Australians at War Film Archive

Eric Willis - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:42 **Okay Eric if you just like to start off and give us a bit of a life summary?**

Well I was born at the Lady Bowen Hospital in Wickham Terrace in Brisbane. I was 8 days old I went out to a station at in the Burnett District. Hainault near Camboon and my father had taken a job as head stockman.

01:00 My mother was the station cook. And I was there until I was 8 year old and then we moved onto our own property at Shorelands which is only 10 miles away and started off. It wasn't even fully fenced at that stage so I had to turn around and help my Dad build yards do that sort of thing. And I had two short periods at school. I went to school at Koongal Convent near Lakes Creek at Rockhampton for 2 short periods. One when I was 8 year old and one when I

01:30 was 13/14. And in 1937 I went to Abergowrie Agricultural College near Ingham and I was there 7 months and that I ever had. I did all the rest all by correspondence. So and I joined the air force on my 21st birthday. My mother wouldn't let me go to the war cause my eldest brother had gone and she said that was enough. On my 21st birthday I went into Biloela and joined the air force or did and I was called up in January for a medical

02:00 and I was put on the reserve because I didn't have an education up to standards and I had to do 26 lessons. So during that period I studied durin' the night daytime lots a things and they called me up in September that year the following year 1942 and I went to Kingaroy and I did an initial. For the first time in my life I really got sick. I had the measles and I missed one course. Then I went down to Narrandera and

02:30 started the initial flying training on Tiger Moths and from there I was given embarkation leave and come home for 3 weeks and then I went back to Bradfield Park near Sydney. Then took the American ship [USS] West Point who was taking injured soldiers from the islands back to America. Had brought troops out here and was taking other sick back. There was 400 of us went on that and because the [HMAS] Centaur had just been sunk of here at the time they were very panicky and we were out at 4

03:00 o'clock in the parade ground ready to go on the buses we sat there till 9 o'clock and they come out and say, "Sorry lads. It's all off." Because one lad had gone into a phone book that night and phoned his girlfriend and say's, "We're off." And course they grabbed him before he got 10 yards from the parade ground. So he didn't get on the boat. So we took a circuitous route across the Pacific through New Zealand and down to South America so we were arrived 10 days overdue. So the Canadian air force thought we'd gone so they filled the western schools with Australians normally went so that was at

03:30 Calgary and Edmonton. So we were sent to Centralia in Ontario which was the first time Australians had been seen in that area and I did my full course there. And then we had leave we went to Chicago, New York, New Jersey and we took this ship from Halifax in Nova Scotia to England. We arrived in Glasgow on the Clyde and by train then we went down to Brighton and

04:00 we were billeted for the first time in the Grand Hotel right on the seafront. Which is where they tried to blow Margaret Thatcher up. Then we were moved to the Metropole next door. Typically air force like shifting you round all the time. And I think we spent nearly 4 months there doing nothing because it was winter time and the English training always slowed down during the winter. Whereas here they'd had 6 months for a course. 4 months a course. 2 months a course and you went on. But over there they had to wait until they finished it because of the weather

04:30 interruptions. And they sent us out to an Elementary Flying School which is Tiger Moths at Deskford because I mean in Australian in Queensland anyway there's only 3 western lines. In New South Wales there's only one. Whereas in England they're like that. So in England they're like that. So we learned to map read by flying these real slow aircraft. So we knew where we were. Then we went back to Brighton again for a while and from then we went out to Western England anyway to do

05:00 a beam course on Oxfords. And I flew Oxfords for the first time there and I witnessed a crash of two

Stirlings in that thing. With the King and Queen were watching because they were preparing for D Day at the time. Then we went on to an Operational Training Unit at Desborough. That was and that's where you crewed up. After the first fortnight they set all the crew. 12 pilots. 12 navigators. 12 engineers and so forth and

05:30 14 gunners and in that first fortnight they were supposed to sort yourselves out. If you didn't they sorted yourself out. But I had my crew by that time. And at the end of that course they asked us for volunteers to go overseas to do special duties. Well I was overseas and of the 3 crews 2 of them were Australian that volunteered. And that involved low level flying so we had to go to Wales to fly up and down valleys on moonless nights because in that it was for dropping spies

06:00 in Europe. To Yugoslavia and to Norway and because of that the mid upper gunner had to throw them out if they wouldn't jump out. So he had to go and do a parachute school so he knew what they were going through. And I mean in the First World War you'd up for lack of morale fibre if you refused to do anything but in the Second World War they didn't. If you didn't make the grade they'd just sent you back to your other unit which they'd recruited you from. Because they reckoned it was just a psychological thing that some people can't jump out of.

06:30 And from there then by the time we'd finished they course they'd decided they didn't want any special duties so only one of the crew got to do it and he was sent to Prestwick in Scotland to do Norway. And actually the first trip out he got shot up with a Focke Wulf and he lost one of his gunners and another was badly injured. And the second trip he lost a motor and had to boomerang and on the third trip he rode slap bang in the side of a mountain. That was the sort of work you were doing. So

07:00 but they decided they didn't want any more so I was sent to a Lancaster. I'd done a Stirling course to do that. So then I had to turn around and do another heavy conversion use onto Lancasters and I ended up in 62 Squadron in Mildenhall which is in Cambridgeshire and 60% of the pilots on both 15 and 162 were Australians because of Flight Sergeant Middleton. He was in that area at and he won a VC [Victoria Cross] where he was sent to Turin on a

07:30 Stirling and got shot up and lost one eye actually and other injuries and yet he got the thing over there and got it back again but because he couldn't see properly he wasn't game to land so he ordered the crew to bail out over England and he went out to sea to try to land it. But he misjudged it and the engineer stayed with him. So they both died and he got a posthumous award the of VC and it was the most laudatory VC citation ever issued. So Australians pilots were popular in that area. But I had 3 crew. There was myself the wireless operator and my

08:00 navigator were all Australians. The most of any other crew was too and that's where I spent the war ended while I was on the Squadron so I actually only did 21 operations. So then I come and home and went back to live on the farm with my parents. So that's basically it.

Okay that's good. Well let's talk a little bit about your parents. Can you tell us a bit about your parents?

Yeah well my father he was reared at Moore. That's 'Mooretown'

08:30 on the Brisbane Valley Road just near Kilcoy. Or over the road nearer to Yarraman and his father. Well he was born in Victoria but his father and mother were both Irish and they'd come out on the same boat and they married and he was born in but the rest of the family were born up here either at Blackbutt or at Moore. But when his mother died of cancer when she was only 40 something and he was 12 his father put him out as a

09:00 horseboy on a station the Brisbane River and he became interested in racehorses which became his passion for the rest of his life. And that's how he met my mother because he was training race horses for a fellow the name of Mark Bell who owned a farm next door to the Enoggera Army Camp during the First World War. Mum was born in Scotland and she come out here when she was 17. In 1913 she come out with her family and they lived rented a house from Mark Bell who owned this place

09:30 and I got a photograph of them there on the veranda of the place and she met Dad because he was the racehorse trainer for this Mark Bell and he used to ride. Actually where the essential services are now at Kedron. You know opposite the Kedron pub? There was a TAFE [Technical and Further Education college] course there at one stage. Well that was a racecourse in 1914. There was a 400 yard small trotting small circuit and it was used for pony racing

10:00 and Dad's this horse that he trained for Mark Bell she held the record for that course on a quarter mile. That's very small for a racecourse but that's where it was. And they married but anyway Mum decided they wanted to go bush so Dad. She applied for this job at Hainault and so they moved up there when I was just 8 days old.

Why did she decide she wanted to go bush?

Well my father was a bit too fond of the alcohol.

10:30 Irish blood I suppose and she though she'd have a better life if she was away from the pubs they were actually 90 mile to the nearest one they were and Lindsay Palms who was the manager of the station for the Palms family he had just come home from the First World War. After the war was over he was an officer so he'd gone to America and he was on his way home and he'd bought his first car which was a

Buick and he was driving home from Brisbane. So we went by train

11:00 to Mundubbera which was the end of the line in those days and he picked us up from Mundubbera and took us from there and took us to Hainault. And we were there till 1928. And we left he went bankrupt because he was too fond of the alcohol too and the Depression and so forth and the parents who lived in Sydney decided they wanted out of it and so they just sold that up. But the mother said, “Lindsay’s gotta get something of it.” And they had Hainault’s, Glandore and Indale. They had three properties and so the mother

11:30 and she owned Glandore but she insisted Lindsay have a pick. So he picked Glandore and they moved there and a family by the name of Hamilton’s bought Hainault’s and they kept Dad on for 6 months and then said you know didn’t need him because they didn’t want a married man on the place. They just wanted single. They’d sacked all the rest of the staff. They only wanted single stockmen so we moved 10 miles over to a place which Dad had actually balloted for in 1922 but he’d been savin’ his money to sort a get the money to stock it.

12:00 So we had to start off in the middle of the Depression so it was a bit of a battle. And as I said I went to the Koongal Convent for 6 months then they had to take me home because of the cost of the thing. And then later on when I was sitting for the scholarship they sent me back again for 2 years to the convent there. And then I failed my. I was a poor student actually. I was daydreaming. And when I wanted to join the air force my mother said I was mad because I wouldn’t be able to concentrate. I’d do this. I’d do that. I’d kill meself anyway so. But I proved her

12:30 wrong because I did very well in my flying in those sort a things. And so but they both lived to be in their 80’s. They retired to Woody Point actually after the war and they lived there till they. They both died in Redcliffe. So that’s. Is that enough or do you want more?

Yeah. What was life like out there?

It was hard but I loved it. I loved bein’ on the land and I mean I grew up. That’s why after the

13:00 war. When I was bein’ discharged the fella said to me what was I going to do? I said, “I’m going back to manage my parents’ property because I was always supposed to have inherited the property because I was the only one that would work there.” But he said, “Well you’re mad.” He said, “You should be flying because we’ve spent 80,000 pounds on teaching you to fly.” He said, “You’ve got a good career.” He said, “Do it.” And he was right too but he insisted to make out two applications one to Australian Airlines which was Kingsford Smith’s lot which were eventually would become

13:30 Ansett and one’s the Queensland line which owned by Ron Adair which was based in Brisbane. Well I never got a reply from them so I didn’t bother about that. And it was rather odd though that Queensland 3 years later Queensland airlines rang me up and offered me a job a second time because they’d offered me one the first time but I didn’t know about it. My mother had interfered in the communications.

14:00 And but my father had just developed cancer and they told him he had 6 months to 2 years to live at the outside and so I knocked the chance back for a second time. I wanted to take it and I offered to pay a manager out of my salary but Mum insisted, “No. You’re gonna get the place. You gotta run it.” So that was it. So I gave it up. But when she died and I had to go up that my sisters place to clean out the tin truck I found the two letters from Australian Airlines and Queensland Airlines offering me a job.

Why did she keep them from you?

Because she wanted me to.

14:30 We’d gone on holidays. After I come home I come and I was discharged on the 10th of December but I went home but then they had already booked holidays for themselves at Redcliffe at the time. And so we come back there but I couldn’t go there because the boarding house was full and so I stayed with one of her friends actually who was her bridesmaid who was living at Scarborough at the time and I stayed with them until after Christmas. In the meantime these letters had come to Shorelands and then they’d been reposted back to Mrs Smith’s boarding house.

15:00 So she got them and opened them and read them and filed them cause she didn’t want me to take the job flying. So that was that. It’s the only regret I got in life that I didn’t go flying again. Because I didn’t get it anyway because the one that worked at home always gets into all the trouble so they sold it to a younger brother instead. So I didn’t get it. So that’s why so I had actually in the meantime I had put all my savings into buying a farm for my brother and when we went to the

15:30 agricultural bank they insisted I put my name. Mum said, “No. Because he’s gonna get the other pipe you know. This is he’s got to do something for the older brother.” Anyway the agricultural bank insisted that my name be put on the thing because I was providing the money for it. And anyway my brother went broke on it and so I he had a bit debt on it and I cut that down by two thirds and then I struck a 10 year drought myself and I went broke on it. Agricultural bank took it over so I sold it. And because of the

16:00 just before that my mother and father had sold the property me younger brother who had never worked for them and he had a 52,000 acre place at Charters Towers as well. Which he’d balloted for and which I’d helped him get. But he got the property and I didn’t. So I sold out and went down to New South

Wales and I worked managing a small farm for the Sisters of Mercy ran an orphanage on a 300 acre farm and then after 3 years I didn't particularly like that so I

16:30 went and another chap who I knew talked me into going and managing a skin shed for him out at Wodonga where they dried the sheepskins and cattle skins for the export trade. But I didn't like that so I saw a job for insurance and I went into insurance and I was in insurance for 18 years. And then when I retired I come up here. I come I reckoned I was 20 years in exile. So I come back to Queensland. And then I got a job I was offered a job

17:00 with the National Party as a field officer so I did that for 13 years. Travelled all round Queensland as a field officer and so that takes me up. I was 78 when I gave that up. I was 68. No I was 78 when I finished when I decided I'd had enough of travelling and wanted to be home for a change. So I gave that up when I was 78. So that's my life story.

What about growing up

17:30 **in terms of the daily routine, what was that like? You were so far away from everything?**

Yeah. Well we had our own vegetable garden which I did down it was right down the bottom. We had a well at the bottom of the hill where the house was and that was the only permanent water so the vegetable garden was down there and I worked that. And we had our own milk cows and made our own butter and Mum made our own bread in those days. She used to bake twice a week make the bread and

18:00 so forth. And initially we used to buy meat from the station which surrounded us on three sides. The Walloon Pastoral Company own by the Shaw Company. It was 160,000 acres I think they had and we had 9. And they fell in three sides and they used to come backwards and forwards mustering because they had musters one side then they'd do. And they used to sell us meat and but later on we used to kill with a neighbour and we'd take half and he'd take half and then he'd kill the next

18:30 time and we'd do the same thing. So that's how we got our meat. But we grew all our own vegetables. Made all our own meat. Cook all our own biscuits and so. And basically we'd probably go to town once every month once every 6 weeks to get the essentials. And when I Biloela didn't exist when I first went to Hainault cause I was born in 1924 Biloela wasn't settled until 1924. The first settlers arrived there 1924 and the first time I remember goin there was in…

Sorry Eric we'll just.

19:00 Sorry. I shouldn't a done that should I?

Yeah. No no. (interruption)

You were talking about Biloela.

Yeah well I hated going to town because it was 32 mile from home we had to go and there was 18 gates because all the settlers were just arriving and they all just fenced straight across the road and there was no grids in those days but they started to appear later on. And I remember one instance my eldest brother went off to boarding school. I sort a don't even remember being him at home

19:30 when we were at Hainault. He used to come home for holidays naturally. But I don't remember much about that. But he was at boarding school and coming home and I always had to open the gates because I was the oldest at home hop out and open. Some of them dragged on the ground. Some were wire gates. Some were hitched on. They were all sorts. And it used to take up to 2 hours to do the 32 mile to go to town cause it was just ruts through the bush you bogged and got. But this time we went in and picked up Jack at the station at Biloela when we come to the first gate I didn't budge and "C'mon

20:00 Eric. Open the gate." And I said, "No, Jack's the eldest now." He said, "But he's on holidays." So I still had to open the gates so. And but gradually they disappeared and bits and pieces were road up made up after bits of gravel here and there but it wasn't. Well even when we left there you could still get bogged on the road to Biloela and that was 1968 and there was no electricity. I think Biloela got electricity in the late '60s sometime. Early no late

20:30 '50s when they got Biloela when they built that powers at Gladstone. But since I've left there they have put a line through there to Taroom and Miles and all the places along that have got. And we had no phone either. The nearest phone was 3 miles away which was a party line and I know at one stage when I was eleven I got appendicitis. I got very, very sick with vomiting all day. So Mum rung the ambulance at Theodore which was the nearest ambulance and that was 48 mile away from where we were

21:00 and we had to go down to the Walloon off station which also had a phone and it was on the veranda and it only communicated with the Walloon Homestead. So Mum rang the Walloon Homestead then they rang the ambulance man and he was out at a job. So he didn't come until fairly late and he diagnosed it as appendicitis urgent and he raced me straight down to Rowan. There was a private hospital in Rowan at the time. Mum said, "We

21:30 can't afford a private hospital." He said, "Well you know you're going to because you won't get to Mount Morgan." And they operated on me at half past five the next morning. There was a doctor there. And I spent normally in those days you spent 2 weeks in hospital for appendicitis but I was there for 8 days

and Dad come down. He was away droving at the time because to keep the place going most of the places had sacked most of their stockmen and they all had one but when they had to muster the big places they had to get casuals. So they got people like my father

22:00 that had worked on that sort a stuff all their lives and he'd go and do mustering at Hainault was one place where we'd come from. He used to have to go there and help them because two men couldn't muster Hainault. And he'd go droving with different taking to the sale yards in Innisfail. So he was away when this happened. When he come home he come down and picked us up and took us home again and then I wasn't supposed to do any lifting but I had to train his racehorse while he was away and cut the wood and milk the cows and all those sort a jobs.

22:30 But then old Doc Nudson, he was doing his medical studies when the first war broke out and so he joined up straight away as ambulance bearer and he'd been through the war and so he knew all about putting people back together again. And actually while I was at Hainault just before we left there Dad was putting up a new fence for these people and it was my sisters birthday and he'd taken us out. It had just rained and one a the creeks was running so we went there for a birthday picnic while he was fencing and

23:00 my little sister wet her pants while I was there and so I was set up to the top of the hill to the bucket to get a clean pair and running down I tripped on a thing and went straight into barbed wire and cut my top lip off. It just hung by a thread there and again it was Doc Nudson that had to come out. And he's just laid me out on the kitchen table under the kerosene lamp and sent Dad up to the stables for horse hair and Mum boiled it up and he stitched it back on with horsehair without an anaesthetic. Because if anaesthetic would take too long to heal up and they leave a big scar. So he stitched it on

23:30 with out any anaesthetic. And he reckoned I was the bravest lad he'd ever seen because I never cried. It was probably so numb by that time. But it was hangin' down on my lip the whole this lip was hangin' down on my lip here and if it'd just come off I'd had a hair lip the rest of my life. And that was twice that he come to my aid. And I've forgotten where I was now. Going into Biloela in those sort a things but I mean it wasn't till I got older that I.

24:00 Even then we'd only go about once a month or so. So we just amused ourselves. I'd go shooting on a. We hardly ever worked on a Sunday unless the cattle had to be dipped because they were tricky or something like that and Dad was busy. But I'd go shooting of a Sunday afternoon or do anything like that or break in horses whatever's going. Cause I was helping him break in horses from the time I was 8 or 9 year old. I learnt to ride when I was 4 so.

24:30 **So your older brother was away?**

He was away at boarding school all that time.

So who did you play with?

I had a younger brother and a sister and that's why I. Because that with the older I was the oldest so I had to do all the chores. And that's why when Jack come home I thought well he's the oldest now. But it didn't work. So that's what I did up until. And then I went to Abergowrie for a. It's the only time I ever enjoyed school and I did very, very well at Abergowrie because we were helping with the

25:00 growing of the cane and we had to milking teams. They had 50 - 60 milkers there and we used to have teams and we'd like you'd do the morning once and then you'd miss two then you'd do that. I think we used to do a session every two months or something like that we had to milk the cows by hand too. They had no machines. And separate the milk and cart the milk up to the thing and feed the pigs and that sort a thing. But and we weren't allowed to cut

25:30 cane because that was a union job and that was very strict in those days. But when we were cutting it to feed. We could cut cane to feed the cows but we couldn't cut it to send to the mill. And we did our woodwork. Tin smithing. Timberwork. That's where I got my love for doing timberwork actually. I got a. The end of the year the brother said well we had to make something decent to take home to our parents to show what we'd done. So I made a tea tray out of silky oak and inlaid it and that was my gift to Mum for the Christmas. So

26:00 and I come home and when the war broke out we decided we'd grow cotton. And Jack had gone when he left school he went to Gatton for 4 years and did animal husbandry. A diploma in animal husbandry and he also had a steam ticket and he also had butter and cream testing certificate which they did all those things at Gatton at the time as part of the courses. And that's how I come to get Abergowrie because he got a job as a lecturer at Abergowrie and

26:30 assistant farm manager. He run the piggery and the other bloke run the. Cause the other fella knew nothing about pigs. So Jack run the diary and the pigs and he lectured us on animal husbandry. Dairying. Agriculture and those sort a things he did the lectures on those. He was the first lay teacher in the school. And then but he left that. Dad insisted I couldn't go back to do me junior cause he needed me at home so I stayed at. Again I had to go home and help work the farm.

27:00 But Jack left to come home so that I could go. Dad said still wouldn't. Cause Jack wasn't much good on the farm. So we decided to grow cotton and then Jack joined the air force and went off and then I wanted to go too but no. And me younger brother he was at Nudgee at that stage and he come home

and wanted to join the navy and Mum wouldn't let him. So he lay on his bed for 6 months then he cleared off. And he went droving and he forged his birth certificate by getting it copied changing the date on it then having it recopied. And he went and joined the

27:30 army when he was only 16. No it must a been before he was 16 because he was on Balikpapan he was turned 16. Fighting on the battle of Balikpapan in Borneo. Cause he was 6 foot. He was like me. He was tall. But he was the one that inherited the property eventually. So that's the way life turns out.

How did the Depression impact you?

It was very hard because as I say Dad used to have to go out and work

28:00 to get money just to keep cause we were building up the herd on the place. And there were times when we run out a things and that's why we couldn't go to town very often either cause it cost money with petrol wasn't it was only bout probably 16 cents a gallon in those days. But you had to be very careful with all those sort a things. Cause as I say even all the big stations sacked nearly all their men bar. You know they had one or do it all themselves or all with casual labour because things. Cattle prices collapsed.

28:30 Like I can remember Dad selling cows and calves for a pound a head. That's 2 dollars for a cow and a calf. Nowadays you pay 6-700 dollars for a cow and calf. So things were really tough at the start off of that. But we survived and the property was still going I think me young brother well he drew that block up north and went on that and he did very well on that and then he eventually bought Shorelands from my parents and then. Only for 5,000 dollars actually which. It took em 18 months to

29:00 get it through the stamp duty cause they didn't believe that was a realistic price but anyway they eventually got it through. I didn't even know at the time. I found out by accident. But then he went on to buy other place out at Emerald. Both he and me eldest brother they both died one of. Jack died about 5 days before his 72nd birthday and Les died about 3 months after his 71st birthday. So they were both almost 72 when they both died.

29:30 So there's only my sister and I left. We're the middle two and we're still going. Irene was 80 in November and I'll be 83 tomorrow. It was a hard life but we enjoyed it. I mean it was the way we lived and. But after the war when I helped Jack buy this diary farm I had to go and help him for a while then I had a row with his wife and went back to Shorelands. And then of course my father developed cancer and I was left. I lived 5 years on my own. Running the place on my own for 5

30:00 years. But then when Jack got into trouble on the place I got married at that time and my wife didn't get on with my parents so I moved over onto the farm. But I still had to do all the mustering at Shorelands. As a matter of fact Dad used to come down to. He come home because he'd got over his cancer but he used to come down to Brisbane for all the races and this particular day I was just having I hadn't finished milking and he rang up and

30:30 said he was going to Brisbane. That the two wells had trouble with the pumps. So I went over and fixed these two pumps and I'd just got home and sat down to lunch and a fella come and knocked on the door and he said he wanted directions to Shorelands cause he was coming down to manage it. And I said, "What do you mean, manage it?" And he said, "Well your brother's bought the property from your parents and he's asked me to manage it for him." And he'd called at people further down the road because he thought he'd gone too far

31:00 and they knew all about it. I didn't. And they said, "Eric'll be able to give you directions. Go up and call at his place. He'll tell ya how to get there." So that's how he come to knock on my door. And I said, "Well he's not there." He said, "Oh yes he is because he arranged for me to come and see the place." I said, "Well he's not. I just left there, and," I said, "he's gone to Brisbane." So anyway I took him over and showed him round where the things were and what was there and so forth and so on. So that's how I found out it had been sold.

31:30 **What was your reaction?**

I was very, very broken hearted because I'd put all me life into it. And I rang them up that night and I told them what I thought. But anyway I made it up afterwards. But it was hard.

You've made some sacrifices as well?

And the fact that I was still working the place and didn't know it had been sold. Doin' all the dirty work. But anyway that's the way life turns out. You make your own

32:00 bed you lie in it.

How did your mum cope being out in you know in such a strange countryside coming from Scotland?

Well she's often said when she first went there because she came from Glasgow and she'd only been in the country 6 years and she said, "If she could've got out the first week she was there she'd a gone." Because there was only the.

32:30 There was 3 other women on the place but there was the manager's wife and his two sisters. They still

lived at the homestead. Well his sisters weren't always there. They went down to their parents in Sydney and so it was a very, very lonely life and she had to cook for 8 men as well as you know look after 3 little children or 2 as there was at the time. Then there was three and she. She actually fell in love with the country and just loved it. You know

33:00 bought this property and we lived there for. Dad always wanted to sell it cause people. Well the Walloon tried to get rid of us because they had had it on occupation licence for years which you know too mean to have it incorporated in the lease cause they'd had to pay higher rental. So they had to knock but the Crown Land Ranger by the name of Tropman had told Dad he said you know, "You're mad workin' for somebody else. You should have your own property." And Dad said, "Well how would I get it?" He said, "I know a 5,000 acre place that's nobody's ever claimed." He said, "If you put in for it," and he said, "I'll back it up and you'll get it." So Dad, he provided the

33:30 paperwork and Dad put it in and they yes they sent it. From then on the Shaws tried everything. I remember at one stage they offered Dad a thousand pounds for it during the Depression and he was ready to take it but Mum wouldn't have it. She'd made that her life and she was happy to live there. Cause there was less hassles with pubs in the bush than there was in town. So no she coped.

Were there any problems when you went into town with your dad?

Well yes if he went in. Yes if he went

34:00 in. I remember once we went into town there'd been a very heavy storm and we had crossed a little black soil gully about that deep. It had washed right out and you had go up around the end of it like that. And a course we went into town and Dad had gone into pub and going home and he missed the thing and I yelled out and he did break and stop. He broke that far from it would be 6 foot ditch he'd a gone straight into it nose first. So he backed. He wouldn't let anyone else drive though. He wouldn't let Mum drive and she could drive. And for that reason because he was

34:30 away so much working outside the property I had to work it and she used to have to do most of the driving anyway to go to town. But when he was there he wouldn't let her. He was one a these men that you know that was his job to drives the car. But he was he just couldn't go to town unless he got he had too much to drink. That's why I've never drank. I've suffered too much from my and my sister didn't either and my oldest brother was the only one that did. But I mean

35:00 the rest of us sort of put us both off for life basically.

Was he quite strict? Your father was he quite strict? Like his discipline was it harsh discipline?

No he left that. Well in one way it was. You know we all had to work and do our jobs and that so. But Mum was the disciplinarian really. You know she used to try and make us do our school work. We when I wasn't busy helping Dad

35:30 we had our regular school hours. We started school at 9 o'clock we knocked off at 12 o'clock we had a 10 minute break for smoko all that but half the time I wasn't there because I was down cutting timber or snigging loaves because there was no yards there was no nothing on the place. And we had to build a little cow yard to start with and then we gradually added to that and we gradually built a dip and we had an old grey horse that was broken into harness and I used to sniggle all the timber in and I used to help Dad dig the holes while he was doin' other jobs. And

36:00 I'd cut the jogs in the things and he'd knock them out and all that type of stuff and lift the rails up. And I'd be snigging the timber up while he was working the timber. And then we puddled the dip. It was you put a foot a' clay on the bottom. Well I had to cut all that up from the creek on a horse drawn sleigh. Cut it up put it in put water in it and then puddle it with my feet and you put a foot in it and he made all the slabs and we put big uprights in it and we built it up gradually went and we filled

36:30 up the sides about that much full of clay right up and that was it was 40 foot. Overall it was 40 foot long. The main part was 12 foot by about 12 foot 6 wide and then it come gradually up and it was 20 odd feet walk out where the cattle come into a draining pan. But I mean that's how I spent my life doin' those sort a thing and because of that then Mum made me do me school work on Saturdays and Sundays. Catch up on what I lost before. And our lessons used to be sent down to Brisbane and they'd send them back. So I was virtually

37:00 educated by the correspondence school.

Did your mother enjoy doing that?

Yeah. She taught us all. So well that was the life she chose and that was the way it went. And she was happy in the bush and being on her own. Being independent. Like when I joined the air force because I hadn't a Junior certificate which you were supposed to have I lacked some of the maths

37:30 algebra logarithms and there was something else. I've forgotten what they called it now. But and I had to learn all those. They gave you a 23 lessons and they it was like the correspondence school they sent them out but they were far better set out because I'd never handled algebra at school and yet with them I was getting 100% by the time I finished the course. And I used to after tea I'd study till midnight and

I'd get up at 4 o'clock and study till 6 and then I'd go and milk the cows and chop the wood and fix up and then I'd go

38:00 and muster do whatever. And I did that for 9 months and 4 hours sleep was all I had for 9 months a night and then I'd study all the weekends as well. And when I joined the air force and they categorised you. They had some silly system like A-3 B-23 or some stupid thing like that. When I said and I said, "What's that mean?" And he said, "Well you're fit for air gunner wireless operator only." I says, "Why?" And he says, "Well you've got one lazy eye." And I says, "Isn't there anything I can do about it?" And he says, "If you want to you can."

38:30 And that meant I had no depth perception so like one eye moved like that and the other eye'd move like that so when you're coming into land you wouldn't know at what height you were off the ground. Because you might think you're up here you might think you've still got and you might drive into the ground. And so he gave me exercises to do which was just watch a fly on the ceiling at night time up and down and cross ways and then around for 10 minutes every night. Well I did that. And the only thing they tested me on when I went back when I was called up was my eyesight and I passed it and I was

39:00 graded as a pilot. Because Bert Hinkler was my hero and I wanted to be a pilot. So I didn't care what it cost me I was gonna do it. It wasn't easy sleeping on 4 hours a night when you're doin' manual work all the time. Growin' cotton and chipping cotton and mustering cattle dipping cattle and all that ringbarking. All heavy manual work all that all the time. But I was dedicated to do it and I did it.

Was part of it also getting away from the farm at all?

39:30 No no. I just wanted. No because I loved that work on the farm but because the war was on I wanted to go to the war and I wanted to fly and when I. I loose track sometimes. But that's right and in Canada my flight commander recommended me for commission but they wouldn't give it to me cause I didn't have an education. I wasn't educated enough. I didn't have my Junior. I didn't have a bit a paper to prove

40:00 it. So they wouldn't give it to me. But when I went to England. That'll probably come into the other part of it when you talk about the war anyway.

Well we're at the end of tape.

I see.

Tape 2

00:31 Okay yeah. Where were we up to though? You'll have to prompt me.

Where there any aboriginal helpers out there?

Yes. At Camboon station they used to vary there but they had up to 200 when I was a child. And most they used to employ some of them at mustering time and that sort a thing. There was a couple of permanents but mostly the stockmen were white. But one of them was an outstanding one old Joe Ivory. He

01:00 eventually become a station overseer. Like Walloon the Camden Pastoral Company owned several properties. They had 250,000 acres I think but and he was permanent on the station and eventually become the head stockman later on. But they used to get these people and they used to provide them with tea sugar and meat. They'd give them that and tobacco. But then it become too much of a drain because as the other

01:30 parts died out people from there were coming in and joining them and that's when it grew up to about 200 and the Bells reckoned it was costing them too much money so they got the head stockman at that stage who was Billy Walsh to set up a store in Camboon. And Camboon up until then consisted of the station. Walsh's Boarding House. A school of arts and a post office. That's all that was there. But it was like a lot of stations were like that. They had those sort of things with them. And the post office was also the line depot for

02:00 Theroom to Theodore to Innisfail and to Rockhampton way and the woman Mrs Sinclair was the postmistress and her husband was the linesman. He used to ride the lines on a horse so far and then somebody from the other end would do them the other way. But it was a lot at the Camboon Races you'd always see all these blacks there'd be at the races and they'd be in the town but there was none on Hainault or any at Hildura, any'a the other stations around there but that was

02:30 the tribes local headquarters and they were there right up until Victor Bell died. He was an Englishman actually and was Major Victor Bell because he'd been in the British army had a permanent commission. When he retired and the young Bill Bell took over after the war he cleaned the lot out. Cleaned them all off. They had to either go to the Woorabinda Mission or find their own way what they did. He closed the whole thing down and got rid of them.

Why did he do that?

Well because they were too much of a nuisance round the place.

03:00 By this time they were getting into the alcohol and so forth and they weren't of any use to him basically because when you'd want them for something they'd be walkabout somewhere. They'd be gone off. So he decided he'd rather have permanent staff on the station and just ordered them all out and got rid of them. I think most of them went to I don't know how many was there at that stage because I went away to the war and that but at a pick when I was a small boy up to 200 used to be there.

03:30 So you know I grew up with all those sort a people and they did a lot a them were drovers and that. They did casual work around other places too labouring work. But mostly droving and that type of thing and mustering as casuals. But there was old Joe Ivory. There was old Joe Ubbadulla the Syrian hawker. There was old Joe Sinclair the post linesman and Dad reckoned Eric was a sissy name so he christened me Joe cause

04:00 Joseph's me second name and I was known as Joe but when I went off to boarding school my mother put her foot down and said I had to be called Eric because three old Joe's. She said, "You'll be old Joe Willis by the time you're 26." Cause none of them were really old but they were. I dunno what fitted in with I dunno. But they were all called old Joe this old Joe that. So Mum said I'd be a. That's why I got Eric as a name when I was 8 year old and I hated it too. So Dad promptly christened me Doolan and from then on to him and all his mates

04:30 I was still either Joe or Doolan. Cause I was a wild Irishman he reckoned cause I could fight.

What kind of fights did you get into?

I didn't get into many but when I was stirred up. There's was one of the stockman he used to teach me to box. He taught me to box when I was only little. I remember him getting me on the floor you know and one of the old station hands, Charlie Brown, he always begrudged the thing cause he said Mrs Willis was awful. She wouldn't Eric'd a been a world champion if they'd a let him he was so fast on

05:00 his feet. But actually fighting never appealed to me really. I mean but I was taught to do it and I did it properly and I could do it. Only person I ever got into a real bad blood fight was with me younger brother. He come accused me of stealing some of his cattle and he got what he deserved. But anyway that's by the board.

So were you hearing much news about what was happening in Europe and Hitler?

05:30 Yes because we used to get the papers. We had a twice weekly mail service by that time. And that was another thing. When we first went to Shorelands I used to have to ride the 10 mile to Glandore to get the mail because there was no mail where we were and there was no mail on the other side from the Callide side at that stage either. It used to come out as far as Drumburle which was further away than what Glandore was. So I used to have to ride over to the Palm's place on me pony and get the mail twice a week. Unless we had bad weather and

06:00 Mum'd put it off. But normally I went twice a week Wednesday's and Saturdays and got the mail. But we used to get all the daily mail it was in those days and that kept us in touch with the world. And Mum was in a bush book club that's why you haven't seen out upstairs. You did. But there's a library upstairs and there's a library downstairs. And there's a. There's books everywhere in our place cause that's how we. That was our amusement. We read books. And when we got past the Santa

06:30 Claus stage that's what we always got for Christmas presents we always got books. And the correspondence school always sent every pupil a book. Every year at the end of the year you got a book from the correspondence school. So reading was our relaxation. So we kept no we knew all about what was going on. And by that time we had a radio too which only worked in wintertime basically. In summertime you used to get all this crack and bang. You couldn't hear it when there was a storm on.

07:00 So and basically early mornings in summertime it was good. But by round midday you got too much interference with static. These old battery operated radio's you couldn't hear on them. I still remember my father trying to hear the races on Saturdee afternoon. "Put me bloody foot through the thing." Cause he couldn't hear what was going on. Just when it'd get to the end of the barrier it'd go rrrrrmmmmm that was the end. He wouldn't know who won the race. So

07:30 no but that was the way life was those days.

So where were you in September '39 when war was declared?

At Shorelands.

Can you remember that day?

No. I don't actually remember what happened or what I did or anything like that. I haven't got that sort of memory. But you know we heard all that on the radio and probably we sort a stuck around it and we were at it probably every news we'd

08:00 listen to it. Particularly as I say in the morning. We'd always get the morning bulletins because they were always free of static. At nighttime you could hardly ever hear it. In wintertime it was all right you could hear. But in summertime it was almost impossible. Sometime it'd be good. You'd have a clear day

like you do but normally it wasn't worth it. But no we were kept in touch with it. Knew what was going on all the time in that regard because of the papers and the radio. Because there was no TV [television] in those days. That didn't come in till after the war.

08:30 **So you said you got cotton? That's when you started? You got into cotton?**

Yeah. We grew cotton because they were urging people to grow cotton for the war effort. Because Australia wasn't producing enough cotton and it all had to be imported and that meant shipping and shipping was expensive. So we cleared 30 acres down on the creek side and we grew two crops of cotton there before I went to the war. And then of course that was the only farming I ever done on Shorelands. We'd never grew cotton. But

09:00 I dunno how many bugs there are in the world but they all eat cotton and oh. You know if you get rain at the wrong time if it's just half open and gets rain it just sets like jelly and it's no good. They use it for flock making and things like that but it's virtually valueless. But fortunately in Queensland you didn't get a lot of winter rain. It usually started. It didn't start opening till you had you first frosts

09:30 and then that'd sort of bowl it over. They've got five little fingers or four little fingers and it gradually comes out and the stuff. And you just go along and actually you'd get very sore fingers if you're not careful because you keep hitting the points of the finger. They come to a very fine point and you get a backache too because you're bending down and it's about that high. You're bending down all the time with this bag around your waist. But then you take it and put it in a bail then you start all over again. So I grew two crops before I actually was called up for the air force

10:00 **So had your brother Jack already left by then?**

Yeah he had left. The first crop he helped with but then he joined the air force and gone off then too. He joined up 12 months before no it wasn't quite 12 months before. I've forgotten the date that he joined up now but he joined up before me. But he never got out of Australia. He went to Sandgate was the reception centre when he joined up. And then he went from there to Parkes and did 6 months in

10:30 a radio course then he went to Evans Head to do a gunnery course which was only 2 months or something and then he went to a squadron up north. By that time the Japs [Japanese] had come into the war and all his intake was kept here. And he was a wireless operator air gunner. But he did 2 tours up. First was on old Hudson Venturers and they went into the drink one night coming home from Timor because they flew into a cu-nim [cumulonimbus] cloud and both motors

11:00 iced up. There was no de-icing on the Venturers and so but fortunately he got a radio message out to headquarters in Darwin and a Naval launch picked them up after they'd been in the water just half an hour. But he said he thought the sharks were gonna get him before Tojo did. But there they were in their Mae Wests dangling their legs in the shark infested waters. But then he went off and he was adjutant at Perth I think. Cause he was promoted to pilot officer while he was up there

11:30 and then he had a break and then he went back and did another tour on Mitchells. And one of his pilots I don't know which one was fellow by the name of Norman and he set up bush pilots from Cairns. The Bush Pilots Airline. They did all that Northern Territory area and he set that up that bloke. And he was still alive when Jack died because he went to his funeral down at Southport. I can't I dunno his first name and I didn't meet him because I didn't get to the funeral. We'd had

12:00 10 inches of rain that night and the road was cut at St Johns Creek. And the police wouldn't let us through so I couldn't get down. I was supposed to be one of the pall bearers but I couldn't get it. So but he never got out of Australia. But I went to Canada to do my training.

So tell us so you went and joined up the first time but you had a problem with your eyesight and then you joined up

12:30 **went again and you got through?**

See I joined up but because I didn't have the education and there was a backlag in training and they put me on the air force reserve. I was on the air force reserve and during that time they used that time to educate me up to the standard they wanted my maths and that type of thing because if you had to be a navigator you had to be good at maths. But see I actually got enlisted in the September so that was from January till December till September I was on the reserve and by that time they'd made more room.

13:00 Because they were. When the Japs came into it there was a great huge influx of volunteers well those schools just couldn't cope with them all at the one time and so there was a backlag getting in anyway. Most people were put on the reserve and in the meantime I used that to correct my eye problems at the same time. And it wasn't because of that it was just because there wasn't the training facilities and by the time that happened the Yanks [Americans] had taken over Sandgate so we went to Kingaroy as an Initial Training School. And

13:30 while we were there The Wirraway squadron from down south come up on their way up to New Guinea and they did their gunnery course at there. They were virtually wiped out when they got up there. I think they shot down one Zero. Bloke by the name of Archer got the honour of fighting the only Wirraway pilot to shoot down a Zero. The rest of them got shot down themselves. But and during that

period that's when I got the measles and I woke up in the morning and I was

14:00 so sick. I went up to the hospital and they said, "Oh sick parade doesn't start till 8 o'clock, you gotta wait." You know and so my bed wasn't made so I was put on a charge for doing something contrary to station standing orders. I didn't fold my blankets up. Cause we slept on the floor at Kingaroy because it was a new station they didn't have beds for us even. They just had straw palliasses you used to fill it up with oat and straw and then we had two blankets and a couple a sheets and you had to fold em up S-fashion and put your

14:30 blankets on top and put your pillow on top a that and put your shoes either side and your kit bag one side and your shoes on the other side. Well mine wasn't like that so I was put on a charge. But I got out of it because I had a medical certificate to show that I was you know I was at the hospital at the time and I couldn't make it. And then later on and, of course I missed a course because a that I was in hospital. They thought I had scarlet fever cause the spots didn't come out and the doctor used to come 4 times a day looking at me for 3 days and then suddenly he

15:00 come one morning and he's opened me shirt up and he's, "Oh," he said, "You're right." And that's about the last time I saw him. So because it was just the measles. It wasn't scarlet fever. And then when I got going again with the next course then I got mumps. Not mumps yeah mumps. Not mumps chicken pox the one that comes out on your face. I got chicken pox so then I missed another course and I went back one. And then as I say the Queensland people normally went to Temora so as to keep them

15:30 all together but there was 12 boys at Bradfield Park doin' their initial training that wanted to go home to Temora to do their initial training and so therefore showed a little bit of you know give and take. So they rang up Kingaroy and said, "Well you've got 12 blokes up there who are prepared to go down to Narrandera?" So course all those blokes were supposed to go to Narrandera. So I put my hand up because I was sick of laying footpaths. They were trying to lay footpaths and get

16:00 lawns down so as to cut this red dust out which was causing so much eye troubles. And so 12 of us volunteered to go down to Narrandera so we ended up with New South Welshmen and it was all virtually our crew all went up to Temora. And I did quite well for a start but then I got quite raggy and. But by that time so many had been scrubbed and the doctor. The doctor there Dr Sweeten had been telling them that they were pushing young fellas too far too fast

16:30 you know this was causing the troubles. And so because they were getting near the bottom of the basket they gave me 10 days leave but said I couldn't go home to Queensland because that would contradicted the rest thing that I needed. But I had good friends in Sydney so I went to Sydney for the week and come back and that put me back another course. So I had all these set backs all the time. So and I finished the course quite successfully from then. I had no further troubles and then I went to and then I was

17:00 sent to Canada for advanced flying training.

So how long was that initial training before you left for Canada?

The initial training at Kingaroy should a been 2 months but I was there for 4 I think it was. And then the one at Narrandera was 6 months and. I bought all that paperwork with me so I'd know all that off hand but I haven't got it.

That's okay.

Roughly.

Cause you were part of the air force reserves at this stage?

17:30 No only. Once they called me up in September I was part of the air force and they issued. They signed us up in Brisbane and they put us on the train and sent us up to Kingaroy and when we got there the first day you were issued with your overalls and your uniforms and kit and all that type of stuff and then they set you to work learning navigation. Engine handling. Aircraft recognition. Wireless operating. We had to do the whole lot because you didn't know what you were going to be anyway.

18:00 And then after that 2 months was supposed to be the course the initial course but then after that then they divided you up into pilots, wireless operators, gunners and wireless operator gunner went together in Australia. In England they were separate. And navigators so and then the navigators went off to a navigator school. The pilots went off to a pilots school. And so Temora was the Queensland pilots initial training as they called it. And

18:30 New South Wales went to Narrandera. But we went there because we volunteered to take the place of these 12 local boys that wanted to go to Temora. And so yeah.

How did they do that sorting?

Only the air force knows. But because I had long legs maybe and because I rode horses. Cause they always reckoned horsemen made good pilots because they had a sense of balance. Otherwise if you couldn't ride a horse if you didn't have a sense of balance because of

19:00 that that would've helped. It wasn't my brother was a horseman too but he wasn't really good. But they weren't to know that. But I dunno why but he didn't make it. He was made a wireless operator. But no they just sorted themselves out depending on. It think it was how many they had to go to so many schools and they'd picked the most likely looking type by physical aspects and that type of thing and you had to have fairly long legs to be a. Although some short blokes did become pilots too. Like we had one bloke on the squadron and he used to have to fly

19:30 with pillows behind him so that he could reach the. Cause they weren't very adjustable the things in aeroplanes. They made them to fit all sorts. And so he had to fly with a big thick pillow behind him to bring him forward so as he could get his rudders properly. But so when we finished there then a lot of them went a lot of our boys from Narrandera went to either Pierce in Western Australia or to Maryborough in Queensland to do what they called their

20:00 Advanced Flying School but some of us were picked to go to Canada to do that. So I was chosen to go to Canada. And we went out there and because I think I described before we went to New Zealand and then we went to South America and up and we got there 10 days overdue. So they'd filled the western schools with Canadians which normally our people went to. So we had to go to Centralia in Ontario which was in the cold country

20:30 and we were the first Australians there. Well there was one Australian there and he was an instructor there and he'd told all the girls what awful people Australians were. So the girls wouldn't even say g'day to us for about a week. They were scared stiff. But and my particular friend Speed Wilson he got killed the first week we were there. We used to have to work 12 days straight. Went straight to work. We didn't get any leave when we got there. We did 12 days straight then you had 2 days off. Well we went into

21:00 town and we Speed wanted to go to a dance because he loved dancing. I was pretty awful at dancing. And so someone told us there was a place called Cloudland out on the Thames River. Cause we were in London in Ontario on the Thames River and this place had been set up Cloudland with all little tables out and a big open dance floor with just one wall and they just had ropes round and they had two bands so it was

21:30 continual dancing. And you'd pay 2 shillings to go on the floor then you have a dance then you come back off again. They had cup a tea or that there and they had it all set up a little alcove along the riverbank which is great lovers lane type a place. And anyway because we were Australians and we'd never been seen there this bloke come rushing up "Australian's where do you come from? I'm Jim Smith from Sydney." He owned the place. He says, "Okay," he said, "you're my guests for the night." He said, "C'mon I'll meet you to a couple a girls." So he took us off and

22:00 there was a summer school going on at the University for School Teachers and so they grabbed these two girls and introduced Speed and I to them and so that was all right. So we met those and Speed got on. Well, we both got on a house on fire with the two girls. And in the next fortnight he got killed in a plane crash. Something went wrong with it. He lost a motor and went into a hayshed. And he was flying just before I went up. I was actually flying

22:30 when it happened. I didn't know till I come back. And we were due to go on leave the next day so it must a been just towards the end of the second fortnight and we'd arranged to meet these girls. And so I had to go and meet them and then this girls says, "Oh where's Speed?" I said, "Well I've got bad news for you." I said, "He got killed just Friday night," and she thought I was pulling her leg and she wouldn't believe me for a while. And then she broke down, she was heartbroken.

Was that pretty sobering for you?

It was yes

23:00 because I mean him and I were very close and he slept in the bunk on and I slept underneath. And you know I'm a Catholic and he was an Anglican and he used to question me why the Anglican said I believe in the Holy Ghost and the Holy Catholic Church and I had to explain about the reformation and how Henry claimed he was still a Catholic you know. And they still say it. They still say that in their prayer. And so you know we were very close actually. And he was an only son unfortunately. And because the air force knew more about you than

23:30 what you thought they did. The flight commander grabbed me that morning and says, "C'mon," he says, "You're going out for a flight straight away." So he took me out and flew around. Made me do lots of exercises things and that. He said you know, "If you stood around too long," he says, "you wouldn't want to go up any more." And this was the way to getting over that. Made you fly straight away. And he went up for me with an hour and then come back and he said, "Okay you go and have a break. Pick up a couple a things then you can go up and do a couple of hours on your own now." And at the funeral they asked me to be the flag bearer and to well

24:00 what you had to do they had the flag over the coffin and as they buried them you take the flag off. It's not to touch the ground and they also had his cap on the thing. Well I had to resurrect that and put it in my belt and take the flag off and do that and so I was the main one there at the thing. And the next day this is what he did he made me fly most of the day. And rather odd on our first leave Speed had put his watch in to be repaired. So I went in and paid for it and got it on the second

24:30 when we went the second time and I kept that all during the war. But when I was transferred to Halifax on me way to England there was a WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] in the bunk above me and she had an Australian hat badge. And I said, "How did you come to get an Australian hat badge?" Cause Australians were great at givin' things away but they're very hard to get over there from stores. And she said, "Oh my boyfriend works in Stores and there was a fella killed there and he gave me his cap badge." See it went back to the stores and he gave his

25:00 girlfriend the cap badge. I didn't like that actually. But I didn't say anything to her. But when I came home from the war I wrote to the Red Cross and asked could I write to this you know I told her what I wanted and they wrote back and said, "Well we can't tell you but we'll write to Mrs Wilson and tell her the story and if she likes she can get in touch with you." But anyway she got in touch with them and they sent me her address and I wrote to her. And we corresponded right up until after I got married and went on the

25:30 dairy farm and she was very appreciative of that invited me to come to Perth any time I wanted to go there. And she valued that because that was the last thing she had. They didn't send her anything back from Canada apparently. But she still had the watch and no that did shake me up actually. But that was and in the beginning of things at Narrandera the first introduction to the air force was a death. Because just a few days before we got there two

26:00 Beaufighters crashed over the towns. Two tryin' to show off in front of their girlfriends they'd come up from wherever they were and they collided over the viaduct and killed the two whole crews. And so we arrived there and first thing we had to learn to do the slow march because we had to be the…bein' the rookies we had to be the do the march in front of the coffin sort a business. Cause the air force always put on a show for funerals. So the 40 odd of us or whatever it was. I've forgotten the number we had in that course so we had to learn the slow march and

26:30 go to this funeral before we even started flying. But then and when Speed Gordon was his name. And that was how he got the Speed was his thing. But he was unfortunate because he rushed off to join the army even though he was an only child soon as the war broke out and they put him in the tank division. They were posted up in the Kimberley somewhere and he said, "God, you know the war's over in Africa. I'm never gonna get to the war this." So when the Japs come in

27:00 he asked to be transferred to the air force and he got air force and he become a pilot and he got to Canada and the poor devil got killed. And I'll never forgive an Englishman for that because he'd taken the aircraft up and it played up with him but he didn't put in what we called the E-77 which was the thing and so Speed got in it and went up and of course the engine failed and that caused his death. And yet this bloke got the Sword of Honour for topping our course. And I didn't feel too much honoured about him. But anyway

27:30 that's the way life turns out. But that's the way the air force went. More people got killed virtually in training than what killed in the thing. Because inexperience and accidents and type of thing. Like the man who taught me to fly at Narrandera he got killed in an accident because he was up with this fella on teaching him to fly just initially and the kid grabbed the stick like that and went like that and he wouldn't let go and they were going into a incline straight over the

28:00 aerodrome. And people on the them saw this you know and they were all coming out to watch why was the aeroplane doing a dive on the airport? And they saw Sergeant Harvey get out and climb out onto the wing to jump out and he looked back and it must've been the look on the kids face he got back in and tried to haul him back and haul the stick back but he couldn't and they both got killed. So he got killed. And then when I was in England when I went through Canada I

28:30 the instructor there wanted to make me send me onto an Instructor and I didn't want to instructor so he wanted me in Coastal Command. I said, "No, I want to be in bombers." So they put me down for bomber and when I went to England as I say we lived in Brighton for 6 months fiddling around and doing route marches and god knows what and did that little school at. And then we went off to

29:00 Oxfords, Airspeed Oxfords on a beam course and I had a horrible sight there. I was just about to take off and the instructor was just about to come in and put the hood on because you were instrument flying but just as we did we were just takin' off and this Stirling was flying over on the aerodrome just next to us and the wing fell of it and it rolled over like that and it went straight through the tail plate of the one underneath it and took the tail plate off

29:30 it. So it went like that too cause you can't fly and the four of them with four motors went straight into the ground with two whole crews on them. But they had been takin' gliders up and letting them go and they were waiting to land and a course the instructor grabbed it and we flew over and he got on the radio telephone but because the people at the other aerodrome would a seen it too. And all that come out of it when it crashed the first one the wing must've broken where the dinghy was and the

30:00 H2O [water] bottle must've broke and the dinghy come out of the wing inflated onto he ground. That was the only thing to come out of it. But that was a horrible sight. It wasn't you know that was the start of that type of thing. But then when I went to heavy conversion unit that was Wellingtons that's where you crewed up. Well your first fortnight you did your lessons and things you didn't. Familiarisation

30:30 with all the different parts and there was 12 pilots. 12 navigators. 12 wireless operators. 12 engineers

and 14 gunners because there's always some loss in gunners and you were supposed to sort yourself out in those 2 weeks and if you didn't they sorted you out. Well I had a whole crew and I dunno why this older lookin' bloke sort of appealed to me and I picked him and he happened to be. He'd been a rigger with A V Rowe and Company that made the Lancasters so he knew more about Lancasters than these other kids that had just gone to

31:00 school and learned all about it. And we had a very good crew actually. But we soloed one day and when it's your first. They take you up and give you a half hour landings and that and then they send you up and then they stop it. Then next day they'll take you up again they just go around once and then they let ya go. Well on that I went to take off and just as we were we were just about getting up to speed to take off there was one awful hell of an

31:30 explosion and the rear gunner. In a take off the rear gunner always turned his turret sideways so as if there was a crash or something he could roll out backwards because otherwise the turret might jam and there might be a fire and he mightn't be able to get out. So they always went and he was facing starboard and this black piece which flashed past like that he's "Hey skip, part a the wings fallen off." And I said to the engineer, I said, "I think the tyre's blown out," and he looked out and sure enough the tyre was gone. It had just

32:00 burst on takin' off but when I saw that I just automatically pushed the throttle through the gate. You had a wire across to stop you goin' too fast so you didn't over rev your motors. It was a safety thing but the thing I just slammed it through and it just quivered like that and it took off. And so we went up and I called up permission to land because other people were takin' off behind me because everybody was doin' the same thing you know we were supposed to go out and do go round and round. Merry go round. Practice coming in and going out.

32:30 Coming in and going out. So I called up permission to land. They said, "No, go to 2,000 and wait further instruction we think you're." No they said, "You're fly down by the caravan because we think you've burst a tyre." I said, "We have burst a tyre." "No, fly by the…" "All right." So we always wanted to shoot up the caravan anyway. So there was the runway like that the caravan there and you had to fly this side. So we went down to 4 feet of the ground and went past and they called up they said, "You have lost a thing. Go to 2,000 and

33:00 wait further instructions." So I didn't know what. So we went up and I said to the boys, "You'd better get in crash positions," and then I emptied all the fuel out of the main tanks because the Wellington you had a hundred gallon axillary tank which you had a hundred gallons and that did you in emergency or when you're landings. So I let the rest of it go to lighten the weight and get away from fire. Anyway we stooged around up there waiting and waiting and waiting and it seemed

33:30 ages no word. Next thing this voice comes on the phone and tells me you are. I asked permission to do a belly landing. "No, you don't do a belly landing. You've got to land on one wheel down." And so that was all right. He said, "Come in." He said, "Put your crew in crash position." I said, "They're already in crash positions." He said, "Get rid a your petrol." Said, "I've already got rid of the petrol." "Oh good." Well he says, "Come in one wheel down," he said, "and keep your starboard motor revving while you take the other one down to keep that wing up." Because actually the wheel locks when the tyre comes off it you see. And he

34:00 says, "Come in on the one wheel and stay on the runway." Well that's a bit difficult with one motor stopped and the other one drawn because the plane wants to go. So I come in and I was on the ground probably a hundred yards before I knew I'd actually touched down. It was so smooth when I come down but then it started to veer because this motor up. So it went off onto the grass and so I pulled the motor down and stopped and it just twisted round and it broke the other leg broke because the wheel

34:30 dug into the turf and it just broke down. And let the wing down and there was a little hole about that big in the end of the wing tip. That's all the damage was done. But the excitement of coming in. All these cars and the blood wagons which we called the ambulances. Well first of all there was the group captains car with the flag flying in the front right alongside the caravan. And then there was all the ambulances the crash wagons the fire stations and hundreds of irks on bikes because when there was a crash they'd always dive in and grab all the perspex out of the windows to

35:00 make foreigners. You know they made little badges and things like that. We called them foreigners. And they used to do that in their spare time and make money. And they were waiting for the crash because you know here's this idiot up there with only one landing to his credit he's gonna smash the thing up. And there yet the first bloke out of the car was the group captain he ran up and he says, "Congratulations sonny. Couldn't a done better myself." And he was the bloke that'd talked me in. He was having his lunch when they rang him up. So he says, "Wait till I have me lunch. Tell em to go up there and wait till I have my lunch." So he had his lunch and then he

35:30 came up to talk me into the thing. And the next bloke out was the doctor out of the ambulance and he was in his blue overalls and this was his first crash. He was disappointed there were no blood and thunder. And the irks were all disappointed too cause there was no perspex to pick up. But anyway he called me up the next day and said he was gonna recommended me for commission because of what I'd done and he sent me off to headquarters about a week later so forth and I got

36:00 commissioned out of that. Even though in Canada they wouldn't give me one. I was recommended because I was uneducated. But because of leadership and so forth and so on he decided I could have

one. And there was only two people recommended myself and one other two others. Another friend of my Reggie Burn and Kayla. But Kayla on the night of our last cross-country. Well cross-country immediately following that he couldn't start his aircraft and he had to get the mechanics

36:30 to come out and he had to switch his magnetos on. So they scrubbed him. And the other poor devil on our last cross-country Reggie Burn he was recommended then too but we hadn't gone for interviews at that stage he went up and he had a gunner that was a druggie. Lived on Benzedrine [stimulant]. And there's two different systems for cutting off your tanks in a Wellington. One you cut off your main tank and you turned on your. You cut off your main

37:00 tanks and you turn on your axillary. The other one you drained your main tanks through your axillary tanks for landing and they were toggle operated. Well anyway he did the wrong thing and turned the main ones off instead of turning them into the axillary. So they ran out of petrol coming in. And I called up, "Farmyard jig," [call sign] for permission to land and they said, "Yes you can land." And then straight behind me, "Farmyard jig, may I have permission to land?" Wasn't farmyard jig. Whatever his. He was gig that's right

37:30 and they said, "Farmyard jig you have permission to land." And he didn't answer them. And so they called up and he said, "Roger." Cause you were supposed to say Roger when you heard the message. And I said, "I wonder what's biting Reggie tonight?" And I didn't know but the poor devil's tryin' to get a. And a Wellington flew like that without any motors. Both motors had stopped at a thousand feet and he was struggling to get this thing down and it was a beautiful moonlight night and he headed into a paddock. But there was one tree and

38:00 he hit it right alongside where he was sitting and it killed him and it killed the navigator and the wireless operator I think and one of the gunners was badly. Three of them were killed. One the rear gunner was badly injured. So that was that. So he didn't get it either. So I was the only one out of three that survived that got the commission from. Cause they don't normally give a lot out at operation. You either get it when you graduate or when you get to a squadron. So anyway I had to go to

38:30 I was given leave to go to London to get me uniform because they had you had to go to the officers tailors place that in Saville Row Carson and Waugh's the name of the company outfitted all us. So I had to go there and get that had me leave and then I had to rejoin the crew at the next place we went to. But that was another good mate left cause Reggie and I were good. Because one of our leaves we went to London together he'd had a bet with a

39:00 fella which I didn't know anything about. I had the flu at the time and we went into this pub and he said, "Oh," he said, "you want a stack a whisky you know. It'll help clear your thing." So he got me this whiskey and awful stuff. Anyway I got it down and he wanted me to have another one. I wouldn't have it. I said no full stop. I don't drink. I don't want to have another one. When I went home I found a bloke was laughing and I said, "What are you laughing at?" And he says, "I believe you did old Reg for a few bob." I said, "What?" He said, "Well he had a bet he could get you drunk."

39:30 He bet some bloke 10 quid [pounds] that he could get me drunk and he didn't so he had to pay the 10 quid to this other bloke. But on that leave also the Doodle Bugs. We were up on the seventh storey of a pub in the Aldwych and some bloke come up and woke us up. Said, "There's a bombing raid on. You got to go into the second floor." And Reggie said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "Well I might as well die here as die down on the second floor with a heap of rubble on top of me." I said, "We're on top of it." Anyhow so I went back to sleep and he

40:00 sat there for a while and he decided to stay to apparently because he was still there when I got up in the morning. But that was the first of the flying bombs and it landed not far from were we were and the next day there was it was a gas main they. Report that come out was this huge explosion was a gas main exploded and I got a bit in my tin trunk that somebody little skit on it and they said you know, "Gas main that flew." But so but anyway he was another one that

40:30 died.

This is the end of the tape again.

Tape 3

00:30 **Glasses sorry. Your glasses Eric. Can you tell us about leaving Australia for Canada?**

Yes. Went to Bradfield Park. I dunno how long we were there but we got this word that we're to go this particular day and we got out of bed at half past three or four o'clock or some ungodly hour even for the air force and we

01:00 were out of the middle of the parade ground with out kit bags in the dark and we sat there till 9 o'clock. Then some bod comes out and says, "We're sorry boys. It's called off for the day." Cause I think I told you that before but it might a been in a conversation. And some bloke had got on the phone the night before and said we're about to leave and because the Centaur had just been sunk a few days before the subs were about and they were scared. But it seemed so stupid because next day the same thing went

on and there’s 60 buses or

01:30 whatever it was to take 400 men all lined up double decker buses and they weaved their way all through Sydney down onto the wharf at Woolloomooloo. As though people wouldn’t know there was some movement the troops were on. And they drove right onto the wharf and landed us there and we got onto this West Point which was American ship and we headed over to New Zealand. They called into New Zealand to get water supplies and so forth and there was something went wrong with the. There was a hole in the some it was leaking somewhere and they had some trouble.

02:00 So they couldn’t travel at full speed and because of the submarine scare they headed straight for South America and then went up you know took a long. So as I say we were 10 days overdue getting there so we ended up in Ontario instead of Edmonton and Calgary. But I remember going out and we went out in daylight and there was people on both sides a the heads cheering us off anyway and so a lot a people still knew and the Japs probably

02:30 knew too. And I remember because I was always a bit of a loner because as I say you know I was the odd one out of the three children at home. I had to do all the work and the other two played and me eldest brother was away all the time and everything I did was on my own. My father was away. I sort of worked on me own all the time and I was always that way. I was probably a bad mixer I suppose. And so I sat on a something down the stern of the thing and watched you know Sydney disappear into the thing and

03:00 gradually the horizon it was just nothing but water and I know I shed a few tears. I thought well I’ll never see that again. I’ll never see me mother and father again and these sort of thoughts. It was very sad parting actually. Because we knew that the casualty rates in the air force was over 50% at that stage. I actually saw the figures just 2 or 3 days ago. There was it was the highest casualty rate even in the army at their worst never equalled the air force’s casualty rates in the war.

03:30 And they told us we had it easy because it was the end of the war things weren’t so bad. But of the 12 crews that joined up together at operational training unit well one of them was killed there Reggie Burn and half his crew were killed. And Claude Paulinr disappeared in the sea out on a cross country. That was two disappeared there an other thing. But then

04:00 oh yeah. of those 12 crew there’s only 5 and a half survived the war. They were either killed in actions or you know lost their lives at the war itself. So you know it wasn’t real good news either. But when we went and I think I was up to where we went to Feltwell where I did a heavy conversion unit. Well Rory Nottage

04:30 and I went to London on leave and we come home probably day after new year I suppose it was and we had to walk a couple a mile from the station at Lakenheath to Feltwell Aerodrome. And we could smell all this petrol and couldn’t’ make out what was going on and as we got further up the road there was people everywhere and I said, “What’s going on here?” And they said, “A couple of aeroplanes just crashed overhead. They collided over there.” And it was a beautiful crystal clear moonlight night. Full moon and these two

05:00 aircraft had over the at a thousand feet over the thing they ran into each other. They’d been up on a gunnery exercise and there was one whole crew and part of another. Because when you went up on a gunnery exercise one crew went up with each pilot and then they took the gunners from the other one and they did their. You know his own gunners do the thing then the other bloke’d take it in turn. But that was Horry Harley another one of our other friends. We’d been together for a long time Rory Nottage and Horry and myself. So he got killed in that with the whole of his

05:30 crew. And I mentioned about it operational training unit where I got me commission for that accident I had. Well my instructor there he got killed. He went back to do another tour on Mosquitoes after I finished. Like my instructor at Kingaroy got at least Narrandera got killed and my chief instructor there got killed too. Cause he went to fly Mosquitoes which was my ambition afterward and they used to go over to Berlin on

06:00 reconnaissance photographic reconnaissance or even to drop a bomb. They could carry a 4,000 pound bomb to Berlin and back and come back at 400 and something miles an hour. Whereas a Fortress could carry 2 tonnes of bombs to Berlin with 12 men and it’d take them ages because they could only cruise at 125. But anyway this fella got shot down over Berlin one night even though he was high and thing somebody happened to get him somehow. It must a been anti-aircraft fire because I don’t think the

06:30 fighters would a got. Cause they could fly in at 40,000 feet those Mosquitoes. Hodge was his name. Flight Lieutenant Hodge. So I lost him at the, you know all these people that I’d associated with. So there was a lot of deaths through just accidents in the air force as well as the actual thing. And another one of my friends from Narrandera Bluey Smart he went different places after that because air force always kept moving you on in different groups to different things and he got killed on the

07:00 run up to D Day. A plane collided him over a target in France. Well they dropped a cookie on top of him and it blew the both of them up. So there was quite a few others I knew that got killed like even before they got to the thing. So the attrition rate went on all the time. But in the air force the joke was if you survived training your chances of survival went up 50%. Because there’s so many

07:30 in the accidents otherwise. Well on a squadron because they were keen because it was a reflection on them if a plane had a boomerang. Everything was right up to scratch. Whereas on training and cause they were dealing with the same crews all the time. Like you had your own ground crew for that particular aircraft and they took a pride in their work. But on a training station there was different people flying them all the day. They didn't have any relationship with the crews what so ever.

08:00 Matter of fact some of them were quite nasty. Like I remember one day the Stirlings were very high off the ground and they were being phased out at this stage because they were people like that one over the parachuters used you know the wing fell of and it took another one with it. But if you could put your key into a cut in a tyre you were supposed to not take the plane up because it wasn't safe cause you'd blow a tyre and at 26 feet off the ground if you blew a tyre you just cartwheelled. It wasn't like the

08:30 Wellington. Anyway I went round this thing and there was 2 cuts that key didn't go to the bottom so I said, "I'm not going to take it." And this bloke says, "All you Aussies," he says, "you've got no guts. You won't fly." I said, "You just mind your thing." I said, "You get in that aircraft and come with me and I'll take it up." "I can't do that." I said, "No, and I can't either. Regulation won't let me do it either." But that's the sort of attitudes these blokes at training commands had. Take the thing up and smash it. It doesn't matter you know we don't care. Well my last flight on a

09:00 Stirling it had to do an air test because next day it was going to the junk heap. So I had to take this damn thing up and they'd stripped the main radio out of it. There was no radio left in it. They'd taken the guns out of it and we only had the two way radio on and all the time we could hear these Yanks screaming blue murder. "Throw up a… We can't see the aerodrome throw up a veri light. Do this do that." Cause they were coming home from a raid and it was

09:30 intense fog all over the damn country and we couldn't. So and because we had no other navigational aids I was flying north and south north and south half hour each way all the time just to keep you know close to the aerodrome. I wasn't going to far. Cause if we'd a gone more than 20 minutes distance from the aerodrome we wouldn't a had any communications at all because the main radio's were out. And they limited the radio telephone because there was so many aerodromes in England there was too much talk come across. So they had them very

10:00 narrow so we had to stay within the limits of our radio telephone. But these Yanks were panicking because they didn't like flying blind. And I flew that aircraft for an hour and a half just up there for the fun of getting a certificate because that day it had to have an E-77 done. Next day it went to the scrap heap. And so that's how the advanced they were and that was my last flight on a Stirling. And yet if I'd a gone onto special operations as I was supposed to have done I would a been flying those

10:30 on operations up and down the hills of Norway or Yugoslavia at a hundred feet because that's what special duties involved. You went out on your own or maybe two aircraft and you approached the country at a hundred feet over the sea cause that'd got you under the radar and then you'd. Both Norway and Yugoslavia is very mountainous country so you'd fly up the valleys to keep yourself out of radar and the bods up there'd have three torches and they'd line them up. They knew noting

11:00 about aeronautics and they might put them up the side of a hill. They're supposed to put them up a valley or up along a ridge but they'd put them up the side of the hill and that's probably what happened to Bluey Tucker. He just slammed straight into a hill because by the time he saw the mountain it was too late. And but anyway that was my last. So then they sent me off to a heavy conversion unit on Lancasters and that's when Horry Harley got killed and I went from there and then onto the 62 Squadron. But

11:30 something else was I gonna say about that? And then we did mostly daylights. It was all formation flying the whole time which was hard work particularly in summertime. Although the Lancasters were good in winter cause they were heated well. But I did 6 ops [operations] in the first 9 days on the squadron and they were all on oil

12:00 refineries different parts of Europe on thing. And the very first op I went on there was another pilot who just it was his first raid as a pilot but he'd done 30 trips as a wireless operator. Then he remustered. He was an Englishman. He'd remustered and went back and did a second tour and did 20 as a navigator and according to the air force that was it. You know you'd done your allotted time. Well you'd

12:30 beat the odds actually so you were finished and you had a desk job or an instructors job or something else. But he wanted to go back and be a pilot so they sent him off to Canada and he come back and this was his first op and my first op. Well as we approached the target there was just one gun shooting because the Germans were running short of ammunition at that stage and I counted them. It was one two three four and the fifth one hit him. Cause if he'd a just gone like that they couldn't a kept up with him cause it was a radar

13:00 controlled gun and they have your airspeed your height your direction all on dials and wind speed. Now the only one that can be wrong is the wind speed because you know met people like today at night well they might give you the wrong winds. So it actually corrected after every one of those first four shots and the fifth one he got his wind speed right. So they hit him fair in the middle of the 'cookie' and the thing just blew up and I just flew through the thing like that because I was only 5 aircraft back from him. That was my introduction to

13:30 fighting. And then we get over the target and our cookie. That's the 4,000 pounder that causes all the

trouble it hung up. We weren't allowed to jettison a cookie over Belgium or Holland because or France because you might kill some of our allies. So you had to wait and there was a dumping area north of the English Channel you're supposed to fly there. So we were flying up the English Channel instead of going home with the rest of them and suddenly George. Cause George used to panic the navigator

14:00 and he said, "Get rid of the bloody thing now." And I said, "Yeah, like hell." I said, "There's a convoy underneath with a half a dozen destroyers," I said, "and if I open by bombs dies the bombs doors'll open up," and we were only up about 1,300 feet. We'd a just been shot out a the sky. So we had to hang on and anyway we passed the convoy over. Cause the navy people were trigger happy you know they didn't care. If somebody looked like bombing well they opened up because they didn't' want to be rained with bombs. They'd get in first. So we went up and we got rid of it so we were half an hour

14:30 overdue on our first op. All the rest of the boys were home half an hour and we hadn't turned up. So we were missing but we turned up half an hour so that was all right. So that was my first operation. First one got blown out. And the navigator cause he'd come out and stood. Cause they worked behind a blackout curtain like you people. Like cause of their radar screens they had to be blacked out. But anyway he'd pulled that apart cause over the target we just had to follow the Vics [Vickers aircraft] and drop you know when they said you know the leader dropped we all dropped. And so he was standing there watching was going on

15:00 well he saw this plane blow up. "Oh my god." He said and closed the curtain. Well I didn't find out till a long time after that ever time after as soon as we got to the target and started to the navigator started to give you directions he used to get down underneath his navigation table and hang onto the two struts of the table and hide under the table. He was so nervous.

Did all these close calls and deaths and training and accidents what kind of impact did that have on your crew?

Well I don't. Well they seemed to all apart

15:30 from George who was quite nervous. I mean they seemed to handle it all right and one thing that stood by me was the fact that I didn't drink alcohol because so many of these accidents caused people were and you weren't supposed to drink for so many hours before flying but they used to do it. And like I was told that I wouldn't get on with me crew if I didn't drink. Well I mean I wasn't gonna take up drinking for the sake of that. But yet I had three other people in my crew that didn't drink either and only two of them

16:00 smoked and they would not smoke in the aircraft because that was banned. I know Colin was a real smoker and we had on that gunnery exercise when we were OTU [Operational Training Unit] like I said we had other people's gunners and they lit up and Colin the smoker in the crew says, "Put that cigarette out. Our skipper doesn't allow it." and he made him put it out straight away. Because you can cause fire because there's oil leaks and all that sort a stuff. Hydraulic oil is very inflammable. But no they seemed we just took it as part of life. You've got to put up with it.

16:30 **What kind of bonding impact did it have though?**

Well I think it did help us to keep together because I know they were quite proud of me as a. Like this bloke said to one bloke he said, "We go'd through hell and high water for our Skipper." Cause they were complaining because I had a double on that squad and his name was Moore. Mammy Moore they called him because there was another fella there that they called Pappy Moore because he used to say Sonny to all his crew. So they christened him Pappy. Course when this other bloke come along they christened him mammy.

17:00 Cause we all had nicknames on the board. They had your nicknames on the board. And he was my double because I remember one day I walked out of a mess and these two WAAAFs were coming up and suddenly a big salute you know we'd Australians aren't great on saluting. So you had to return the salute. And then they started gigglin'. They thought I was Mammy Moore coming out cause he was a he had girlfriends all over the place. And then three times after the war I was mistaken for the same bloke because we were so alike.

17:30 Same build. Same height. Same we looked the same because people who should a known better often picked us the wrong one. But he drank like a fish and he'd sort a stagger home at night time then he'd go out and get in and fly in a daytime and his crew were scared stiff actually. But you know some people had to go and drink to bond. We never had to. We'd go down to the pub and Len and Colin they'd have a couple a beers. That's all they'd have and the rest of us'd drink soft drinks whatever we could get you

18:00 know it didn't worry us. We'd play darts and have a few drinks and go back home again. No we were very apart from George the navigator who was an Australian all the rest of us were you know we were really good friends. But he was I dunno what he was in civil life but he was well educated anyway and he was gonna go back. He become a lawyer after the war through training. But he sort a didn't want to associate. We were all uneducated ignoramuses to George.

18:30 And it was funny how the people get this. I remember one of my best mates was supposed to be Bluey Tucker when we were operational training unit and the promotions come out I was down the somewhere at the mess somewhere and it came out and when I come home I opened the door and I heard. He had his back to me and he was sounding off cause he was a school teacher. He says, "Look.

Bloody Eric Willis goes and gets a commission." He says, "and here's people like me school teachers educated people like me we miss out.

19:00 What's wrong with the air force?" you know. And I heard that but that's the attitude some people took and he was one a the ones that got killed on that. He was the only one that done special duties and got killed on it. He was from South Australia. But no we had a good. Bob Farthing the rear gunner he actually come out to live out here and he stayed with us for 6 months. He lived with my people in Redcliffe then he come up to Shorelands to live with me cause I was on me own at that stage cause Dad had cancer and he stayed up there with me for a few

19:30 months then went back and bought himself a house and was building on the Redcliffe Peninsular. But his wife wanted to go home because Mum so he went home and eventually one of his daughters married an American serviceman and they went to live in America I believe. But up until I got married we always corresponded and my bomb aimer we still correspond to this day. And he was supposed to come out here this year to visit me because his wife died last year and he was sort of on his own and I'd invited him out and so he said he'd come.

20:00 But then he had trouble with one of his daughters. She'd joined the Scientologists and gone to America and he'd bought her a house and he was trying to sell it but four sales fell through because he'd send the documents over and they wouldn't' give them to her. He believed that she never saw the documents. They were tyring to wait for him to die so that they could get the lot they thought. And so he said he had to straighten that out before he come out and so he wouldn't leave until and I dunno what's happened. The last letter I had from him was in April but

20:30 we'll both exchange letters again at Christmas time. He'll probably come out next year. But we lost trace of Len the wireless operator he was. Cause like I corresponded with all of them after the war until I got married and then when I took over the dairy farm from my brother I was milking a hundred cows and when you're milking a hundred cow and got little children coming along you don't have time to start sitting and writing all over the place. So I lost I even lost contact with Henry. But George Walters for some reason

21:00 or other he started a think a crew and he wrote to me at Shorelands and that was sent onto my brother up at Charters Towers and he sent it down to my sister in Brisbane and she rang George up and gave him my address and he got in touch with me here. And we used to go out to lunch occasionally in Brisbane when he was there but he had a stroke and died about 3 years ago. But Henry and I still correspond Easter time Christmas time and sometimes in between

21:30 if something happens. No we were a good crew and we stuck well together. They'd go like one of the. Something happened once before and something said. I know. On our final trip with the Lancasters on the finishing school we were at Feltwell and because it was a grass field with Lancasters on it and it was

22:00 snowing we couldn't fly so they sent us over to Wratting Common. And on the last night we were there. We were there for a week I think and on the last night we had to do a cross country. It was put off from the Thursdee night and the Fridee night the bloke said McTaggart was his name. He said, "Well you've got to go because there's a mess party on tomorrow night at back at Feltwell," he said, "and I've got to be there." So he sent us off and we took off into falling snow and got up and we flew out the wash up the North Sea to far as nearly to Norway back into Scotland and

22:30 come back. For 3 hours we didn't see a star and we didn't see a light. As a matter of fact I got a fright half way up the North Sea because I was sitting there staring at the implements and suddenly this bloomin' streak went 'zzzooooh' like that right in front of my eyes and just looked like a bullet tracer bullet and then another one. And then I woke up. It was static electricity had built up in the windscreen. It was jumping from point to point on the windscreen. So that sort of solved that. But when we got back you were supposed to

23:00 drop bombs on a bombing range a Lake Innes. Well the bombing range was a triangle 30 feet. 30 feet. 30 feet were all great powerful lights and you're supposed to fly over that and drop your bombs little you know 7 pound things. Practice things. But we went over it at 300 feet and we couldn't see that from 300 feet above. And a relic Cathedral had a spire 270 feet so you didn't go below that. And Henry said, "Are you gonna turn round and go back?" I said,

23:30 "No." I said, "Too many people have hit the deck because you're doing you're trying to see something and you're not watching and you slide and you pick up a wind trick." So we went straight home but we couldn't see the aerodrome from 300 feet either. So we turned around and went back to I can't remember the name of the aerodrome but they had FIDO [Fog Investigation Dispersion Operation]. Now FIDO was 2 rows right along either side the aerodrome and they pumped petrol through them and lit it and it burnt 60,000 gallons an hour it burnt. And that lifted the fog

24:00 up to about 4 or 50 feet and in addition to that it made the fog red so you could circle round this red patch until you broke cloud. So we broke cloud and got down and they gave us bacon and eggs to cause we'd been up in the air three and a half hours I think. And they said, "Okay, hedge hop your way home." So we just took off and hedged home. Just tree topped till we got back to. Cause we were only 10,15 minutes away anyway. But people said to the crew, "Were you scared?" "No, we're not scared with

24:30 our Skipper. We'll go through anything with him." So that was an unnerving experience though because

when you're flying an aeroplane with ordinary rotors you get the feeling that the aircraft's turning all the time. And a course in the day time you see the horizon you don't take any notice cause you don't have the visual effect of it. But at that after half an hour we did get this feeling and if you didn't watch your instruments and some people don't. They'd say, "Maybe it's wrong," because you had an artificial horizon you had to watch that and

25:00 they'd gradually get up and tip up and tip up and they'd go too far. But that particular night a New Zealand crew was following us and they did what Henry thought I would do. They went circling round trying to find this and they hit the ground with their wing tip and killed the whole 7 of them. And the other five crews were dotted all over Northern England. So we were the only crew that got home that night. And you know well I was talking to Nancy Bird. Do you know Nancy Bird?

25:30 She's a famous Queensland aviatrix and she was the first woman to hold a commercial pilots licence and she flew all sorts of stuff here and she was over in England not long ago. She's written a book and she was launching it and my niece whose flying and they're both in the Women's Air League in Brisbane she took me and introduced to Nancy at the air show and Mary said, "Eric's been flying in Europe." She said, "Oh," she said, "I don't know how you fly in that country." She said.

26:00 "You can't see to walk in it." She must've gone over durin' the wintertime when all these fogs and that sort a thing was on. But they the sort of thing they were more nerve racking than a lot of other things because after a while. To fly on instruments for three and a half hours is an awful strain. See even at night time most bad nights you can still see a horizon and that means you got some visual connection with the earth. But on those sort a when you were flying in tinted cloud all the time you got nothing. And then

26:30 when I mentioned in the interview I did with the other girl that after the war stopped. No before the war stopped we had to feed the Dutch on the Channel ports because the armies had come in here and they'd gone round them to. Cause they were very heavily fortified the Dutch coast and the army went right around and joined up further along and just went swept through and so the Germans were isolated in those ports and they were running out of food. So they made a deal with England through the Red Cross in Switzerland that we'd

27:00 go over and drop food on the aerodromes. We had to go in do this do that do all the next thing. But when they made the arrangements the weather set in and it was rain and hail and you can't even do operations in some of that weather unless you can get above it. And but this had to be done at lower level at 500 feet. Anyway on the third day Harris said you know, "It's them or you so you've got to go." Well we took off and we just got up high enough to get above the power lines and we got

27:30 over the sea and then we dropped down onto the water because it was blinding rain all the way. But apparently with the wind which normally over there blows west to east hit in that case lifted the guy up so we did get up to 500 feet to cross the coast because they said they'd shoot us down if we didn't. But you know once we got over the coast we dropped back down again cause we wanted a good look. And they'd put concrete posts all over this aerodrome we get as the thing and as we dropped our stuff the army was supposed to take it over and then distribute it. But the

28:00 Dutchies just weren't having it. They didn't trust the Germans and they broke through the cordons and they were running onto the field while all this stuff was raining down. And as we flew out we were only about a hundred feet I s'pose and on one corner of the street here's these Germans with their rifles on their shoulders and their big tin hats and on the other corner was these four Dutchies with Union Jacks waving to us. I've got a photograph actually not that shot but of you know things in Holland. So I think we did about 5

28:30 of those trips. Two into Hagen and three into Rotterdam I think it was. But that was the worst one because the weather was tremendous that day. But it wasn't long after that that they collapsed and gave in anyway. But before they did we had the last Bomber Command raid of the war on Bremen. And we turned over we lost a motor on the way out but we got it going before we got to Wilhelmshaven and we turned there and headed south because with radar bombing you had to go down on a south easterly

29:00 course bout 85 degrees because that way you picked up a signal from England come through and that's when you drop your bombs. But anyway as we came over Bremen Scotty which was on our flight he lost a motor on the. Something hit it and the hydraulics and I was just the one behind him and the prop on the starboard engine broke and the propeller just

29:30 graciously flew over like that just all the three and fell away. So he lost two motors on the one side and he bailed his crew out over the target which I would never have done cause there was a thousand of us and we were you know in the middle of that. There was a lot of planes dropping bombs. But anyway he got. The engineer wouldn't jump because in a Lancaster you couldn't handle your own petrol tanks to change from tank to tank and you had to keep them going he had the gauges and he used to do it. So he stayed with him and as they cross

30:00 the front. Because they only had two motors when they crossed the frontline they were only about 3,000 feet and the artillery there knocked another motor out the starboard outer and so that bought them down to about a thousand feet and as they crossed the Channel ports they knocked the other one out without knockin' them out a the sky. So he did a belly landing on the mud flaps on an island just off the Dutch coast. Well he was only of course he was. And 4 days later they surrendered so he was the senior officer on the coast so he was in charge of the prisoners of war the German

30:30 army and those sort a things. Anyway he come back to England after a week and they gave him an initial award of the DSO [Distinguished Service Order]. An immediate award of the DSO for that because he got his crew home. Well he got himself and his what's a name but because he kept going and didn't let the aircraft go. But so that was the last bomber command raid of the road and then after that we ferried prisoners of war back from France. Used to fly up to Juvincourt pick them up and bring them in.

What kind of

31:00 **state were they in?**

Well physically they were fairly good state. Cause the Germans they looked after their prisoners. You hear a lot a bad stories of what happened but that was when they were first arrested. The Gestapo used to get them and they used to torture them. They used to do awful sort a things. Like they'd get you in their initial room and they say and suddenly there'd be bang bang bang bang. You'd hear bloomin' gunshots going and the bloke says, "That was the before you. He wouldn't talk." You know that sort a

31:30 thing. And you're only supposed to give him your name your regimental number and that was all you're supposed to give them. Not where you were. What duty. No nothing and they used to interrogate you. They used to put electrodes on you and all this sort a stuff. But if the army caught you you were fairly safe. Or the any a the ordinary people. But and once you got into a. All bar there was a couple of prisoner of war camps that were run by the Gestapo because they were people who kept escaping

32:00 and the Gestapo. But the ordinary camp they were run by the German army. But one bloke I bought home he was a prisoner of war in Austria and they put them to work in the salt mines and he used to go down before sunrise and come up after. He hadn't seen daylight for 4 years. Because he was captured at Dunkirk and on the day of Dunkirk it was a crystal clear day and they could see the White Cliffs of Dover as they were marched away to prison. And the

32:30 day we picked them up this particular one that was a crystal clear day and about a hundred ks [kilometres] before we got to the French coast you could see the white cliffs of Dover. And he'd asked me if he could come up and stand up near me when we were crossing the. And I said yes and he cried all the tears run down. He said, "I never ever thought I'd see that again."

What kind of health impacts did he like was he fairly healthy or?

Well you'd think it would. But the exercise apparently counter manned the other and they were reasonably and apparently they fed those who were working they fed them reasonably

33:00 well because they were prisoners of war. But the Americans killed a lot a those Austrian prisoners of war too because they wore a khaki uniform too. The Austrian army is different to the German army, wore grey. But the Austria army wore khaki and these bloomin' Americans fighters were out one day and they saw this column marching along the road. They were a work party goin' to work and they were Australian prisoners of war and they strafed them and killed about 50 of them. The Americans were all. They're still doing it to

33:30 their own people over in thing. They killed a whole lot of Australians because they were in khaki. They didn't make you know try to find out or why they had to strafe people who were obviously under guard anyway. But that's the sort a thing that happened. And the man who was in charge of our insurance office in Albury Bill Williams he was in the army as a prisoner of war and he was in that and he was a nervous wreck after. He used hit the grog. He wouldn't talk about the war unless he had a few beers but when he had the beers he'd open up.

34:00 But he made 9 escape attempts in the years that he was a prisoner of war. And I said, "Why did you keep doin' that Bill? You know the risk you took doin' it?" He said, "Well you felt you might as well be dead as be locked up there doin' nothing." It was boredom that got them down and the planning and the digging and the getting ready it all helped to sort a take their minds off. He says, "You'd a gone mad if you didn't do something like that."

So would you get to spend much time with them or would they just then be shipped off?

34:30 No they. We'd pick them up at the airport and they'd all be sit down and. I've got a loading thing there. There's about 36 of them I think we used to scrooge into a Lancaster. All just sitting on the floors. And we'd fly them to a certain aerodrome in England where there was hospitals because they a lot of them did need a medical. But none of mine were actually sick on the plane because it was only a short hop from you know probably a half an hour forty minutes from where we were to where we landed it. We just landed them. They discharged them into

35:00 ambulances and then we'd fly back home again. And then next day we go up and get another lot and bring them back. But so they all went through a full medical once they got to England. But the Americans used to pick them up from outlying places in Dakotas and bring them en masse to France. But to save time and to get as many out as quick as possible they left then us in Bomber Command to fly the aircraft to get them from there to England. And that went on. But I know talking about Americans while we were in operational training unit

35:30 we were in having a meal this particular night and an early one for tea just before dark and about 7 American Fortresses dropped in on our thing. And they come in to have they bought them in to have a meal and bloke started to talk he said, “Why you fellas having a meal at this hour of the day?” We said, “Well we’re going out on a cross country.” He says, “What? Cross country?” “Yeah?” “What do you want to do that for? You know you don’t fly at night-time do ya?” We said, “Yeah, we fly at

36:00 night-time all the time. That’s what we’re trained for.” He said, “Only birds and fools fly and birds don’t fly at night.” And it was getting dark so they didn’t wait to get home. They were only about 20 minutes from home and they flopped in. They stayed there the night and they got in their planes and flew home the next morning. They would not fly at night. They were never trained to it. And like when they first come out here to Australia they flew the Beam in America in all their training. Well there was no Beam in Australia. All we had was 3 railway lines. So when they went to New Guinea they would fly over take an angle to

36:30 hit the coast somewhere then they’d follow the railway line all the way back to Brisbane and that’s how they flew. So our mob got a bit sick of this cause there were so many of them getting lost. They were flying out at sea and getting lost in bad weather or flying too far inland caused they’d missed the you know when they’d crossed over maybe was a missing link or something and so they used to take half. Of a unit they’d take the navigators down to Cootamundra and then put Australian air force men in to fly with the Yanks while they were doing it. Then they’d bring

37:00 that half back and take the other half out and put another Australian and we had to train all the navigators retrain them to fly directional navigation when they first come out here. So they didn’t fly by night and they did. Well they couldn’t if they couldn’t do navigation.

So what were your overall impressions of them?

Well they were game enough and that sort a thing but I mean they just didn’t have they didn’t’ have any clues. They didn’t know what was going on. But they by going out at daylight and going well into Germany they did suffer horrendous

37:30 casualties. They were you know they’d loose twice as many as we’d loose. Our blokes lost lots at night time too but I mean they did it at daylight which meant that it was open slather all the time because they were away from there...They used have fighter protection for so far with the Thunderbolts but then when they went further east the fighters couldn’t come up. They used to have to go back to France. Well before they took France I mean they couldn’t they used to only get the fighters about half an hour in. That was about the

38:00 maximum for a fighter. But the thing is they just flew a gaggle as a stream and if a fighter attacked they would peel off. Well that was the last thing in the world you’d do because that left you they could concentrate on you rather than face the firepower of all the other aircraft that were near you. They had tremendous armament. They had .5 guns which you know were very heavy and the pilots had there was so much steel in a Fortress that’s why they’re so slow and they had a crew of 12 to fly and they could

38:30 only go. We used to carry 12,000 pounds to Berlin they’d carry 2,000 pounds that was the difference in the thing. But no they were fought well that type of thing. Although they had a bad name in some out here they had a bad name. Like one a the jokes they tell them about up in Port Moresby. This mob went out one day and they come back and they hadn’t dropped their bombs and the interviewing officer said, “Well why didn’t you come down lower.” They said, “Oh we come down to 25,000 feet and we still couldn’t see. And then we come down to 20,000 feet and we

39:00 couldn’t see and there was no use going.” “But why didn’t you come down lower?” And he says, “Those bloody silly Aussies are down there bombing the place.” And they won’t come down and mix with us. They were too low down. Cause once you got under 20,000 feet the anti-aircraft fire was far more accurate. But that’s the joke is the Americans. But no they did a good job. They but it’s just they didn’t have the training. They didn’t understand what they were going in for. And in

39:30 England of course there was a lot of radar and that type of thing but they still wouldn’t fly at night time because at night time you’ve really got a use proper navigation to get there and get back. But as I said we were trained for that but I only ever did one night and that was on Berlin. And that was one night when I did get a scare because we were due at midnight at. We were going to Pottstown which is a suburb of Berlin, it’s a satellite city but we flew right over Berlin to get there and

40:00 we were due there at one minute past midnight. Well at about two minutes to midnight one plane crossed over underneath her that was the path finder he had to drop the flare. Well he went through and dropped and because we were the first two planes we weren’t covered by window. Now window was long strips of silver paper. Silver coated paper and used to have it in bundles in boxes and as you got over Germany you keep throwin’ this stuff out and every one of those strips made a dot on the

40:30 radar screens of the thing and that used to black them out. Like when that was first introduced in England they did a flight test over France and the Germans at that stage used to talk on their radio in plain not. I was gonna say in plain English but in plain German. Plain language whereas our people always used codes and they sent this 20 odd aircraft fitted with this stuff and next thing they heard the fighter bases French bases along the coast say, “British

41:00 bombers approaching from 75 degrees at 15,000 feet and so forth. Oh there’s about 20 of them. Oh no

that’s gone up to about 50. Oh there’s more there’s more there’s a lot more. Oh there’s thousands.” Because it’s black. All these little white dots started appearing next thing it just went white. And there was wholesale panic on the German. They didn’t know just what it was.

We’ll pick up because.

Tape 4

00:30 **So you got as far as dropping the windows, were they called?**

Oh yeah well see we weren’t protected by that so they picked me up on the master searchlight and all these little there was hundreds and hundreds we could see them for 400 mile back all the lights the place cause it was so well lit up. But suddenly just after the pathfinder dropped the thing they picked me up on their radar rather than him and the master searchlight lit up.

01:00 And it was just like that all lit up like a crow on a dead limb tree. And you had 8 seconds to get moving because if they had the wind right like that earlier case I described to you the bullets started to come up that beam. It took 8 seconds to get that first bullet up to where you were and if the wind was wrong a course it might miss you but then they’d pick you up unless you thing. So I as soon as it hit me I just rolled it over went down rolled it over

01:30 and when I pulled up my eyes must a been down here somewhere lifted it up and just as we levelled out Henry says, “Bomb.” Oh no when we were on the bottom because I levelled out on the bottom he says, “Bombs away.” And on the photograph I’ve got of that they’re just off the actual flare so they were well within the target area. And when he said, “Bombs gone,” we must a gone up like the fastest elevator on earth because I’d turned. We were doin’ 400 when we hit the bottom on the thing and with the rise of the

02:00 motors coming up and him dropping the bomb it just went up we literally went 500 feet in split second and my eyes and my ears. But anyway and when the master searchlight come on all the little manual ones they all wound them round cause they could follow it around. But fortunately just as we got off the top of it again it went out. So somebody the planes coming round it must’ve been either a bomb dropped on it or something you know on that actual gun site because the big master search

02:30 light went out and soon as it went out all the little boys lost us so dark was never so beautiful. But that was my night time plane.

So it was a successful operation?

Oh it was a successful operation yeah. Although that’s one of the ones that the world has condemned old Bomber Harris for because they said Chemnitz was a trade town it wasn’t. But it was full of army barracks for the Russian front because you know the Russians

03:00 asked us to bomb it because they were coming in towards that area and they asked for it to be bombed so Bomber Harris. But that’s one of the critics they always make that bombing. Dresden I should say. Dresden and Chemnitz. I wasn’t on the Chemnitz one but it was another staging point. But Dresden was originally just a, you know a trading town. It’s like Melbourne and Caulfield you know. They’re two cities but I mean they’re joined together. But there was a lot the army

03:30 had aerial surveys. There were troop concentrations and god knows what there. So we bombed it anyway. But that one thing the world after the war they all got smart and started to find fault with these sort a things and they condemned him for those two raids reckoned it was just sheer murder. And people have often asked me since did I ever have any regrets about killing civilians and so forth. I said no. I said, “If I’d a seen them, maybe I would’ve done.” But I saw

04:00 Southampton when the Germans come in at midday when the streets were chock-a-block with the lunch hour thing and they just come off the sea went straight up the main street at 500 feet and obliterated it. You know you’d see a little butcher shop here and you’d see a basement. Joe Blow Baker removed to funeral parlour removed to so forth. There’d be about 7 then there’d be another shop and just they just virtually wiped out the whole of the central Southampton and then Coventry was even worse. And I saw what they did in London I mean I was in

04:30 London when they were bombing it.

How often would you think about this?

In those days? You probably thought. Well you tried not to think about it. You red you did this you did that. I mean but you know because of what I saw the Germans did I thought they’re only getting their own medicine back. So I didn’t. I know when you look back it probably is. I mean we had civilians die here in Darwin and Townsville. I dunno any that died in Townsville but they did die in and quite a lot in

05:00 Darwin. So I mean I couldn’t that was just part of the war to me. I mean and like my mother always told me I was too nervous too highly strung and I wouldn’t be any good at it and I was always considered

highly strung and nervous but no I never suffered any nerves over that. Like I had to laugh when I read that letter I got from your people. It said I could have counselling after if the interviews upset me. They're not gonna upset me. We didn't we saw men die around us every day and we didn't have counselling because it

05:30 was a daily occurrence basically. But something else I wanted to tell you now I've forgotten and it's gone right out of my mind what it was.

You said off tape you mentioned about the daylight bombings?

Oh yes. Well we used to fly 250 aircraft and we'd get it over a any target in 20 to 30 minutes because we used to fly

06:00 virtually wing tip to wing tip and that's hard work with a Lancaster that's not. You know fighters are different they've got lighter touch to what bombing planes have got. But the fact the Lancaster did have ample power and had good supercharging even at 18,000 feet I mean they were still. See a Stirling you got a Stirling up at 18,000 feet they were wobbling in the air because they didn't have the supercharging of the Lancaster had

06:30 and that's why that Flight Sergeant Middleton that I mentioned about that got killed I dunno whether I did mention it. He flew a Stirling in the early part of the war to Turin the bomb the Turin factory where they made the motor cars cause they were makin' aeroplanes and tanks and so forth and he got shot on the way over and he lost an eye and he had other injuries. But he still got that thing through the gaps on the mountains got over to Turin. How he got it there

07:00 I don't know because they were wobbling in the air at 18,000 feet and there's not to much of the Alps that are under 18,000 feet but he got it there and he got it back and as I said he baled the crew out over the sea and then he ditched it and he killed himself and the engineer. But the Lancaster had very good supercharging. You could get up I dunno the highest I ever went in one was 25,000 but they still flew perfectly at that rate. But we did most of our bombing

07:30 from 18 and a half to 21 and a half. That was apparently it was the best range for the radar and the wind on the bombs and all that type of stuff. And when Montgomery was waiting across the Rhine River which is only just as wide as from here to the front gate probably we bombed that for 6 days in a row and we didn't drop one bomb on the wrong side a the river and we didn't have visual contact at all. It was all done by radar. Because we used what they called GH [General Heading]

08:00 and there was a signal come from Scotland and there was one come from England and the one in England was the key one cause the other one we're just flying a beam down and you had to fly about 85 to 95 degrees you always had to go in a south east and you had to do a 9 minute. It had to be 9 minutes straight. So if you had to fly over a heavily fortified place to get there well that was just too bad. And then the leading aircraft where they got where this beam crossed onto the thing the first bloke dropped it then the other four ran in and did the same and then each one

08:30 that followed through on the whole lot. So we laid a pattern out a 250 aircraft within 20 minutes over a target. And but on major air raids that was when the 5 Group come out with us. We were Three Group. Well they flew by day the same as they flew at night time just as a gaggle they you know just a stream. And on that raid on Bremen did I tell you that before about that bloke nearly

09:00 bombing us? No well as we ran on this 9 minute course all these other people were flying all over the top of us and we were trying to keep formation. The next thing the mid-upper gunner says, "Hey Skip, a fellas opened his bomb doors on top of us." And I looked up and he was no further up than that sheet of tin there and he'd opened his bomb doors. Well I couldn't turn because when you turn in an aircraft you go like that. So I hit the rudder and skidded and his first bomb dropped between the main plane and the tail plane

09:30 and that was the run up. So I took his number anyway and took it cause they were supposed to watch. But see they weren't used to flying by daylight and they were mesmerised by the sight of all these aircraft coming over the target. And so that was a scary sort of a thing because we had to. And then of course Smithy got shot down over the target. That was the one I told you about got himself back. But and then Essen was another one we went on where we had the same type a thing but we didn't have any trouble on that one.

10:00 It was Helengrad, Essen and Cologne, well I didn't do Cologne. But one of our squadron got killed on that one. Actually the Cologne Cathedral was named as the aiming point because it was basically bombed all round and it was. Whether they really wanted to them to hit it or whether they knew nobody'd actually hit it on the point I don't know. But this Flight Sergeant Ray he went straight up and he said, "Well my bombs won't drop on the Cathedral anyway. I don't believe in that." But he got shot

10:30 down before he got there and it was just over the front line and 3 days later they come across his body and two others in addition they'd been pitchforked to death. They dunno what happened to the others. Whether they got killed in the plane when it was shot down or whether they were burnt in the plane. But they found Ray himself the pilot and two others got out. But there was haymakers in the field where they landed and they rounded them up and pitchforked them to death and left them in the thing. But the frontline soldiers found them 3 days afterward.

11:00 So that was him. And funny thing when he joined the squadron they had to find a thing. Because his name was Ray Death Ray was the nickname they gave him on the thing. Mine was Wheeler because of that accident with the. My history had gone ahead of me and when I got there it was up Wheeler Willis.

And did that kind of create a bit a kudos that whole incident?

Which one? Oh yeah. It did yeah. Like at the

11:30 accident?

When you were commissioned?

Yeah it did yeah. But see I was living with my crew up until then but then I had to go and live apart from them. Because once your commissioned you got a go eat in the officers mess. They eat in the non-commissioned officers mess. Do you're different. And you're supposed to then s'posed to salute me and that we Australians didn't do that sort a thing anyway. Unless the group captain was wandering by and then they'd go (salute). Otherwise they'd be particularly the Englishmen because they'd be in trouble.

12:00 But no it caused a bit of consternation because I was the only one from that course that got one. But something else I thought of there when I was talking about that too. But now. I get these slips of memory.

It'll probably come back. If we could just take a step back and we'll just go back to the ship the West Point. What were the conditions like on the West Point?

Very good. Actually we were supposed to work on the West Point. This was to you know they didn't want you sitting idle for a trip

12:30 over there 21days or whatever it was. So we were supposed to work and I was allocated to the bake house and so I was in the kitchen. And it was rather odd really because the Americans have got different idea of food to us. Their ice cream was semi fluid to start with and they grab up all these curries or salads or stews and everything was all chopped up and mushy. It was all full of olive oil or you know sugar and it was all

13:00 sloppy everywhere. The only thing I dunno whether it was Thanksgiving Day but it was some particular feast day anyway and we had roast turkey. That was the big you know. We had a real and plum pudding and that so. The only good meal we had on the whole ship. But they used to have percolated coffee all the time. They'd drank this stuff that was percolated and it was horrible. I says haven't you can't you blokes make tea? Oh yeah. And they

13:30 got out a cup and I dunno what and they set up another one a these. They emptied a coffee percolator and started that to make tea in it. And they said, I said, "You don't drink tea like that." I said, "Gets too bitter." I said, "Haven't you got a teapot on this ship?" "Oh, we'll find you one." So they souvenired one from the officers quarters somewhere. Cause they had all the stuff there they used to have to take them into the officers too. So they got this little teapot for me and I used to make me own tea out a the boiling water straight away. So I was happy as Larry. And all we did was helped them washed the dishes or dry the dishes. They wouldn't let you do

14:00 the cooking. They had their proper cooks to do all that and we were just a damn nuisance to them. It's the same in England. When we were at Brighton one of the jobs they gave us to fill in time they sent us out to an aerodrome as aerodrome control pilots. And we got there and the aerodrome control pilots are "What do they know about controlling aircraft." You know. So we'd stand there watching what they were doing and there was a lot a snow about at the time so our main job there was shovelling snow off the runway.

14:30 And actually on that trip I asked permission to go out on a trip with the squadron. And that had people used to do that before. You'd go onto those sort a places something and they'd ask could they go and as long as you could get a crew that was prepared to take you could go. And when I went to the bloke in charge of the squadron. It was Ninety Squadron and I'd become quite friendly with another Australian pilot who was on this squadron and I asked him if he'd take me. "Oh yeah. No trouble at all."

15:00 Pilot Officer Rowntree was his name. Funny thing I remember that and I can't remember people I met yesterday. But he said so he said, "But you'll have to go and ask the squadron leader first." So I went up to the squadron leader and said, "Can I go out with Rownie?" He said, "Oh," he said, "we're not allowed to give permission for that. You've got to go and see the group captain." That's the bloke in charge of the whole station. So we went up to this group captain. There was another chap going to do the same thing so we went up to the group captain and went in and told him what we wanted. He said, "What do you want boys?" We said, "We want to go out on the next raid that's on.

15:30 Pilot Officer Rowntree is prepared to take me," and the other bloke said who was prepared to take him. "Oh that'll be fine yeah yeah, go good." So anyway we went down went back to the squadron leader and told him. He says, "Go back and see him when he's sober." So we went back to see him when he was sober and he said, "No way. I'll get hung." Because the second pilots that's why the air force did away with them early in the war because the number of second pilots that bought an injured plane home when the pilot was killed were virtually nil. So

16:00 they reckoned they were wasting a pilot by getting put one. And then they didn't want these spare bods

they'd spend all this money on to make them into a pilot they didn't want them going out on some mission without any training and getting killed in the process. And that particular night that I was supposed to have gone and I still wished I'd gone it was the worse night Bomber Command ever had. Because the met had promised them tin-tense cloud over France then when the got there it was a beautiful crystal clear moonlight night and they followed them all the way

16:30 from the coast to west to all the way back and they lost 90 aircraft. But Rowntree come back so I'd a come back. But that would a looked good in my log book bein' able to. But that was one a the worst Bomber Command raids of the war. They lost 90 aircraft that night because of the bad met and they'd gone so far into it they didn't call them back. Like in some cases like that they did call them back and when we were in training they used to give us intelligence reports on

17:00 what you did and what you didn't do. And like don't talk once you've been briefed don't talk about where you're going and what you're doing and this particular instance that they quoted they were supposed to go and bomb a factory somewhere in Germany an aircraft factory or something and because of the weather it was postponed and so the bods went off down to the local pub and they were talking away and this bloke said to one a the other blokes that was there with him he said, "Oh

17:30 we're going to Nuremberg, deep France tonight." Something like that. There was a spy in the room and they were flying Blenheims in those days which were you know murder. He rang the Germans in Blenheims, said, "There's five…" Not Blenheim, wherever it was. "The British are coming over to bomb you tonight at such and such a time they'll be over there. So many from this squadron and so forth's going." So the Germans said, "Okay." So they got onto

18:00 all the fighters and got it. There was a British spy somewhere in this particular town heard the Germans talking about the British were coming over at mid night to bomb the place. He got in touch with (UNCLEAR) and they were 20 minutes out of the target when they got this thing, "Come home. It's all off." So the Blenheims turned round and come back to England. They were pretty chipped because nobody liked aborting a trip after they gone so far. When they got home and they found out why because careless talk in one place it warned the Germans which meant they'd a all been shot

18:30 down and one of our spies in Germany they picked the talk up and reported back to England. So he saved a whole squadron. And that's just how dangerous it was to talk you know after you'd been told where you were going. And so they used to and like the night we were to go to Heligoland which was the Naval base. The day I should say. The same thing happened. Not the spying part. But we were briefed to go to Heligoland but the weather set in over the target so they

19:00 put it off for 2 hours because the mets [meteorologist] expected the weather to clear which it did to. Cause I got a photograph of Heligoland. But I mean see the same thing could a happened there. You know if they'd a been prepared it's a naval base well they'd a probably blasted half us out and they'd a brought the fighters up from everywhere. So you had to be very careful with that type of thing because of the security. And one a the blokes that gave these lectures he broke all his own rules. He was shot down over Germany and we always carried

19:30 photographs of ourselves in civilian clothes. I've got mine there. I look like Mark Dillinger the Second. Cause they used to get these old tweed coats and dress us up and take these photographs. And you'd have one front on one that way and one that way. Because as soon as you landed in France they'd come "Photo, photo, photo." It was one of the things they knew. And before you knew it you'd have a migrant workers outfit. Well this bloke was lucky he got out of the aeroplane he parachuted

20:00 out and the pilot got killed and a couple of others got killed and the French got him into a safe house and he actually went to his pilots funeral and stood at the head of the grave while the Germans buried him. Dressed up as a farm labourer. And then he walked back and he walked right through the Channel ports and he did sketches in his notebooks of all the gun emplacements. If he'd a been caught between there and Spain they'd a shot him because he was a spy. But he

20:30 did all this and he got right though to Spain and got back to England and a course he got a decoration for gallantry in the face of the enemy sort a business. But he said, "But don't do what I did because that's the penalty you'll pay if you do it." You know you'll get shot on the spot. And we had one pilot on our squadron, Thawbeck was his name. He had been a student in Holland when the war broke out and the Dutch came through and he wasn't gonna pick up with the Germans so he escaped to England and joined the air force become a pilot. And he was the only one on our

21:00 and in Germany they had posters all over the place you know wanted for treason or whatever they were gonna charge him with. And he had to be shot if he's captured. Anyway he was allowed to go to the armoury and get a .38 [pistol] and carry it on his person. Because if you were shot down with a arm you're counted as spying you were shot. And he said, "Well he wasn't gonna be shot anyway cause he'd be shot otherwise." So he was gonna fight it out. He said, "I'll probably die but it doesn't matter.

21:30 I'm gonna fight before I die and kill a German too." So he was the one bloke on our pilot that was allowed to fly armed. Cause that was the thing you weren't allowed to fly armed because they could take you as a spy. And he survived the war so he went back.

Could you walk us through a day of you know on a day of when you'd have an operation?

Could you walk off the aerodrome?

Could you walk us through a day a typical day where you had an operation on that day?

Yeah.

What would happen from when you

22:00 **get up, to meetings, to doing operation?**

Well first thing you went to the mess and had a look for a. Next time you stop I'll show you. You go to the mess and look at the battle order. See if there's a battle order for the thing. And if not you went over to the squadron officer and you sat there and if they weren't expecting it they might send you out to do bombing practice or gunnery practice or put you in a link trainer to do some link training blind flying and then the telephone'd ring and they'd say, "Okay it's on." And they'd have a battle order there.

22:30 Or you could go back and go to sleep if you wanted to if they didn't have a job for you. But usually we'd go out in the morning because the flying conditions was usually better in the mornings than in the evenings. Then they'd tell you what time briefing time was and you'd go there and they'd have the group captain'd be there and all these staff they'd have the Nat officer. Navigation officer. Gunnery officer and they would all give their little briefing what to

23:00 do and they'd unveil this map with the target on it. It'd be as big as those 2 walls and twice as high and they'd have red things. Cause we didn't just fly to a target. We'd fly down to France. We'd go over France and we'd dodge places like Essen and those sort a places. They'd dodge you between to keep you away from the anti-aircraft guns as far as they could. You couldn't keep away front fighters if they found you but you could. So you'd dog leg. And

23:30 also by dog legging you threw the fighters off. Because you were gonna go like that and they'd the radar people'd say, "Okay fighters you know scramble." Then you'd turn this way and you'd go up there so they'd have to be called down then they'd put another one up. Then you probably go out for 10 minutes then you'd do. You kept changin' direction all the time. And the same when you come out. But they'd try to straighten the route out if they could. Just dodge heavier fortifications. So you usually took a lot longer. And the fact that with our

24:00 case we had to be north of the place to get this you know 9 minute run down on the south eastern thing that we had to do. So we always had to come in to the north of a target anyway so we always had to get up that way and then come down and then we'd come out through the south way.

So you had a map?

Yeah. They had a map up on the wall and then the navigators were issued with smaller maps with the whole thing on it. They were all cut just for the target and we'd do the whole thing and it was

24:30 marked and he had to keep you on. And he had to do a fix every 6 minutes and they did that on the H2S screen. He had a H2S screen which read the land as you went over it and he could pick out things on that and he could do that and then he could. He had another screen that he could take and take readings on it of where you and you also had the compass there that showed him what the heading was. And he kept changing. Cause the wind and what kept changing all the time so you'd have to keep changing. But with us because we flew

25:00 formation they still had to keep that in case we got hit and then we dropped out a the screen. So you had to know where you were. But actually it doesn't matter what he did we had to follow the leader because he had the main responsibility for takin' you where you went. Although in some cases that fell flat. Because when I came home from one raid over Germany one night and I was just pink all over and went and had a bath and Laurie and I went out to the pictures. The next morning he said, "What is your

25:30 skin like Eric?" And I says it's still pink. He said, "You'd better go to the doctor." So I went to the doctor and they bundled me to isolation hospital because they thought I had scarlet fever for the second time in my air force career. And so the wing commanders who run a squadron they were only allowed to fly once a month because they didn't want their headquarters turning over all the time. So he picked on this time to go out cause they didn't have a crew so he took my crew and went out and as they developed half the.

26:00 There was squadron leader McDonald he was takin' he had the navigation officer with him in his aircraft and they gradually split up and they were different places. And Wing Commander Buckingham called George up he says, "What's with you? You got the right course we're Squadron Leader McDonald is a couple a miles adrift of us." George says, "No that's the right course. The right course." It's a wonder Buckingham didn't change. But he was s'posed to be the leader so he had to sort a keep

26:30 on it. Whereas McDonald he was just a sub-leader. Cause a squadron leader was in charge of a flight. Well he was in charge of A-flight. We were in B-flight and he was going this day because the wing commander was going. But anyway the wing commander was and he was badgerin' George all the time and when they got there got the photographs he got he got a target hit. The other mob landed they followed McDonald and they landed them all out on a farm. And he had the navigational and he put his when he wrote down

27:00 the co-ordinates he put the decimal point in the wrong place. So he was one point over so they were 5

mile away from where they should a been and all just ended up there. So old Buckingham was pleased as punch with two tails. And he says when I got back he says, “Oh,” he said, “You’ve got a very good crew Willis.” They always called you by your surname over there. The English never called you by a name at all. But he always Willis to everything and I remember I had a row with him too so I wasn’t very popular with him. When they changed

27:30 the turrets in the Lancasters and when Bob that was my rear-gunner did his training he trained in the new Fraser-Nash turret. And when we got to the squadron they still had the old ones and then they changed them and the gunnery leader didn’t know anything about this new FN [Fraser-Nash] turret so Bob gave all the lectures to all the squadron gunners on this. And he did a good job. He was carpenter by trade but the knew his stuff. He was oldest gunner in the squadron. He was 37 I think. But he gave all these

28:00 lectures so the gunnery leader recommended him for commission because he’s you know what he’d done to help out. And Squadron Leader McDonald he had two young ruffians as his thing but because he was Squadron Leader he recommended them from commissions too. And they come from the Docklands in Liverpool and that’s no disgrace but these were a disgrace. They were real two little well I won’t say what. They were no good. But because they were in his crew and he wanted all officers in his crew and he recommended them. I s’pose he got on well with

28:30 them and drank well with them. But anyway when the things come out those two got the commissions and Bob didn’t get one. So that upset me. Even though it’s none of my business and I was told so too. So I went up to the adjutant and I said, “Could I see Wing Commander Buckingham please?” “What do you want to see him for?” I said, “Well my gunner was recommended for commission and didn’t get it.” He said, “What’s that got to do with you?” I says, “Everything.” I said, “He’s my gunner. And,” I said, “I want to know why.” Mmmmm. So he went in he

29:00 come back and said, “Take a seat. He’ll see you shortly.” So I went in and he says, “what can I do for you Willis?” And I said, “I just wanna know why my gunner didn’t get his thing.” He says, “Ohhhh.” And he gets up and he lights up a cigarette and he’s marching up and down. “Well, Willis,” he said, “It’s like this,” he said, “We don’t like you Australians.” He said, “We look at a man’s future and what he’s been in life.” In other words he’s takin’ a crack at me cause I didn’t have an education. He said, “And after all, Farthing was only in the building trade.” I said, “Oh really?” He

29:30 didn’t take a liking to me. But that’s why he didn’t get his commission, because he was only in the building trade. And the air force didn’t give non-coms [Non Commissioned Officer] those sort a things. And I said, “Well how did Squadron Leader Howard?” I said, “He come from the docks of Liverpool.” He said, “That’s Squadron McDonald’s business.” He said. “I had nothing to do with it.” I said, “Well you’re supposed to be the leader.” He said, “That’s it.” He said, “You’re dismissed Willis.” So. And normally

30:00 Flight Lieutenants were handed out like I was only an acting flying officer because I was made a pilot officer when I and then I got there and 2 days later I was made a flying. Because all captains had to be flying officers. I suppose unless you’d been really naughty and you know and you’d been barred because you’d committed a crime. Like we had one bloke who was for a start just a what do they call it? Flight sergeant. Warrant officer. But they eventually gave him a commission

30:30 too. Because he’d had a crash in Canada. He was royal flying and they charged him with 8 charges. Damaging those aircraft. You know a whole string of them and so that’s why he didn’t get one when he went to the squadron for a start. But anyway and as the older crews went the ones that had the most ops got the next were made acting flight lieutenants and then if they lasted long enough they were made a they were put in charge of a squadron and they were made an acting flight commander. So and our wing commander was actually only a

31:00 flying officer because he’d added to all his acting ranks because of his thing. But anyway I had 16 ops and my mate he had 16 ops and a young bloke that had only had 3 ops who went through Cranwell, an Englishman and went through Cranwell and that was their like our Point Cook in Australia. It was their staff college. But that had nothing to do with flying training basically. Because you know you

31:30 went through a flying training school but because it was at Cranwell he was. But he got it and we got dumped and I know I got dumped because I was insubordinate. And he could’ve charge me once with insubordination too because on one. I did 6 trips in 9 days and it was a summers day and there was a lot of cu-nim cloud around and as we were coming home. We held the record for the fastest squadron to come home in a group. We used to put 3 aircraft down on the

32:00 runway at the one time and I think by day we used to put in. The whole squadron used to land within 42. Forty-seven seconds by day and 42 seconds by night because we used to come in. Now getting home Buckingham liked to put on a big show and it was hellish and rough and we you know you’re like this because as you flew under the cu-nim clouds bouncing around and probably because I was tired I must a stood off a bit. Next thing I got this call on the thing from which I

32:30 thought was my Vic Leader he says, “Easy.” And that was another thing I was flying an aircraft which I wasn’t used to and it had bad trim. And he said, “Easy, move in closer. Move in closer.” And I said, “Get stuffed.” And that’s the only expression I use. I’ve never used it since or before but I was so wild and all the people around me always used it and that’s just what I said to him. And it was the wing commander. It wasn’t. The other bloke was Australian and he would a. And so when we landed they

33:00 usually just come round and ask how you are and Buckingham comes up to me and says, “How did it go Willis?” And I said, “All right sir,” just at the thing. And he said, “By the way Willis, were you flying easy today?” I says, “Yes sir,” and looked him in the eye and he just turned around and walked off. Someone comes up and says, “This is the bloke that told the wing commander what to go and do.” And that was the first time I knew it was the wing commander. But anyway I got wild and I moved over and I had my wing tip

33:30 that far from Max Door all the way home bumping up and down bumping up and down and when I got home he said, “What in the bloody hell you think you’re doing trying to put your wing through the door?” And I said, “Well you told me to move in closer.” And he said, “That wasn’t me. That was Buckingham.” So we all misbehaved sometimes. But I paid for it because I missed out on my promotion.

What would you have to do after an operation? Like any kind of

34:00 **debriefing or?**

Well yeah when you come back you went in and each crew sat down in front of an Intelligence Officer the whole crew round. Just one crew to one table and he’d asked you all the questions what you saw and this is how they compiled who went missing who was shot down or who maybe just went adrift like I did on our first one. They’d get all the statistics you know and that’s how they knew how many were actually. Cause the Germans’d claim they shot half of us down. But then they knew how many were shot down because of the returns and they’d go

34:30 through the whole thing and what the weather was like and what were the fighters and what were the ack-ack [anti-aircraft gunfire] like and which direction it comes from. All sorts of things like that and they’d write all these reports down on those what happened on the trips out and what happened on the way back too. Like we had to report why we went and dropped that cookie up in the thing. And the reason why you had to drop it before you got home. In the early days a lot of aircraft landed with them and the first night that happened they jarred them and they lost 7 or

35:00 12 aircraft of one squadron because the end to end fusing buckled and it set the full cookie off and it blew the whole plane to smithereens on the tarmacs. Which caused a lot of other damage too. And so from then on they ruled that you were never to. The armour piercing ones you could bring them home and land because they had a propeller on the end of them and the firing pin was on the end of that propeller and when it went down on the thing there was a pin through

35:30 the thing like that that locked it and as they fell off the pin pulled out and they went down and that gradually wound off and that let the firing pin lose and when it hit the ground it went like that and hit the fuse and that exploded it. But while that pin was still pinned it couldn’t explode. And they were actually protection from you. Like if flak hit them they wouldn’t go off because they were that thick steel and that was part of the damage. When they exploded these big bits of heavy steel’d scatter. Whereas the cookie, it was just like a jam tin and it was

36:00 filled about three quarters full and it had a fuse from end to end and of course it used to turn and twist in the air. Whereas the other’s it’d go straight because they were aerodynamic. And when they hit the ground if they hit on a corner which way it bent the fuse and it blowed it doesn’t matter what happened. So but there was no safety device on it at all. So if it didn’t go you to get out to sea and try to land it at sea. Get rid of it by manual you know get a fire or get anything you could and break the thing if necessary and get rid of

36:30 it. Because otherwise you’re likely to blow up when you land it. So that was that.

With all the dog legging you had to do was there any issues of running out of fuel?

No because they always. Well if you holed your. If you had tanks holed you did run the risk of running out of fuel. Although a lot of them were self sealing but self sealing is only good like a bullet hole might go or a bit a shrapnel go through and the sealing between the two layers would seal it off

37:00 again temporarily. But if a bloomin’ shell went through it well then you lost all the fuel in that tank and there were several tanks all through the wing and they all had to drain through into a certain system. So there wasn’t and they worked out the mileage you had to do and what petrol you’d use and that varied from a mile to the gallon to 1.5 mile to the gallon depending how thing. Actually I had the record in our squadron. I had the best fuel consumption on the squadron with my aircraft F for Freddy.

37:30 We used to get there and back on about 9.4 of a gallon per kilometre or per nautical mile actually not kilometre nautical mile. Where some of the others are up to 1.5, 1.7 depending on the age of the motors and things like that. They’re statistics they kept too all those sort a stuff.

How did you conserve fuel?

Well the engine like in motor cars all things a bit different and well if you flew the thing as you were supposed to fly it. Never exceeded your limits or didn’t do a lot a

38:00 silly things and did straight and some engines operate better than others. And this was a brand new aircraft when I took it over and that probably had something to do with it but also the way you fly it. It’s like the way you drive a car. Some people get a lot better petrol consumption than others simply because of the way they don’t use their brakes. They just glide to a halt at the lights. They take off

slowly. Other people drive up to the back end of a car and jam their brakes on. Then they take off to the thing. It's the way you drive them and I mean. Like if you pull your

38:30 power up like that and take off you use a hell of a lot of petrol in a full motor. Whereas if you just gradually wriggle it up and gradually take time taking off. See some people want to get up in a hell of a big hurry because once your motors start they reckoned the quicker you get off the ground the safer you were. So soon as you put your brakes on and you get your motors up to about 2,000 revs full revs and then you let the brakes go and away you go. But some would turn round let the brakes go and let it start moving and then they'd ram them through. Well you use a lot a petrol [energy] doing that

39:00 and then on your climb if you try to climb too steeply you used a lot more petrol than if you took a gradual climb. And even though we formed formation you didn't formate until you got. 18,500 was your ceiling you all wound round up until you got to 18,000 feet or wherever it was and then you all come together and then off you went. Because you had what they called a leaving point and we usually used to leave over Lakenheath airport because it wasn't being used at the time it was being resurfaced and everything. So we

39:30 had to move straight over so like and one day we climbed to 18,000 feet of cloud. You couldn't see a thing and that was probably the most nerve-racking trip I ever did other because even that night I knew there was only 6 other aircraft you know in the sky out that way. But this time we knew there was 250 of them all in this one squadron tryin' to climb up to get up to 18,000 and we broke cloud just on 18,000 feet and goin' round. You flew a

40:00 little triangle like that all the time. But I mean everybody was doin' the same thing and you also had different take offs time so you don't know whether they're and you couldn't see that far. So that was the most nerve racking I ever did other than with that one in the fog and is that it.

We're at the end of another tape.

Tape 5

00:35 **Okay Eric we might just. There was some just talking about your childhood were there some kind of hawkers or people that would come and try and sell you things?**

That's right yeah. Twice a year we had hawkers. One was old Bill Lovering he was an Englishman and he used to have drapery and boots and all that sort a stuff. Sewing gear haberdashery. And the other fellow was

01:00 a Syrian old Joe. Another Old Joe. Old Joe Ubbadulla they both come from Rockhampton and his people had a shop in the main street in Boldover Street in Rockhampton where the trains run along the main street and they used to run the shop and he used to do this 6 monthly trip around the Dawson and Callide Valley. He'd go back home and pick up and then start the second tour. He used to come round in June and December and the people up there like my mother and the people that on the station

01:30 where she worked originally they would order their stuff from Hedricks or Thomas Browns or Dalgety's or some of those big pastoral companies cause they all run that type of stuff in those days. And they'd put it on the train and it'd come up as far as Rannes which was the end of the line then and these two horse drawn wagons one George Barrett and the other one was oh doesn't matter. They'd pick it up and they'd go together they'd do up along the Dawson to Theodore then they'd come over into the Burnett and

02:00 come back down through the Callide and that used to take them virtually 5 months. Then they'd have a month at home to get their new stock and clean up the wagons and start all over again. And depending on the number of people at the station how long. They'd go from one to each one they'd pull up at each station and stay there for a period of time. Old Bill Lovering used to only usually spend about 4 weeks and Old Joe'd be 6 to 8 weeks sometimes depending how. And he carried lollies and that's the first with children and

02:30 all the groceries and things like that. You know non perishables like apricots and dried pears and that type of stuff and tea sugar any stuff like rice tinned canned meats like bully beef and spam [manufactured meat] and all those sort a things and they'd just pitch their tent opposite where we lived at the homestead at Hainault and we used to like Old Joe Ubbadulla because when he went there might be half a carton of lollies left and he'd give that to Mum for the four kids because they spend a lot a money there I suppose. But

03:00 one a the tales about Old Bill Lovering. One a these blacks at Camboon run up an order with him and it wasn't one that the Bell's guaranteed. So he hadn't paid his bill so next time he come around this bloke come in and wanted a pair elastic side boots and he said, "But Bill," he said, "You haven't paid your bill from last time." He said, "What do you mean last time." He said, "You had a shirt and a pair of jodhpurs from me last time and it was 2 pound something whatever it was." "Don't talk old debts to me." Don't talk old debts to me he said. No he wouldn't pay

03:30 the money anyway so he didn't get his pair a boots. But they were regular visitors every. But I know in

1928 was one a the major floods in central Queensland and they were bogged down at Banana. They got as far as Banana and they bogged down so all the Christmas supplies didn't turn up the first week in December. So we had corned beef and potatoes and home grown vegetables for Christmas dinner.

Might just need to repeat that last bit I think that car?

So I mean because they were bogged

04:00 down they didn't make it by Christmas to our end of the road we only had corned beef and local grown vegetables and that for Christmas dinner cause all the special things like the bottled fruit salads. Rosella used to have a beautiful bottled fruit salad and the tinned and the hams and all that type of stuff that didn't arrive in time. So we just had to depend on the ordinary food we already had in the place. But see I know Mum used to order I think 3 sacks 150 pound sacks of flour and two or three bags 70 pound bags of

04:30 sugar and all the sultanas raisons the seed to do a 6 month period and then she had 6 pound Robo tea tins which she stored all this stuff in the kitchen on great long shelves. But even then sometimes they'd go weevilly. So it'd be my job to get them out put them in the great big wash basin pour the hot water all over them. Shift them put them through and when all the stuff floated on the top skim it all off and then. You wouldn't eat them but they'd be used in the brownies and the cakes and the biscuits and all that sort a thing. You couldn't

05:00 throw them away because you'd have no biscuits or no cakes. So that was part and parcel of it. That was a regular. We used to look forward to these hawkers coming around because it was a bit of activity on the place. See and on that place there was Mum, Dad and us kids. Then the Palmers had two children and then there was anything up from about 7 to 9 there was usually 6 to 7 stockmen. There was a roust-a-bout and there was a

05:30 station mechanic. He had to look after the Utes. Well there weren't many there was one Ute there but he had to look after the stationeries the pump the water and the windmills and all that type of stuff and that was a full time job on that sort of a place. We had about 50 or 60 windmills and pumps type a thing. So there was a fair bit of trade and the fact that there was in that early part the closest shop was in Innisfail which is 90 mile away. But then as I said earlier Bell's did

06:00 set up that little store in Camboon which virtually only carried you know basics and they were very, very expensive so Mum used to try and avoid ordering anything through them. Because I remember once she ordered a pound of butter cause she was just about out a butter. Must a been a bit of a dry period and our cows weren't milking well and I think it cost her one and thruppence for the pound a butter when the mailman brought it out he charged her a shilling for brinin' it out and then he ate half of it with his lunch anyway. So

06:30 it wasn't very popular thing. But no mostly the vehicle traffic in Biloela when I was very young was 50% of it would've been sulkies and buggies and things. Well our only thing which brings me. Audrey reminded me of this before. Dad bought his first car in 1928 cause he was finishing work there that year or just after and we were going down to Sandgate for holidays

07:00 and Maurie Cooper who was the garage man General Motors dealer in Innisfail he brought this Chev [Chevrolet] car up to Hainault and took Dad out to the old racecourse where he used to train his racehorses and drove him round three or four times. Did a review. Said, "You'll be right Mars. It'll be right." The next day we set off for Brisbane for our holidays. Dad didn't have a drivers licence and it was that was as I say that was the flood year and when.

07:30 I'm wrong there. The year that the wagons didn't get through was 1924. And 1928 we took off and there was an awful storm durin' the night and we got to Innisfail the Burnett River was a banker and they only had a corduroy about that far off the bed a the river and it was just round logs been cut down in the bush and laid and with all and all these things were on the thing. Well we couldn't cross it so we had to camp in the car on the side a the river that night

08:00 and next morning and old fella Windamere lived on the far corner he got in touch what the local mailman in our mail Billy Marks in Innisfail who was 3 mile away and he come out and when the water was down far enough which was about 2 foot over this it was all muddy water flowing he agreed to drive the car across because Dad you know didn't have the experience to drive in ordinary road much less over a flooded bridge. But what they didn't know they walked across it but they missed it. One of the rails'd washed out in the flood and when the

08:30 tyres hit it they were so slippery because the water the car just fell over and fell into the river. This was a brand new car. We'd only taken delivery of it the day before. And Mum had bought Irene a new velvet dress for Christmas and it was purple it wasn't fixed dye and it went through all the things in the suitcase. So when they got the car out. They got it out they got it back up on the corduroy cause those sort a cases in the bush those days everybody around come to help you know and they got the car out and

09:00 then they had to course drain all the water out and change the oil and in case there was sand in it and that. And so Mum had to put all our clothes out on the barbed wire fence alongside the river and dry it out. And it must a been getting late in the afternoon by the time it was all dry and we got going again. And then as we went from Innisfail to Mundubbera no past Mundubbera. Between Mundubbera and

Gayndah is what they used to call the

09:30 Binjour Plateau and they'd just put a new road down the mountain. God bless you. And it was had 42 bends in 2 miles and it was something like the Toowoomba range. You know you looked over top and saw the trees just a couple a hundred feet down below you and this lightening and thunder. Mum had her rosary beads out saying the rosary all the time. Every time the lightening. And us kids were petrified a course because it was a really violent storm and

10:00 with all the lightening you'd see these trees below you and it was just a dirt gravely road but anyway we negotiated that all right and got to Gayndah. Instead of getting to Sandgate for Christmas day we only got as far as Ipswich. And so we had Christmas dinner at the pub in Ipswich and they had balloons and party stuff and little presents for all the kids that come there for Christmas dinner. So we had a sort a Christmas and then we went on. But that was my big memory of the flood that year. And the other in

10:30 '24 when the teams didn't turn up. But and we had that old Chev right up until 1937 I think it was. Dad bought a new one in 1937 and then he traded that in for another one in 1939 just as the war broke out. So

How did it grazing being a protected occupation

11:00 **how did that what kind of impact did that have on your family?**

Well Mum tried to use that actually. But Walloon Pastoral Company they had an old bloke there who couldn't go to the war. He was an elderly man himself anyway and he was the station manager but he said to Dad, "Look if the boys go off to the war and you want to do your mustering you just call on us and when we can't." Cause they used to come up and go through our place and do what they called Wakeful and Wave Hill. They had two three properties on the other side. Wakeful. Wave Hill and the 18

11:30 Mile and two of them had huts on them and they'd come through our place and muster then and old man Harry Webb said, "Well you know when they're up there doin' that they'll call at your place and do yours on the way home." because Dad only had 2 paddocks to muster anyway. So that gave me an excuse and. When the army might've been more particular I don't know. But the air force said, "Well how's your father gonna get on to muster? you know do his mustering when you're away." And I said, "Oh well the next door neighbours have volunteered to do the work for him without any that's their war effort sort a business cause

12:00 none of them were gonna go to the war." Like one a the stockmen said, "Eric I wouldn't mind goin' to the war if they didn't use live bullets." No thank you. But that was the attitude of some of them.

So there was no problem with you leaving?

No.

They didn't enforce it in anyway?

No they didn't enforce it no. But like if I'd been employed by a boss and he said, "Well I can't do without him." That would a been the full stop. They'd a believed him not me. They wouldn't a let me go but because it was my own parents and Mum didn't

12:30 go to the actual extreme of writing and telling them that I couldn't go. She reckoned I was mug anyway. But the point is they asked the question and I told them what was happening and they took that and they let it go. Because they were actually tryin' to recruit as much air crew as they could at the time. If you'd gone into either ground staff or something like that they'd a probably said no.

Did your parents need to sign the forms for you to join up?

No because I was 21. I mean they should a had to signed the others but he didn't

13:00 sort a, he wasn't really interested. He asked the questions he supposed to ask and I gave him an answer that he considered satisfactory so there was nothing done about it. But lots of employers did stop their workman from going for that by that reason. Because they needed em to run the properties they claimed. Then you know particular the big properties like the one next to us where over 100,000 acres. They had 6 or 7 stockmen there. But they were quite happy to help out in that regard so that was one hurdle I

13:30 overcome without any problem. But I'll never forget while I was in Brisbane and I'd joined the air force and I'd been put on the reserve and told to wait for my call up because of the back lag in training and I went to the movies I can't remember what theatre it was now and some young soldier come in and sat along side me and durin' intermission he says, "Why aren't you in uniform young fella?" So you know even that I never believed in that sort a thing. I never ask people why they didn't go to the war because

14:00 I went because I wanted to go. If other people didn't want to go that was their problem. But that was a nasty attitude. And I remember one incident in Sydney that was highlighted in the media. This fella had been to the Middle East and he had both legs blown off and he was laying on the beach with a towel over him stretched out and this young girl come up to him and gave him a white feather and asked him why he wasn't fighting for his country. So that's the sort a thing that used to happen.

14:30 I mean I've always been a bit soft centred I suppose I dunno but I mean I didn't believe in those sort a things.

Did any of the men receive any white letters whilst you were away for not coming back?

I couldn't answer that, Kylie [interviewer]. I don't know. But I mean many people were in civilian they'd been in the air force or they'd been in the army they'd been wounded they'd been civilled out some of them copped it you know people ignorant people in my book because they don't know what their history was like. Like this lad that sat alongside me. He'd never seen me in his life

15:00 before and then he asked me why I wasn't in uniform. Well it was none of his business to start with but the point is I was on the reserve of the air force. I'd done all I could. I couldn't do any more. But that stuff was more prevalent in the cities rather than in the bush. There wasn't so much there.

So what was it like leaving your parents, saying goodbye to them for you know?

That was a bit hard. Had go into. Mum had to take me into Biloela to put me on the

15:30 rail motor cause when they called you up they sent you rail vouchers. You had to travel by rail and Mum and Dad could a taken me down but because it was for nothing Mum. Mum being Scot she wouldn't. Beside the cost of it you know and the war. So I had to go to Biloela and take a 12 hour trip from there to Rockhampton and then get the mail train from Rockhampton to Brisbane. That was sad when I had to leave Mum cause with all the casualties mounting you felt you'd probably never come back anyway. So

16:00 that was hard. Bein' a sentimental type.

Can you remember what she said to you?

Well I remember what she said to me on the way into town and it wasn't very nice either. Because I can tell you the exact spot it was on the top a the hill at Crowsdale station right in front of the gate into the house. And she said, "You're only a coward running away from your responsibilities to get a pretty uniform." That's what my mothers parting words to me where.

16:30 That hurt.

Did she have the same feelings towards Jack your brother?

No. He was the favourite. Always was. Always will be till the day he died. So Jack could do no wrong and I could do no right.

Did she give you anything or

17:00 **did you take any personal items with you?**

Not that I can remember. Not that I can remember for that. They did when I was in Kingaroy for me birthday they did send me presents. Dad sent me a little leather shaving kit and Mum I've forgotten what she gave me. She gave me something probably a book probably. But oh no she kept and I wrote all three or four letters. I wasn't a letter writer but because I was away and I knew how much she'd feel it

17:30 that I did write constantly while I was over there. Like air grafts all the time. The original one's they used to fill em and send em over. They put them on microfilm and send them over regularly. But then they replaced those after a while with air grafts. Same type of things you use now. You know a bit a flimsy paper that you fold up. But it's rather odd she saved every one of those cause they were all in her tin trunk when she died so I got a lot a them back. And it's rather odd that I can remember lots a things about the war and what happened

18:00 and yet my brother in law. No, Jacks eldest son. The Biloela RSL [Returned and Services League] wanted details of people come from there and the secretary got in touch with me wanted my history you know and so I decided to do Jack's as well. And I wrote to John his son and asked him to do it and he said, "Well he had no records of Jack at all and Jack didn't talk about the war very much." And he said, "But he had a couple

18:30 of old letters of mine that I'd written to him from England." So he sent them in the thing and on VE [Victory in Europe] night I remember we all got leave to go and we went from Cambridge down to London for the night and there was the lights all came on for the first time in 6 years and all that sort a business. And I was in Trafalgar Square and we were climbing up on Nelsons Column and there was a couple a Canadian WAAFs [CWAAF – Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force] and a couple of American soldiers and

19:00 we sort a started to talk together and after the excitement died down cause the silly idiots were turning double-decker busses over and all this there was just thousands of people crowded into that square. And these poor buses were tryin' to thread there way through and they were manhandling them and turning them over just. I didn't appeal with that. But anyway they decided and we'd gone down to Buckingham Palace with the crowd and they're chanting "We want the King. We want the Queen. We want the King." And all this sort a

19:30 racket so I stood there and they come out on the balcony the whole family and they went and they stood we were there for about 5 or 10 minutes. As soon as they went in the 10,000 or so people they just

turned like that everybody turned and sort of went off. Well we went back up Trafalgar Square and then when this was over one a the Yanks [Americans] said, “Let’s go and have a steak.” I said, “Where are you gonna get steak in this country?” I hadn’t had steak since I left Australia or since I left Canada. And they said, “We know a place that’s got steak.” So we went down bit not far from Trafalgar Square went down into a little

20:00 dungeon underneath and I think they must a dealt with the American air force and probably got meat through them or some black market thing and we had T-Bone steak for the first time in two and a half years and it was beautiful. And then they went off their way home. But apparently according to this letter I offered to walk one. She wanted to know where some place was in London cause she wasn’t used to London. And I said, “I’ll take you there.” Because I said in this letter that I took this WAAAF to show her were this place was cause this was about 1 o’clock in the morning

20:30 and as we went Parliament House Atley Clement Atley was out makin’ a speech. Well now I don’t remember either those two little incidents. I don’t remember going with this girl or where she wanted to go. And I don’t remember hearing listening Clement Atley makin’ a speach on the balcony of Parliament House. And yet everything else about the night I remember. I must a been getting so damn tired at that stage I didn’t. But so apparently I showed her where she wanted to go and that was it because I never ever saw or met I don’t even know her name.

21:00 But we just you know we’d been there together as a crowd do after a war and went and had our steaks together went to the Buckingham Palace and they went their way and I went my way. But I wrote that letter myself to my brother. So it must a happened and yet I don’t remember it. That shocked me because I remember most a the minor details of what went on. Like the bloke tried to get me drunk in London. And the buzz bomb attacks things like that. But no

21:30 it

What was the moment like when you know on VE Day what was your immediate?

Relief that it was all over and we could go to bed and know we’re going to wake up in the morning mostly that. The fact we went to London well we had a wonderful time. Where they just gave us leave to go and we had to back that following day or two days later or something. That was VE Day, Victory in Europe.

22:00 And then of course they told us we were going to be shipped out here well to fight the Japs. That didn’t appeal to me a great deal because I’d read a whole lot about flying in New Guinea before the war with. It doesn’t matter. Some great Australian he one of them was a great Australian war correspondent but his brother had set up an airline in New Guinea and they talked about how they flew the he had Junkers 88 and how they flew the mining dredges

22:30 into the goldfields. They’d dismantle em all and you know and then trip them up and put them together on the goldfields. And the flying conditions up in there were dreadful you know suddenly tropical squalls and all that type a stuff and high mountains and that poor navigation stuff. So that didn’t appeal to me but I mean we just lived for the moment at the time. Our war was over the time being and we were told it would take us a long time to get home. And a story about that my mother immediately

23:00 rang to Frank Ford who was our member but he was also Minister for the Army and so she wrote to Frank Ford demanding that I be brought home for Christmas. And actually they did get boats going quite good and they got it home a lot earlier than what they thought. They told us we’d be at least 6 months before we got home. But the war was over in June and we were on a boat late September and I got home here in October and it was on the Aquitania. It took us just 21 days from South

23:30 Hampton to Melbourne which was a record for the time. We only had one stop and that was Aden on the way home to pick up supplies. But I forget what I was gonna say about that now. Yes. Mum wrote to Frank Ford and in the mail that arrived after I got home there was a letter from Frank Ford sayin’, “Dear Mrs Willis we understand you’re excited to have your son back from the war and all this but we can’t give

24:00 any guarantees when they’re home but we do hope to have them all early in the new year.” Well I was already home and he didn’t even know. Typical government department. But they did a tremendous job of getting us onto boats and getting us home but I dunno why the services and I s’pose all bureaucrats are the same. They didn’t do things logically. Like we went from Brighton

24:30 we weren’t allowed to go to bed that night because they had a lot a people coming in from the north coming down to take our places in the hotels and we were to leave at about half past four in the morning. So they set up a something down at the Palladium so that we could go and entertain ourselves have a dance and this. They had Vera Lynne which was my favourite at the time. And so had her down there singing When the Lights of London Come On Again and all this sort a stuff and Target for Tonight and so forth. And

25:00 so we had to catch our train to go up to Glasgow to get on the boat. We got the boat there and identically another boat left Southampton with all Australian New Zealanders on it too and they went round the Cape and we come through the Canal. But they both had New Zealanders on em and they both had Western Australians on them and we saw the lights of Fremantle as we come past there and those poor devils were brought all the way through to

25:30 Melbourne. Taken off that boat and put on a train and spent 4 days getting over back to Perth. Whereas the other boat called at Perth and dropped the West Aussies [Australians] off and then the Queenslanders on our boat. All the Australians had to get off our boat get on another boat to come to Sydney then we come home from Sydney on a train. But the New Zealanders that were on our boat had to get off our boat and get onto this other boat that followed and join the rest a the New Zealanders to go over to New Zealand. Now why didn't they put all the New Zealanders and all the Western Australians on one

26:00 boat and all the others on another one? But no the army doesn't do that thing. They keep like shuffling you around all the time. But anyway the biggest thing that struck me on the trip home from Sydney. Well in don't take this as an insult but in Melbourne we were standing up on the railing of the ship we were to go on watching them unload the stuff and the Melbourne people greeting their husbands wives you know sweethearts whatever they were on the desk they were all told when the ship was

26:30 coming and they all come down and the accent of the Australian girls it was like a nail on rusty iron. It was dreadful and nasally after the English soft accent. I mean I don't say all Australians speak like that but that one thing. And I was just thinking this and this bloke he said to me he says, "What do you think of our girls' accents?" So he was thinkin' the same thing. We were just bystanders. But then the other thing that struck me coming home from

27:00 Sydney to Brisbane by train was the grey trees Australia grew instead of green because after Ireland and England everything is really green. But I mean I would look at some and they're probably exotic ones come in but the bloodwoods and the ironbarks and the coastal timber it's just grey after you been over in England and those places and it looked pretty sort a stark. So they were my two impressions of coming home. But we were glad to be home

27:30 just the same.

Speaking of impressions, what were the Americans impressions of the Australians when you landed over there on your way over? When you were travelling through making your way up?

The Americans in America when we were going through?

Yeah.

They treated us like royalty. Like when we got to New York we had 5 hours leave and by the time the boat got in and the train arrived

28:00 because we had to go by train from there up to Canada and then go across Canadian Pacific so we had 5 hours leave. So Speed wanted to taste an American beer because they had beer different to us and they'd drink it with salt in it. And we went into this pub and you've got to go down and sit at a table and the waiter comes and serves you and a course he gets his tips to do it. You can't go to the counter and order it. So he ordered his beer and they had salt sellers on all these table so as they could

28:30 tip the salt into the half hot beer. Now I ordered a what did I want? I wanted a sarsaparilla. "No we don't have sarsaparilla. The only soft drink we have is lemonade or tomato juice." So I had a lemonade and that was only because they made it a shandy but they didn't have any soft drinks at all. Whereas Australian pubs they always had soft drinks for those who didn't drink. Usually squash or something like that or sarsaparilla. So he had his couple a beers and anyway we'd just finished one drink the next thing the waiter comes down and plonks another one down in front of us. And we were to. He's

29:00 "no no no." He says, "Somebody shouted you those." And we said, "Who was it?" "That bloke on the other side a the bar." Said, "Okay." When we finished we went over to thank him for his hospitality and he welcomed us and he says, "Let's." He says, "You ever been to American before?" No. He says, "Let's go in and see San Francisco." We said, "Well we're sorry because we've only got half an hour to get back to the dock to catch our train." And he turned out he was the editor of the San Francisco News and he when he saw us with Australian he said to the barman, "Fill their pots up for them." So that was my

29:30 and everybody that we met you know they all wanted to do something for you. And the same in Canada. I know I went to mass one Sunday at the Church in London with in from Centralia on the bus and I went just trying to fill in time I went in and sat down in a shoe shine place. I'd never had me shoes shined for me in me life before. They were part and parcel of service life and this bloke started to talk to me and asked me who I was and everything. "Oh you come from Australia?" Yeah. "Oh do you know Jim Smith? He went up there with so?" No I don't know

30:00 Melbourne. And he said, "Well would you like to come around home?" And I was a bit of a bush boy that hadn't mixed a lot. I was a bit suspicious a these people. But anyway because I had nothing better to do I said yes I'd go. So he took me out to home and his name was Ted Yelf and they made a great fuss of me and for the rest of the time in there I was you know I just went I spent all me leaves at their place. And we wrote to each other for years afterwards too until I had the. They had no children they eventually adopted one and Ted was working

30:30 the day I graduated but Ruth come out and with the people next door John and I've forgotten the woman's name. But I've got a photograph of meself outside Centralia with the three of them on the thing. They come out to my graduation. So we were good friends but I wrote to them for years and they

adopted a girl alter on and she became a Canadian ski champion. She went in for you know competition and that type of stuff. But I lost trace of them after I got married and started a dairy farm. But I often wonder what happened.

31:00 I still remember the day it's 64 Alexander Parade London.

What were the Americans attitude towards war?

They at that stage they were all in favour of it because they'd been attacked at Pearl Harbour. Pearl Harbour was a big thing in American eyes and there dignity had been rubbed right in the dirt. I know the ones that I struck they were all in favour. Whether they were servicemen or not I don't know. But the ones that had any feeling about it they were all pro-war at that

31:30 stage. Get it in and get it over. We'll win the war. And they did turn the tide in a lot a ways too. Not so much when they come into it but before with all the stuff they provided Britain with. I mean but then of course they did win the war. But that's just the American psyche that doesn't worry me. But it reminds me of the First World War. I think they were only in the war for about 13 months I think the First World War and when they had this great big Armistice

32:00 Day celebrations in New York they invited Lord of the Admiralty Fischer. First Sea Lord Fisher over for the thing cause he was in charge of the whole British navy and American after America got up and said how we won the war and all this sort a thing. And they called on Fisher to say a few words and he said, "Yes and it will be a few words. Who kept the bloody thing goin' for 4 and a half years until you decided to come in and finish it?"

32:30 And he sat down. He probably got a reprimand when he went back to England because that wasn't diplomatic. But that was his reaction.

You mentioned very briefly about an accident with a demo that was for the King and Queen?

With a what?

An air accident?

Yeah.

Can you go into a bit more detail about that?

Well we were taking off and these they'd been demonstrating glider towing

33:00 and all that type of thing for the King and Queen just before the invasion and this was a preview of what's gonna happen a couple a weeks later.

Before D Day?

Yeah before D Day and these Stirling's had gone out and released their gliders and they'd landed on paddocks where the King and Queen could watch them and they started coming back to their own aerodrome which was probably the field next door to it and as we were about to take off straight up into our flight path the wing fell off one of

33:30 them and it just went straight up and it went straight through the tail but just and about that far in front a the tail plane and chopped the rear end off another one and they both went down like that with four motors screaming. And nothing as I said before the only thing that come out of it was the dinghy in one of them. The H2O bottle inflated the dinghy and it come through the skin a the aircraft and sat there. We went straight over to it and flew over it at about a hundred feet and there was no one survived it. Because with 4 motors going at 60 to 100 horse power motors

34:00 they just went in at probably 4 or 500 mile an hour and they'd a just pumped the whole lot. But it was spread all over the impact just blew up. Not blew up but you know shredded and went all over the place. But we flew over it and there wasn't a living thing other than that dinghy come out of it.

So if this is a demo for D Day and it went really badly what was the psyche like for everyone after it?

Well I imagine for the people there it would a been dreadful particularly the air force because the fact that it was just a it was

34:30 probably a maintenance problem that caused it and the fact that it happened in front of the King and Queen. To us it didn't have any impact us on except on my instructor and me because we witnessed it. But then we just went on and did our blind flying finished our two and a half hours work and that was the end of it as far as we were concerned and that wasn't reported in the papers the next day either. But it would a had a big impact on the flying crews at that aerodrome because of what happened. You know they'd be thinking, "I wonder if my wing's gonna fall off on the way over to France?" And that but

35:00 that's the sort a thing that highlighted the actual lack of maintenance. But it was actually they put it down to metal fatigue which does happen. The wings move like that all the time when you're goin' and the metal fatigue fits in the metal and it crystallises and then the bolt breaks. Well it happen to happen at a very important part and the wing just folded up and it went. But it was just lack of proper servicing and maintenance because any aircraft after. The airframe every thousand hours I think it was had to be

completely

35:30 taken down and all bolts were supposed to be x-rayed and then they put. Then the motors had I dunno what the motors I can't tell you the actual figures for those but engines had a life. Airframes had a life and they did minor things all the way. Like there was a 70 hour. Every time air force had done 70 hours they had to have a complete inspection. That just meant like you takin your car for servicing. But then every so many hours they had to be stripped bare and put back together again and obviously

36:00 they weren't doing it with these old planes because they were phasing them out. But they were still there for fighting aircraft to take these poor soldiers to the thing. Fortunately they'd let their gliders go and it was just the actual aircrew that died in the thing. But it would've been had an awful impact on the big wigs there showin' the King and Queen our capabilities and two crews died.

You mentioned mental fatigue, were there any wakey-wakey pills [stimulants] that you were offered or?

Yes. We were given

36:30 Benzedrine tablets that's why I mentioned before one bloke who was addicted to Benzedrine I didn't follow that up. On the thing they used to use fruit bowls about that big and they were full of Benzedrine tablets and you could take a fist full of them if you wanted to you. And that was the tablet the race horse owners in Australia used to drug their race horses with to get make them gallop fast. And yet they used to give them to us to keep us awake on missions. I only ever took one of those tablets and I never carried them. The navigator

37:00 always carried a few of them in a little thing. And on the way home from France after that night raid on Berlin I went to sleep at the controls and my George wouldn't work so I was flying it all the time and I dozed off. And cause I dived George let a yell out a him which woke me up and he come up and "take these." He gave me saved me one a these Benzedrine tablets and according to the records you wouldn't be able to sleep for 8 hours after a Benzedrine tablet.

37:30 But anyway we got home we had our bacon and eggs because you asked before about what happened when you come home. Well we did our debriefing and then they gave you bacon and eggs and that was the only time you got bacon and eggs in the air force was when you come home from an operation. So that was a rare treat one egg and one strip a bacon. But it was wonderful. But I went and had that and I went to bed and slept for 8 hours I mean so my nervous system didn't worry about those sort a things and it didn't keep me awake at all. It kept me awake to get me

38:00 home but it didn't keep me awake afterwards and they reckoned normally you would stay awake for 8 hours after taking a Benzedrine tablet. But this bloke used to go out with his girlfriends all night and then he used to take these pills to keep him awake during the day and he become addicted to them. Yeah so. But that was that accident at the with the poor old Stirling's and then there was my experience where they were stripping the one I had to sort of they were doing a bloomin' test on it that time.

You just mentioned

38:30 **debriefing then did they separate you in different rooms and did you have to hand over?**

Oh no used the great big what they used for the room basically the it was Intelligence Rooms. But no there'd be one table there and one. They didn't have them close so as there wasn't cross talk but I mean there'd be about there'd be up to 20 tables in the one room each with an intelligence operator because we used to put up to 20 aircraft at one time

39:00 and but between the 20. There was 10 a squadron so that meant 200 to 250 aircraft between them. So around about 20/25 aircraft in the one thing. So they'd have 25 tables there for 25 crews in a great big sort of a hall and all the doors were locked so as other people couldn't get in. Only the intelligence officer and the main briefing officer were allowed in and the wing commander would wander round if he was there and have a talk to you know butt in. But there was one bloke assigned to talk

39:30 to the seven people in that one crew and took all the notes. And if you had anything to say you had to. And if somebody hadn't said anything he might, "What do you think on it, what do you think Bob?" You know and he'd have to give him some sort of a story. So that was the debriefing. It probably lasted half an hour by the time you got though what happened on take off and what ack-ack there was and so forth. So and then you went off and you had your meal and then well if it was an ordinary day you could either go out

40:00 for the night or go back to bed do what you liked. But for a night time in that Berlin one we got home I s'pose I can't remember the time. It'd be in my log book. But we took off about half past four I think it was because we flew over London in daylight and you won't believe it all that the air force did for England we flew over London for the first time durin' the war and next day all the papers and air ministry were flooded with complaints

40:30 about these awful air force persons disturbing the peace by flying over London our London airspace. And they did it to try to cut down the time. Normally we'd have go round south and go down that way. Well we'd go east and go round and come back and cross to France but they said, "Oh well, you know, the war's getting towards an end and they're not likely think that's that, it's a German air raid coming," because the Germans couldn't get to England at that stage so they decided. And particularly was in

daylight people out working so we flew just over part of London and there was a flood of complaints about it.

Tape 6

00:30 **Can you tell us about the initial uniform you were issued with when you joined the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]?**

Yeah. It was a fairly rough serge dark blue. Basically we wore what they called giggle suits when we were in training. You didn't wear you only wore them when you went off the station the main the, what they called the dress uniform. And we had Australia on the corner here and on your cap you had a little white flash. There's a photograph of

01:00 that somewhere. Where the fold of the cap you had a white flash that indicated you were a trainee airman as distinct from an ordinary ground airman. But it was a good fitting uniform actually. Nothing fancy but it was a rough. It wasn't black like that. It was a blue. But when you become an officer they gave you one in a much better type a thing smooth. Really elegant type a one and a course you got the peaked cap that goes with it as I got it on that

01:30 photograph. Although when you were flying you still usually used your.

Hang on Eric. Sorry. (interruption) You were just about to give detail of your hat?

Well I mean they gave you the peaked cap you know the officers type of cap with the big brass thing on the top of it. But the other one the field service cap but you usually used that when you were flying anyway cause you could put it in your belt or. Because you had a helmet you had to fly with a helmet with the earphones and your gas mask on. That was another

02:00 thing I had a call with once. We were going over. If you lose oxygen you're just like a drunken man. You think everything's right and it's not. And like they put us through decompression chambers durin' training to show us what happens. Big long tube bout as wide as this and there's a seat there and a seat there and you all sat in a great big row about 24 of you and the bloke outside'd say, "Well now write down your name. Your address. Where you come from?" and a

02:30 few other little questions and you'd write all this stuff down and write so. And when they decompressed the thing again and let you out your name was good the first line a your address started to shake a bit and the others were just all over the place. You didn't know. And they quoted our people one particular crew were coming home and they realised the pilot was had no oxygen because he. They're just half way across the English Channel and he says, "Okay," whatever his name was, "Bill let down the wheels," cause your

03:00 engineer always let down the wheels and pull your throttles back and all that sort a stuff. Well I always handled my own throttles. He put the lock nut on them. And this bloke said, "Okay what the," he said, "What do you want to let the wheels down for?" He said, "Well we're coming into land." He says, "No not yet." "Yeah, there's the aerodrome over there." And he pointed at a cloud and they woke up straight away. So they rushed the spare bottle out. He'd developed a leak in his thing under his thing and he just thought he was landing at home and he was

03:30 15,000 feet up gonna land on a cloud. So they had to be careful about that so we always. But this particular night cause I've always had sinus trouble and it used to annoy me and I'd be always like this you know. And anyway the copper thing broke and I started to go dizzy straight away cause we were at 21,000 feet. But anyway George ripped out the spare share and ripped that off and put the other one on my face and that was it. But some people did crash because of it because they didn't wake up particularly fighter pilots. They had

04:00 nobody to sort a. It's all right in a bomber crew cause the engineer stood alongside a you and the others if it started to wobble about the other crew started to complain. So that was it. But no it was a reasonable we had a good uniform and I could still fit into my uniform for 40 years after the thing. And my daughter come home with a whole lot a clothes and I emptied out half my wardrobe and put them in a tin trunk which is over there. Put me uniform in it and when they opened the

04:30 new War Memorial to the airmen in Brisbane. Do you remember that? In Queens Park. I went to dig it out to take down to there and the moths had eaten it. I nearly cried. Cause I'd kept that and I could still. I could fit into it now because I was 12 stone when I was measured and I'm only 9-stone-4 now. So and people Audrey complains. I'm 9 stone 7 I should say. Audrey and other people keep sayin' "You're too thin, you're not eating properly. There's something wrong with ya." And I always say

05:00 well I was 9 stone 4 when I was 21 and I joined the air force and I'm 9 stone 7 now so I'm not doin' too bad.

Did many of the other blokes on the aircraft ever have problems with their oxygen?

No. With them no. The maintenance on a squadron was right on top. It was only because I always fiddled with this damn thing and it was only a little narrow copper thing and it just broke and of course

it let the thing bulge out. So I had to hold it while they come up.

What about you were mentioning the white bands you used to have on your hats one of the blokes told me a story once where all the girls in town were told that the blokes with the white bands were ones from the VD [Venereal Disease] clinic or something?

Yeah, that was one a the words around.

Did you have a story like that down there or?

Yeah that was a story went round. And that was cause all the air force men wear those field service caps as they called them. But because they wanted to and you had no badges because you were a trainee you just had the ordinary stuff and so

06:00 they put this little white band between the two pleats on the front so that was aircrew. You were a trainee aircrew until you graduated and then of course that came out. I've still got that little white thing somewhere.

And what about can you remember getting your wings?

I sure do.

How good was that?

Very important day of my life. The crew the course before us they had Guy Gibbes come out to present theirs with them which was a big. And of course we had to be on parade with them too and we heard all about his exploits and the dam busters and so forth.

06:30 But no that was a big day for me. Cause you know I had me ups and downs. Another thing I didn't mention or did I? Did I mention that my wife. I think I did. My flying got pretty raggy half way through the.

No no you didn't. No.

Didn't I? I thought I did. And it became very raggy half way through and they sent me off on leave to Sydney to have a rest because the medical officer said they were pushing people too far too soon in field. They're people that weren't made to fly actually. And because they were getting sort of

07:00 people they decided that I was the guinea pig. There was 9 around Narrandera as the guinea pig after this. And they sent me off and I come back and I just went straight through. I never had an. See I had the trouble of not having an education to start with. I had the trouble with my eyes not in the thing. Then I had the English pommy and the Canadians too because they thought I was an ignoramus because I didn't have a Junior certificate and I overcome all those and I got there where I wanted to be and that was the main thing it meant to me.

You spoke earlier on about Bert Hinkler being one of your flying

07:30 **hero's what sort of things can you remember of that?**

Well the first thing I remember was when he come out here in 1928 and the little ditty went round "Hinkler Hinkler here you are, 16 days." No. "Hinkler, Hinkler little star, 16 days and here you are." And there was more to it but that's the only part I remember. And he'd flown. Kingsford-Smith had come with a crew from England to here in 27 or 28 days. Hinkler did it in 16 so he nearly halved the time and he did it in a little have you ever seen his aeroplane he did it in?

08:00 Yeah I mean you wonder how he got. Particularly across the Timor Sea with bloomin' lashed with storms and God knows. And he navigated and flew the thing all that time so I mean that meant a big. He was a loner like me I think. And he had a battle because he was part aboriginal Bert Hinkler and they held that against him all and he tried to join the air force here I think and they wouldn't have him and so he went over to England and worked in manufacturing type a thing and then he joined

08:30 the air force over there and served in the air force over there during the First World War and he had quite a good career too. And then he went into this stunt flying afterwards. Well then he was the first man to circumnavigate the whole world as a solo pilot and he took the longest way round. A lot a the others have done it but they'd sort a crept into you know to make it easier flying they'd changed up or changed down so as to get a flight. They'd gone round all right but he went rough virtually round the middle as far as you could

09:00 get round the middle. And that was another thing and then so. He just it just meant a big thing to me. Whereas Kingsford Smith didn't mean anything to me because he always had people to help him.

So did you always think you'd like to fly?

Oh yes. I always dreamt that some day I'd be a rich cattle baron and I'd have my own plane. I never got to that stage.

So the thought wasn't necessarily to become a pilot. It was to succeed at farming and then maybe one day be rich enough to own a plane?

Yeah yeah.

09:30 Cause I know my parents would never approved of me you know playing flying lessons for me. But I wanted to have the money to be able to go and do it and learn to fly and become a pilot. But the war intervened and I learnt to fly at the King's expense.

Did you always think when the war started you'd eventually that you would join up?

Oh yes definitely.

And was there any question that it would be the RAAF or maybe?

No none at all. Was the RAAF and I was gonna be a pilot come what may.

10:00 **What about the uniform that you got when you were Commissioned in England when you went to London to get suited, that would've been quite different to the officers uniforms in Australia I'd imagine?**

No they used the same material here cause the Australian manufacturers provide Carson and Waugh with the stuff. It was probably made up better. I wouldn't doubt that because these were the you know the leading tailors to the British air force and they were in Saville Row which is where all the wonderful tailors hang out

10:30 and I was given a weeks leave after the thing to go down and because bein' an officer and gentleman you had to buy all your own things. But the air force gave you 50 pounds. Our air force gave you 50 pounds to go and buy it. But that rebounded later on because they gave you the cap 2 new shirts cause they're far better quality shirt that you had than the others and the trousers they gave you a big tin trunk which is over there under the thing.

11:00 Instead of havin' to cart 2 kit bags round all the time. And Burbury waterproof raincoat which was a navy blue raincoat made by the leading waterproofers in London and instead of having the three quarter mackintosh like the Australian air force even the officers had to put up with and there were a few things. And they even gave you a set of gum boots for the wet weather work and a few other things I forgotten what they all were now.

11:30 A gas mask. Well that was a gas mask you had that anyway. But when we were to come home when we got here they wanted they said they wanted the torch back. A little 2 cell tin torch cheap thing. They wanted that back. They wanted the gum boots back and they wanted the helmet back which I've still got it's over there I kept that. Cost me 7 pounds and they wanted the tin trunk and the raincoat. Because they wanted to take all the they didn't get tin

12:00 trunks and raincoats and they were gonna have em all here. They'd a got them out a stores. But I kept my tin trunk and I kept my raincoat and my helmet. And so that was it.

But you were made to pay for those were you?

Yeah I was made to pay for them and yet it was supposed to been a grant they called it. A $50 grant towards a 50 pound grant to get your thing. Cause you had you weren't supposed to go and get handouts from anybody. You were an officer and gentleman you know thing. But you got back here they demanded them back. So I thought

12:30 that was a bit hot but I wanted them and I kept them and so they said I had to pay for them. I think they charged me 2 pound 10 [shillings] for the raincoat. 7 pounds for the flying helmet and the earpieces and 2 [pound] and 6 [shillings] for the torch and I can't remember what they charged me for the gumboots cause I'd abandoned them at home anyway. That's how miserable they can get.

Was there any pomp and ceremony to being commissioned?

Not during the war no. Like some of the English blokes might a got it in their

13:00 I don't know but I never saw anything like that no. You just got the thing in the mail. You were called up to the adjutants office and told that your commission had come through. Go down to the tailor and get your stripes to put on your. Take your sergeant's stripes off and put your other ones on the uniform you had and then a couple a. I can't remember the time frame but anyway you were given the 7 days leave to go to London and get yourself outfitted properly. But my old uniform is still there with the pilot officer little thin little stipe on it.

13:30 The old sarge [sergeant] one they issued me with in Sydney. But the good one that I got the moths got to it.

Did the attitude of some of the English officers towards you change at all once you were commissioned?

Well in some of them. I never took much notice of what the English officers thought or said but I didn't make much. On the squadron we had a bloke that was a typical pommy you know pompous Englishman. And I found out after he was an accountant. If I'd a known that when he said what's his name was only a

14:00 carpenter I'd a said to him, "What's an accountant?" You know all they do is add up figures all day but he was an accountant and he thought that was something wonderful apparently. But he always refer to us as colonials and that real. I mean I got no hang ups about status or anything else bein' dirty little

urchin runnin' round a farm but I mean when they start sneering at you because you come from another country you know "You colonials," as he said when I queried the thing. That sort a used to get to me. But no there was no ceremony about it at all.

14:30 The only thing you had to move from one mess to the next. Go from the sergeant's mess over to the officers mess.

So when you joined up initially in Australia were you doing it for King and country or for Australia or for yourself?

No for Australia basically. Because the war was on. The Japs were coming and I wanted to do something about it. And I mean I didn't want to be a hero or anything like that and I never was a hero. I didn't get any decorations or anything like that. But no I wanted to go and fight the war because I wanted to protect my home and it was an added bonus that I could learn

15:00 to fly that was the second. But I mean the main thing that made me want to go was because I wanted to defend Australia.

And did you have any idea that you'd be sent to England?

Well there was a fair percentage because most of them in the early days were sent over there and the air force here wasn't big enough to absorb the numbers that were going through so it was a fair chance. But a lot of them actually it all come down to that transfer from the primary flying school to the secondary flying school. The one's they wanted to keep here they took em

15:30 straight out of initial training as they called it and sent them to advanced flying here and they knew they weren't gonna get anywhere. Not at that stage anyway. But part of the Empire Air Training Scheme once you were posted to Canada you knew you were gonna end up in England. And actually the bloke who taught me to fly in Canada or the flight commander not he didn't actually do all the teaching but he took me up after Speed got killed but he wanted me to go on and be an instructor. I didn't want to

16:00 spend my life teachin' other people to crash up aeroplanes.

Can you tell me a bit about basic training? Like even before your flying training, the basic training that the RAAF put you through?

Yes. Well that was all done at Kingaroy. And I mean you had to learn the basics of navigation. The basics of engine handling. Aeronautics. Navigation. Like you learnt the theory of flying like how the wind air flows over the aerofoil and gives

16:30 lift all this sort a business. And the control you learnt all this airmanship type of thing. Morse code we all had to learn that in case they made you wireless operator. And the fact that I'm tone deaf I can't sing I can't play music. I can't do anything. I found it very, very difficult because you can't count dots and dashes. But because I tried hard the fella who taught it he said he picked three of us out or four of us actually that he wanted to take for

17:00 coaching. I don't know what their problem was it might a been the same as mine. But we weren't getting onto it but I was trying. So he offered to take us after school. One bloke said, "No I couldn't be bothered." And I think he ended up getting scrubbed anyway because he couldn't do it. But anyway I went two of us went two out of the four went and he used to come there after tea and give us 2 hours hammering away at Morse. Well eventually I got the rhythm of it. And it's dit-dah-dit-dah-dit. It's not dash-dot-dash-dot and you pick up the rhythm and I ended up actually being able to

17:30 send at 25 words a minute and take at about 30 words a minute which was pretty good for Morse code. But as I said what you don't use you lose and I don't even know the alphabet now. But the naval people were the best at it. Cause they were very they could get up to 36 words a minute on the tapper.

So then you'd go on to flying training?

Yeah.

What are you flying there?

Tiger Moths the first time and there again you did a lot a school like on the theory of flight and all that type of stuff

18:00 and again engine handling and other things. Well see from then on we never touched a Morse key from that initial training on and yet people got scrubbed because they couldn't do Morse. And we went onto Tiger Moths and flew there and we were supposed to get a minimum of 60 hours to do that. Well I got through that all right after have been given a weeks leave to go off. But there was more school in the first couple a months and the next one was mostly all

18:30 flying. And we had a satellite aerodrome the one outside and I got into trouble there too because when we first arrived there there was lockers in the rooms we went into these rooms and they give you a copy of station standing orders which you're supposed to sign, "I have read and understand blah blah blah." But we'd only arrived this day and we had to go out and practice this dead march for the funeral coming up and that afternoon. We'd been in

19:00 town for a leave. We must a got there on a Friday and we had Saturday and Sunday off and I went in and I got some money out that I wanted a pocket watch that I'd seen in a thing. So I got the money out a the thing but they were closed because it was late and Saturday. And I put it in my locker with all my other things you emptied you stuff cause you had to get in your giggle suit and go out and do you thing and late them evening Leo Mognohan came up to me he was a newsagents from Red Hill. He said, "Eric did you have any money in your locker

19:30 this afternoon? And I says yeah why? He said, "Have you still got it?" I said, "I dunno." So I went to the locker. No I didn't have it. It was only 5 pounds because I was very Scotch. I didn't like carryin' a lot a money. I didn't have much anyway. And I said, "Why do you ask?" He said, "Well because I had 60 quid in me thing," he says, "I won at the races at the races on Saturday," he says, "and it was gone." So we reported it to the SPs [Service Police]. What happened? They charged us with takin' action contrary to

20:00 station standing orders and we washed the dishes in the sergeant's mess for a whole week to pay for our sins. And that went on our records and followed. Cause when I got commission I had to go down to group headquarters from where we were to talk to the air vice admiral or some. I dunno what he was. He had scrambled eggs all over his hat anyway and the first thing he said, "You've had a charge against you since you've been in the air force." He said, "What was that for?" And I told him and he just shrugged his shoulders and went and forgot about it.

20:30 It still followed you everywhere you went and that's what happens. But and apparently a lot a the ground staff were next door and there was a corporal used to wander through our units all the time when we were out. Cause he was off different times but then he went out and had a great night out. We lost our money and did time.

So Bert Hinkler was your flying hero, you'd always wanted to fly a plane and what was the first time going up with the instructor in the Tiger Moth like?

Scared stiff.

21:00 I was too high off the ground. As I said I was always a nervous type but I mean I gradually got used to it. I was all right. I soloed in 10 hours, 5 minutes I think which is reasonable. The best in our group I think was 5 and a half hours but the average was around 8 to 10. And if you got up to 14 you were out.

Can you remember that first solo flight?

Not a great deal expect that

21:30 I was scared stiff. All they did they took you up and they said, "This is the that's the rudder. You push that to turn. But to do that you gotta pull the stick this way so as that you tilt the wings so as you don't skid in the dirt." And they went through all this sort a stuff you know. And then they'd ask you to do it to just get the feel of the thing. You're up for about an hour I suppose and they did all the talking and all the shuffling around. But and all you did at that stage was circuits and umps. Circuits and

22:00 bumps until you soloed and then of course you'd get a dual out and then they'd take you out on a cross-country and he would be there and you'd have to do your own navigation and if you did something wrong he'd tell ya what you're doin' wrong and that. Or they'd take you up he'd take you up and show you how to do slow roll. And you'd go up and then he'd send you up and you'd practice that for a couple a sessions. And then how to do a stalled turn and then they'd do how to do a loop. They'd show you one thing at a time and then send you off to practice until you could do it properly.

22:30 And we used to do that what they called in Narrandera what they call a Lake. Basically it was an empty lake but in the wet season it used to full right up and it was out where the satellite aerodrome was and you know funny how history changes. When I married Audrey she comes from Narrandera and her uncle owned the farm that they'd taken off him to make an aerodrome out of the lake. So when we went back there on our honeymoon he took me on a drive out to have a look like normally with sheep and wheat all over it.

23:00 But I remember and that watch that I eventually got I had it in my thing in here and I went out there doin' loops and I was a bit too slow over the top apparently and it fell out. So somewhere in that fast lake is a brand new pocket watch. So (interruption).

Yeah you were saying there Eric?

There's only one flight I really remember a lot about because you know it become routine after a while was my final test that I

23:30 had to do and I had to do that with the wing commander and you know they were way up here and you're just little down here. And I did everything really well right up to the last and then he said, "Okay we'll do a forced landing." And he grabbed the throttle and pulled it closed. And a course my nerves come to the thing and I sort a get round and I went through all the procedures pretty right but I got cross wind and he said, "Didn't you see the bloody windmill down there?" Bein' a bushie I should a thought where's the windmill? Which way the winds blowing you know. But he said, "Anyway you did pretty good. I'll give you a shot at the

24:00 second one." So that was it. But that's the only flight I really remember. It was a.

And how did they present you with your wings after that?

Well they didn't present you with your wings there at all. You just graduated to the next school which was the advanced flying school and that was what we went to Canada for. And we flew because I was later to go into Bomber Command we flew Ansons. Twin engine Ansons. But whereas the one's in Australia had Jacobs Cheetah

24:30 Motors in them they had to wind the wheels up. 140 odd turns up and 140 down so doin' circuits and bumps they used to do em half way. But they had to do em half way just to make the thing. But with the one's in Canada they were treated with the Cheetah engines Jacobs 6 LMB [motor manufacturers] motors and they had hydraulics so we got it easy over there. We had hydraulics to do our thing.

So when you marched out of there after qualifying

25:00 **on the Tiger Moths what was your official title?**

It's just a leading aircraftsman still just the same. Nothing but the book was stamped that you'd qualified as a flying the Tiger Moths. Then you went onto the advanced flying school and you went through that and we were very far from Niagara Falls and my instructor one day for some reason had to go down. We were supposed to be doing a cross-country he said, "Well look, we'll break the routine and I'll take you down to Niagara." So we went down

25:30 and flew over Niagara so.

What was that like?

Yeah so that was good. It was down near Hamilton but and I told you about how I was sent up. You know the squadron leader took me up after Speed Wilson got killed. But that was pretty uneventful there. I had no troubles with the twin-engine aircraft.

Can you tell me Eric what? (interruption). All right. I was just gonna ask you Eric what the conditions on the ship, what was the name of the ship that you went over

26:00 **on?**

West Point.

And what were the conditions on that like?

Pretty good and food like American food. We didn't like it but it was all good food and that. And there was no discipline on it really. I mean the Americans didn't weren't into discipline. As I said we were supposed to work in the cookhouse but all we did we spent a day talking to the blokes and drinking tea. So it wasn't any big hardship really. But from when we finished at Centralia in Canada that's when we got our wings you were fully qualified

26:30 pilots partly. And so they had some big shots come out and present you with your wings. Probably the air vice marshall in charge of Canada. I don't know who he was now. But you all lined up and all the other courses were lined up there behind you and you went up one at a time and they pinned them on and he shook you hand and said, "Good luck fella. I hope you survive it." and send you on your way. And then a course they gave us 10 days leave. But all the other boys all got 3 weeks who were with me because they were all going to different schools in Canada.

27:00 Not all of them but some of them were going there. But the ones I was with I mean my mates. So we went off to Chicago and to live up to it's reputation there was a murder on the loop that night. There's a murder on the loop nearly every night in Chicago in those days. And then we got the Pennsylvanian Flyer from there to New York and I was a great mate with Geoff Thompson whose family bred racehorses. They owned Manfred who won a Melbourne Cup and they were somewhere around Scone somewhere and he

27:30 wanted to go horse riding. Well Cliffy Withers and the other bloke Mortlock they were city they weren't keen but they wanted to go along anyway. So we went up to the Australian place they had in New York and said we wanted to go and they said, "Oh well, there's a senator so and so," I've forgotten his name now. "Lives up in New Jersey. They've got a hunt club and they've got horses we'll get you up there." So they rang him up and he said, "Well yes," he said, "They can come up here but my son's just graduated in the American air force so we

28:00 can't put them up." But he said, "I got an old mate that'll do that for me." So he arranged for this bloke at what they called Two Farms to put us up out in New Jersey. It was about an hours run I s'pose out a New York and we went up there and some black maid met us at the door. There was no man in shape and showed us to our rooms and gave us a drink and so forth and so on told us to sit down in the waiting room she said, "Mr" Whatever his name was can't think of his name now either "He'll be home later on."

28:30 And we found out there was a reason for this later on. And then when he come home he was a bit starry eyed looking at us you know and yeah. So he invited us into the bar to have a he had a lounge as wide as this and three times as long and he'd doubled the length by putting an end on it because the Hunt Club wanted to have a ball. So he just had an extension on it and doubled it and put it. And he had a radio player which would a been odd in those days it played 48 records straight off

29:00 this thing and that was the music and there must a been about 6 lounge suits lining the sides of this hall. We went there and sat down and he ordered the maid to bring in afternoon tea and he was quite good for then and he put on a lavish dinner for us. And durin' dinner time he said, "I got a confession to make to you boys." And we said yeah. And Bryce "What is it sir?" He said, "I thought you were all blacks." He said, "And I don't like blacks." And he employed them because we were

29:30 Australians, he thought we were all black and that's why he wasn't there to meet us. But because his mate the Senator asked him to put him up he was gonna put us up but he was gonna keep clear of us. But anyway because we were all white we and he was a multi-millionaire. He was a shareholder in Wright Cyclone who made all the aero engines for the First World War. He was a Swede. And he hated the war because it interfered with his private life. He had a Cadillac. A big Cadillac. He had a

30:00 sporting Cadillac. He had a Pontiac station wagon and he had something else. I've forgotten what it was and he was only just a single man a bachelor and he had a chauffer and he said, "Oh," he said, "I had to let my driver go as a part of my war effort." So he said, "The chef does the cooking and the car driving." And he said, "Well we can't give you horses to go to the thing because we've got a hunt on

30:30 just now and we're only allowed one horse each because of the war effort." And he said, "You can take the Pontiac and station wagon and follow us around. Well course you know they jumped over fences and we lost them so we just travelled all over New Jersey. What time we had to be back? She said, "Whenever you're ready, whenever you're ready." So we got back at half past 10 for breakfast.

How did you find that being a country lad from country Queensland out in the bush to the sort of life that these people were leading, how did you find all that?

Pretty revealing. You know and in every room there was this little box of cigarettes about that long with Walpole this that about five. Pall Mall, I've forgotten what. There was five brands of cigarettes and Two Farm matches in every bedroom and every the dining room the living room the lounge room and the bathrooms. And the bathrooms had his and hers. You had a washbasin there and she had a wash basin there and she had a toilet there.

31:30 The common front to it but there were the two different things and this was in a private home. And then the senator he was having a great big party for his son whose graduation so we were all invited to go over there on this particular night. And they ran a bit short a whiskey half way through it so they just get the tomahawks and just bash through the broke about three glasses on the top to get to it and Mum had a nose as red as Rudolf the reindeer. She was a great whiskey drinker. And when I asked for a soft drink, "What museum do you come

32:00 out of?" And they said, "All we've got's tomato juice." So I had tomato juice for the rest of the night.

Did you find that the way the white Americans treated the African Americans was any different to the way white Australians treated the Aboriginals?

Worse. Like here in Brisbane the. I was gonna say Aboriginals. The Negroes were not allowed to cross the Brisbane River from south Brisbane to north Brisbane in that part of the war. That changed

32:30 as the war went on and the fighting got and the islands and that sort a thing. But they weren't allowed and they weren't allowed to fight. They were cooks. They were scullery people. They were drivers. They were ammunition handlers. They were anything but they weren't allowed to fight. They were niggers. And if they did something wrong bang that was it. There was no murder charge no nothing. They just shot them. They were out of the road. And that went on here in Queensland and yet our people weren't game to take them to task over it which they should a done. But as the war went

33:00 on and they were havin' casualties then they gradually started to integrate them into the fighting things and they found they fought just as well as the white blokes did. So it calmed down a little bit. But you didn't see very, very few of them in the air force. I didn't see them anyway. There was probably some there.

How did you find the African Americans compared to the Aboriginals that you'd seen back at home?

Intelligent. One word. I mean they talk about the Aboriginals this that and the other. All the intelligent Aboriginals have got

33:30 50 per cent white blood. You take the bloke Pearson all those blokes they all got. The Aboriginals, I mean it's no fault of theirs it's the way they were made. They got a huge skull. Like I feel sorry for that poor doctor in Caboolture. This woman brought the child in with a bad case, he'd fallen off the bed and hurt his head. And the doctor happened to say, "He's got a thick skull, so it won't have done his brain much damage." And she sued him and he got damages because that was an insulting

34:00 remark. But it's the truth. The Aboriginal skull is that thick. Whereas ours is that thick and I mean it's just the natural and people say it was you know nature taking part hitting on the nulla nulla sort'a. Whether that's true or not I wouldn't know. I don't care either. But it's a fact of life and they aren't in their own natural state. They got a lot a got points about them but they haven't got a lot a brains. Not from our point of view. I mean I've reared among these people up there and I mean I know them and I mean I'd be able

34:30 to mix with them it doesn't worry me at all what an Aboriginal is. But my mother hated them cause she come from Scotland and she had this you know they're blacks out there. And like when she first got married she wrote home and said she was marrying an Australian and her cousin wrote back and said, "I didn't think you'd ever marry a black fella." Just as well Dad wasn't touchy on the subject.

So how much interactions would the Australians have actually have with the African Americans? Were they just?

Not much.

Were they all sort of just in service kind of roles?

Yeah. We didn't have much to do

35:00 with them in American or around the place. Most places I went to. Well a course I wasn't in I was only in America for 10 days anyway. But in Canada there weren't that many around in Canada.

How many other nationalities were training up in Canada with you?

Well in the course we were on there was only Canadians and Australians. Out west there were a lot of English people a lot of English come over there. There'd be South Africans. Like this bloke I told you about that was on his 51st trip and got shot down he'd come from England over there and trained there then went back to England to

35:30 start. But he trained out west rather than out east where we were cause most those did. Being part of the Empire Training they trained all sorts there the same as they did in Rhodesia. They had the set up the same there. They trained a lot of Englishmen there but none of our people went to. We went to Canada but a lot of New Zealanders went to Rhodesia I believe. They had a pick of where they wanted to go.

How exciting was it seeing all this whole other part of the world?

Well it was new it was exciting for someone like me that'd come from the middle of the

36:00 mud. Hardly ever been to Brisbane sort a business only down to Sandgate for holiday about every 3 years and that was only after 1928. Up until then we'd never been to the sea for anything. No it was an eye opener particularly New York. As a matter of fact I was scared stiff in New York because from the Pennsylvania Railway Station and we got a hotel near there and the other boys were staying so they stayed and I had to get meself down to the railway station another one to go to back to Canada

36:30 to get back with the people to go overseas and I had to walk through Harlem to get to the railway station. And this was midday and all these black sitting along on the tenement steps with nothing to do but just gaze at. And I thought they're trying to see how much money's in my pocket. And it scared me in broad daylight. I'd a hate to walk down there at night time. But see they hadn't got involved. They hadn't started all the man power pushes. A lot a those people would've ended up in factories later on. But at that stage there was still an

37:00 awful lot of unemployment in. Cause people didn't want to employ them they just wanted to employ white people basically. And they were just sitting around with nothing to do and they were big powerful looking people too.

How did America seem different to Australia?

That was one of the things. There was too many blacks around. They were in all these sort a. And they were in ghetto's they weren't spread like. And I was used to living in the bush you'd see the Aboriginals and that you got on with him. You went droving with them. You mustered with them.

37:30 But there was such a clear cut division in America between the black and the white. It wasn't nice thing to see really. They treated them like dirt. But you know they're coming into their own and they treat the white bloke like dirt now a lot of them. Cause we had a neighbour here she went over there and she said she was looking through dresses and this great big Negro was there and when she left the thing he picked two dresses up and dropped em on the floor.

38:00 He said, "Madam, you just dropped those dresses on the floor. Pick them up." She says, "I didn't." He says, "Pick them up." She said, "What did I do? I picked them up and I left that store." But that's they way they're getting now. They've got the power and they're sort of abusing it.

But in what ways economically did you see America as being different to Australia?

Well only that things were far more expensive. I mean at that stage economics wasn't one of my subjects. I've studied a lot since the war and with the different politicians

38:30 we've had running the treasury. But in those days it was earning a living and makin' enough to live by and mind your own business. So I didn't. But I did like we were getting a haircut here for 15 pence or 2 shillings. Over there it was a dollar or more to get a haircut. And a hot pie here was under 2 shillings. Over there it was nearly a dollar. So and we got the same pay over there as what we got here.

39:00 Whereas the Americans when they come out here they got a 50 cent rise in their pay because they were

overseas and they got more than us in the first place. In fact that's why they could slash money around like nobody's business. But we didn't get any extra loading. We got our loading once we'd graduated and become and airman we got a loading on our pay to I think at the end I was getting 2 and 6 a day for flying.

Tape 7

00:31 **Your flying suit what can you sort of talk me through that?**

Well that was our standard we had what they called battle dress and the English one was. Ours was navy blue and originally we were issued with one of those before going to Canada. But in England they reissued us with the English one which was bluey grey an it was a thick sort of flannel type of thing and it come round the bit just belt

01:00 and it had a buckle belt on the middle and it pulled in on the buckle belt and a big pocket here and a big pocket here. It was much like the uniform without the tails on it. It just had the belt and so that you flew. And then you had your flying boots which I never wore. I wore me shoes because I used to. I correct that. In the Wellington's and the Stirling's I wore them because they had no real air conditioning heating and like

01:30 one night we got lost in a bloomin' thunderstorm and we had to land at a place up north England and the bloomin' camera hatch kept blowin' off and it was 34 degrees below zero. And we landed this place and I could barely get out and I sat down in the snow and belted my feet like that for 5 minutes to find out where me feet where. But when I got into Lancasters it was too hot for me. And also we had

02:00 white wool jumpers that come down to your knees and so you fold em up here and you folded them up there. The idea was to keep your kidneys warms and stop you getting chills. But on the whole that was too hot for me and I just used an ordinary pullover underneath my battle jacket and I wore my ordinary shoes. And my helmet of course with the ear radio telephone things on the thing and the microphone on the thing here. We didn't have the throat microphones like the Americans used.

02:30 Ours were a microphone set in the nose of our thing. But it was serviceable workable. You were comfortable in that in the other one with the big belt round it and everything. Some blokes flew in their dress shirt though. They liked Pommies [British] a lot a the Pommies flew in their dress uniforms. And you weren't. The only thing you weren't allowed to wear a tie flying because if you went into the drink it shrunk and it choked you. So we all had to have and you couldn't have an open necked shirt. So we all had to have scarfs and have a scarf round your

03:00 neck the toffy English type. So that was the flying uniform.

And what about there was no good luck charms or anything like that?

Only a pair a rosary beads was my good luck charm. And I still got them there.

Who gave you those?

Well these aren't the one's I had at the war. On the way to Sydney we had to sleep on these you know big long seats sort a thing and my rosary beads must a come out a my pocket and I lost them. And I went to confession before we were due to go on the boat and the priest said to me

03:30 "Do you say the rosary?" I said, "I do normally." He said, "You got your rosary beads?" I said, "No I lost them." And so he pulled his Irish horn ones out of his thing and gave them to me in the confession. And I carried them all through the war. And when I come home the first job Dad gave me was when I put this windmill and tank up he had a well down about 20 feet which was as far as you could go with the ladder and I had to keep it going with a windlass and so and I was blasting there one day and I don't know whether I lost it in the well pulling out a handkerchief cause it was.

04:00 This was January February and it was hellish and hot you know 70 feet under the ground whether I pulled it out and it got blown up with the gravel and it was in the middle of the '46 drought and I used to walk or run from the house over to the back well which was two and a half mile away to start the motor because the windmill wouldn't work cause there's no wind in a drought. And whether I dropped it there I don't know but I followed every cattle pat back ward and forward to that well I could never find them. But that was sad because they meant something

04:30 to me cause they were my talisman that I carried. But I replaced them just another pair I bought.

So can you tell us about religion growing up and ?

Yeah well where we were at Hainault I can only ever remember one priest ever coming there. He was an old Irish Priest who was based in Mount Morgan and he did the rounds in a sulky. But he was the real old Spartan type and I know you're not supposed to tell what happens in confessions but I mean this has got nothing to do with the confession anyway. But

05:00 Mum had been to Rockhampton probably having one of the babies cause Irene and Les were both born

in Rockie [Rockhampton] and it was about a 6 hour trip from Rockhampton to Rannes and then it was when Biloela started it was another 6 hours up to there. 102 mile in it all, 12 hours 14 sometimes. And Mum went into Anne Honkies for our, and this was a Friday and had a meat sandwich because that was all she could have. So when she went to confession she told about having a meat sandwich. And he says

05:30 "Next time you have one I hope it chokes ya." So that was that. But he was the only Priest I ever remember seeing as a small child. But then when we moved on our own place they opened up a church there was one in Thango. One in Biloela a hall but they come up from Bowen. And the priest that was there used to come round our place used to come about once every three. Used to go to Theodore and come round and so and he used to say mass at home and then just before the war they built a

06:00 church and a Presbyterian in Biloela and gave it a special parish. So that because we were poor and struggling with the thing we used to only go in once a month because it was you know nearly a 2 hour trip in and 2 hour trip back out. But we'd go in and we'd have a picnic lunch near one a the creeks on the way home that was just out about 5 mile out a town there was a running creek and we used to have lunch there and then go on home. It was a bit of a picnic day for us to go to thing. But then as I said when I was 8 I went to the convent at Koongal for 6

06:30 months and that's where I made me first holy communion there. And then I went back again when I was 14 for 12 months 18 months I did my scholarship twice. And then I went to the Christian Brothers up at Abergowrie near Ingham to do an agricultural course. And but Dad took me home to run the farm again so I didn't get me Junior.

So most of your religious instruction was through the schools was it?

Home. No Mum

07:00 taught us our religion. She used to get lessons by correspondence from some nun in West Australia, a Sister Legury run a correspondence school in that type of thing. So we were pretty well educated with her and she used to make us read the mass every Sunday whether we went to mass or whether we didn't. We had to take an hour off on Sundee morning and sit down and be quiet and read it. Whether we read it or not was a different matter sometimes but we did it. And we always said the family rose. My first memory at Hainault of being there or doing things

07:30 was kneeling down outside. We had a grapevine outside the kitchen Mum used to sit in a chair and the three of us'd kneel down on the ground alongside and say the rosary. That was when I was about 3 or 4 I suppose. But that's my earliest memory but I've said it ever since. I still say it today. Means a lot to me.

So how did your faith serve you in your military career?

Well I think it was because of that belief and that everything was in the hands of

08:00 God I think that's why I didn't get upset about a lot a things. I didn't let things get me down because I said, "Well that's outside my control anyway." As long as I do the right thing I should be right. And the fact that three of us went to war and three of us come home. And I knew a family from (UNCLEAR) six of them went to the war and none of them come home. The same war. So you know there's something my mother would a spent most a the war on her knees I'd say. In spite a the things she said about me.

Can you remember going to church parades or anything like that?

08:30 To which?

Church parades?

Yes when we were at the convent in Koongal St Patrick's Day was always a big thing in Rockhampton. All the big businesses used to run floats and that for St Patrick's Day procession and they'd go out to the showgrounds and then we had the annual sports day for all the combined Catholic schools. That was the only thing I remember. Then occasionally at some of the Churches they'd have a like the feast to Christ the King they'd have a little march round the church but they wouldn't go out on the streets sort a business.

09:00 But that was the major one for me when I was young and then in later life just before I went to the war I went to a Corpus Christie one in Brisbane cause Arch Bishop Juing used to have them at the exhibition grounds. They used to have a Corpus Christie procession through some. I don't know what streets they were but I wasn't in the procession but went to the one at the. Used to pack the showgrounds complete. And the only other one I went after the war. I was in the National Catholic Rural Movement and I went to a National Rural Conference in

09:30 Albury and there was a Eucharistic Congress on in Sydney at the time and I marched in that. So they're the only ones that I ever did.

What about when you were in England on the airbases and anything like that, were there padres and that there?

Most of them had them yeah. Most of them did. And the ones that didn't provided buses on Sundays for those that weren't flying to go to the local church. The same in Kingaroy. They didn't have a Catholic padre there but it's marvellous how many Catholics there were on that

10:00 aerodrome because the bus took them into town. 15 to 20 would go to church 40 or 50 would to go the pub. Because the ones that stayed at home had to do an emu parade. Do you know what an emu parade is? The one's that stayed home did emu parade so they all became Catholics on Sunday.

What about did you cross paths with the Salvation Army in the air force?

Yes they always had on most bases they did have an office and you could go

10:30 there and write letters and get things if you wanted. And then the Catholics had CWO [Catholic Welfare Organisation] they weren't as wide spread as the Salvation Army but I often wrote home on the Salvation Army paper and went to their place had a cup a coffee that sort a thing. Well my father he was s'posed to be an Anglican I think. But anybody asked Dad what religion he was he always said, "Salvation Army," Cause they used come round the stations every 12 months and take a collection up and Dad always give them a few quid on the thing. So he always claimed he was Salvation.

When they came round to the station

11:00 **they took a collection, what else would they do while they were there?**

Nothing. They'd come down and eat at our place and I don't ever remember them staying at the Hainault homestead or at our. Well we couldn't put them up. The Homestead had the accommodation. But they obviously must've stayed at some of the stations that were leaning their way. Well see the Palm's were they were practicing Anglicans and Camboon were the same. I think they might've stayed at Camboon when they were in that area because there was a boarding

11:30 house there. Or the Bell's even though they were practicing Anglicans. Cause I remember when the local carrier Billy Marks his little girl they don't know they never worked out whether she was bitten by a red back spider or a brown snake. But she was under a little house like that and she got bitten by something and she died. And because Major Bell wanted to do the right thing by her he was a Anglican he come out to Mum and go her mistle so as he could read the Catholic death prayers over this little child because she was buried at the station cause there was no

12:00 Catholic Priest within coo-eee [close by] of the place in those days. So he came out and got Mum's mistle and he read the Catholic prayers over this little child while she was buried. So they would'a been quite happy to put the Salvos up. And other stations would've done the same thing.

What about can you recall getting Red Cross packages?

Yes.

What was in those?

There's usually a little thing with a bit a cake or a pudding in it and some sweets. Cigarettes which my mates used to love because I used to give them all mine

12:30 and face washer and pair a socks or sometimes woollens a jumper or something like that. And the country women too they when we were at Narrandera they gave all us sheep skin vest. It was turned inside out with wool on the inside so we could. And at Narrandera I used it because it was so damn cold there and even though we had a flying jacket. The winds there were bitter coming across those plains and I used to wear it there but I never ever

13:00 wore it England or anywhere like that. And I ended up givin' it to my son when he was working in the gardens. He's still got it. It was just you know a simple cut. No buttons no nothing. Had a bit of tape so as you could tie it in the middle but it just sort a went under your arms and it covered it went right back to your backside so as again it was to protect your kidneys sort a business.

And it was the CWA [Country Women's Association] ladies that organised that was it?

Yeah that was through the CWA. And they did a lot a things and I got a big present from the CWA when I went cause they were strong in our area and for

13:30 me brother they put on a dance at the Prospect Creek School which was about 9 mile from where we were but they wanted one for me when I. I don't want any dances. I couldn't dance anyway so. And all the girls were smothering Jack in kisses and I was scared stiff a girls in those days.

What about you mentioned the mail that you used to send what sort of mail did you receive?

Well all the usual bills you get when you're on the land and

No no when you were in England sorry?

14:00 Well my family wrote to me regularly my sister and my mother. Dad never wrote to me. He wasn't a real. Well he didn't have much of an education. He'd left school you know early and but he could read and write but I mean he didn't have a good education. And then different other rellies would send a parcel and these Palm's that owned the station where Dad had worked earlier they used to send me a Christmas card and an Easter card and a letter and photograph of their cattle latest cattle shots and things like that. And then there was a girl I was fond of in Canada

she wrote to me the whole of the war and then she fell in love with an Englishman and married him. So out a site out a mind. But she wrote to me regularly and sent me little parcels with goodies in it like sweets and all that sort a stuff. And Mum used to send parcels regularly.

How good was it for the men to receive letters and parcels from home?

Real good over in England because the rations there were very, very basic. Like even you go into a café to have a cup a tea you'd have Welsh Rarebit as they called it which was just melted

cheese on toast. And if you went to the NAAFI [Navy Army Air Force Institute] or any of the café's you'd have this dried eggs scrambled eggs which tasted awful to most cooks. Or you could have baked beans. I swore when I come back from the war I'd never eat baked beans again. And mostly in our canteens in our own places you were served all that sort a stuff. The only time you got an egg as I say is when you went on an operation the eggs were so. And they had to all be imported from

Ireland. They took all the land for aerodromes in England. So those food parcels with a bit a sweet cake or biscuits and that sort a thing it really went down well.

Looking back after having flown all the different aircraft that you've flown looking back on the Tiger Moth what sort of aircraft was that like?

Beautiful aircraft. You felt you were flying in it. But my favourite aircraft was the Oxford. In some

ways. I mean the Lancaster was because it was all so powerful and when I did my ops but as a personal flying machine I liked the little Oxford. It was low down. Comfortable to sit in. Two side.

Sorry. Was the Oxford the first plane that you went onto after the Tiger Moths?

Yes it was yeah.

Tell us a bit more about that, you were just telling us about it?

Well first of all we flew Tiger Moths in England after here just to get us used to the country. Then we had to do this beam course and they used Oxfords for that and they had this

little hood once they got off the ground they put the hood after you and you had to fly instruments all the time. And then at one stage we did 2 weeks of nothing but night flying to perfect this sort a thing but you didn't have to have the hood. That was on your own. You went out and you did what they called a beacon bashes and you had to used to follow these beacons round to do your navigation. And the only fault it had the under carriage lever and the flap leader were on alongside each other

like twins right there and you'd reach down and pick up the wrong one and the penalty for that for grounding it as they called it. They'd give you a tyre and for the rest of your stay at that station you had to wheel this everywhere you went. You went to the mess you had to take this tyre with you and park it at the door. And the bloke who taught me Flying Officer Fleming, an American who taught me to fly in Canada he came there to Feltwell. Not Feltwell wherever it was Babdown Farm the course after me like they

always had half way through a course when another course come in and his first week there he pulled up the under carriage after he landed and shot through into a ditch. So he was wheeling this tyre round when I left and he felt very, very embarrassed cause he'd spent 12 or 18 months teaching people to fly. But he just reached down and grabbed the. Used to the old Anson you know they the other thing was way up here with your throttles but and he was just. So he just reached down and pulled the and it was the under carriage.

So what…?

It was a beautiful little aircraft to. Some people reckoned it was tricky to fly. But I probably that's why I liked it because it was you know light to the touch.

And then you went from Oxfords to Wellingtons is that right?

Wellington's that's right yeah.

And what were they like?

They flew like stones without motors. I remember the first day that we did a no engine landing. We went in down the thousand foot leg. Then we dropped down to 500 went across

and just as we got onto that he said, "I'll just show you what these things are like." And he flew until the aerodrome disappeared under the front of it and he's chopped both motors. And he had to put motor. I had to get it in but just getting in he had to put the motor on a bit get over the fence to land on the thing. So that's, they'd dropped. They're (sound effect) like that and they go down. They were as heavy as led. And they were just as heavy. They were a very safe aircraft from the point of crashes because they were

geodetic construction they were made like that. All criss-cross all the way and if you saw a Wellington that had been crashed the front might a been stoved in a bit and the tail might be a little bit crooked but the body was just still had it's shape. Even though they had no wheels they just run along and they

wouldn't crumple up. And I think that's what the trouble they had too much weight for the motors. Even though they had Hercules motors in them they only had two. But and they couldn't get up. They didn't have a good supercharge and about

19:30 12,000 was about their ceiling.

Cause a lot of pilots have mentioned how good that is it geostatic is that what it's called? It's the construction, the geo…?

Geodetic.

Geodetic yeah. Geodetic construction, they all rave about how good that construction was but it was that that made the aircraft heavy?

I think so because with so much metal. Whereas the others just had a very basic metal frame and it's just aluminium skin whereas they had all that metal all the way and it was quite tight you know just very little diamonds and then they had the pressed metal skin on top of that

20:00 again. And because of the weight they had a poor power rate ratio. They flew all right while they were flying but you lost motors. And that really showed it to me cause I thought he was gonna go we'd never get into the aerodrome. But we had to lift the power to get onto it because it disappeared behind it.

And then from Wellingtons to Stirlings?

Yeah, went to Stirlings.

What were the Stirling's like?

Well they were hard on take off because they sat up fairly straight and they tend to

20:30 veer a lot and in that log book there's a thing there that I read and understand how to correct a swing in a Stirling aircraft. So they were hard to get and once you got moving and got them down they were good. And they were a beautiful aircraft to fly low. And that's why they were using them for that sort of work. Whereas the Lancaster had 4 Merlin engines which was 11,000 and something horsepower they had four 1,600 odd horsepower motors. And I went

21:00 out one day with the instructor for some. I dunno why we had to visit another aerodrome for some reason or other and we just cruising round at fairly low level about 2,000 feet I think it was and the next thing he said to me. He said, "There's a Yank formation. Don't look. Don't look. There's a Yank formatting on us." They loved to come up and show you how they could fly and they'd formate on ya. And he says, "Just watch them out of the corner of your eye." So he chopped the motor down over there and I was waiting there. Mate you've lost your motor mate what you gonna do about

21:30 it? Next thing he chopped another one down and they were panicking and then he chopped the third one down and then the ripped the thing through the thing and she went zoooom and left them standing still. They were beautiful on the ground but once you got to about 12,000 feet they had no supercharging and they'd start a wobble. They had the power but they just didn't have the supercharge. They couldn't get enough air into their lungs sort a business. So the petrol mixture went right off. Whereas the

22:00 Lancasters they had a beautiful supercharger. But it was I loved flying at low level though. That boost of power.

And what about the Lancasters?

They were good at all levels. But they didn't have quite the same power but they were better balanced sort a thing and it was rather odd that they were made out of an aeroplane that was a failure. The Manchester. It was a twin engine bomber that was brought out to be.

22:30 But it was no good at all. So and Air Ministry ordered it to be scraped and one bloke he pleaded for one last chance and so because he'd been successful before they gave it too him. So he extended the wings. Put two more motors on in it and put a new supercharger a new motor in it with a supercharger on it and he transferred it from a sow's ear to a silken purse. Because even the Americans

23:00 recognised that it was you know the best flying. Well actually the Readers Digest wrote an article once on the Mosquito which was my ambition for second tour that it was the best bomber in the world and because it could carry 4,000 pounds to Berlin against their two just on a twin. But see it was made out of plywood. But it was the dream machine but I never got to fly it.

At what stage of your training was there that split from fighter pilots and bomber pilots?

Well right from the once you finished on Tiger

23:30 Moths the split you up then and you entered either fighter the fighters went off to Uranquinty to fly on Wirraways or whatever they had in those days. Wirraways mostly and the bombers went off to if they were in Australia they went off onto Ansons. In Canada you either went onto Ansons or Beechcraft I think it was. It was a Canadian plane anyway. But for me we went to the school that had

24:00 Ansons. Harvards, they had Harvards on the other a lot a Canadian places cause that was built in

Canada.

So did you make that decision yourself where you wanted to go or was that made for you?

Oh no they. Well they did ask you what you wanted to be you know an instructor. A fighter pilot. A bomber pilot or a air/sea reconnaissance and they went on these Liberators. I didn't like the idea of stooging round the ocean for 14 to 16 hours trying to save submarines.

24:30 So and I dunno why I wanted bombers what the reason was because I liked bein' on my own so it's a wonder I didn't pick. But when he asked me what I wanted and when you went to. Even when you're in Canada when you finished on a twins he did ask me but of course the choice was Bomber Command or TAFE which is on a twin engine stuff or an instructor or what did they call that one? But anyway

25:00 it was air/sea reconnaissance what it was involved in and I said, "Bomber Command, Bomber Command, Bomber Command." So I got Bomber Command.

So of all the aircraft's you flew Oxfords are the favourite are they?

Well as a personal flying yeah it was the favourite. I would've liked to have owned one actually as a private plane. And I believe there are some still around in Indonesia. After the air force got rid of them Indonesia bought a whole lot of them as training planes. Because it flew it was had a good touch about it and it had good

25:30 power in relation to its thing and it I liked it. I mean I'd love to fly Lancasters again too. They're all been melted down for pots and kettles.

And have you flown since the war?

That's something I forgot to tell you. Yes. I flew a Tiger Moth. In my log book the last flight I did in England was on the 30th of September 31st of August I think if I remember rightly. It doesn't

26:00 matter anyway. But my niece Mary Willis she's a private pilot licence and Audrey and Patricia they wanted to shouted me. Cause I've always wanted to fly in Tiger Moths just fly in one and they wanted to give me for my 81st birthday they wanted to give me a flight in a private Moth's down here the thing. And they booked the flight up and 2 days before Patricia rang up to see if it was still on and the bloke says, "No it's not. It's cancelled." And she says, "Why?" he said, "It's cancelled." And slammed it down.

26:30 And I was telling Uncle Barney this that's my sister's husband and he told Mary about it and so she's in Civil Aviation and her boss initial boss he's the Chief Engineer for Queensland and the Northern Territory does all the inspections. He did 80,000 hours with Cathay Pacific but he's also an engineer and he had his own Tiger Moth and he's got a Proctor. He said, "I'll get you a ride." I said, "But what's it gonna cost?"

27:00 He says, "No Ray loves takin' people up. He'll give you your flight for nothing." So that was good so they arranged and it was the 31st of August it was 1 day after my last flight 43 years after my last flight as a pilot. And when we were walking out to the plane he said, "Well I s'pose you'd like to have a touch of the controls?" And I said you know hundred thousand dollars of thing and the young fella. I said, I wouldn't mind havin' a bit, you know, go and…" So he took the thing off and we got up to about

27:30 1,500 feet and he says, "okay," he says, "It's all yours." He said, "Do a few steep turns and this way and that way get the feel of it," he said, "Go where you like." So I took over very gently. I didn't even know where the instruments where. And I flew up towards Caloundra up towards the Glasshouse Mountains then turned round and went back and I flew over Bribie up to the seaside and then I started to come back he said, "We'll go back and you can have a shot and have a landing." So

28:00 he told me kept a bit to the left so I went over right so I went over and got in the thing went through did a down turn and come in. I was a bit too high so he says, "Just let me have it for a minute and I'll slip it off." So he side slipped it down and handed me over bout 200 feet I suppose and I went in and I felt a bump and I thought it was a bad landing but it must a been the tail I must'a done 2 wheels and a tail. Whereas the Tiger Moth you supposed to sit them down. He says, "That was good." And I said, "I thought I bumped…" He said, "Oh no," he said, "That was good."

28:30 And so away we went round. He said, "We'll go back and have another go." So he got round now he said, "You can take it off now." So I took it off and he had his he's got his hands up on the thing so Mary said, "That proves you took the thing off you know." So I took it off and went round again. We went round come in did it and I greased it in and he was amazed. I think he thought the first one was a fluke. Because you know after 43 years and he was raving on about what wonderful training and that you must a had

29:00 you know to impart that into ya. And then when we were siting in the hanger there was some other blokes come in and he was telling all them about it. He says, "This bloke hasn't flown for years." He said, "he just greased it in twice." He said, "I've never seen the likes." He said, "I've had commercial pilots come in and they want to fly a Tiger Moth," he said, "And they can't. He said, "They couldn't land. You gotta take over half way through." But he was chief instructor for Cathay Pacific. He converted all their pilots that come in through the schools he converted them

29:30 on to 707's and that was like towards the end of his career he was the Chief Instructor so he knows all

about flying. And he really he was very generous because we must a flown for about three quarters of an hour. And he also took a second plane up so that they could take a photograph of us in the air. So that was my highlight of my career. And I put it in my log book and its just one day more than 43 years between the two flights.

And did it really

30:00 **come back to you like a duck to water?**

Well it obviously did you know. I felt very nervous when I first took control and I did a bit of side slipping for a start. And he said, "You do better than what Mary does and she's got a licence." So no that's my only flying experience since the war.

You were telling us about how your aircraft takes a photo of the bomb that you drop, can you explain how that works for us?

Yeah they had a. In the early part'a the war. This came out through skull doggery. The people'd go out and they go and they'd dropped their bombs then they'd come home and they'd say we got all the flack this blah blah blah blah. And they weren't getting the results they thought they should'a been getting and then when the radar first come in they started to track them. And this particular bloke this intelligence bloke quoted to us in the action he said, "This bloke we're a bit

31:00 suspicious of." So he said, "Because the plane never seemed to get damaged. No bullet holes or anything like that." So he said, "We tracked him this night and he flew over towards Germany then he head up to the North Sea then he did about 3 and a half hours on a square section of the North Sea then he come back home again." And they came in for the briefing they said well you know, "What happened tonight Paddy?" or whatever his name was. He sat down and told them this long story and all the crew conferred about it. And the bloke said to him, "Would you really like to know where you went?" Huh, huh. He said, "Well here's the

31:30 map," and he said, "We've just traced you all night tonight and this is where you went." So they cashiered him. And that's why they introduced cameras. And they were in the back a the bomb doors and when the bomb and they knew by your height and the type of bomb how long it was going to take to get to the ground because they know the velocity and all these sort a things and the cookie was the slowest so it was timed on that. And so they put this thing in the back'a the bomb day

32:00 and when he pressed the button of the thing it started the camera was alerted that it was to go and then there was a 40. I can't. Well I'll show you after. There's some 37/ 47 seconds and that's how long it took a bomb to get from 18,000 feet to the ground. And a course they viewed the explosion as it happened. So that's how they did it.

Was there any sort of flash

32:30 **mechanism that would illuminate the ground, or was it just the flash of the explosion that would be enough?**

The flash of the explosion was all it was and they were just going along and they had this thing reeling and it just took the photograph at the particular time when they claimed the explosion was taking place and I can show you 4 or 5 photographs there. It doesn't actually show my bomb cause there's all these little bomb bursts all around it. But the one I wanted to show you was the one from Berlin and it's not there. Unless I've got it mixed up in the paperwork. Because it was taken at night time

33:00 and you can actually see the flare that the pathfinder dropped.

And how soon would you be able to see those photographs of that particular operation?

Well mostly in our case they didn't come out because we were bombing over ten/ten [rating of cloud cover] cloud most of the time and I think I've only got 5 photographs. But you could see them next day in the intelligence room. Go into the intelligence room and they can show you your photographs.

But how were you able to get those photos? I thought they would a been snaffled by the intelligence guys and?

33:30 Well at the end of the war I went in and asked him and he went through my file and gave me the ones that were readable that's how. And there was two of one particular thing. I dunno why they it might a been the one they had for their records and one for me I dunno what it was but Gelsenkirchen. But one raid on Gelsenkirchen and there's two photographs.

What did you think what did you feel about dropping those supplies the food supplies and that to the Dutch and

34:00 **Germans?**

Well that was probably one of the most satisfying things about the war cause you're doing something positive instead of negative. You weren't destroying anything. And to see all these Dutchies there waving to you and even flying Union Jacks in front of the Germans that were standin' there with their arms. I mean it was really heart warming to see it and then see the photographs in the paper the next day of all these cheering crowds and what went on in the place. And seeing them all raiding the thing.

They had blokes through the German coordinator they raced on the aerodrome.

34:30 Some of em must a got hurt surely.

The things that you dropped on them how were they packaged?

Well they were package. Like the flour would be in a flour bag but then it'd be in a great big bag like this. So the inside one would burst but the other one not having any pressure it wouldn't. So the flour'd all be in the other bag and the same with the tea and the sugar and all these. They were all done up in twins all the time so that they'd survive the. And the fact it was no they had parachutes on them too. Some of them had parachutes

35:00 on them depending on what they were. Probably if there was glassware they'd have the parachute on them and they'd come down more slowly. But the flour tea and sugar and that they just dropped and. But to see all those people there waiting for all this stuff because see the Germans wanted it themselves because they were starving too because they were cut off from all their supply lines. No that was probably one of the most satisfying. Well next to bringing the prisoners of war home. That really warmed my heart brinin' them home. I remember one little I told

35:30 you about the bloke standin' at the thing and crying when he saw the white cliffs of Dover. But one little Cockney got out and he ran down the gangway like Pope Paul he knelt down and kissed the ground. He says, "Back in Blighty [England] again." That was really good.

Back to dropping off the supplies how was that organised do you know?

Well through the Red Cross in Switzerland. The Red Cross in Switzerland negotiated with the Red Cross in Germany and the Red Cross in England. And it took 'em about 2 months to work it out.

36:00 **Can you remember how you were told what you were gonna be doing?**

Yes when you went to the. We didn't know what we were gonna be doing. We went to this briefing they said, "Well today you're gonna be, or as soon as we can get the weather cleared you're gonna be dropping food to the," and they explained what was going on and how dire the straights were in that particular area and we knew why because we knew they were cut off. We didn't know it was that bad but. So no they explained all that to us and told us what the procedure and that we're to make sure we're above 500 otherwise we'd be shot out a the sky.

36:30 Some of the Germans on the ground did fire bullets too. Some blokes come bullet holes in their wings. But we didn't not on those. In the actual operation the only damage I ever suffered when I was on one raid they blew one piece of shell took the bottom off the radiator. Cause the Merlin motor was a water cooled motor, well Glycol [ethylene glycol] cooled because that didn't freeze and it shattered the bottom of the tank and we lost all the water out a that.

37:00 So we had to come home on three motors. A bit late getting home that down and we come a bit low too which was a bit dangerous. Cause the fighters can pick up a low one quicker than they can pick up one in the big thing. But we'd often had little holes through the wings and things like that. You'd go round afterwards and say you know rifle hole. You know little bits of shrapnel. Because that was the most frightening thing of daylight raids because you could see the shells exploding all around you the black puffs and you knew they were on your area

37:30 and some days it was so close that your windscreen'd get all foggy with this bloomin' black smoke. But you were too busy tryin' to get to the thing and watch the bloke next door you didn't bump into him to sort a worry too much about it. When it was really thick that's when you think well is the next one gonna through my bottom?

So on the food drops did you feel like you were any safer from being attacked by the Germans?

Oh yes we didn't worry about that. We didn't think they would shoot us down. But that was just a thing to make sure that. And they made sure

38:00 we didn't land by putting these concrete posts all over the aerodrome. They apparently thought we might be silly enough to try it. But nobody was. But we did once we crossed the coast over the Batteries we did go down because we wanted to get a good look at the place. Our particular one we dropped from about a hundred feet I s'pose. But that wasn't we didn't fly formation on those. They just went like they did at night they went just a gaggle over the place. But no, that was very satisfying thing.

I assume

38:30 **given the cargo you were dropping it probably was better dropping it from a lower height as well was it?**

Yes because less impact. Because a body falling gathers speed until it gets up to a certain speed. So when you're lower it doesn't get that time to build up to full speed. Like the human body reaches 110 ks before it hits the ground. So it's a hell of a splatter if you haven't got parachute.

Speaking of parachutes. Sorry we'll stop there and we're at the end of a...

Tape 8

00:30 **I was just gonna ask you about parachutes. What sort of chute did you have and where did you wear it and things like that?**

Well the pilot wore it on his backside so we didn't put ours on till we got into the plane because it was on the seat and you had to hand something so if you had to bail out it was there. And the rear gunner was the same. But all the rest had a chest parachute and it hung on the side a the thing which meant often time they were denied it because the thing. It hung on a rack along the and then you had to pick it up

01:00 and there was two great big clips here they just banged it on like that and they had it on their chest. Whereas ours on and when we pulled that slip the straps down low used to lead up and it used to come up and it hung from the shoulders just the same as what the other one did. And there's come up from the front and the same thing on the thing. But there was one Australian he dropped 20,000 feet without a parachute and lived to tell the tale and the Germans gave him a certificate to prove it. He was from

01:30 Longreach actually. He was over I've forgotten what the target was that night but they were badly damaged over the thing and he was blown out of the plane. His parachute was the explosion and thing and he got thrown out of it. And it was very, very snowy time and he dropped into a birch tree or some tree that had these great big you know fronds come down and that and they went like that like our

02:00 stuff and it was covered in snow and about 30 or 40 feet high and he hit that and slid and gradually and he ended up in a snow pile on the base. And when they got the things there was only one plane shot down that night and the Germans had picked him up gave him this certificate to say that he actually fell from this plane without a parachute. So that was a miracle bloke. And another one who was an American his

02:30 plane was cut in half by machine-gun burst from a fighter and he was in the he was the rear-gunner. And as it happened it was almost aerodynamically balanced. It just went into a incline like that and it fell cause you know the ailerons were there and that sort of gave it stability and he went into the English Channel and one a the other planes followed him down and put on

03:00 the radio and the launch came up and picked him up. It was the tail end of a Liberator and he survived to tell the tale so he landed without a parachute but he didn't even bail out or wasn't blown out.

Did you ever have to do practice for getting out of the aircraft in the event of needing a parachute?

The only place we did that was when we were at Narrandera at Initial Training School and we had those seat parachutes there too. We used to go into the gym and they'd take you up on about

03:30 14 feet or 15 feet and hang you on this parachute and you'd hit the button and you went down and landed on the big gym bags down below and you had to do. You're supposed to land on your shoulders not on the thing and you did a somersault when you landed and that was the way you did. Like if you landed normally you landed on the run but then you didn't try to because if there's wind it could drag you. So as soon as you landed you were supposed to do a somersault over. But that was the only time that apart from the mid upper-gunner because we were going to be on special

04:00 duties he had the job of throwin' the spies out. So he had to go up to Ringwood near Manchester and do a parachute jumping course so as he understood the trauma of getting out of an aircraft. And they used to have a loading bloke and the mid upper-gunner'd get one either side and if a bloke grabbed the side they'd just one'd go bang and one'd go bang and out you go mate. And a course the static lines opened the chutes for them. But he was the only one that actually did a jump out of aircraft so the rest of us never practiced it except

04:30 initially.

Can you recall any of the specific missions where you were pushin' spies out of the aircraft?

No well we never. The point is, Peter [interviewer], we never did it because by the time we'd finished the course they decided there was enough crews trained and the Germans were getting so close they didn't want them and what they did have would service Norway. So we never had to do it. That's why we had to go do another conversion unit on Lancasters and go onto Bomber Command. And so we were trained for it and we never did it. We were only a month

05:00 4 weeks we did flyin' up and down the bloomin' ravines in Wales on pitch black nights without any moon so the fighters couldn't see you. There were no fighter in Wales anyway but that was the practice getting in between these little narrow mountains.

How did you actually get in and out of the Lancaster?

Well just forward of the rear turret there's a door in them and there was 3 steps there and the erks [ground crew] pulled the step away.

05:30 It wasn't in the plane the erks had it. And you walked up into the plane and you walked up the middle

and the rear-gunner he had to go down and get into his turret from inside and then he'd turn it sideways. But to getting out of it the mid upper-gunner the wireless operator the navigator had to jump out that door and what they had to do they had to sit on the thing and roll out so that they didn't hit the tail plane as they went past. And

06:00 the bomb aimer and myself had to jump out through the camera hatch in the front where he did his work. There was an opening about 6 foot by about 3 foot wide and him and I were supposed to get out there. That's if you could get George to keep the thing level while you got down though. Cause that was the nearest escape hatch the quickest way out. So you did lots of drills on that in the early part but we never did one on the station. We were shown where it was and that was all there was too it.

I

06:30 **was amused then when you called the ground crew blokes erks, what was the relationship like between aircrew and ground crew?**

Well in all training there wasn't any relationship at all. But on the squadron it was quite good. And like we'd go out after the briefing was over we'd go out there they'd be sitting by the except wintertime with their little fire and we'd warm our hands and have a yarn with them and that type of thing and when they come back we'd give them a full report before we went to the briefing cause they used. They were dispersed all round the aerodrome and a truck

07:00 used to drop you off at your various own dispersals then they'd come around and pick you up when you come home. But we'd go in and tell the erks what had happened you know what trouble if we had trouble with a maggy or a motor or something we'd tell em what it was and they'd look into it. No, there was a good relationship between the crew and the ground crews on a squadron but not on Training Command. You never met them cause they worked in the hangers. You just went out to an aircraft and got in it flew it off and then come back. Unless someone happened to be there doing it. Like this erk that told me that I was gutless because I wouldn't

07:30 take that Stirling up that had punctured tyres on it.

When you were talking about your uniform before on your flying suit did you have the compass escape button that some of the pilots had?

No. The only compass we had there was a little plastic container about that big about 6 inches by 3 inches and about that thick and it had edible maps and the compass that was in it, it was

08:00 two fly buttons and one had a little prong on it and one had a little white dot on it. So you put it on the ground and the compass was where you put the white dot it'd show you which was that was you put that north and the little button'd fly around tell you where it was. That was the compass we were given to escape by. And then there was some dark chocolate and a few sort of hard biscuits and rations that. But it all fitted into a thing and it just fitted in

08:30 your flying boot like that. And if you did land you were supposed to eat the maps before the Germans caught you.

Edible maps, I haven't heard that one before.

Edible maps of where the route you were going so for escape purposes you know of Germany. And they'd give you the one depending on where you were going and then the main routes out of that area. But you were supposed to eat them not let the Germans get them so that they knew what was going on. Cause then they would know what escape routes we're using and then they could pick up they could

09:00 follow some bloke later let him get out and follow him and pick up all the people that were sheltering him. That's why you had to eat the map.

Was it standard paper or was it some special paper?

No special soluble paper and it was made out of some rice paper or something like that and didn't give you indigestion because it was so thin. It was just like cigarette paper actually but a little bit stronger and they were coloured maps too they were quite easy so as you could read them under a little torch. Oh, that's right there's another very tiny torch in there

09:30 so as you could read how to get out.

That's the one they asked for back to get back at the end of the war?

No that's the one we used ourselves. No this was a very tiny one we never got to keep that. You used to hand these things back in every time you come home. But we had the escape whistle on our battle dress and that was if you landed in a dinghy somewhere and you could see a launch you could get on this thing and blow like hell and hope that they could hear you

10:00 over the motors.

Did you have to wear a Mae West as well?

Yeah we wore that all the time and like when you got into the plane you put your Mae West on as well as your harness for your parachute. Because we were flying over the sea all the time and they weren't

gonna take the risk that you could get into it if you crashed in it so you had to actually fly in a Mae West the whole time.

And where was the life raft kept on the aircraft?

It was in the

10:30 starboard wing just where the ground crew used to get up onto the stepping plate to refuel the tanks and it was made of a fabric so as that. You pulled a lever inside and the fabric was torn away and it'd come out on spring loaded or something and then it was attached by a rope so as it didn't drift away from you and so you got a hold of that and you

11:00 broke the H2O bottle and that inflated it up then and then you all piled into it. But the only one I ever saw inflated was that one in the Stirling.

Was there any other survival kit in the aircraft apart from the personal one that you had on your person?

No nothing.

And how did you favour your chances if you ever had to ditch in the Atlantic?

Not too good. I've forgotten now. I think if it was a wintertime and you ditched in the Atlantic I think you had about 3 and a half

11:30 minutes before you froze. So unless you got a message out and had a launch there. Like in the summer time it would a been a lot better but in mid-winter it was pretty dicey. But we actually didn't fly much over the Atlantic it was always the English Channel or the North Sea. Well the North Sea would a been just as bad in winter time and the English Channel wasn't real good either.

And I think you told us that you would get more nervous once you'd delivered your payload. At what stage did you

12:00 **feel safe again?**

When you're either later in the war when you cross the front line or when you crossed the French coast cause you knew that you were out of the range of the fighters by then. And we knew then by then we had the American fighters up above us. Because the Spitfires used to come so far and guide us and then the Americans'd come over with the Tomahawks and the Thunderbolt. They had the longest range of any of the fighters. They weren't a good fighter

12:30 but they had the longest range and they used to take us further into Germany. But because of that and because of our firepower with such a tight formation our group that I was with anyway was never ever attacked by fighters. We never even saw a fighter come up to intercept us. A lot a flack and that type a stuff everywhere but no fighters because they knew that these Thunderbolts and Spitfires were up about 30,000 feet and waiting to come screaming down if they moved in anyway. And

13:00 then with 250 aircraft with 8 guns a piece and firing 1,500 rounds a minute from each barrel you were flying into hell of a veil of lead to get in. But at night-time where they flew gaggle well they could get them you know drop onto them uninspected. But they didn't worry the daylight much. Very few losses by fighter pilots in that.

What were the sights and sounds of flying into a big

13:30 **field of ack-ack fire?**

You didn't get much sound because of the motors themselves. You didn't hear I don't' think I ever remember hearing any explosions at all but you'd just see the puff of smoke all the time where they burst. Or in the night raid you'd see a little bit of a flame and you'd see the streaks with the ack-ack guns coming up. Every seventh bullet was an incendiary. But I had one close call I was nearly shot down one of my own aircraft on a cross-country in a Wellington.

14:00 We had to fly out from where we were at Desborough at North Hamptonshire fly out over the coast at a certain I've forgotten the points now and then we had to turn left and fly down over Fishguard Bay direct south hit land at Fish Bay and then come up back at an angle. And they gave us a wind of 60 ks a met wind of 60 ks and George did a thing and got 120 and didn't believe it so he took 80 or 90 or something.

14:30 The next thing I said, "Colin, we're over water," and I called up George and says, "George, we're over water." He said, "Oh yes, that's a lake that's Lake so and so. That's lake so and so." I said, "Well that's all right then." We were still over water. I said, "It's a damn big lake." Next thing we started to see lights ahead of us. I says, "George," I says, "Dublin's just ahead of us." "Oh God, turn 90 degrees, turn 90 degrees south east." He panicked. And by this time we were well away where we should a been and

15:00 that's when the gunners had their show. We were out over the sea and they could fire as much as they liked over they did all. Every time you went over cross-country they had to have gunnery practice. So they would fire. But we just turned down and was heading down and the next thing I see these little bits a light coming in just underneath the port wing. And I looked up and they were coming from another

aircraft well over from us. He must a been just a bit higher than us and they were just looping below our wings and I turned on all

15:30 the lights which you weren't supposed to do. The landing lights and the dome lights and everything else. And one of the other crew which were closer into the coast where we should a been following behind he was his guns were doin' their practice and we were right in the firing line. So anyway they stopped when they saw all the lights come on. They must've known. So we survived that one.

Cause what was the comm. situation like between you and other aircraft?

Well you didn't have any basically because

16:00 the whole time you were in the air you were supposed to have radio silence. You could talk on the intercom to your crew as little as possible cause that only had a 5 or 10 mile range and we were out on the west while the spies couldn't pick that up anyway. But the only time you were allowed to contact if something went wrong and you did it all in a Morse and not only in Morse but it was in code. They were given a code before they left the wireless

16:30 operators and they would send a message back to base by code. But other than that you didn't have any contact but you had no inter-aircraft thing. We probably could a called him on our intercom if but that was dangerous so I didn't want to do that I just lit all the lights on and they stopped anyway. They stopped firing.

Was turning on the aircraft lights less dangerous than getting on the intercom was it?

I'd say so because after all people who ware a long distance away they'd just see a light in the sky they wouldn't even know what it was. And at

17:00 least the bloke that was firing the bullets he knew what it was. It was another aircraft because a the position of the lights he knew it was an aircraft.

And was he from the same squadron?

Oh yeah. From the same base. But see you were timed out different times and the fact that we'd gone further west than we should a done we'd got behind the bloke that was ahead of us. One bloke that was ahead of us we got behind him but then the one following behind us he'd got in on line with us instead of being behind us because there weren't supposed to be anybody out there towards Dublin. We went all we could see the lights a

17:30 Dublin. They had no blackouts or anything like that and that's what you know first of all I saw this water all the time and Colin and I were looking and when's this lake gonna end? But it wasn't. Then we looked up and here's this great big set a lights out in front of us. I don't know how far away it was but you could see it.

Did you catch up with those guys from the other aircraft when you got back on the ground?

Oh yeah. But a funny thing on the next cross-country he crashed into the sea somewhere the same bloke. Whether he had a similar accident I wouldn't know.

18:00 But port called and he never come back again.

So presumably you said your navigator thought the cross wind was 120 kilometres an hour and he thought that was wrong so it must've been right?

Yeah. Well that was right. It was you see and we travelled over twice as far and we paid for it too because when we turned and going up I had the aircraft and we were going like that because the bloomin' side. No we were goin' like that. We were pushed into the wind to try to keep it. We crabbed all the way home and it took us

18:30 ages to get home. We zipped across this way at 120 but we took ages we were goin' back. We were doin' about 45 miles over the ground with the wind that we had.

So how did you go with fuel consumption on that one, like when you're having to crab back did you?

Well see they always allowed a safety margin of a hundred gallons and so we would've had to go on to the auxiliary tank by the time we got home to land because we would a been getting low because it

19:00 took a fair bit longer than what we should a done. But see it wasn't quite so bad because we gained going west and then it was pretty neutral going direct south but when we tried to head back north again well we were cutting right across this wind all the time and you had to crab all the way. But one virtually cancelled out so you were still within your safety limits.

The last mission that you flew to Bremen did you know that was going to be your last mission?

Oh no we didn't we didn't no.

19:30 **So what was the briefing for that?**

Well basically that they thought you know the war was coming to an end but they wanted Bremen because it was a great ship building place and I think they built tanks. It was an industrial city anyway. But I think they knew the end was near because the fact that we used Wilhelmshaven's Naval base which was heavily fortified is the turning point. That's how cheeky they were getting. Whereas normally they tried to

20:00 avoid those sort a places. But it was a good landmark if you could see it but actually we couldn't see it anyway. But we crossed over at 18,000 feet then we turned round at Wilhelmshaven and flew south. But that's how cheeky they were getting. But no we didn't know for a few days that that was the last one. But then they decided it wasn't worth any more so.

Were they putting up their own defensive fire from the naval yards?

Well no. Well we didn't see any flack anyway our

20:30 mob didn't anyway. But that's when I had that bloke I told you about the bloke that flew over the top of us and opened his bomb bay doors. Yeah well that was the biggest scare on that one. Not flack from the naval base.

And what was your payload on that operation?

12,000 pounds.

What did that consist of?

Well I couldn't' tell you off hand because. Well it consisted of one cookie 4,000 pounds and there would a been some incendiaries

21:00 and they were just sticks diagonal sticks about that long and about that long and they tied them in bundles. And then they dropped before the high explosive bombs and then they helped fire them and then the cookie come down and with one almighty burst through the fires all over the place. So there'd a'been the ordinary HE probably 10'a them. A couple a bundles of incendiaries plus a cookie but all up it was 12,000 pounds. That was, they loaded

21:30 to the plimsoll [level] every time.

Did you feel any different about dropping incendiaries as opposed to normal HE?

Yeah I didn't like them. I didn't like the idea of burning people. But that was part of their search and you know. And the fires did more damage than what the bombs did actually. And that's the way they spread them. And that was one a the things that cause all the consternation about Chemnitz and Dresden because there was a big payload of incendiaries in both those raids and that caused the

22:00 outcry actually. Not so much at the time of the war but after the war they were criticised for that.

And how did you feel when all this sort of outcry sort of started, how did you feel being a pilot you know that delivered those?

Well I just felt I'd done my job as I was told to do it. So as I said earlier I was always was highly strung and nervous but none of that ever played on my nerves that I can remember. And like Audrey said I had lots a nightmares after the war and she used to get scared because I'd be. But I never

22:30 ever had a nightmare about flying. All my nightmare was on the ground. You know getting into trouble with other people but I never had any night. The only things I ever dreamt about flying was finding this old Lancaster in an old shed out in the bush and taking it out and flying it. How it got petrol I wouldn't know. Three times I dreamt that different thing you know at different time over a long period of time finding this old Lancaster and stuff in a shed out in the bush somewhere. Took it out and flew it but there was no nightmares about that. That

23:00 was real love story.

And when you were picking up POWs [Prisoners of War] where were you picking them up from?

Juvincourt in France which was about a half an hours ride out of Paris and I dunno why they picked that. Probably cause it was a very big aerodrome and the Dakota's could come in and unload and we could get in and pick them up fairly quickly afterwards. But there were a couple of others too but all mine were from Juvincourt. There was one other aerodrome they

23:30 used further south but all the ones that I picked up were at Juvincourt. And then one bloke damaged an aircraft there one day and I was given the job of flying back and picking it up. One'a the other instructors probably or one of the other pilots probably but my crew went over and another bloke took his navigator and his wireless operator and he took my aircraft back and I had to fly this. It wasn't badly

24:00 damaged but because he'd damaged it they wouldn't let him fly it back home again and so I had to pick that up and fly it back to Mainz. I think it was. And that was a special aerodrome for crashes. And it started on the beach. So you could fly in just on sea level. There was no timber. No nothing and it was twice the width of an ordinary run and it was three times the length. So that people who'd lost their

hydraulics could come in and land there and they could stop

24:30 before they reached the end of the runway. And that was an eye-opener really seein' some of the aircraft there that had come back. There was one Mosquito that had one of the motors hanging down. It only had one motor and it had half one wing missing off it. That bloke must'a been awfully tired the next day getting that because it would a been a hell of a thing to. His trim wouldn't have handled it. He'd a had a use rudder all the time all the way home and really work hard. And there was a Lancaster there with about 9 feet off

25:00 one wing and two motors knocked out of it. Some awful things. And there was others you saw crashed they'd landed and they'd crashed them up. But that was made for that purpose. The Yanks used it a lot too.

You received special recognition for landing the aircraft that had the burst tyre on take off.

Yeah.

Would it be fair to say that all the blokes that return aircraft like the Mosquito pilot would they have received any sort of recognition?

They'd a got DFCs [Distinguished Flying Cross] or DSOs or Distinguished Flying Medals or something.

25:30 Some of them might've even got a Victoria Cross the worse ones. Well that bloke that I told you about that crashed it into the sea to save his crew he got a Victoria Cross. But any a those blokes that bought those planes back there they'd a got a DFC. But because I did mine in training I just got a nice little green endorsement in the back of my log. And with green endorsements. The air force claimed that 95% of all accidents were pilot error. So you got a red endorsement and that was a blot

26:00 on your career. There was 4% well it was then accident but you couldn't help it. And you know you smashed an aircraft up and got away with it so it wasn't so bad. And 1% which should a been in a bad accident but wasn't because of the skill of the pilot. And that was a green endorsement. And that was 1% of all accidents and I've got a green endorsement in the back a and I'm very proud a that.

So if you got a red endorsement presumably you'd be charged would you?

Oh yes you'd be charged. Yeah definitely you'd be charged.

And if you were in that other 4% which was you know just bad luck,

26:30 **what would happen there?**

Nothing at all. You'd just give you a pat on the back for surviving. But that didn't count against you or for you. It was just it was an accident that. Like some people have a car accident. Some idiot they're driving along peacefully and suddenly someone bangs into them. Well it's not their fault well that was the type of thing. So they got away with that one.

So when you were flying into France to pick up the POWs were you dropping off supplies as well were you?

No no. That was just

27:00 go there pick the thing up and get them back as fast as you could. That was just a specific job on it's own.

And did you have any idea where the POWs were actually interned?

No not basically expect with one bloke that I talked to a lot because we didn't actually see them to talk to. They were filed on. You know you were up front and the ambulances'd come or the Dakotas'd come and they'd get out a one craft and go out and get into. They were told where to go and who to go with. And you'd be given a sheet of who they were and what they were. Their

27:30 number. Their rank and their name and that's all you had on it and you were given this sheet a paper or two sheets a paper with all these people on and you had to give that and go out. And I kept most a those because there was two of them and you gave one to the people when you got to England. And the bloke in charge of them would a probably had one anyway. But no we had very little to do with them except in you know when we got out they were there some'd come out and thank you for bringing them home and that type of

28:00 thing. But they were just all so pleased to be home. And they weren't home because they just had to go then and get in another aircraft or a bus mostly it was buses I think. Well they were taken to a hospital on that particular station to start with and how they got them home from there I don't know.

Were they all air force POWs or?

No no. Most of them were army. Most of them were army. There were a few air force among them. There was no Australians among em from my point of view. But there were

28:30 some English air force ones among em but they were mostly army and navy people.

No blokes from the squadron?

No. None from the squadron at all. No nobody I knew.

And amongst the squadron how much did you interact with the other Aussie crews?

Well in your own flight a lot. Or even your own squadron a lot because you lived in the same mess as them. You worked with them. More the pilots because you

29:00 didn't meet their crews very much because you went to briefings you all sat in this great big all and the pilot was with his own crew. You come home and you were debriefed and you went over. They went to their mess and we went to our mess and you didn't meet a lot a the others excepting the other crews that were close to you. Like a few particular mates I had like Laurie Nottage. Well we'd often go down the pub together the two crews. That type of thing. But on the whole no there wasn't much in the air force there wasn't much intercommunication between groups like that. It was a very close knit little groups

29:30 all the time. And most of the Australians some of the girlfriends here there and everywhere and they blew through. But a few of us become very good mates and you'd go out with them. You'd go on leave with them and you'd get to know their crews because they were always meeting. At the briefings you'd probably all sit together basically. But there wasn't a great and with the other squadron. Fifteen Squadron was on the same aerodrome. We were sort of

30:00 cut off Fifteen. Cause they had three flights on Mildenhall which was a permanent aerodrome and then the air force said, "Do you want to put another flight there?" So they cut them down to two and made two and they called that 622 Squadron. So there was four flights on the thing instead of two.

So at that stage were you still writing to your Canadian lass?

Yeah.

And what were you thinking about the future as far as that was concerned?

Nothing much.

30:30 It was all distant. Actually because my mother took so long to settle down here and always hankered for home I sort a made a resolve I wasn't gonna marry anybody from overseas anyway. I'd come back home and marry an Australian. And I was a long time finding an Australian too. I was 34 when I got married. Dunno whether it was because I was hard to please or because I didn't get on with girls. I don't know what it was.

So how did you take your Dear John letter [letter informing that a relationship is over]?

Which?

From the Canadian lady?

31:00 Well I was bit upset at the time because I was quite fond of her but I mean for that reason I'd never sort a looked at being married. But she wrote and told me just matter of factly she'd fallen in love with this bloke and then later on she wrote and said she got married and that well she stopped writing. He must've objected because she stopped writing when she got married and she went to England to live. But her mother wrote to me and her brother wrote to me. Like he was in the Canadian air force ground staff and he was with a Canadian

31:30 had their own group and they were up near Manchester. And I went up there and called on him and we went out on one leave together and we used to send not a great lot but we used to write a note to each other every now and again. And even after the war he wrote me a couple a letters Christmas cards but like me he wasn't a great letter writer. I was to my family but other than that I was you know half a page or a page was my limit. But and her mother

32:00 wrote to me once. I don't know why can't remember why now but her mother wrote to me after the wedding. Probably to tell me of the wedding I don't know. I can't remember that part now. No I was a bit upset when I first got the letter cause I was quite fond of her. But I had only known her for 3 weeks when she was at this finishing school and she went home to Port Arthur which is right up on the top of Lake Superior and she was a school teacher up there. At one stage I toyed with the idea of going back to Canada to see her. Maybe I might a got married I don't know. I don't think

32:30 so. But a lot of people used to go to Prestwick and they used to hitchhike rides over to Canada on the transports. But being a very obedient type I was scared stiff I'd miss one and I wouldn't get back. You know you only had short leaves and you were takin' a risk to be able to pick up a plane to come back when you wanted to come back if you're stuck foul weather cause they wouldn't be able to fly. But a lot a people did it they flew to Canada visited their girlfriends.

Did you ever get involved in the Lady Writer Scheme?

No.

Did you know about it?

No. Not in a great deal.

33:00 **So where would you go on leave?**

Glasgow because I had relations in Glasgow and London mostly. Mostly London. Laurie and I when we were at Desborough we went out west and visited the western country round what is it? Cause we'd both been out that way a bit when we were on those earlier planes. But the Straud Valley was a beautiful part

33:30 of England and we went out there a couple a leaves. I know one particular place we went out there on a bus. We got a bus and a train and went to Straud itself the first time I went there other than when we were at base there and we couldn't find any accommodation and somebody in one a these little NAAFI places where they're set up you know to look after troops on leave they said, "Oh there's an old lady out on the hill got a mansion out there. She takes service people in for

34:00 leave." So the four of us trooped out. I dunno who the other two were now but the four of us trapped out this place and this great big notice on huge big iron gates and little gatekeepers house on the side but no one in them and on the main gate "No Vacancies." And we were standing there wondering what in the hell were we gonna do and what where will we go next. This woman said there was nothing in the town. The next thing this old lady in the garden wandered over. She said, "What are you boys looking for?" We said we're lookin' for somewhere to stay the night.

34:30 She said, "Well I can put you up." but you've got a sign that says no vacancies. She said, "That's meant for the girls." She said, "They've splashed lipstick and powder all over the place." She says, "And I get sick of tidying up after em so that's to put them off." But she said, "You'll be all right." So she took us and gave us a bed for the night. It was a huge big mansion and that was her part for the war. But she had to do her own garden because the gardener had gone off to the army and she happened to be gardening. Just as well she was gardening when we got

35:00 there or otherwise we wouldn't have known.

Did you get chatted up by the English lasses when you were on leave?

Yes. Actually I had a girlfriend part time in Glasgow because my mother's language teacher was still alive and she was retired and Mum insisted I go and see old Miss Stefarge who was Spanish and she lived in a little flat out at oh it doesn't matter. Burnside I think it was. So

35:30 I went out to see this Miss Stefarge and she apologised for not. She was too old she was virtually housebound not being able to take me out and show me she'd like to show me Glasgow. She said, "I got a very good friend a little girl lives upstairs. She works at the dairy down here," she said, "I'll get her to fill in for me and take you round." So she hauled this girl down. Rang up and this girl was upstairs she was home from the shop. They had what they called the Diary Shop in Rutherglen.

36:00 That's where it was. They had the in Rutherglen. That meant the sold milk and cheese and bread and all that sort a stuff and her mother and father and her run it. So she come down and she said, "She's a Protestant but she's a very good girl." And so she bought her down and so she introduced me asked her to take me around so we had quite a few nights out and I used to go back and thing. I remember she got quite sweet on me actually. She was

36:30 a beautiful singer and Lady Invocargal in which was a big society show she had an annual conference and she used to pay this girl to come and sing as a lead soprano at the charity concert. And she also was the lead soprano at a Presbyterian church out at Shorelands which our property was named after. And she had to go out there for choir practice when I was visiting so she said, "Would you mind coming out?" I said, "No I'll come out." So we got a bus and she struck very silent

37:00 and I said penny for your thoughts. And without looking at me she said, "I'm just wondering how I'd like to live in Australia." I said, "Oh no you wouldn't." But no we were very good friends and when I come home I used to send her. I remember just close to her 20th birthday she developed a bad she got the flu at it developed into TB [tuberculosis] and she was bed ridden for nearly 12 months. But she died I've forgotten when now a few

37:30 days or something short of her 21st birthday would've been. But her boyfriend her current boyfriend wrote and thanked me for how much she used to cheer up when she got my letters and my parcels and those sort a thing. But she was only just 21 when she died. But that was sad because she was a lovely girl. I know one day she went to take me up to show me a forest park up on a hill about a mile from their place and we got caught in a thunderstorm and I took my coat off and

38:00 put it on her and a woman in the house was we were shading under a tree she came out and invited us into the house and gave us a cup a tea and things and so on and so forth and talked. And then we went home her mother and father had gone out for the day to visit some Aunt somewhere up somewhere I don't know where. Cheshire somewhere and they expected to be away all day. But when we got home she said, "What would you like to do?" I dunno what she expected and I said, "Well sing for me." She looked very disappointed actually and

38:30 she'd only just started playing the piano when her mother and father walked in. So because the Aunt they went to see was away and they called on someone else and she wasn't available and so they come

home. They come home early. So but anyway that turned out all right.

So it's lucky you asked her to sing and not something else hey?

Exactly yeah. Didn't get cuddlesome.

Tape 9

00:37 **You were telling us about how the Canadians all stuck together in the squadrons?**

Not only just squadrons. They had a whole group a Bomber Command group and so they were from the top down they were under control of the Canadians. Like they had to go by Bomber Commands orders for doin' operations and that. But apart from that everything else was controlled by their own people and they were all Canadians.

01:00 Whereas with the Australians they only had one squadron. Well two actually number 10 Squadron the flying boats Sunderland's that was an Australian squadron and then there was 460 Squadron was a Lancaster squadron on Bomber Command. So they were the only two that were purely Australians and even there they used mostly English ground staff as well. But still it kept the Australians together and that went on the Australian war record and it goes into all the history books. Whereas everything I did goes into the English history books. It doesn't count basically.

01:30 So I mean it's only a minor point but I mean you just felt a bit a national pride it was your air force doin' a certain job. Whereas we were in the English air force doin' a job for the English people. We used to tease em about that sometimes too. We reckoned if those balloons weren't here you'd sink into the Atlantic. And then they talk about summer time we'd say what day does that occur?

What can you tell us about the barrage balloons?

They were all over the country. They were a danger if you went low flying in a murky day. But they used to go up to about 500 feet they're all these

02:00 things on great big steel cables. They were just usually around the industrial areas more than anywhere else. They didn't have too many near aerodromes because that interfered with more likely to be dangerous to the flying than to the Germans. But mostly round all the industrial cities and around London they had a lot of them there and they had them at various heights and of course the cable was the big danger to the flying. Not so much the balloon itself but that was just to keep the cable up there and they were a bit hard to see of course. But we used to

02:30 tell em they were only there to keep them afloat.

Do you think they worked?

They used to rib us about bein' white Australians so we used to rib them about their balloons and their summer time.

So victory in Europe is declared and you have your party and so what was the process, what were you told was gonna be the process of getting home?

Well we weren't told anything at that stage. We were just

03:00 told we could go on leave wherever we liked and of course we all headed to London for that for the big show. See London with the lights on and they were puny little lights too but it looked wonderful after havin' to wander down dark alleys with no lighting at all. And so most of us some of them that had girlfriends probably went off to different little towns but the bulk of us headed off to London to see the great big celebrations and the crowds and all this sort a stuff. And course to go to the Palace was a must to be. Say you saw the King and the Queen.

03:30 I wasn't a Royalist in those days. I still not am. I believe in the Monarchy as an institution but I'm not you know I'm not that wrapped in them. Particularly in me early days with these Pommies with all their bloomin' say they looked down on the colonials it sort a upset me a lot. And a matter of fact because of that when I come home from the air force I joined the Labor Party because of that backwash and that sort a stuff. Plus the fact that my parents had all been working people for a long time and we were only small

04:00 on the land and we got our land because of the Labor Party. But things have changed dramatically over that. The Labour party today not the Labor Party I was in. But we won't get into politics. But I mean that's what drove me to it was the way they treated their servants. The way they treated the lower ranks and that type of stuff. All this stupid saluting business going on and we were referred to as. We weren't Australians we were colonials. Wasn't a colony by that time anyway. But that's the only.

04:30 I mean I got with the English people I got on real well. I don't but with the stuffy people running the show it was a different matter altogether. Like I was invited to go to a different squadron by the fellow who was the flight commander where I had the accident because he thought you know he wanted me in

his place. And we met up at Lancaster Finishing School together because he had to go back cause he was on Wellingtons as an instructor he had to go back and do a

05:00 finishing school on Lancasters for his second tour. And by that time he'd been promoted to squadron leader. He was in charge of a flight. And he wanted me to go to his squadron which was at Stradishall. But we went through Stradishall because it was group headquarters for the Training Command we were in and the group captain there was a real stinker. If you went down the street without your tie on or your cap wasn't just on the right angle you were slapped on a charge. You were battling officialdom all the time. But apparently when he got a

05:30 squadron on the thing the people on the squadron were a bit more relaxed and they bought him into gear. But he actually wanted me to go to him and I'd a had immediate promotion if I had. Instead of that I landed. But went to Mildenhall because I had friends there already and the crew didn't want to go to Stradishall because of the you know. I wouldn't a suffered a great deal because of the thing but the English crews would a done. You know they'd a had to had their creases right and their boots polished and all this bunkum that went on when

06:00 headquarters types of places. And it was still a group captain establishment. They didn't control the squadrons but they controlled the whole overall station and. So I decided I wanted to go where Laurie was and so went there but I'd a been far better off if I'd a gone to the other place. But that's you know you make these decisions at the time and you think they're right and that was it.

What was your impression of the English people that had to put up with everything they had to put up with during World War

06:30 **II?**

I think they were very stoic you know. They put up with all sorts a stuff but I think that's because they were used to that cause the way they were treated on the whole. Like one a the things when we were at one a the stations we couldn't get out because a the close in with the weather they used to organise outings and they took us to a food processing place and do you know that they coffee comes down onto a chute onto a concrete platform and they used a number 9 shovel to put it into a 4 gallon tin to put the lid on

07:00 it. They were still putting the that's the way they were carrying the stuff. And it was everything was so primitive in this place and you imagine a bloke standing in his gumboots shovelling the bloomin' thing off the concrete into a 4 gallon tin for export over to where it was goin' or to the RAF [Royal Air Force] stations or whatever. And the whole factory was like that. And after the war we were told because we would be goin' home for a long time to find ourselves a job. So I made a job about a motor mechanic and the

07:30 pittance they paid you wasn't worth getting dirty for. It was about 2 pound a week they wanted you to work at 10 hour day for 2 pound a week.

This is in England?

Yeah.

So were you still getting paid by the air force at this stage?

Yes we were getting paid by the air. But they told us to get so as to keep us out of mischief I think was the idea. But anyway our mob turned the thing around quick smart you know and we weren't any time anyway and we spent most of it on leave and none of us got into trouble. But

08:00 this was what the Pommies told us to find ourselves a job. And so I thought oh well a motor mechanic I could maybe get a job with that but no. So I said, "No, I'd rather roam round and see England while I could see England." And I had money because I didn't spend a lot a money. I saved my money. Well I walked out of Redbank when they discharged me I walked out of there with 1,200 pounds in my pocket all in cash which scared the living daylights out a me. Cause I had to get down to Scarborough and there was the weekend before I could bank

08:30 it. But I was staying with these friends and so he hid it in the bedroom for me for the time being but that not too many people. That would a bought me. At that time that would a bought me 5 Chev cars. They were 300 and something pounds they were worth at the time and I bought my first one in 1948 and I paid 620 pounds for it. So even in 1948 after the inflation of the war I could a bought two cars

09:00 for the price of it. So not too many had that much money when they come out. So I wasn't interested in working really but they told to do it so I thought I'd find. But I chilled out. I preferred to travel. I went to Ireland actually as part of went back up to Scotland. Went to London. Looked round the countryside. Saw a bit more under peacetime conditions with the lights instead a creeping around blackened out streets.

Did any of your pay go home to mum and dad or anything?

Yes.

09:30 Because they were getting it hard and you know we were just recovering from the Depression I allotted

a full allotment to Mum to help out with expenses and that sort a thing anyway. That was 3 shillings a day out of 6 shillings a day and when I was going overseas to Canada the paymaster tried to talk me out of it. He said, “You want to cancel that out because you know you’re not going to be able to live in Canada on the pay you’re getting.” And he talked about what the. He had experience over there apparently and knew what all the charges were. But I though I owed them that and

10:00 so I left it on and that increased every time you got a pay increase that increased. But by the time I ended I was on 21 shillings a day. Magnificent pay of 21 shillings a day. That included flying pay uniform allowances and all that sort a racket. But I still saved all that money on that.

Did you have any idea at that stage what your brothers were up to?

Not a great deal. Jack and I used to write fairly frequently but I lost trace of Les because as I say he cleared out from home and went and joined the army. Went droving for a

10:30 start and then joined the army.

So you had no idea that he was?

I had no idea where he was or what he was doing at all. And he landed at Balikpapan when he was only 16. So but and even after the war because he inherited the farm against me I mean we never became reconciled either so there wasn’t much loved lost between the two of us. But no the other brother and I we were reasonably good friends.

What were your future plans like before the war had actually ended in Europe what were your

11:00 **future plans?**

To go back and manage the property I was told I was to come back and I was to inherit the property and I was to come back and look after it when they got too old to run it. But then when Dad developed cancer he had to leave it anyway and so I took it. I spent 5 years living on my own on Shorelands.

And did you have no problems planning for the future or did you find yourself living day by day?

No. I just I thought that was my future on the land. I had 10,000 acres. Cause

11:30 I referred to it as four and a half thousand acres before but during the Depression we got an additional area of 6,000 acres so we had just on 10,000 acres and I mean you could make a good living out a cattle with that the way prices were going up after the war. But then I put my money in to help buy the farm for my brother and that went sour. But no that’s when I started wonderin’ what I was gonna do. I ended up a farm manager in New South Wales then I went into Insurance industry and I spent 18 years in

12:00 Insurance and I spent 13 years as a field officer for the National Party in Queensland. I didn’t stop work till I was 78. I just like working.

Did you always feel like you would survive the war?

No I didn’t. I didn’t expect to. When I sat on the end of that boat I shed a few tears because I thought I’d never see Australia again. I didn’t expect to come back because the air force carnage rates at that stage was dreadfully high. And the Australian air force did suffer. Well over 50% of all servicemen

12:30 died in the air force.

How often did you think about that when you were flying operations?

Tried not to think about it. Just getting home again. I didn’t I think if you dwell on those things that’s what does get to you. But I didn’t dwell on it. I was alive and that’s all I worried about. But the only time that I ever got a bit nervy was between briefing and getting. Matter of fact I used to get quite uptight at that stage

13:00 and I’d always have to go to the toilet before I got in. The last minute the last thing I’d always do was go to the toilet because my stomach used to get so churned up. But once I got in that plane I was too busy to be frightened and you know once you got and you were working hard. The fact that you were flying formation you were working hard all. I think it might a been different if I’d been flying night and you’re just on your own flying in a stream. Worrying about fighters. Worrying about ack-ack. But I

13:30 mean daylights you were working so hard tyring to keep station and that sort a thing and doin’ the right thing didn’t have time to think of what was gonna happen.

We’ve heard of some crews that had little things where they’d have a wee on the tail wheel and things like that little tricks they’d do like that before they’d hop in, was there anything like that in your crew?

No. Nothing at all. No. I don’t think any a them had any. One of them had. One of the Englishmen had a little teddy bear not a teddy bear. A little some sort of a bear and he used to hang that on his thing with his whistle.

14:00 But none of the others had that I knew of none of them had anything at all that they carried like that lucky charms or anything and I didn't carry any excepting for my rosary beads which had always been part of my life anyway. But so that didn't mean anything extra to me. So no people don't believe you but that's when I was frightened that half an hour or so between briefing sitting out there waiting to take off to get into the aircraft because there was always a

14:30 time lag because they always got things through so as to make sure that every body's in your position because once you started you had to get in start your motor get out there and as I say we'd have three aircraft on the runway at one time. One up the end one in the middle and one just revving up on the end. And the same coming home. So everything had to once you got in the plane everything had to be clockwork. You got in. You did your check when you first got there you had to go round check your tyres again you used your key that was the motor

15:00 for your tyres. You made sure the locks were out of the ailerons because for towing them round they used to put wooden things on the things so they didn't flap about in the wind. You took the peeto head'a canvas cover off your peeto head which gave you your airspeed. Because if you didn't do that you had no airspeed you had no alternator you had nothing and you inspected the wings. Then you got in it and as you went up you checked all the different bits of material and equipment. You sat down in your thing. You tested your

15:30 call for the battery things and he'd come over and plug in and you'd start your motors up. Then you checked your run each motor up on the two maggots. Then you switch one off. Then run them up on the next one then switch it off. So as to make and if you had more than a 300 rev [revolution] drop but with one motor that was US [American] because it might fail and then the other one would get you home. And we did all those things and then

16:00 the next thing you had to taxi out because the one next to you moved you moved and you were sort of tail to tail all the way round the perimeter to get round to where the take off thing was. And they had the little red light there when the control to you know your turn the red light as soon as it turned green you swung like that you slammed your brakes on tight and you revved it up to 1,800 revs and then let them off and let it roll and then you gradually built her up to 23, 24 hundred revs. And the rule was

16:30 you didn't take off under 110 because under that a Lancaster wouldn't fly on three motors. And the most critical place with a motor was on take off because they were usually under maximum power. But we had people they used to get off the ground quick. They'd get their tail up and as soon as it hit 80 or 90 they were off the ground and sometimes with heavy winds you'd and a light petrol load you'd

17:00 be up like this bumping along the runway. But I used to go 110 before I left the eased her back and let her lift up. And the proof of the pudding in that is we lost two crews for failure on take off. One crew. We had two crews while I was there that lost a motor on take off. The first bloke he was one a these take off early and get your clearance. He got up to about 500 feet and lost a motor and he rolled over and went in and killed the lot. About a week later and he was a brand new crew. A week

17:30 later he was replacement crew took off they lost a motor he was doin' 110. He got around and he turned round and he come back in on three motors. The difference between 90 and 110 was your life if you lost a motor on take off. Because they wouldn't fly on three under 110 and yet people used to do it. Young Mackie McHugh he always flew off at 80 to 85 k's. Get off it clear a the ground but he was fortunate he did 40 trips and he never lost a motor.

18:00 But if he had he'd a been dead. And I didn't see the sense in dying on my own aerodrome. If they shot ya down that was one thing but not throw it away. So I always made sure I had my hundred and ten on the clock. And I think that's why I survived. I stuck by the rules. I didn't do things that you weren't supposed to do. The only thing was that I had that accident when the explosion took part I just put the thing straight through the gate. There was a little bit of wire on the thing and I had maximum power and it just shuddered.

18:30 If I'd a closed the throttles we'd a cartwhelled and probably with the being thrown about we'd a one of us or two of us might a been killed or we'd all been injured that's for sure. The thing wouldn't a crushed us up but just the battering we'd a got we'd a. But no that's where training repetition repetition repetition comes into it. You do things automatically and even though we'd never put that thing through the gate on a training trip because that upset the erks

19:00 that had to clean the motors. But you were always told you know when you're doin' emergency you'd put them right up to the gate and that thing but it was just a matter when that explosion took place I just went bang and that got us off.

Was it cockiness or bad training that lent itself to pilot error?

A bit a both. Not bad training because we all had the same training but it was not doing the right thing at the right time. Like these blokes that flew off

19:30 at 90 instead of. They were told to fly off at 110 and they were told why you can't fly on three motors under 110. Once you got that you can go where you like. You can go on two if you got the speed up. But you can't fly on 90 and yet they'd constantly take off. And things like that and they'd ignore other safety things that they were supposed to do and they wouldn't do them. But the training was there but they didn't absorb it. They didn't do it. They took the short

20:00 cuts. You don't take short cuts with aeroplanes.

When you took leave during the war and you went into London did you ever go and see the movies and see the show reels and?

The live shows? Yeah.

No no, the showreels from the war and that sort a thing?

Oh yes you'd go to the movies or the newsreels always come on

Newsreels, that's the word I'm looking for.

Yeah. Newsreels oh yes you'd see them and you'd see that bloke that used to give these travel talks you know what was his name? Used to take you to Berlin or take you here or take you there and run through the thing. Fitzpatrick's

20:30 Travel things. They used to even show some a those some a the time. That was more here in Australia and in America and Canada. But no I even went to the live. Went to the Windmill Theatre once another fella and I and I went to the ballet another time. Cause another girl that I knew I went out with in Tetbury she had a sister was a nurse in London and she spent one leave down there with me and her sister was a nurse to the President of the

21:00 Western Railway system. They had four different railway systems in England and he was the President of the Western Railway system which was out towards the Bristol Canal and she was his night nurse and he owned a box in the. Can't think of the name of it now. In the main theatre in London anyway and she always had these tickets. He'd give her the tickets to so and so he sister Betty and I we went there one show one night and here were sitting in this royal box

21:30 looking straight down into the thing with the ballet. I wasn't a ballet fan but the experience was worth it. And I've often seen shots of that since with the Queen and all these Royalies in all these little boxes. I dunno where the Queen's one was I can't remember seeing. But I can always you know can see the picture meself when we were there at the thing. Oh no there was plenty. That's why I liked London you could go to London every leave and you could see something new every time you went there. Like we went down to the Tower of London and saw all the beefeaters and all the execution equipments where they chopped poor old Anne Berlin's head off and all those sort a things. And then we went through Madame Taussaud's Waxworks and the chamber of horrors. A lot a people used to scream and get out of that but no I went through that. That didn't worry me particularly.

What did you see of the damage from the Blitz and the people in the underground things like that?

Dreadful, Peter. And even in Brighton when we were there, there was an awful lot of damage in

22:30 Brighton. But in Southampton they just wiped out the whole of the central town. Laurie and I went down there on a bus trip and then in London itself St Paul's Cathedral like Cologne Cathedral stood there in the middle of the ground and the whole blocks every side of it just completely wiped out. There wasn't a thing left anywhere near it and it was just. And all these great big holes in the ground where the basements used to be. They'd cleared the debris away and that's all there was too it. I believe they've

23:00 rebuilt it all they've done it nicely and kept a bit a room around the Cathedral. But the devastation in London was dreadful. I never got to Coventry to see that it was out in a part a the country we never seemed to get to. But Southampton and London showed me what it was all about and then when. That was another thing when the war was over. I forgot about this. To reward the ground staff and to show them that we weren't telling a pack a lies it wasn't all media. They had German tours for

23:30 the ground staff. I'd forgotten about that. Excuse me. And we'd take our ground crew you took your own ground crew and fly them over. First we went straight across Germany to Cologne. Well that's the first. I didn't go on the raid on Cologne so it was the first time I'd seen it and we went in at a thousand feet. And coming up to it from a hundred mile or so back you think well you know where is all the damage? Because you can see all these buildings but when you got there they had no roofs.

24:00 They were just shells that were all burnt out. Like St Pauls there was nothing left anywhere near the cathedral and it was pock marked but it was still standing. And then we went over to Essen to the marshalling yards which I had been on and we did a tour round different you know the bigger places. We showed these blokes just what the damage the planes had done while they were on these raids. So it give them some belief in well they'd achieved something themselves. And I think it was a good idea because they were neglected largely

24:30 and a lot of people sort of well you know the politicians jazz up all the results. Like the Germans used to tell 'em they shot down a hundred planes when they only shot down two and our blokes probably did the same in the early part to. And you get to the stage you wonder what a politician does tell you even in the war. But that just showed and flying over at a thousand feet you really got a birds eye view of it. So that was another good experience we had too.

Can you recall any of the comments that the ground crew blokes made?

Not

25:00 particularly you know one bloke he says, “Oh Jesus, I’m glad I didn’t live here.” That was the only one I remember cause it. But they didn’t have too much to say.

Can you recall where you were when you heard about Darwin being bombed?

No I can’t. No.

Were you even like was that would you have even known whether you were in England at the time or did you only find out when you got back to Australia?

No we heard about it. No I think now what year was that?

25:30 Now I don’t even remember what year it was. If you told me a year it was. Do you know, Kylie?

I think it was ’42. I believe.

Well no I’d a still been in Australia. So no we knew about that.

Okay. What about the, did you hear about the A [atomic] bomb in Japan being dropped?

Yeah. Well that was in everything. That was in all the news in all the theatres and all the papers the whole lot and we knew then that that was virtually we weren’t gonna have to fly in

26:00 New Guinea. That was a relief to us too. I wasn’t looking forward to that a great deal.

And later when you found out about what the Atomic bombs actually were and what they actually did what did you think about that?

Well I say I claim to this day that it saved a million allied lives and I think it was worth it. And again the media and the peaceniks over emphasised that. Now they said that what was the first not Yokohama and what was the other one

26:30 Nagasaki. They claimed that Nagasaki was wiped out and depopulated. Now there’s Japs come out here for the 50th Anniversary of that that were right in the centre of the hut where the thing exploded and they were still alive today and also about 2 or 3 years later there was a tidal wave in Japan and there was 300,000 people washed out of that place I just said it.

Nagasaki?

No, the other one.

Hiroshima?

Hiroshima

27:00 and you know it didn’t depopulate the place at all. It killed an awful lot a people and it was a tragedy but it saved a million of our lives and our lives were more important to me, that’s what I was fighting the war for. To get our people to survive. But no that’s never the morals of that have never worried me. I think now if we’d a fought on. You saw what the Japs did up in the Islands they fought from fox hole to fox hole to fox hole and there was people up in New Guinea and in the Philippines 30 years later being captured because

27:30 they wouldn’t give themselves up because they expected to be executed for losing the war. They were fanatical and for us to land troops in Japan it would’a been worse slaughter than Dunkirk. And I agree whole heartedly that that saved a awful lot a Japanese lives and ours. It was just too bad for the people in Nagasaki and Hiroshima.

So you’re in the process of coming home. Where was it that you saw Vera Lynne [singer] perform? Where did she perform for the troops?

In Brighton. They had I said the name before I can’t think’a the name of it now.

28:00 But there was this huge great big thing about 14th Century building with big globes on the top and it was the entertainment centre in Brighton and they got her and a few others to come down there for this night to entertain us and she was always my pin up girl with that because the songs she sang and the voice she had a real. Whereas with the Yorkshire woman I never particularly. What was her name? Gracie Fields. I wasn’t a fan cause I didn’t like the Yorkshire accent

28:30 and that but Lynne had my style of music. So I really enjoyed that. It was a huge big dance hall and they had dancing going they had two bands playing on the dance so you could dance all night if you want to.

If you hear a Vera Lynne song today where does that take you?

It takes me right back to Brighton. The last night in England cause I saw her in person. I’d a liked to saw her when she come out here a few years ago but

29:00 she didn’t play in Queensland so I couldn’t get to see her. But no that every time I hear a song of hers

on these old time things I don't watch TV so I don't hear many of 'em these days. But not so long ago Rick had some war movie and they played one of her songs in that. I've forgotten what it was now. And my favourite movie was Mrs Minivar the woman that grew the roses. That cause that was really true to

29:30 the war. Do you remember that movie? And I forgotten Merna Loi [Maureen O'Hara] I think was the main one in it. But it showed these boats going out to rescue the people from

Dunkirk?

Yeah from when the Germans pushed them into the sea. Showed all these people getting in their boats and getting off and coming home and there's a romance but Mrs Minivar grew these roses for the old station master or something and that English prudery come into that even you know.

30:00 But it showed it up because where people really had their hearts in the right places it didn't mean a thing to them. And this old some people got snotty because this old station master won a thing with a rose he grew and because he always liked Mrs Minevar, he called it Mrs Minevar that's how it got its name.

Have you seen any war films that you think accurately recreate what it was like to be a pilot?

Well yes that last one they showed on Bomber

30:30 Command and The Target for Tonight which involved Wellingtons on the Amiens jail. I mean that was very real to what you know.

Are these documentaries?

Well no, they weren't documentaries. There was two made on the Amiens jail. One was a documentary and it showed you know Guy Gibbs and that type of thing cause that was the one he got killed on busting the jail. But

31:00 and there was another one which was it was all film from the stockpile taken during the war just made together. It was really realistic but the other one The Target for Tonight it was a set up by done actors. That wasn't real air force thing but it was true to what the. And that involved Wellingtons. And like that was the one where the pilot was coming home and it was they coined that song

31:30 "I cannot see, I did not bring my specs with me tonight." Or something but that was played also in that one of the Australian because he sang that song actually coming home because he his eye blown out on the trip and he was singin' this old song that they'd got from that other movie and the was "I cannot see cause I did not bring me specs with me." He couldn't see all right.

Did you have a squadron song?

Not that I know of. We had a squadron

32:00 crest but not a squadron song. Not that I know of. I didn't go in much. I didn't enjoy mess parties. I'd go to them for a small while and have a bit a dance and then I'd go home. But the excess alcohol and the stupidity of people when they get drunk so called officers and gentlemen standing in the middle of the floor pouring beer all over each other that wasn't my scene at all.

When you landed in the Aquitania back in Australia, was that Sydney where you..?

Sydney.

32:30 Well we landed in Melbourne and then we changed boats and come up to Sydney on another boat. And then we came by train from Sydney to.

Which had more effect on you when you first landed back in Australia, was it coming back into Sydney or was it coming into Melbourne that?

Probably coming into Melbourne cause it was the first landfall and bein' bystanders virtually watching the parade go by and all these people greeting their long lost families and all that sort a thing the emotion was probably far greater there than it was when I got to

33:00 Brisbane. Even though my mother and father were there to greet me. Well actually I can't remember the name of the place where the. Where was the Clapham Junction. You know that's out of Brisbane a bit that was a marshalling yard. I don't know why we had to go there instead of South Brisbane railway station but that's where the troop train pulled into.

Was it Clapton Junction did you say?

Yeah.

Was that near Rocklea do you know whereabouts that was?

Yeah it was somewhere in that area. But it was just a marshalling

33:30 yard. But for some reason that's where the troop train come and they'd organised parents and friends and citizens and that of the air force for cars to come out and they knew how many cars they wanted and how many thing. Well there was more cars than they needed cause Dad only had me. Nobody else

wanted to get in the car. And Dad come out to Clapham. And we had to drive right through Brisbane down through Queen Street. Over south Brisbane through Queen Street. Down through Albion and those places and to Sandgate and Mum and my

34:00 sister they were there waiting at the gate in Sandgate when we drove into Sandgate. So that was emotional. But when we were going through Albion the local comforts fund they were there and they were handing out parcels to us as we drove past. There was cigarettes and that was in everything. Cigarettes and lollies and bits and pieces and mementos of the thing. And that's another thing I forgot. When we were in Canada we went by train from San

34:30 Francisco to Victoria to whatever it I can't think of the name of the town. The main town in British Columbia and then we took the Canadian Pacific from there over to London. That was 5 days and 5 nights on the train. And we were just in our overalls for most of this time and we got out at. We went through Lake Louise. We stopped there and had a cup a tea there.

35:00 But when we got to Calgary we were told we had to get dressed up in full dress uniforms and everybody was whinging and whining. We'd had enough of this train and why get in. We didn't know what was going on. Anyway they pulled into the station well there must a been a million girls there waiting to get the. And they'd put a meal on for us to greet us to Canada because they were used to greeting Australians because that's the most the Australians actually stayed Calgary and Edmonton. And we came into the station and they were all the whole long platform was just full of

35:30 them and we were taken downstairs. And do you know there were romances took part in the 5 hours we were in Calgary. Speed and I went for a walk round the place then when we got back here were these couples hugging and kissing and crying their eyes out and they'd only known each other for 5 hours. But that was the emotions of war I suppose. But they put on a beautiful meal and they gave us all a comforts funds parcel to greet us to Canada. So it was well worth getting into our best uniform for that.

So what do you think about Anzac Day?

36:00 It means a lot to me. For a long time I never bothered marching in it. But I went to a couple in Biloela when I first come home and then I sort a let it go. But when I went to Albury I was in the RSL there and I took it up. I was in the RSL at Biloela too and I usually went to the main march there. We just marched straight down the thing and because of the huge hill the monument was on they used to bus you up whether you were in good health or whether you weren't because it

36:30 went up like that and 400 steps I think if you went up and walked up it. So they used to have buses at the foot of the there and they used to bus you up for the service up on top of the mountain. And I got in the habit. And I've gone to all bar one Anzac Day here in Caloundra.

And what do you think about on that day?

Mates that died. And that the air force gave me a life. It changed my life entirely really. It educated me really

37:00 cause I was just a shy bush kid who'd never been out a the bush very much so I was very well very shy with people generally because I'd spend most a me life on my own anyway. Like I had two younger children but the fact that I had to work all the time and do jobs and it was only just Dad and I or myself on my own when he was away and so I was a bit of a loner and I still am.

And have you talked about your experiences with your own kids?

Yes I've told them

37:30 a fair bit about it. I wasn't one a these ones that clammed up because of the war. I mean people want to talk about it I mean I'll talk to them about it and I mean other people have asked me and that and we have a friend of our's who was a school teacher and she taught with Audrey for 21 years in Albury she's been on my to write my life for years and years and years because of the experiences. But my second son has actually taken up doing the family history because my eldest son's father in law he got on to me for details of our

38:00 family and I gave him what I knew and he got onto me a couple a other times and I didn't know it and this is beyond me. But in the end James was down there once and he asked James and so James said, "I'll dig something up for you." So cause he'd done all the Van Rievens side. And that was Dutch my son's in laws and he'd done all his history right back about for 3 centuries sort a business and he wanted the Willis part of it to match into it. So James started to

38:30 help him and he got involved in it. So he's got me and he's been up home at different times for long weekends and I've sat there for half a day going through and he makes it all down and then he sorts it out after. Like now I've done all over the place instead of following it by sequence. And of course he's got it on the computer so he can easily just slot it down or slot another bit in or a correction if I suddenly remember what I said was wrong and he's got about 25 pages of it now on the computer. And he's involved other people in it and it's been a

39:00 big thing for him now. So he is actually putting it down on paper for the sake of the family. And he's started with Willis in Ireland and the Brannigans in Scotland and brought them together and he's got the early one's over there and then he's built. And we only knew there was two family Willis but he's got

I think he said he's up to about 70 odd Willis' he's traced now. Different families have grown up and like Dad was never I s'pose because he was separated from his family young because he was sent out to work when he was only 12 and the only sisters

39:30 he ever had much time was Ethel and Violet and we visited them. But the rest of the family they didn't mean a thing to Dad so they never meant anything to us. And of course they've all had families and grown up and we've never known them. But James had dug them all up. So. I mean funny thing about me when I was over in Ireland I met a girl there and the first thing she wanted to go to Trinity College to find out whether we had a crest. Well those sort a things didn't appeal to me in those days I was you know that

40:00 was the aristocracy and I wasn't interested in that. But anyway we went along there and so the girl looked it up and there was two families of Willis' she said, "But you're not really Irish. They only come here in the 12th Century." So she said, "You're English really. Only come here in the 12th Century." But when James went to Ireland he come home with a plaque with the Willis clan on it and then Patricia went over she come home with a different one the Willis clan on it. So whether they're two lines I don't know. And I bought a teaspoon up in

40:30 Montfort and there's an Irish shop up there and I bought a teaspoon and it's got a different one on it. Whether you know it's just a commercialised thing to me.

INTERVIEW ENDS