nose right through to the tail, and the wings were different but the fuselage itself was all that geodetic construction and I think it's shown there in one of the pictures.

20:00 **The interior of a Wellington there.**

It's a criss-cross construction like a series of diamond shapes and they were riveted together – very, very strong, and they could take a hell of a hiding, the old 'Wimpy'. Most of the aeroplanes couldn't.

20:30 They could take a bigger thrashing than the Lancasters could, the 'Wimpy'. Providing it didn't hit the motors you could get home. That was the biggest feature of the Wellington aeroplane – it was so strong.

What did you call your aeroplanes? What was the nickname for them?

Mr Woo, that was the first one. The second one didn't get a name.

You called the Wellington a Wimpy. Where did that come from?

A Wimpy.

21:00 There was, before the war or just at the early part of the war, there was a comic strip, like there are now – they have daily comic strips of 'Peanuts' and so forth. This was called 'James Wellington Wimpy', that was his full name. Now, James Wellington Wimpy

21:30 was a caricature, very easily drawn, head and body and whiskers out about that far, and a dot for an eye and a stroke for a nose and a slash for a mouth, you see, and this is how the cartoon started off, and he would appear in every edition of the newspaper. Now, James Wellington Wimpy was

22:00 obsessed with hamburgers – he loved them – and the stories that used to go with this little thing always related to hamburgers, and one of the quips I remember in the paper, he was talking about the cattle and he used to refer to them as 'hamburgers on the hoof'. And it went on, a little bit like Little Abner, for a long, long time

22:30 and it was a funny strip, and the Wimpy was taken from that strip as applicable to the Wellington aircraft because the name Wellington suited the name of him, James Wellington Wimpy, and that's how it became known right throughout the whole service, Wimpys.

Any other names in usage for the Wellington?

23:00 No, only Wellington, that's all.

I'm curious. Up to the OTU you'd been on your own, more or less, or with an instructor. How did you crew up? What was the system?

Well, that was a difficult process. Originally the RAF crewed you up and they found that was unsatisfactory because they had to judge a person's personality and some of the crews that

23:30 they formed didn't get on with one another, because either there were two persons much the same, which they shouldn't have been, and so there was friction, and that's not good. In an aircrew it is much like a football team. You get a football team which co-operate with one another. A medium standard will always beat

24:00 a team of individualists, always, because the combinations are not there. In bomber aircrews you must have co-operation with everybody. If you've got a weak link that's the end of it. Everybody's got to pull his weight and everybody's got to understand the other fellow's weaknesses because there is no perfect man and you've got to understand

24:30 that he can do his job properly but he's just got this little weakness perhaps, and you've still got to work well together. Now, the way to achieve that is to select a person who you can more-or-less train who is not the same as you. Right, well I had difficulty. Most pilots had difficulty because they got posted to these places at the same time

25:00 as a whole lot of strangers became posted, and they had to try and talk to these people over a drink at the bar or something like that and get around and talk to most of them and it was a bit of a pig in a poke. I got hold of Shorty, he was my first pick and he was a wireless operator. He came from South Australia, and I said, when he agreed to be my

25:30 WOP [wireless operator], I said to him, "Have you got anybody in mind that might like to join us? I haven't at the moment." He said, "Yes. I know a bloke from Victoria, Laurie Delahunty." I didn't know Laurie but he took me to see him or else he came to see me – I don't remember –

26:00 but anyhow, he introduced me and I said, "Where do you live?" And he told me all about his father's property down near Stawell in Victoria and he, himself, was at that stage employed as a bank officer, and I said, "Well, would you like to join me? I was a bank officer and we might get on pretty well together," and he was an observer, which I looked for,

26:30 and that's how we got there. The gunner was the next that was chosen. Wireless operators do a gunnery course as well. Shortie said, "Oh, I met a little bloke who might suit us," and I went and saw Frank Ward who was the gunner in question. He was a good deal younger than the rest of us – he should have still been at school in my

27:00 opinion. Anyhow, there he was and he came from Yorkshire, not Yorkshire but somewhere up there and he had a bit of an accent, of course, and I said, "Would you like to join us as gunner?"

27:30 And he said, "Yes I would," and I told him who we had and that left us without a navigator, and I couldn't find anybody who I thought might like to join us or who I would like to have. The people I did ask had already been chosen by somebody else, and so we started off without a navigator, and the CO of the flight that

28:00 we were in said, "I know a bloke that might suit you. He's been here for some time but his problem is he gets air sick." If you're sick you can't do your navigation. I said, "Alright, who is this fellow?" He said, "A fellow named Strachan, George Strachan. He's an excellent navigator but this is his problem – he gets airsick all the time." He said, "Try him out." So I went and saw George

28:30 and he said, "Yes," he'd join our team and then he told us his fault. "Oh well. We'll see how you go." So we formed this crew and the first trip we went up, of course, George was sick. And when we landed he said, "I don't think I'm any good." I said, "We can make you good."

29:00 I said to Laurie, "I don't think there's very much wrong with George Strachan except that he's not in physical condition." I said, "He'll have to do some physical training." Every station had a gymnasium. I said this to Laurie and he said, "Yeah, probably. We'll try him out." I said to George, "We can fix your air-

29:30 sickness. You've got to come down to the gym." He said, "I can't be bothered going to the gym." I said, "Do you want to get discharged and go on to ground?" And he said, "No I don't." "Well come down and see what it's like and if you still get air sick well then you've got your option." We got him onto the ropes and things and we built him up and he lost a bit of weight and after a while I think he got

30:00 a little airsick once or twice but after that he was as right as rain. So we were lucky because he was an excellent navigator and he was an accountant by trade and he was younger than I was – I was twenty-four and he was only about twenty-two – so we set off on our training.

What were the nationalities in that crew?

30:30 There were three Aussies: myself, Laurie and Alan McMahon; the other two were Pommies, the navigator and the gunner. Now, in this Empire Air Training Scheme, the Australians and the Canadians insisted that the RAF make squadrons of their own nationality.

31:00 The RAF said, "No, we wouldn't." So the Australian representative, whoever he was, sat on his block

and didn't say 'boo', but the Canadian bloke got up and argued with them. He said, "Alright, if you're not going to do that we're going to pull out of the scheme altogether and you won't have our services." And so the British came 'round and said, "Alright, you can have a Canadian squadron."

31:30 And our bloke pipes up, "Well, if they've got one we want one too." And so there was a series of Canadian squadrons and Australian squadrons. I think there was one New Zealand squadron – I'm not sure about that, but they were separated – but the Poms had the last laugh because they mixed the crews up. When they sent them to OTU, they mixed them up, Australians and Pommies and Canadians, the whole lot.

32:00 So those that were lucky and those that wanted to, if they were in early enough, got Australian crews and some didn't. The Australian squadrons were the same. When they said they could have their own squadron they got a whole lot of Englishmen in their squadrons, so they were mixed up. So all in all England won the day. But the – and I say this with my tongue in my cheek a bit –

32:30 on the whole, in my opinion, the RAF people were better trained than the Aussies because they were used to more discipline. The golden rule in my book for bombing crews was, 'Relax on the ground and be friendly – you've all got to live together – but in the air there is discipline.' I wouldn't allow anybody to refer

33:00 to a crewmember by his first name. It was always his occupation: pilot or skipper, navigator, wireless operator, or gunner or bomb aimer. That's how you addressed each other on the intercom and that worked wonders. It worked wonders. On the ground forget all about that, but when you are in the air with the stuff

33:30 you got your message through quickly, you got a message understood quickly, and there was no familiarity. Everybody did their job to the best of their ability, and that's how I think our crew was and it counted, to a certain extent, in our success.

How much is a crew like that and the forming of it like a football team or a co-operative entity?

Oh, different altogether.

How much is it controlled by the pilot?

34:00 It is controlled by the pilot but not on the ground, only in the air. It is controlled by the pilot only because he is an automatic skipper. They make the pilot skipper because he is in charge and he is partly trained in all sections and they make him the boss. On the ground it doesn't matter. You can relax and call them what you like.

34:30 It's the skipper's instruction. There were many, many crews where the pilot and captain were non-commissioned officers and amongst his crew he had commissioned people. Now, it was very difficult sometimes to suddenly have to admonish,

35:00 if you put it that way, not that word, but insist on doing something as a non-commissioned officer telling a commissioned officer what to do. It just didn't go down too well and it didn't go down too well with the Pommies. It went down quite alright with the Australians because they're a different breed. The commissioned officers and the non-commissioned officers in England didn't mix much in England.

35:30 It was because of class-consciousness which didn't exist in Australia, well not to that extent. The Aussies, being Aussies, were able to work together and the Aussies made pretty good teams. But the whole box and dice was controlled by luck. I reckon in bomber command to get through a tour of operation

36:00 was ninety- percent luck and ten- percent skill and co-operation, it was like that, and they had terrific losses in bomber command.

Quickly, before we get to one of the most interesting training exercises you went on, which we'll talk about in a moment, but what other training occurred at the OTU?

For the pilot he went and did what they call it

36:30 now, simulator, a modern invention, where you put up with what they called a link trainer. It is a thing shaped like a…it was about that long and it looked like it was pregnant. You could take the lid off and hop inside and there was a seat

37:00 and an instrument panel and make-believe wings and it was secured to the floor but it used to move and it was operated electronically by a fellow sitting at a table pressing buttons, and he would set the exercises to the done. He would close the hood over so you couldn't see out. All you had

37:30 was your instruments and he'd command that you drew...they had a thing that drew. The exercise, for argument's sake, might have been a Maltese cross and you'd start at a certain point and have to fly a certain course on your compass. Then he'd say when it was time to turn and you'd turn around and this line would

38:00 outline the turn that you made and at the end of the exercise you'd would compare it with what the perfect one should be and he'd point our your mistakes. That gave you accuracy but, oh God they were hot. As soon as you closed the lid, in an enclosed room with all the doors and windows shut to keep the dust out because they were very allergic to dust these things, and it got hot.

38:30 Terrible. They got all sorts of rude words called them. Sweatbox was the only one that was printable. And you used to do half and hour or an hour at a time on these things, and you used to have to do so many hours per week on them. In one way they were a good training medium, because it taught you to fly an accurate course

39:00 manually. It taught you proper turns of the aircraft. I can't think too much more about it but that's what it was and they were regular practices that all the pilots had to do.

Tape 7

00:35 **It was interesting to hear you talking about your crewing up. I'm wondering, did you have a nickname yourself?**

I don't remember having a nickname. No,

01:00 I don't think I had a nickname ever.

And what did your crew call you?

Skipper, or skip, that was the usual. No, I can't remember me ever having a nickname except at school. I had a nickname called Amy because she was an Australian woman

01:30 pilot that flew out solo from England to Australia and I happened to have the same surname so that's how I got that, but that didn't stick, of course. No, I can't remember any nickname that I had. Some of them did.

I guess you've talked a little bit about the difficulties that you had in crewing up. I'm wondering

02:00 **how long did it take for your crew to really, I guess, gel together?**

I would say the best part of three months. We didn't stay together when on leave, that's all. We got forty-eight hours' leave every now and again; otherwise we lived together and worked together.

02:30 There were differences of opinion now and again but that's all they were.

And you've talked a little bit about the talisman that you had.

When I got it, I didn't tell the others about it to begin with

03:00 and it used to travel in my parachute bag every trip. I don't know why I put it in there because I would never have been able to get it out if anything had happened.

At what point did you actually get your talisman?

I got it, I think it was about in March sometime. Of course, the names didn't go on until after I'd finished my tour. I sent it back to England and they

03:30 sewed the name on over what I had written. I found that material hard to write on. I had to use a red indelible pencil that I had, and that's how that happened. It flew in my parachute bag every time. After we

04:00 had been on two or three trips with it, of course, I was praising its capabilities all the time and I told them that these people in England had sent it out and I showed it to them. They thought it was a great idea to have a mascot. And, yeah, they thought it was a great idea and at the end of the trip

04:30 of course, in the parachute bag that's where it lived really. The parachutes were different from fighter parachutes. In a fighter you sat on your parachute like a cushion and when you were out of the aircraft one of the penalties that they used to like putting on fighter pilots when they did the wrong thing was

05:00 to walk around the perimeter track with the parachute on which was on your bottom. You used to strap it on and it would sway from side to side on your bottom. And they were heavy and after about twenty yards you knew what you were carrying and after about a hundred yards you were just about finished with it, you see. They were very difficult and very uncomfortable to wear. A bomber's parachute

05:30 was different altogether. It was still a parachute but it came separately. Your parachute harness had two big clips here, around near your bosom, and the parachute itself had two round metal 'D' things that used to clip onto these clips. Now, when you decided to jump out of the aeroplane

06:00 with the parachute, you had to stretch over, pick up your parachute out of the parachute stowage – it stood on its end and easy to get the handle sticking out the top. All you had to do was heave it out, put it on these two clips and then dive out the entrance hatch, and when you'd been gone a couple of seconds pull the ripcord and the thing would billow out and you'd fall down to the ground. That was the

06:30 bomber parachute. The fighter parachute, being sat on and being part of the harness all the time, he had to push his canopy back – over his head was closed – push the canopy back 'til it clicked, turn the aeroplane upside down, release his harness and just fall out of the aeroplane. He would fall down and pull his parachute

07:00 out and away he would go. That was the difference between bomber and fighter parachutes. They were still efficient, just as efficient as one another, but you couldn't operate them too close to the ground because you did have to have some seconds to have them open properly. I've forgotten what it was now – I think it was about three hundred feet was the minimum you had

07:30 before…to allow it to open. So that was parachutes. The dinghy, of course, used to be in the aircraft wing and the Mae Wests [inflatable life jackets] were 'round your neck.

Well that's probably a very good point for us to talk about your ditching stories.

Alright.

08:00 Mae West was a film star. She was on the television the other night, Mae West. She had big boobs and I don't think they were padded anywhere and she had these big breasts apparently, and the RAF wrote to her during her film career and asked her permission if they could use her name on their

08:30 lifesavers, which were inflated with air at the right spots, and she wrote back a very nice letter in accepting the honour of having her name on the British lifesaver. Amazing. The name stuck post-war and I don't know what they call them now.

09:00 I don't suppose they call them Mae Wests any longer because she's been off the screen for many years. That's how it started, Mae West. So we had these Mae Wests and that was part and parcel of our flying gear.

Well can you tell me what happened, the events that happened?

We used to run, at OTU

09:30 towards the end of our training, two exercises. One was called a nickel raid where we would go over to the enemy territory and drop paraphernalia telling them how bad the Germans were and push them down the chute and it would burst where you thought it would burst, or you hoped it would burst.

10:00 On the way down it would disintegrate and spread out over a large area. They were all single sheets of paper encouraging the people there to dump the enemy and come over to the British side and be available to help rescue our people who had the misfortune to jump out in their parachutes. That was called a nickel raid

10:30 and they picked various targets which weren't usually heavily defended because, just for experience and practice. They didn't want to lose any aeroplanes on that sort of a mission. The other exercise was called the bullseye and it was training for searchlight crews, aircrews and fighter crews.

11:00 Those three arms all got benefit from these bullseyes. Now, the idea was to take off at night time and fly on a pre-arranged course. On the first leg of the course, perhaps, you could expect to be attacked by night fighters. The night

11:30 fighters would be briefed to go up and see if they could find any bombers to shoot down. Instead of having ammunition in a proper gun they were substituted with camera guns and when the bloke pressed the button to fire a burst it would take a picture instead of firing a gun, and those pictures would be developed the next day and assessed as to whether the bloke was

12:00 successful in shooting you down or whether the bomber was successful in escaping being shot down. On the next leg, perhaps, you might expect to be coned by searchlight crews. Now, the idea was for searchlights to be three, four and five, six of them

12:30 all within a radius – not a small radius, quite a big radius like an aerodrome – and they would be trained to meet at a certain height. Their training provided that they all meet at this particular point where there was an aeroplane and that's what was called being coned, and if the aeroplane was coned the pilot would immediately

13:00 lose his night vision because of the light and would be easy prey for a fighter to shoot down. Now, they were not very good to begin with in the war, these searchlights. They'd all go on but then they'd be searching around the sky because they didn't have the technology to determine the course and the speed of the aeroplane. Once they learnt that, they were

13:30 a whole lot better and they could feed this information into their searchlight paraphernalia so that at a

certain given time they were all at the right spot and the aeroplane should be in that position. They'd press it on and the light would come on and either miss the target or catch the bloke, one of the two,

14:00 and one was called predicted. Anyway this was the exercise that was carried out. The assessment, of course, was visual – you either got the bloke or you didn't – and that was exercise for the searchlights. Exercise for the bomber to escape the fighter that came up by doing

14:30 what they called corkscrew like that and also exercise for the bombing crew because they used to put these six-pound practice bombs on board and you'd go to a bombing range where the target would be illuminated – usually a goose-necked flare or something like that – on the ground in the target area.

15:00 The six-pound bomb would be released by the bomb aimer when he got the target in his sight. He would press the button and it would be released from the bomb bay and down they would fall like an ordinary bomb. If it hit the target, being six pounds, if it hit you on the head it would kill you because of the velocity coming down – it was still six pounds. If you get hit in the head with a six-pound missile you're

15:30 history. So these were called practice bombs, although they were still dangerous, and they'd burst wherever they were thrown. Now, you either hit the target or you didn't and the bomb aimer got that information the next morning by the people out at the target area signalling in the result of the raid. These exercises

16:00 that were carried out towards the end of your training proved to be very, very beneficial for everybody concerned. It was on one of these that this happened. We were routed on the second leg. We had to go out into the Irish Sea to a certain point. Now Ireland was a neutral country in those days, teeming with Germans,

16:30 teeming with German intelligence and this is why the submarine activity in the Atlantic Ocean was so successful for the Germans because they had the intelligence there telling them when the ships were leaving. They were observing these ships leaving England

17:00 and it's not very far across the Irish Sea to England and they lost lots and lots of shipping in the early part of the war. So we weren't allowed to go to Ireland because it was a neutral country. We weren't allowed to fly over Ireland because it was a neutral country. That's international law. Now, we had to go to a point in the middle of the Irish Sea and then alter course back to

17:30 England where the bombing range was. We got over to almost the point where we turned and the port motor went 'BANG'. It backfired, so it had to be closed off. You couldn't feather the propellers in the old 1C aeroplane – that was another fault it had. In later aeroplanes you could press a button and the propellers would

18:00 stop with their blades facing the way you were going so that they wouldn't turn 'round, but the other ones just kept windmilling and that increased the drag of the aeroplane and dragged it down. So this is what happened. I opened up the good motor and we altered course. The navigator gave me a course to go to the nearest aerodrome in England after we crossed the coast, but I was at eleven thousand feet fortunately – that's

18:30 fairly high for an old Wimpy, although we used to do our bombing at that height – and the port motor being no good was windmilling, and I opened up the good motor to get us home so we could get to the coast before we had to ditch and possibly to the aerodrome before we had to …

19:00 If I could keep the aeroplane in the air and losing height all the time eventually make the aerodrome because I wasn't losing as much height as I would normally unless the motor was throttled back. The cylinder head temperature on the good engine went up and up above

19:30 the safety margin so that had to be throttled back. That increased our rate of descent so we just didn't make the coast at all. We made the coast…When I say we made it, we were still over the water – we could see the coast and we went up and down to see what the position was, where the high ground…In north Devon it's a bit hilly and you didn't want to get down there and run into a hill, so I had to make the decision as to whether to go

20:00 over land and tell them to jump out or take a risk and land in the water. If I went over land and didn't make the aerodrome, which was quite a possibility, and the crew jumped out, I would have had to stay with the aeroplane to try and guide it away from crashing on civilians. And I thought, 'That's no good to me. I think the safest thing is to go down in the water.'

20:30 And that's what I did. It was as simple as that, but fortunately I didn't have any experience of ditching and I can remember I concentrated on my job more than any other time and I eventually got the aeroplane into a position. I knew I wouldn't run out of runway because it was all water, so I turned around parallel to the coast

21:00 so I wouldn't hit land and I stalled far enough so that I wouldn't hit anything else and I gradually sank down on top of the water. I put the flaps down – I used full flap and the book said not to use full flap – and I sank gently onto the water. I forgot that the motors being the heaviest part of the aeroplane would send the tail up in the air and

21:30 it would disappear down into the water. I hit my head rather a bad knock on the instrument panel and I started to go down. I thought to myself, 'Well, this is it.' We'd done all our cockpit drill and dinghy drill and opened up the canopy at the top, the escape hatch, so that the water poured in and I just kept on going down and suddenly it stopped.

22:00 I shot up like a cork because I had all this gear on – a flying suit with a lot of air in it – and I shot up like a cork. On the way up I hit one of the propeller blades, so I grabbed hold of that, climbed up and I had my head above the water, so I gradually worked my way 'round to the other wing, to the starboard wing where the dinghy had been stowed

22:30 and fortunately everything worked perfectly. The salt water activated the electric switch, it blew the top off the top of the wing, out came the dinghy, it inflated itself and it was already tied up, and by the time we got there it was all tied up ready to go, inflated and everything. By the time I got there others had already

23:00 climbed out through the astrodome and the escape hatches as well and we got into the dinghy. And we had a passenger on board who went there for experience. He was second pilot in theory, so that's how he got onto the aeroplane because you weren't allowed to take passengers. We put him in the second pilot and that's how we did it. And

23:30 from there, of course, we cut the painter away from the aeroplane, which was still floating nose down, and we were free. So when we got a few yards away from the aeroplane we chucked out what they call the sea anchor, which is a thing like a dunce's cap tied to a piece of

24:00 rope. It filled with water and stopped your movement, virtually – well it was supposed to stop your movement but you were still moved by currents.

And before you put the plane down what type of Mayday signal [distress signal] did you send out?

SOS. The wireless operator did that. They used to call it SOS.

24:30 They call it Mayday now. It's the same thing, and whether it got picked up or not I don't know. I couldn't find out but we did send it. We had another system which was called 'Darkie', which didn't apply in the circumstances I was in but I tried to use it all the same.

25:00 A 'Darkie' was a radiotelephone connection with ground centres where there was an attendant who had an illuminated arrow on the ground. It was quite a substantial thing done with electric lighting and the procedure was to

25:30 press the transmit button on your radio and call, "Hello Darkie, Hello Darkie, Hello Darkie." Then you'd stop and you'd turn your receiver on and if Darkie heard you he'd say, "Darkie," and give you his number – they were all numbered – and you would then know he was in that area, and by circling

26:00 you could find this arrow pointing towards the closest aerodrome. That was the Darkie system and theoretically you were to follow the arrow and find the aerodrome and land your aeroplane. That was the Darkie system, and theoretically you were to follow the arrow and find the aerodrome and land your aeroplane. That was the Darkie system. I don't know of anybody who had to use the system. I know of lots of people who tested it out, including myself. I tested it out one day and found it had worked

26:30 and it was good, but it was inappropriate in the circumstances I was in. Anyhow, we got into the dinghy and we found, eventually, we were drifting towards the coast. Because it was wintertime – it wasn't very hot in the dinghy, and I was rugged up but some of them weren't as rugged up as much as I was. Anyhow, it was cold and

27:00 I took security of the rations that were embedded in the dinghy. Nobody got hold of those. In case we were taken out to sea somewhere we'd have had something to live on. But no, we got in towards the coast and we could see this beach coming in and we thought, 'That's the place, we won't get our feet wet.' We made for the beach

27:30 and paddled and all sorts of things, but it didn't have any effect. The current that had us took us right into the rocks and dumped us on the rocks and the dinghy was punctured and that was the end of that. We had torches onboard, I remember, on the dinghy and we kept giving the SOS signal towards the shore, SOS in Morse.

28:00 **What were you using to give that signal?**

Torch, waterproof torch. It was about that long, about that fat and made of rubber. It was in a little niche in the dinghy and we used that to signal with, and one of the sentries did see it and we

28:30 got onto the rocks and to our astonishment we found that help was available. The Americans who had the camp up the top, their sentry had reported a landing aeroplane. They had seen our navigation lights and our landing light that I put on and it suddenly went out so he reported that,

29:00 like there might have been an aeroplane down in the water and they were searching in case it was and, from the land, and they eventually saw this torch. As we got closer to the shore they saw the torch and

they knew then that there were people to be saved. And they had a whole heap of people, these Yanks. They got their ropes down and we were hauled up the cliff and taken to the grounds

29:30 of this hotel where we…you've got the photograph of, and dumped there momentarily until they got their gear and everything and then we were taken to their hospital, which was the Pandora Guest House – also a picture there somewhere, the Pandora. The Yanks used it as a hospital and converted it to a hospital. They gave us a good medical examination and found us all clear. They said, "We'll send you to the

30:00 nearest AIF station," which they did the next morning, which was Chipping Ongar, not all that far away. That was the aerodrome we would have been landing at had we made the shore at sufficient height, but we didn't.

And for the record can you just tell us the name of the hotel?

Yeah, Lundy House Hotel. It is situated right on

30:30 the…well not where we were rescued but just on the lower end, near the cliff.

And what type of injuries did the other crew have?

There were no injuries apart from me – I had this lump on my head but that went down. There was no problem. The wireless operator went to hospital when we got back to camp.

31:00 He contracted the beginnings of pneumonia but whether that was associated with the ditching or not I couldn't tell you. I personally feel it wasn't but it could have been. Anyhow, he was in the hospital for a few days.

I imagine it would have been a very traumatic event to go through?

Well, I didn't feel it at the time because I was concentrating on

31:30 what I was doing. I was determined on doing my best, and I knew that the old Wimpy was fabric covered, I knew it was virtually…not waterproof, but there would be time to get out because the air in the machine would keep the fuselage floating for a little while. The later aeroplanes, the Lancasters and things, they just went down like a rocket

32:00 if they ditched.

And did anyone panic at all?

Oh no. We were trained for dinghy drill. We had done all our drills and it was an exercise that we followed so, no, nobody panicked. I don't know about the second pilot. He was…I don't think he panicked.

32:30 Yeah, we all got out.

And can you tell us about the soldiers, the Americans who rescued you?

They were a section of American marines. That's all I know. They didn't divulge their identity to us. In England you must remember that in wartime you don't give this sort of information to anybody because you don't

33:00 know, people just can't hold their tongues and the enemy get it and the next thing you know they receive a series of bombing raids. So you don't tell this information to people, only people that you have to. Oh dear, funny things have happened in England.

33:30 This is nothing to do with the ditching but in the railway trains, the tube trains there – they call them tube trains because the aperture that they go through is tube-shaped, round, and so the carriages are round with round sides, and the tube trains had windows, the same as our suburban trains, and they were covered

34:00 over with, later on with…what do you call that cloth? Anyhow, it's to stop the shattering of glass, people getting hurt, but before that they used to put messages on the inside of the carriage, the same as the Sydney buses have got, advertising, and

34:30 it had a picture of this train window with a person pulling up the cheesecloth to have a look and it had, "Pardon my correction, that stuff is there for your protection." That's all it had, to stop people doing this, and some wag had written underneath it

35:00 "Thankyou for your information, but I want to see my bloody station." I thought that was rather cute at the time.

Well how did you get over the ditching?

Well look, we were sent on survivors' leave. It was only a short period. I don't think the crew were affected at all, it was so perfect. It was a traumatic

35:30 business, I must admit, but we were young and I think the majority of us were more elated, once we were saved, in the fact that we were eligible for survivors' leave for one week, which they gave us, except for me. I got detained because a bloke from the air ministry in London wanted to come to Moreton-in-the-Marsh to interview me

36:00 and he was a real desk-wallah. He came down and the CO said, "Johnson, you won't have any leave. This chap wants to come from the air ministry to see you and the interview will take place in my office,"

36:30 which it did, and the CO was there as a witness all the time, and this bloke got stuck into me. He said, "Why didn't you jettison some fuel?" "I forgot to do it." I've forgotten what else he brought up but the main points he brought up was that

37:00 I had destroyed one of His Majesty's aeroplanes, and the second thing he brought up which disturbed me was, it was going to cost a hundred and thirty thousand dollars to get a new one. Anyhow, he said, "Alright, that will be all," so he went on his way. The CO said, "Before you go, Johnson,"

37:30 he waited for the other bloke to go and he said to me, "Congratulations. You saved your crew and you did an aeroplane in which wasn't worth saving anyway." So that was it. It was all over. I went on leave then. So that was the ditching.

Did you have a personal sense of shame, I guess?

No, not at all. Not at all, because

38:00 we knew the condition of the aircraft. They were rejects, and that didn't disturb me at all. The casualty rate at OTUs was twice what it was in the other training places because of the aircraft being so old, and no, it didn't worry me at all. I don't think it should have, but anyhow this

38:30 bloke came down from the air ministry. I suppose it satisfied them that the thing had been investigated and that was that. We went on leave and shortly after that we got another new aeroplane, a brand new one which we liked and 'P for Peter' it was, 'P for Peter'. We had to hand that in eventually, when we got to Italy,

39:00 and we got another one just as good.

And was 'P for Peter' a Mark 10?

Yes. It was exactly the same sort of aeroplane, Mark 10, as the one that came from the factory directly to me, 'P for Peter'. It was LN872 and when we got to Foggia the bloke took the LN872 off us and put it in the pool and said – he could see we were all upset because

39:30 we came to love it, especially after having a trip out to Italy in it – and he said, "Never mind. You'll probably get one just as good," which we did. We got ME872. The number was the same but the initials weren't. It was exactly the same type of aeroplane and I think it was just about as new too, came from the pool, and we had that all the time.

Tape 8

00:53 **When you ditched your Wellington, you became a member of the Goldfish Club. Can you tell us what that is and**

01:00 **about that club?**

The equivalent of the Goldfish Club is the Caterpillar Club. The people that jump out with their parachutes are able to join the Caterpillar Club and they get a little brass caterpillar, which they can pin on their thing. Now, the people who ditch and go into the water are eligible to join the organization called the Goldfish Club.

01:30 It was started by the manufacturing company who built the rubber dinghies and the Mae Wests. I've forgotten which suburb in London it was, I went out there one day but I've forgotten which suburb it was, and to be eligible you had to be in a

02:00 position of saving your life by use of their product; that was the main rule. It was started in 1942 and when we went in the drink in 1943 it was

02:30 less than twelve months old so we joined it at a fairly early time. Joining was only a matter of writing a letter to them telling them what had happened, and I think that was about it. I can't remember what they did to verify it – I don't remember – but anyhow that was the joining bit.

03:00 George made an application on all our behalf and he got us into the Goldfish Club. Now, before I left England to come home after the war I went out to this place to find out what the objects were, whether that was going to fold up or whether it was going to keep going or what, and I didn't

03:30 place any importance on it but I just wanted to know what was in store. The chap who I saw out there said they hadn't decided yet what would happen to the Goldfish Club, but they were all hopeful at the factory that it would continue in some form. It became dormant only for a year or two and then it was resurrected. The rules were changed

04:00 to be more suitable for peacetime but I think you didn't have to use one of their products to save your life. Whether the factory was still in existence at that stage, I do not know. I suspect, perhaps, it may have folded up because there weren't too many recipients for their products, it being peacetime. So

04:30 that was just out of the Goldfish Club and its rebirth, you might say. I wrote to them and told them that I was a member during wartime and also my name and address and they wrote back and said, 'Yes, we have your record,' and they sent me a certificate saying that I was a member

05:00 of the Goldfish Club which I think I've shown you – he might have taken a picture of it even. They said that they hoped to send out a newssheet periodically throughout the year to all the members, and that was that. They said that they were in the process

05:30 of getting a shop together for paraphernalia that you could buy. Payment would have to, necessarily, be in sterling currency and if I wanted to purchase anything, just fill in the form at the back of the newsletter, send over the necessary draft, and the things

06:00 would be posted to me. Well, I did that with several things: one was a tie that I sent for with the goldfish on it and everything, and the other thing was a sweater with the goldfish logo on the front of it.

06:30 The tie arrived – it was typically English, shorter than ours, and it ended about there. I don't know whether you've seen them before, but they're all the same. They look as if they have been cut in half. But the sweater was of fantastic quality. I have never had a sweater better than it was and I kept it to wear on special occasions

07:00 until around about the mid-nineties when I wore it as a sweater quite regularly. I have still got it. It is a little bit worn now. The Goldfish Club then became more poplar than it was in wartime, A: because there weren't the casualties and, B:

07:30 it spread from being a small organization to a worldwide one, and they had applications from America, India and every air force in the world practically for admission to it. I don't think the Germans applied and I don't think they are acceptable, even to this day, but anyway,

08:00 and so the format of the thing changed and they used to send seasonal newsletters, which they still do, and I get what news I can out of them. I don't know why I still belong because it doesn't give me any benefit, but it's psychological I suppose.

It is an interesting honour I think and an interesting connection.

08:30 There is an annual fee attached to it now, which there never used to be. It started off at one English pound per year and then went up to two and now I believe it's up to five. They did bring in a few years ago provision for life membership and I think you paid about seventy or eighty pounds sterling and you are a member for life. I didn't take that option up until –

09:00 I was sorry I didn't – until relatively recently when I found difficulty in getting a bank draft for the ten English pounds that I wished to send – their fee plus a little donation, you see – and I couldn't find a bank who were prepared to issue it, and in desperation I went to the St George Bank

09:30 who used to be a building society as you know and I said, "Would you be able to sell me a bank draft, in sterling, for England?" He said, "Yes." "You can?" I said, "What are the fees?" because the other banks, if they were prepared to do it, I would pay more in fees to them than I would for the amount of the draft. Anyhow they wouldn't co-operate, but anyhow the St George Bank said, "Yes, we will."

10:00 I said, "What fees?" And they said, "Ten dollars." So I got an amount which I sent them – I think it was about seventy-five or eighty pounds sterling – and suggested that as I didn't take up my option to become a life member earlier, would they take payment in advance for seven years, which I thought would just about see me out, you see,

10:30 and so they wrote back and said, 'Yes, they would, in the circumstances.' I told them I was a member right from practically the beginning. Yes, they accepted that so I sent them this draft over and I am a member now until 2008 or something.

It is a great connection with the events of the past. Moving on, can you tell us, after you'd

11:00 **left England, after your survivor leave, you were finally posted to Italy, eventually. Can you tell us about how that came about and what you knew about where you were going?**

Because Moreton-in-Marsh was the station from which the Middle East RAF drew its reinforcements. That was the OTU, and most of the output from

11:30 Moreton-in-the-Marsh went out to the Middle East. Now, the hostilities in the Middle East had just

ceased when we got posted and so we were sent to the Middle East and then on up to Italy. We didn't know our final destination, We were just sent to the Middle East and that was round about when we had finished, I suppose,

12:00 November '43. Yes, around about November or December '43 when we got a new aeroplane from the factory.

This was the aeroplane you mentioned, 'P for Peter'?

Yeah, that's the one.

Can you tell us a bit about the incidents on the way over in 'P for Peter' and what happened?

We went from an OTU to a transport

12:30 unit which was based also at the same aerodrome, and we had to deliver this aeroplane to the Middle East. That's what it amounted to in the books of the turnout. So we did all our tests on the new aeroplane that they told us to do and then after they'd all finished

13:00 they sent us down to Portreath, which is right on the tip of Somerset, the bit that sticks out into the ocean, and there we were briefed on a trip to go down to Rabat, which was the capital of Morocco in Africa, in north-west Africa I suppose, and we were to take off in the dark

13:30 and keep going over the Bay of Biscay where the German night fighters had been – it was a known activity there for many years where the German aircraft were active there – and we set off one night in this new aeroplane and we had a magnificent trip, really, in the middle of the night.

14:00 We changed course now and again. George got wind velocities from the directions and things while we dropped flame float and the gunner took aim on it to get the angle and so we worked out the course we were to change to and when the sunrise broke next morning we were off the coast of Spain and

14:30 without incident we flew on to Rabat, landed, sent the aeroplane 'round for maintenance to be told that we would have to spend the night there because the aeroplane had developed an oil leak in one of the oil coolers, and so anyhow, that was fixed up,

15:00 not the next day but I think it was the day after that we set off down the runway. Now, in England during the war they were allowed to taxi on the runways to save petrol, which was brought over the Atlantic, of course, and a lot of the tankers got torpedoed. So it was rather an

15:30 important item, petrol, and they allowed us to bend the rules of aviation and not use the perimeter track but to cut a shortcut through the runways that weren't being used. Well, this went on all the time I was on Moreton-in-the- Marsh. It became a habit with all of us. We set off from Portreath, we got down there and when it was time to leave again

16:00 I taxied up the runways that weren't in use. I never thought about the rules of the international laws that prohibited that and used the perimeter track at all times for taxiing. So the next thing, I get a blow on the intercom which was connected to the control tower, of course, on the radio. "Get the hell off the runway! That Wellington on the runway,

16:30 get off the runway! There's an aeroplane coming in to land!" So I did a left hand ninety-degree turn in double-quick time opened the throttle and 'boom', straight off the runway. The other aeroplane landed but in the process I went onto some soft ground. We were fully laden up with petrol and fully loaded up with freight and full crew and we were a pretty heavy object. Down it went,

17:00 down and down and it didn't stop sinking and the wheels were almost covered. All you could see was the top of the tyres. So I pressed the top of the microphone button and I said, "LN872,

17:30 Flight Sergeant Johnson. We've just got off the runway and we're bogged." So the fellow said, "I shall report you. There will be some assistance to help you shortly." So we just stayed in the aeroplane, bogged, and sure enough a truck turned up eventually with a heap of people on it and

18:00 had a look at the situation. I got out of the aeroplane, of course, and I said, "Look, I'm sorry about this. I forgot all about the rules. We didn't do this in England. We were allowed to taxi on the unused runways." And he said, "Yes, I know that. This is going to take some getting out." So I said, "I'm quite prepared to help you with whatever I can, to shovel or whatever,"

18:30 and I said, "My crew will help also." And he said, "No, I don't think that will be necessary." And they had a good look and they decided that they would dig a trench for each wheel, gradually moving uphill until it got onto the track and then with the tractor they would keep it going and drag it back onto the runway. It worked out that way but goodness me,

19:00 it took two or three hours to get it all done because it was a pick and shovel job. There were no great big scoops or anything like that. So that's the way we got out of it. I went and reported to the control tower and explained how it came about and he said, "Yes, I know. I know the rules in England. They are daft, the whole lot of them.

19:30 You won't be able to take off today. You've got to have an inspection of the undercarriage and things, but tomorrow you should be off," and I said, "I do apologise for my stupidity." He said, "Don't worry about it. If you hear from us through the squadron you might have to face a charge but if you don't hear anything, forget about it." And that's all that happened.

20:00 So the next morning we took off and had a cook's tour 'round the top of Africa, right down to Algiers and Aloina airfield, and from there spent the night and next morning we went off down to Tunis, Tunisia and spent the night there. We went to a sort of a nightclub in Tunis itself with a chap from

20:30 in the camp where we were billeted. As a matter of fact there were two or three of them, and we went into Tunis to this nightclub where there was a belly dancer put on. The natives thought it was absolutely marvellous. It turned them on no end. It left me a bit cold, along with all my mates. They thought it was very ordinary, especially as the girl

21:00 was a bit buxom. She wasn't at all pretty. And anyhow, that was that. The next morning George turns up ready to go with a great big bundle under his arm. "What have you got there, George?" "Oh, just a little bit of stuff I'm bringing." "What is it?" He said, "A stretcher, a folding stretcher, a camp stretcher." And I said, "Where did you get it?" He said, "Well, that's the one I slept on last

21:30 night. I borrowed it. I'll return it next time I come to Tunis." So we took it over and he was the only one of us who had a bed when we got there. So anyhow, when we got to Foggia they took the aeroplane off us, which disappointed me no end, and I think they were just as upset as I was. The fellow said, "Never mine. Don't worry, don't worry. You'll probably get one just as good.

22:00 It's got to go into the pool." They took us out to Foggia and showed us our digs. It was a bombed-out old school and we left our gear there in charge of the fellow who was on the door. He had a table and a chair and he was in charge of the place, apparently, and we carried on to Tortorella, the four miles out there.

22:30 **At this stage in the war what was number 37 Squadron's role from Foggia? What were they doing?**

The 37 Squadron was one of the squadrons involved in a group of squadrons. The air force was the same as…The army has battalions, the air force have groups. Now,

23:00 in this group were four squadrons at that stage: 40, 104, two squadrons based at Foggia itself, 37 and 70, which was based at the satellite out at Tortorella, and that was the complete wing of

23:30 205 group. I said that the group was comprised of four squadrons. It wasn't. It was the wing that was comprised of four squadrons. There was another part of 205 group, which we were, situated at another aerodrome called Amendola, over towards the Adriatic coast, and they also had two squadrons, I think, there, or four squadrons.

24:00 That made up the whole group. That was the only group of the RAF that was under the complete control of the Americans. They called the tune from A to Z. They said, "You do the night time and we'll do the day time." And they chose the targets; they chose the bomb loads and I think times of take-off and things … no, they didn't do that. They

24:30 attended to the daylight stuff and they attended to take off times of their own aeroplanes and squadrons, but our squadrons did the night time stuff and our people were in control of the time of take-off and the time over target and all that. But the bomb loads, I think, were dictated to us.

What were the main sort of targets you were flying?

Oil wells, marshalling yards,

25:00 factories manufacturing military stuff for the enemy, sometimes civilian targets like electricity companies to stop him using his trains. At one stage we were

25:30 dropping magnetic naval mines in the Danube River because the air forces had so crippled Germany's capacity on land that he was taking to the rivers and so they mined them. But for a naval mine you can't drop

26:00 it from any height. It bursts when it hits the water because if you drop onto water it's just as hard as hitting the ground, really, and they were bursting so you had to get down pretty low and release these from about fifty feet up, which is pretty low at night time, I can tell you. The first night we went out loaded up with one of these things – they were heavy – a piece of cake. We got

26:30 down nice and low, it was moonlight, we got down nice and low, got a nice run up, and down went the mine perfectly and so it was a good night, that. We all did that and there were no casualties, and so the idiots that were in charge of the RAF, the same as they were in the armies, decided, 'That was a successful raid. We'll do it again tonight.' And out they went, and they nearly

27:00 lost the whole squadron. The 37th Squadron – and I think all the other squadrons – normally one crew would take an aeroplane and fly one night and another crew would take the same aeroplane the next night and the first crew would have a day off, because you bombed at night time, you got home late or

early in the morning and so you

27:30 probably didn't wake up until about ten o'clock when it was too late to do anything, so you got that day off and you'd be on the battle order the following night, unless, of course, they turned on what they called a maximum effort when every aeroplane had to be manned and sent. They weren't very frequent, although they were spasmodic.

28:00 Sometimes you'd get a group of raids and you might have to do four nights in a row, and that would be the maximum I think. But then you'd go a long time and you wouldn't have to do any at all and you'd be on the alternate system. That's how it worked, and 37 Squadron was out at Tortorella and they had to use the aerodrome

28:30 in conjunction with the Americans, who had it in the daylight, and 70 Squadron, which is our sister squadron at that 'drome. Air tests – you had to test your aeroplane every time you used it – air tests would occur in the morning and after that you had the rest of the day until briefing in the afternoon or whatever

29:00 time the raid was, evening or afternoon, and the target would be divulged. The intelligence officer would come and give you whatever intelligence he had about the place, where the flak units were and where the enemy airfields were and what routes to take were determined, 'Round here and go round there so you miss this and you miss that.'

29:30 The time over target was worked out and they'd tell you. The navigator took all this down in his notebook and then he had all the rest of the time to plot his course and things like that, what they call his flight plan, and then you'd take off.

What time did you take off?

Well it varied each night, depending on what the target was and where it was.

30:00 You'd take off, usually waited until dusk – I think that was the earliest you took off, dusk – and then any time from there on right up until about ten or eleven o'clock at night you could take off. For the short targets it was a later take-off and you'd be back quickly. For the longer targets, of course, you had to go further and therefore you'd leave a bit earlier.

How did you prepare yourselves in the time after briefing

30:30 **for operational flying?**

Well, it was difficult to start with. How? I don't know. I think a lot of them used to use the time for letter-writing. Some of the silly coots used to go to the bar and have a few drinks. I made it my business when I went to the squadron –

31:00 together with a lot of others – to be tea-total on the squadron. That was different on leave but when I was on the squadron I didn't drink and I thought that's what I owed the crew and I don't think they drank either. They may have, once or twice, but I certainly didn't and

31:30 I don't know whether it was a factor in my completing the tour or not. I don't think it was but anyhow I felt it was.

How did things change for you now that you were flying operational flights rather than training?

Well, it was a bit like starting school. You didn't quite know what to expect. It was strange to start with. You got used to it. You got

32:00 into a routine, and that's much the same with the operations, depending on the target and what type of bomb load you took and what the time of take-off was set at and how you got there, what areas to miss and what areas to take. Quite often they'd say, 'It's expected to be clear over target

32:30 but if it's not the alternative target is such and such.' They'd usually give you an alternative. Some of them went to the alternate target, some of them didn't. They bombed through the cloud on ETA [estimated time over target] and that was a hit and miss sort of a thing. The aeroplanes were equipped with cameras and after you dropped your bomb load you were supposed to fly nice

33:00 and straight and level so that they could take a picture and they could have a clear picture, whereas if you were moving from side to side it would be all blurred and you couldn't do it. And, of course, they couldn't see much if you were in cloud, and you'd never know what the conditions were going to be until you got there because it was enemy territory. You didn't have any places to send what the weather was at such and such a place, and

33:30 they used to have to send these fighter aircraft up – they were at every station – up to enormous heights, thirty thousand feet, to take the temperature and report on what clouds there were at that height and where the winds were coming from and so forth.

How did you know where your targets were? How were they marked or otherwise?

The navigator had a chart. If you had to go to Budapest, for argument's sake, he had a chart where you could,

34:00 with the briefing, pinpoint the places to go and he would get his protractor and take the angle and so forth and draw a line on the track upwards and back. It was very seldom you came the same way back.

What could you see over a target?

You couldn't see anything because you could see where the target was or you could see where the vicinity of the target was

34:30 because of the lights coming up to it. You could see from forty, fifty, sixty miles away on a clear night, the lights, and by the time you got there they were all at blackout of course. But the illuminators were supposed to get there at a certain time, drop their flares, which would light the place up like daylight, and you could see.

35:00 You were supposed to be able to establish where your target was because you were told where it was at briefing – it was on the southwest corner of the city or in the north or halfway in the centre or wherever – and they'd give you directions so you'd know where to look for it, and the bomb aimer used to get down the front of the aeroplane and look through the window there and he could search during this time for it. Ah yes, he got

35:30 it in his sights and he'd say, "OK, I've got the target," and he would direct you. If he wanted to go left he'd say, "Left, left," twice. If he wanted to go right he'd say, "Right," once. So if you heard two words and you couldn't understand what they were you knew it was left, so you'd swing over to the left a little bit. He'd say, "OK," and then you'd just go straight ahead or to the right or whatever.

36:00 He'd get you on a target, which would get his bombsight right onto the target itself. In the meantime all this flak muck is coming up at you, you see. It's very pretty, flak, very pretty. It's exactly the same as you would see in Sydney Harbour when they have the fireworks, going up slowly until it gets up to your height and then it bursts and it smothers you with shrapnel.

36:30 **What is the sound like up there?**

Just like a cannon, 'BANG!' Same as it does when you hear the bang when they send up the rockets. It bursts out into flame and then you hear 'BANG', because our eyesight travels quicker than sound, and that's what it sounds like. It looks very pretty coming up – comes up nice and slowly and a lot of it you can miss but in doing so you miss out on your target line-up.

37:00 So the thing is, what they said was, "Keep on your target until you've dropped your bombs, maintain that course for fifteen seconds until your photo's taken and then make your own way home." Well, that's all very well in theory, but quite often you had to change your course before you got to the target otherwise you were history, and you couldn't bomb because they'd fall all over the place and it would be a wasted exercise

37:30 as far as the air force was concerned – loss of plane, loss of crew and loss of bombs. So you had to kind of avoid these things and get onto the target. You might've only had a…where you thought you had a long run up you may end up by having only a short run up, and the bomb aimer was supposed to be quick and alter his gear accordingly. Well, of course, some were good, some were bad, some were only mediocre, like everybody else, and some of the targets are hard to hit and,

38:00 of course, some of the raids weren't as good as they expected.

How much adrenalin is there at that time when you are flying over a target? How much tension?

I don't know about the adrenalin or the tension. The tension doesn't come at that stage. The tension comes just before you get there and you are so concentrated

38:30 on what you are doing that it goes away and it doesn't resume until you have finished it and you are on the outskirts. Well, that is a really dangerous time because they've got, in the bigger cities, these night fighters going 'round and 'round the perimeter all the time just waiting for you to drop your bombs and start going home and then you cop it good and solid. If there's a

39:00 lot of searchlights and you get coned, well, of course, you're a sitting duck. They can just wait until you get near them and 'pop' because you've lost your night vision and it's an easy target and a lot of people got killed that way. An equal number of people got killed by collisions over the target, crews trying to escape the flak and stuff and the

39:30 opposition so they could get in to position to do their work. They'd touch or something like that and they lost a lot of crews that way. So it wasn't all beer and skittles.

What was it like from inside the plane to get coned? What would happen there?

Oh it was entirely up to the pilot and the gunner at the back. He did his best to

40:00 see if any fighters were coming; that was his main thing. The pilot had several options: he could drop off height in a hurry in a turning descent; he could try climbing on a climbing turn; he could do a complete circle and see what happened, but it was only luck really.

40:30 I determined, when I got coned once – I was only coned once, fortunately – to open up the throttles and get the hell out as quick as I could, and it worked. I just put it right up as fast as it would go and fine pitch and away I went. And in about four or five seconds I was out of their range. But I could have run into stuff coming the other way, of course. Just luck.

Tape 9

00:31 **Henry, Chris was just asking you off-tape, you've just been telling us about the operations. How many sorties did you do all together?**

Forty.

What do you think was the worst of those, or the hairiest?

01:00 I think one of the raids on Budapest was about the worst and even that wasn't too bad. Did you want me to tell you about it? I've forgotten the time over target. We dropped our bombs and we're on the way home when the fighters must have got on our track, not our particular track but

01:30 this squadron lost a lot of aeroplanes that night to these night fighters, and I could see on the port side one poor chap, he got copped by a fighter and burst into flames. You could see it falling down – that was a terrible sight – no

02:00 parachutes or anything like that. On the other side we got home…no, on the way home we saw a tracer in the sky. We saw it hitting the aeroplane but we didn't see the aeroplane burst into

02:30 flames or crash but it didn't arrive home, because we lost two that night. It could have been one of the other squadrons that were in it but we never heard. That wasn't very pleasant. And another time we were coming home from a place called Sophia, or it might have been Bucharest, Bulgaria or Romania, one of the two.

03:00 We were coming home and behind the aerodrome at Foggia was quite a high series of hills and we struck fog out over the Adriatic Sea and I said to George, the navigator, "I think we'll

03:30 try and get under this fog, George," and he said, "OK Skip. Do a 360," – that's a full circle – "and lose some height on the way. You're over the ocean now and you won't hit the water." So we gradually lost height and as a matter of fact I did two circles I think and I got down just underneath the fog, and I suppose we must have been

04:00 no more than a thousand feet up and we went through bits of fog and that's how fog is, it goes like that, and we got back to Foggia aerodrome and I got right down underneath it and did a quick circuit and landed, and I suppose there would have been five or six crews bashed into the mountain because they didn't do as I did – and it was only luck that I decided to do it, because

04:30 they used to have searchlights to light up your aerodrome on the way home when the first aeroplane was due home. They'd switch on the searchlights and cone it over the aerodrome, and on a clear night, of course, you could see that from almost fifty or sixty miles away. And you'd say, "That's it. We'll make for there. Even if it's not our own, it's somebody's." It's in the right spot. It'll be within

05:00 the allied area, you see. And one night we did that and we made for the wrong lot of searchlights and ended up at Brindisi. We spent the night there and went back next morning. But that was another hairy bit, the bit with the mountain that night, but other than that I can't recall, apart from being coned when we were coming back from Milan,

05:30 any other things that really stood out.

What was the casualty rate like on number 37 Squadron?

Over the period I was there I would say it would be 'round about thirty percent, twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty percent. That was the average. That's what, when we first started, made me think I'd never get through this – forty –

06:00 impossible, but anyway, I got about halfway and I thought, 'I may be just lucky.'

Well you say you had quite a lot of luck but I'm wondering what do you think it was about your skills that made you a good bomber pilot?

I don't think it has anything to do with my skills at all. Other people were much more skilful than I and went early –

06:30 two or three operations they got the chop. So, as I say, it's a great percentage of luck and a very small percent skill. I think any airman will tell you that – in the bomber command, anyway. I don't know about the fighters. I don't know what the casualty rate was there. But the bombers…Look, the aircrew from Australia

07:00 numbered two percent of the whole lot of soldiers, sailors and airmen. Of the total casualties of that army, navy and air force it was something like thirty percent was aircrew.

07:30 They had the smallest numbers and the biggest casualty. Now that wasn't just Australians, that was air crew right throughout and I suspect the Germans had the same problem. I don't know. The whole thing about war is it's unnecessary, it is a waste of money and a waste of human lives – I don't care whether they are

08:00 Japanese or anything – but that is war. It doesn't do anybody any good at all.

And what do you think got you through some pretty tough times?

Luck mainly, just luck. I'm serious, I think it was luck. We got a few holes in our aeroplane now and again from flak but none of us got injured

08:30 so the Almighty must have been on our side, that's all.

And I'm wondering, were there times that you were perhaps more dispirited than others?

Well, that's a hard question. I think I was more dispirited at the first, say, the first ten or perhaps not

09:00 even that much. I was more dispirited in the beginning at the prospect and then I was like the rest of the squadron. You learned the best way out was to live one day at a time, cope with that like the Alcoholics Anonymous, just live one day at a time.

What would you do to cheer yourself up when you got a bit low?

09:30 There wasn't much you could do except have a sleep. Thinking usually made you worse. I remember being disappointed when all the chaps that I shared the tent with, they didn't come back at all and I was on my own. That didn't make me real happy and I just went to bed

10:00 early and slept it through. I was not on operations that night. Sometimes you got disappointments and had to go on operations the same night. You became absorbed in what you were doing, you know. That helped a lot. It must have. You concentrate on what you are doing and you are oblivious to other things that kind of want to intrude.

10:30 **And how did the rest of your crew cope?**

I think they were magnificent really. I think they did the same; they learned to live one day at a time. They were in different accommodation from me and they used to play cards at night time and joke and skylark like the rest of them.

11:00 They would laugh at things that happened. One thing happened when we went to occupy the aerodrome from the school. The sergeants' mess was only a tent and they decided that

11:30 they should put up a structure so that in the wintertime they could have some heat from an open fire – you couldn't have an open fire in a tent. Anyhow, they decided to build this structure and they scouted around and got timber. They used to get timber from odd places. The tail fins of the bombs used to come in a timber crate.

12:00 The bomb may be that long and the fin, that long, and you'd have a thing about that long in the end, and the fin was quite often fitted out with screamers. Now these screamers, as the bomb fell and twisted,

12:30 would blow a whistle. These screamers would whistle and the blood curdling noise it used to make, getting louder and louder – no matter where it burst it would frighten the living daylights out of you – and they used to use these things and the crates used to be stored up and used for building materials and they built a sergeants' mess

13:00 and it was a shoddy sort of a construction. Anyhow it was completed and used as a sergeants' mess until they had a big party one night and they burnt the thing down. Whether it was accidental or not, I don't know. They said it was accidental. I suppose they had a bit too much vino [wine] and somebody set it alight and they had to start from scratch again. So they were funny things that happened, unwinding I suppose in lots of cases.

13:30 **And what about cases of LMF [lack of moral fibre]?**

Well, that was different kettle of fish all the time. There's no use closing your eyes and saying it didn't happen. It did, it did happen. It was most unfair because at that stage – they don't know about it like they do now – LMF

14:00 was put down to cowardice and if you were found to be a coward, having offered your services and your

life for king and country, they thought you had reneged on your contract and you got punished for it. They took you off operations, they stripped you of any rank you might have had, they made the officers

14:30 resign their commissions, they stripped off their flying [badges] and they were sent to a gaol school. Now, one of these gaol schools, they weren't like a civilian gaol. They were like a very severe military camp. The severity was that you

15:00 didn't walk anywhere; you had to run at the double. If you went out of your accommodation, if you had to go the lavatory, you had to run. That was alright for a little while but everywhere you were supposed to run and if you didn't run you got punished. After you had served your sentence, which was about six weeks of this, they sent you back to England where you got a dishonourable

15:30 discharge.

Did you come across anybody who …?

Yes, I did. I struck two cases like that. One was an Englishman who went back and did his penance at the gaol. He went back and lost his rank, lost everything, and was discharged dishonourably. The other one was a New Zealander who was a bit friendly with me. He

16:00 had a habit of getting into trouble, over targets, he'd get shot up and attacked by night fighters, his aeroplane would play up on him and he had all the bad luck in the world, including a ditching where his wireless operator got drowned. Now, he got shot up so many times that he was like this, and it wasn't his fault.

16:30 He was a New Zealander and his navigator went up to the CO and said, "It is not fair to make this man go on any further. He has ditched, he has been over the target, he has done a good job and he has been attacked time and time again and his nerves are at an end." And so the CO said to him, "Well, if he goes through

17:00 the normal channels he will end up LMF, because that's the way it is. And so Butch got onto the New Zealand representative and he was sent for a medical and the medical people found him not LMF by any manner or means but he was distressed and

17:30 recommended that his tour be expired. So they took the doctor's recommendation and expired him from operations. It was not as though he had only done one or two. I think he was about more than halfway. He had done about thirty. He had done that but he was in such a mess that he couldn't carry on. His tour was expired and he and his crew

18:00 were with me and caught the same boat over to the Middle East. John was, as soon as they made expired his tour, the improvement in him, his attitude and his physical being was absolutely noticeable – it wasn't as though he was putting it on or anything like that – and he came over to the Middle-East

18:30 with a medical certificate to go to the New Zealand hospital, which was just out of Cairo. He went to the New Zealand hospital as soon as he got there and he was there for about ten days. He underwent all the tests and he got discharged medically unfit and he went back with his pride to New Zealand. That's the only case of LMF which I've ever seen

19:00 turned 'round and treated properly.

And what shape were you in at the end of your forty…?

I was in remarkably good shape because I was so elated at finishing the tour and doing the impossible. I was a bright spark, and I fully realized that I would go for the normal rest tour of six months and come back for another second issue

19:30 but you didn't think about those things. So my crew and I got posted to the Middle East and we were at this place outside Heliopolis. We were all there together and my crew, all except me, were posted back to England and that distressed me just as much as if I was on operations.

20:00 I tried to get out of it; I tried to be with them but no, they wouldn't have it. I went down to Aden and they went back to England. That's how it was.

And why do you think you and your crew have stayed in touch over all these years?

I have always been a cautious sort of a fellow and when we crewed up I recorded in my

20:30 little address book their home addresses and didn't pay it any attention, of course, until after the war. Christmas time came on and I thought I'd like to send a Christmas card to Laurie and Frank and these people so I looked up my little book and there they were. Only one of them didn't get a Christmas card from me. I'm not sure that it was returned to me, I just don't think I heard anything.

21:00 I didn't get a card in exchange or a letter or anything like that and it was from Frank Ward the gunner. He had moved. He had gone to a different address and they didn't bother with the mail – I think that's about it. I didn't find that out for years and years and years afterwards. A friend of mine who was on the squadron at the same time was a court clerk

21:30 in England in the law courts and after the war he did this course and became a solicitor and came out for a holiday to Australia with a view of seeing his old mates, of course, and having a holiday. He saw all his old mates. He was impressed with Melbourne and the nice climate there and

22:00 decided he would migrate to Australia, out to Melbourne. On the way home he went to New Zealand and he was so overcome with the beauty of the place and the similarity to England that he diced all about Australia and decided to migrate to New Zealand, which he did. His wife didn't want to come so he made a bargain that if she didn't like it

22:30 he'd take her home. So she got out to New Zealand. She didn't like it. She had a dog which she adored and they wouldn't take it back into the UK [United Kingdom] so she was faced with the proposition of having it destroyed or staying with the dog. She decided to stay with the dog until it died and then go back, and that's

23:00 what she did. They went back and lived in England. He is still alive but she has Parkinson's disease very badly and she is a vegetable really. But Sam, he's still going. He writes and sends a card every year. He'd be just a year or so younger than me, that's all, and I've kept with them. It's amazing the bond, which is taken when you have

23:30 an experience like a war, the bond between people. I can't describe it. It's better than friendship. It's a real bond, and it's reliability I suppose. You feel that you can rely on this person and you want to know them and you become friendly, and that's how it is – like brother and sister I suppose – and I've kept in touch

24:00 with my crew – I feel that I am one of the few who have – for all these years. Laurie lives in a little place called Stall, where they ran the Stall gift every year and he's retired now from his farm. He has been mayor of the municipality for years, several times.

24:30 He is happily married. He's got grandchildren to look after and I think he is on the way to being a great grandfather, actually. Frank went out to where I was at Aden but at the other aerodrome called…I've forgotten its name. He did a stint out there and then was sent back to England and learnt to become a schoolteacher, went

25:00 on a teaching profession for the rest of his life. He retired at age sixty and he lives up in Norfolk. We still keep in touch.

And how did you adjust when you got back to Australia?

How did I do it? I was anxious to get back to work at the bank so as soon as I was discharged, and after my honeymoon, I couldn't get back quick enough.

25:30 And I went back to the bank at Wagga in my uniform, reported to the manager and said, "I'm going to start on Monday." And he said, "Not in those clothes, surely?" And I said, "No, I'll be in civilians and I'll be back on Monday." And he said, "We'll be glad to have you." So I got back determined that I was going to settle down. I wasn't going to be like some of these fellows and walk up and down the street doing nothing,

26:00 envying the fact that they had been officers in the services and now they were nothings. So I wasn't going to be like that. I got stuck in. I did a Hemingway and Robinson course, actually, on accountancy, and that kept me pretty busy.

And what about nightmares? Did you have any?

No, not for a while. Not for a while I didn't.

26:30 I had nightmares once or twice in about 1948, 1949. That was about five years afterwards. But no I didn't. I can't say that it was a complaint. I might have had one or two nightmares and that was it. I very seldom dream but sometimes I have dreams, which I don't call nightmares because they are not.

27:00 They are not, they are just thoughts and memories in my subconscious. I think that's what I'd call them. They are not nightmares like jumping out of windows and getting shot and all that business. No. But I think I did the right thing. I just buckled in and got back to work. It paid off too because I got promotions all the

27:30 time.

And I'm wondering whether you've participated in any celebrations for war's end?

Celebrations. I happened to be in Melbourne when the Japanese chucked in the sponge. They dropped those two atomic bombs and they gave in very quickly. Otherwise they'd still be fighting,

28:00 I can assure you. But no, they gave in very quickly when they saw what happened. Complete wipe out of a city, completely wiped out, everything, and that was an atomic bomb a fifth of the ones they've got stored up now. Anyway, the Japanese could see the writing on the wall. They were going to get beaten anyway, but

28:30 they would have delayed it by some years, I'm quite sure. Once they got a footing in Japan itself it would have gone on and on and on, but anyway it didn't. They gave in straight away and that was it. Billy and I went into town that particular day. Billy's mother, who wasn't a drinker – she was virtually a teetotaller – delved into the cupboard and brought out a bottle of

29:00 port she used to do the cooking with, and we had a port all 'round, a drink of port. Billy and I went into the city. The celebrations had to be seen to be believed. There weren't streamers or anything like that. There were people virtually jumping up and down in delight

29:30 and running up and down the streets. Some of the people were leaning out of windows of office blocks. Whether they emptied their waste paper baskets or not, I don't know, but all this rubbish came out of the windows and this paper came down. And the crowd that was in Collins Street,

30:00 at the top of Collins Street up near the parliament building where we were, was fantastic. Everybody had a smile on their face and jumping up and down, and this went on and on and on all day and that's about all the celebration I can remember. In Sydney I believe it was a lot worse.

30:30 We weren't in Sydney so I can't confirm it or not but I believe it was more violent in Sydney than it was in Melbourne. Yes, so that was the end of the war but, of course, that wasn't the end of privations. Rationing continued for quite some time after the war, and shortages continued.

And how do you think

31:00 **your time with the air force and the militia change you? How did the war change you?**

I don't know that it changed me much. It gave me more common sense, I know. It taught me the stupidity of war which I didn't know before. I thought that the winner would have something to gain, like a fight, fistfight.

31:30 The winner gets a big belt and probably a big heap of money. I thought there was some prize at the end of war but there's not. The winner of the war is usually the loser of the battle. Now, that's been demonstrated with England. They fought cat and dog and won the war but it bankrupted them. They are still paying for their war debts. Now, that's sixty years ago

32:00 since that's finished. They've got a whole lot of people in their country who they don't want, Middle-Eastern people, one of whom had a son who was mixed up with Princess Diana, and they both got killed, that particular person that owns that big store of Harrods in London,

32:30 and it had the royal patronage at one stage. It hasn't any longer. So, there's no winners in war, winners or losers. No winners. All you end up with are a heap of casualties and a heap of debt over your head.

Do you think you missed the air force when you were discharged?

I don't think so. No, I didn't miss it.

33:00 I did miss the life with my crew a bit but that was only temporary. I had a different life to lead being married and going back to civilian life. I accepted it with open arms. No, it didn't effect me.

Well I'm wondering, when you look back with all these many years of reflection and

33:30 **time to think about it, what do you think stands out as your proudest memory?**

Well, I've got disappointment in one way. Years ago, well not all that many, I used to go in to the Anzac Day march every year and meet up with my old friends, or some of them, who I served with. You go to the march, finish the march, go and have your lunch and have a few beers or grogs with them.

34:00 After you had the conversation, 'Remember this, and remember that,' you realise how little in common you've got with them. They are following a different life from you. They have different interests now from you, whereas when they were young you were all together. This is the realization that comes to people I think. I'm not alone in this experience. It's been mentioned to me several times. You know, you go in and you say, "Oh I haven't seen you.

34:30 How have you been Bill? Come and have a beer." "Yes." "And remember this and remember that, and him, he did so and so and so and so." After it's all over you say, 'God, I wouldn't like to be like him.' It's not a depressing feeling but it's a realization of the actual position that you are in. You see him. Yes.

35:00 He's no more than an acquaintance, really. The real friends are the ones in your own crew who you keep in touch with and have lived with and have fought with, and those who you have shared disappointments with. It's a bit like being married, really.

And is there a memory that stands out for you as the

35:30 **strongest or the proudest memory from your air force days?**

I don't think so. The memories of that part of my life are in a separate department, if you can understand me. They are pushed aside, the memories I have. I value them, I value the memories, but

they are

36:00 not part of me any longer. They are in the past and it's a different world now – we hope. It's no better than it was in terms of the fighting, I can assure you of that. It is a realization that the world is the world and there's too many people in the world – that's the whole problem at the moment, too many people. You get a lot of rats put in

36:30 in together, you put two or three of them together they have the fun of the chase. You put a whole lot of them together in a confined space they fight like Kilkenny cats. It's the same as war.

Well, how would you like your crew and your time with the 37th Squadron to be remembered, do you think?

How would I like it to be remembered? Well, I don't know how I'd like it to be remembered. I'd like it to be remembered for

37:00 the value that was put into it by us. That's all. Whether that value was worthwhile, well that's for somebody else to decide, not me. I think I'm thankful in some way for the experience that I was given. In other ways I think, now, what a waste of money and what a waste of time,

37:30 fighting with people. You don't get anywhere. There are no winners and no losers. It's the aftermath that counts and if the result of the fighting leaves you in a worse position than you were before, there wasn't much point in starting it in the first place. So, I don't know, I'm not a psychologist or anything like that but that's the way I think of it. Today is to be lived, tomorrow is tomorrow.

38:00 **Well, we are coming to the end of our session today.**

That's funny. I thought you'd just started.

I'm wondering if there is anything we've left out that you would like to add or if there is anything that you would like to say to conclude the day?

I think that's enough. I've written a great long treatise there

38:30 and as soon as I'd finished it I remembered things that I should have put in it. I don't think so. At this stage of my life what I think I'd like to do is just remember the war and the fellows that were unfortunate enough to be still over there under the ground and many more, of course, who were never found.

39:00 **And why do you think it's important to remember the war?**

I don't know that it's important in one way. It's only important privately. I don't think it means two hoots what happened in the war. It's a different world; it's a different generation. The First World War, when I was a youngster, was remembered

39:30 because of the casualties. That was in my mind. It was remembered because of the number of people who lost their lives, unnecessarily as it happened, because that was the way wars were fought: you miss out on the first wave, send another wave in and let them get killed and keep doing it until you achieve your object. It's silly, it's silly, and I thought to myself, 'That is silly.' It is. It's a stupid way to run

40:00 anything. Much better to sit on the side and wait for your opportunity and then do what you want. That's the difference.

Well, thank you very much for speaking with us today. It's been a real pleasure to hear your story.

I find it's been … I won't say refreshing, but pleasing to me to be able to tell you a few things

40:30 which otherwise wouldn't have been brought up, I'm quite sure, because when I did my preparations I had to think hard and once I got into the thing of it, things came back one after the other, things that I thought I'd forgotten. Names I had forgotten, they didn't come back. But I'm at that age where you forget names so I am

41:00 excused.

Well, thank you. It's been a great day. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS