

Australians at War Film Archive

Jack Stronach - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/130>

Tape 1

00:48 **Jack perhaps we could start with your early life where you were born and brought up?**

I was brought up in Haberfield, went there to school, to primary

01:00 school and later, later I went over to education at Ashfield and after that, that was it and I lived on in Haberfield for some time and where did I go then, I was a Legacy boy as I mentioned, they got me a job

01:30 at Halstead Press which is an off shoot of Angus and Robertson book company as a letter press machinist and I went for as an apprentice there and war came and I drew one full pay and I was in the air force.

Did you know what you wanted to do as a career when you were young?

Yes, I always wanted to be an air force pilot.

02:00 It was my ambition but it was a bit hard to do. I was very lucky to get this job because he was a director of the company, he had one arm he'd lost in the First World War and I was a Legacy boy and that's why he gave me the job.

Can you tell me a little bit about what a Legacy boy is?

Well it's um, you're the parent of

02:30 or a child of an ex-serviceman who served in the war, my father had been on Gallipoli and in Germany and had got gassed there and so I think the deputy Premier was my legatee he looked after me and guided me in certain ways and

03:00 they are really marvellous what they do, Legacy. I just did the apprenticeship and I was in the air force.

And why were you so determined to be a pilot?

Oh just wanted to be, in fact I have a book over there that I can show you later that motivated me very much before the war and it shows you the career. I wasn't interested

03:30 in just being a pilot I wanted to be an air force pilot because it came on.

And where were you when war broke out?

I was living at Bondi then.

Who were you living with?

My mother and that's about it in that respect.

What was your family's reaction to the war breaking out?

04:00 Oh I don't think I can remember that very well I think. I had two uncles who helped bring me you know through not having a father I just can't remember their reaction really you know, I suppose they weren't too happy about me taking on being a pilot, I should have been a cook, they were

04:30 essential of course but a bit safer.

Did they talk to you about your ambitions?

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

Tell me about the day that you enlisted?

Well for the first interview do you mean?

Where did you go to enlist, what did you do?

I was called up for the first interview that took place and that was in the Health Department,

- 05:00 corner of York and Barrack Streets and I went in there and went before a group of selectors and somehow I passed and I went in for the medical and passed the medical and then I was put on the air force reserve, which we eventually started night school
- 05:30 doing the course but I didn't do it because I was called up. Called up on the 19th August, 1940 and we went down to Woolloomooloo which became the depot for (UNCLEAR) later on and they took us up to the ITS [Initial Training School] at Bradfield Park where we did all our training, maths and all these things,
- 06:00 gunnery and law and various subjects and things that we got through on that and I became qualified for a posting and I was actually posted to Rhodesia [Zimbabwe] as a pilot training but went down with a very bad dose. I was on No 4 course pilots,
- 06:30 and I went down with this very bad dose of measles, very bad, and living in Sydney they sent me home to get me away from the others, naturally, so I eventually got over it and came back and I was put on with a group of floating bodies
- 07:00 and then I had a typhoid injection and I can remember dragging me down to the hospital at Concord a very sick boy, so I slid back further again.

Was there a risk that you may have been sent out of the air force with the illness?

No, no that never come up.

- 07:30 I would have had to have been pretty bad. I was in (UNCLEAR) other countries for certain periods and you're all pretty healthy in those days when you come out of it. And then eventually I was sent out to Mascot No 4 Elementary Flying Training School to start on the Tiger Moths and paraded us along there and first of all I had a very bad instructor.
- 08:00 He could fly very well but he couldn't communicate and it was terrible. I had about eight hours up and in those days you had to make by ten hours or you were gone and I came home to my mother and said "I don't think I am going to make it with him" and there must have been a few mind readers there and they,
- 08:30 and I came back on the Monday morning and I can remember the instructor, they changed the instructors, Flying Officer Clancy, a fantastic chap, I went solo the same day.

What was the difference between Clancy and the previous instructor?

The other one couldn't communicate and Clancy he just understood people, marvellous chap and I was on my way.

- 09:00 I never looked back.

Tell me what it's like to fly a Tiger Moth?

Well after what I flew, heavy bombers later it was like flying a match box, didn't have enough instruments in it when I look back at the instrument panel on the Liberators which was made for two pilots, well it's a different world in a Tiger Moth

- 09:30 as opposed to other aircraft and it, really flying of course. I can remember when I first went up in it, you know I went solo and we were taught aerobatics and I remember one point clearly there was a tragedy happened over a course before me.
- 10:00 The instructor fell out of the Tiger Moth over around Kensington, he had no parachute and what happened was, when you got into a Tiger Moth, you pulled your belts, you know you had four belts across your shoulders and they all came together on a pin and there was another pin went through and there was cord that ran down and so that you could get the cord to put it in,
- 10:30 so when he was up there and they rolled on to a slow roll, the control column caught the tape and pulled the pin out, he was doing a loop the loop the force needed to keep him in was gone, so we had to in future put the pin in and coil it around so that you did catch it and you couldn't go out, so that's one little incident that I remember there.
- 11:00 Another thing we did I remember the aircraft that were made by De Havilland the first aircraft, we flew those, they had just come from the factory we were not able to do aerobatics in them or steep rolls, or steep turns or right on your side flying around like that because the dope they put
- 11:30 on the wings didn't taut the fabric lines, so we could only do aerobatics and steep turns in the Tiger Moths that were built in England, so not long after that, in fact when I did my final test, the first when I did a complete slow roll, I went over.
- 12:00 It was on my test, although we didn't have much experience on that anyhow that didn't matter really.

What was the hardest thing about learning to fly? What were some of the problems that you had to face to get the hang of it?

Yes, well it makes me think now, it was a long way back, you know with all the flying I did afterwards.

- 12:30 Well there were some of these things that you automatically knew, you've either got it or you haven't got it and some people can never land either things like that I had no trouble with it, like most of the chaps who got through, I got through all right like that.

What about judging when to commence the landing from the ground, is that a problem?

Well that's in there,

- 13:00 some people have it and some people haven't got it. To a person who's got it, it's no problem but to somebody who's not just right it don't matter what you do you can't do it, land 10 feet up and flying in, I didn't have that trouble so like all the other pilots that got through I just had that certain thing that they look for and you know you progress.
- 13:30 You know, what you're after is experience and as the years go on the experience grows and you don't realize that you're getting it but that's what it's all about you've got to go and get that experience, which goes into you very slowly.

How long did it take you to become confident in your flying ability?

- 14:00 Well I suppose it took me right up when I finished my time flying in Canada. You know I did the night flying over there, went up to (UNCLEAR) before I got there when I finished the course. At Mascot they asked for two volunteers to

- 14:30 go to Canada. I was keen and I beat everybody else and two of us put our hands up and away we went.

Was there a selection process, how did they pick the two?

Well there were two volunteers, nobody else put their hands up but that was a first, when I look back on it that was my first move away from getting the chop,

- 15:00 you know to get killed, because the other boys they all went down somewhere to (UNCLEAR) I'm not too sure they trained on Wirraways and when they graduated they were sent up to Malaya where they converted on to Buffaloes [Brewster F2A Buffaloes] which were American fighters
- 15:30 and when the Japs came into the war they just knocked them down. So I became one of the few survivors out of that course and going back a bit I remember that first instructor he said to me and another pilot, "You will never make pilots,
- 16:00 you're just hopeless". I don't know how many he must have scrubbed in his time but we were the two that came back. We went right through the war and he was in bomber command, he survived too and it's a wonder he did as the two he picked as never making pilots, made it.

Why did he say that about you?

He wasn't too happy with himself I don't think, just one of these miserable people, who knows?

- 16:30 I'm glad I left him behind and got flying off with Johnny or I wouldn't have gone anywhere.

Did that have an affect on your confidence?

Oh, on my confidence, oh, that was very bad, once Johnny came along I was a new person. It opened the world up. That's what you get with flight instructors. Anyhow I then went to Canada

- 17:00 and I didn't know what happened to the other boys, I found this out when I came back three and a half years later. So I went to Canada, to Calgary, with the SFTS, Service Flying Training School, on to Ansons [Avro Ansons] and no trouble there and progressed like most of us did.

What was different about an Anson from what you had flown before?

- 17:30 Oh well it was a twin engine aircraft and you know before when Ansons first came out they were main operation aircraft in the air forces, British Air Forces and they were still flying on coastal command around here and over in England. They are a marvellous aircraft for training twin engine pilots, so we flew over there and had different
- 18:00 experiences of course with them but it's a bit like flying here you know open spaces, not like in England where roads, and rivers and train lines run everywhere but no, we were flying in the snow at first and that and I had a rather close call.

- 18:30 **In Canada?**

Yes, on the Ansons.

Tell me about that.

It happened at night time and when you go night flying, and I had already gone solo at night time, you know I was very advanced now and I did one circle with the instructor and he goes round the first every time.

- 19:00 You know because you're still learning but then you came back and dropped him off and I came back and took off and I got up into the circuit area and I got the red light to hold and I'm flying around there and nothing's happening and I thought "Gee I'd better check the fuel
- 19:30 and checking the gauges" and they were right down and I thought "Gee I have to do something here with this going on" because I didn't know what was happening. There could have been a smash on the ground you don't know what's up there and there's no radio communication, these are old aircraft and they're not like the modern ones and I thought I'll have to do something about trying to change these
- 20:00 tanks over. Well the Anson was built for two pilots, the other one sat over there and the petrol cocks were on that side, right on the other side of the aircraft so I had to undo them and the petrol cock were a knob like that and you had to pull them out of the slot and move them back about 12 inches back into another slot.
- 20:30 There were two of them but on two different sides so the air was very smooth and I trimmed the aircraft very nicely and she was going beautiful, so I eased myself out of the seat and got into the other one and I'm out there tugging at these petrol cocks trying to get it out and I happened to look across at the artificial horizon, that's the main instrument about
- 21:00 that size with a cross there and a horizon and a little aircraft in it up and down, banking and it was like that which meant that I was on my side and what had happened was the port engine had stopped, run out of fuel, so I grabbed the control column, pulled the wing up and pushed the port to hold the air space.
- 21:30 You can't bring out a textbook and turn to page 24, this is how people live or die, you know I was on the turn just to go straight down and pulled it round and got her up got back into the other seat and I've got no belt on of course, I had to undo it to get over there and I had lost so much height.
- 22:00 See I was just about to go and I pulled her back and realized that I had no chance of flying around, you know you're taught to turn towards the live engine, you turn towards the live engine, if you turn towards the dead engine anything can go, there was no chance of turning around that way, I had lost 500 or 600 maybe more feet
- 22:30 and I decided I'm going to go in from the other end. When you take off you take off in the wind, into the wind which reduces the air and up you come, so I was going to land with the wind behind me the wrong way so I turned around to where I could make my approach and on these aircraft.
- 23:00 On these modern aircraft you want to put the flaps down, you have to wind a handle, wind this handle trying to wind it down and of course the old Ansons, not like the modern aircraft, she just floated and I'm trying to pull the height out to get in ahead of her by this time they had opened the runways and aircraft were taking
- 23:30 off and I'm coming in and they're going past me, you could see the navigation lights, I'm pumping away and pulling the throttle right back trying to come over the bloomin' fence I hit the drome [aerodrome] about half way down kangarooed, kangarooed and I kangarooed right over the boundary fence, right over and I came to rest, stop
- 24:00 and of course the control tower had seen me coming past and had alerted the fire engines, they were on their way, so I got out of the aircraft and I'm right on the edge of a big quarry that went right down a 100 feet or more, 200, I wouldn't know, anyhow on the other side was this enormous pile of rocks
- 24:30 and I was in between them. I made it. The aircraft was flying next day, I didn't even damage it. So it was a bit of a classical but you carry on.

Did that have any affect on your...?

No, I flew next day, just another experience.

Tell me about how the

- 25:00 **other Australians were received in Canada?**

Extremely well, it couldn't be better; no they are very nice people. They took us out to places when we weren't flying on the weekends at times, no they are very nice people and we blended very well, no trouble.

What other nationalities were there?

On my course?

Yup.

Well there was one

25:30 Englishman and there was one Canadian, the others were all Australians, nobody else.

And how were all the nationalities mingling?

What there? Well we didn't have any, we only had those on your course, only involved with your course

26:00 and when that course finishes, another course comes in behind you and away we go.

Was there a sense of purpose and common brotherhood amongst...?

Oh yes, we blended in very well and after that we left there and we made our way across to Halifax to catch the ship to take us to England.

26:30 **And what was waiting for you in England?**

Well, by the way we didn't go straight to England we went to Iceland. I'd never heard of it at this point, we landed at Reykjavik for a couple of days and then we changed into another ship and transported to the Clyde River, I can remember going up towards the Grennoch that's the port at Glasgow.

27:00 And as we went up the river, gee I remember the big battleship, I don't know whether it was the HMS Repulse or the HMS Renown, most formidable thing, to think they could be sunk, you can't think that they could be sunk but they were and from Glasgow we went by train down to Bournemouth, in the south

27:30 and we just waited there and I did a night vision test there, I always trying to get on to fighters and I was getting far away but ...

Why did you want to be on fighters?

Well in my opinion, at that time you know, I didn't want the responsibility of being the pilot captain of a heavy bomber, I wanted to be

28:00 that's what I wanted to be, a lot of other fellows had the same ambition too. But anyhow I did this night vision test and I got an above average and you will see it stamped in my pilot's log book right in the front, so that sort of sealed my fate so I think I had no chance (UNCLEAR). Anyhow eventually I got a posting up to Kinloss,

28:30 it's right up in the top of Scotland and I nearly died really, I was getting off the train and there was this Whitley heavy bomber, a Whitley it's very obsolete you know, that's where I was going, I felt terrible, I wanted to be a fighter pilot. Anyhow

29:00 I got there and sat on two smaller flights big things, they were big in those days, this is '41 and so they believed me and they made me Link Training Instructor, pulled me off the course, so that really helped

29:30 me with my flying because when I didn't have any pupils going through I used to hop in the Link trainer and practice and brought my standard up of instrument flying which was a big thing particularly as to where I was eventually going.

Tell me what the Link Training Instructor did?

Well you had the pupils, you got in this Link trainer and you had this instrument board just like in an aircraft,

30:00 standard instruments and then the instructor sat at a table, a large table, and you had an instrument called a crab on it and that moved in a certain pattern to make it this pattern you might say give the pilot a practice to do what they say.

30:30 A cross and this would be asking him to fly certain courses with hoods over the top of him, he can't see anything, the crab moves on the table and traces this out correctly and if the trainee is wrong you can see it there and show it to him when he's done it, so it's practice though.

31:00 In it I used to hop afterwards and brought my rating up very well.

When you said you were too small for flying, tell me how that argument went?

Yes, well the legs, even when I was on Tiger Moths, I used to have a big cushion behind me but you know you

31:30 had to have control by (UNCLEAR) and if you don't have control on the end of the front (UNCLEAR) so what was the question now?

How you mounted that argument that you say you were too small...?

Well they saw me and they could see that I wasn't a big giant but anyhow I went from the frying pan into the fire.

32:00 I got a posting, see I was in bomber command and I got a posting on to Inter 2 Group Bomber Command which were the light bombers so I went to a place called Upwood where they trained for Blenheim [Bristol Blenheim] bombers and I flew a short Mark 1 first and I took to them very well,

32:30 just suited to me and then I advanced through there and got on to Mark 4s that's along those bomber types and progressed through there.

When you said out of the frying pan in to the fire what did you mean there?

They had a very high casualty rate, they called them the "Death and glory boys" - there was no future.

33:00 It was low level in France and all this stuff.

You are now going into operations?

Yes, this is an Operational Training Unit.

Tell me what it was like to be finished with training and face the real thing?

Well I didn't face the real thing, they sent us on leave.

33:30 And I came back and they expected you to go to the squadron and there were six pilots and their crews picked to go and do a conversion course on the Hudsons. You don't know anything, you just go and you do as you're told, you're not here to reason why you're here to do and die, in case you haven't heard. This is an old saying, we went there and I did the conversion course, you had to go through everything,

34:00 night flying all that just like I had done on the bloomin' (UNCLEAR) and I converted on there and I was eventually told that we had to go to a place called Kembla to pick up a new Hudson and we were flown over there and we came back to a place called Lynell [?] which is a big transport base even to this day and

34:30 then we were told that we were going to fly it, ferry it out to India, you know I expected to be on ops [operations] and done a few by then and I finished the conversion course on Hudsons, most of course had gone already and so we started to do consumption tests flying out into the

35:00 Irish Sea and up around in the North of Ireland into the Atlantic and back again all these things.

Excuse me, what is this consumption test?

Working out the fuel, seeing the rate of consumption of the fuel because it's not like a motor car when you're out of petrol, you're on the ground when you're up in the air you've got to work out that you fly a certain distance you only have so much fuel.

35:30 **And you already had that bad experience in Canada of a low level of fuel when you were training?**

Oh yes, that's a different thing altogether really. I had a most unusual experience, not a close one on the ground this time. We were going out for another test and I taxied

36:00 over to the control tower where the officer commanding the base was down in the bottom of the control tower and I stopped there and we knew the colours that day the Verrey pistol had been lowered, every day the colours were changed because if you're challenged and a fighter comes up on you.

36:30 We were waiting for permission from flight command to proceed across into the Irish Sea to let them know where we were going, because they fly anywhere there, it's all control and I'm sitting in the aircraft, the navigator's up the nose working out what and I'm sitting on the main spar which runs right through,

37:00 that goes through the wing, through the body of the aircraft. I'm sitting on it with my hands on my elbow like this and thinking about in Australia and the armourer had come through the back door and he had another young armourer with him, "Good morning Sarge", "Morning" and put my head down again.

37:30 I heard him say "Have you seen your new safety catch?", as soon as he said that, I looked up and he pulled the trigger, I could see it coming straight at me, you know all the phosphorous was burning and about that big it is and I saw it coming right at me and I went like that and lifted my arm up

38:00 straight underneath, ricocheted around the, we had a long range tank in the aircraft, and it went underneath and smoke was everywhere, and the navigator came up from the nose, he didn't know what the hell, there was smoke and ran through like a Bondi tram outside and as I said were parked right underneath and everybody saw the smoke coming out.

38:30 I'm laughing now but not then, I went to the back door and grabbed the fire extinguisher and got it and came back and put it out underneath the tank but my battle jacket afterwards was all pitted with metal and around there, there were little burn marks, it was very close. I don't know what happened to him, I don't think he got a promotion so then of course we took off and were on our way

39:00 **And why did he pull the lever?**

Ask him. You would have to ask him.

What was the outcome of that?

I wouldn't know.

Did you have words with him after?

Oh no.

Tape 2

00:38 **Jack would you like to continue with the story you were telling?**

Yes, well I finished the tests completed and then we flew down to a place called Portreath, that's at Lands End and getting ready for the flight out to,

01:00 we were told that we were going to fly from there to, Gibraltar and then from Gibraltar to go down the west coast of Africa to a place called Takaradi and then fly east to Khartoum and then come up that way so we took off and flew and got down to Portreath and we had to cross what was known as the Bay of Biscay,

01:30 heavily patrolled by German long range fighters. Very dangerous and a lot of air crew died there. In fact, to tell you the truth, the CO [Commanding Officer], the squadron, unbeknown to me I was going to join, got shot down there with his crew, they'd come back to England but on the return flight they got caught, very experienced pilot but (UNCLEAR).

02:00 We took off in the morning, this would be the last day in May I think it was, it turned out to be the thousand bomber raids took place on Germany I can remember it about the 29th May '42 and we flew across in hazy weather very slight

02:30 sprinkle it was, made landfall at a place called Cape Finisterre, which is the most north west point of Spain. Flying down the coast and as we got to Portugal we ran into a heavy haze and we're flying,

03:00 you know, this flight took about seven and a half hours by the time we virtually got to Gibraltar. So we had been flying for some time, so we're flying in this haze and all of a sudden it cleared and all I could see on the left side was desert, I said to the navigator, "Something's wrong here", I realized what happened, we'd overshot the Straits of Gibraltar and we were going down the coast of Morocco so I asked

03:30 the wireless operation to get me what we call a QDM [Magnetic Heading (zero wind)], it's a magnetic bearing plus or minus the variation and give us the course back to Gibraltar which they gave us anyway. We came back and started approaching from the south and we identified ourselves and come around to make the landing from the Mediterranean Sea side, as I'm making the approach

04:00 I couldn't get the flaps down, they jammed up, most unusual, but anyhow I couldn't get them down and I'm coming in and of course with a flap up landing you've got to come in faster so I eventually I got the wheels down on the runway, tearing down towards the other end and I was very lucky, they had started to extend the runway into the Bay of Algeciras in Spain,

04:30 and they were servicing it at the same time, I'd only gone out about just over about 100 yards I'd say, anyway as you were approaching you could see the tails of the other aircraft that had overshot, in the water sticking up, so I'm approaching pretty fast and I'm standing up on the brakes and I had the Jamaican air gunner in the aircraft

05:00 and I'm right down there and I swung it right at the last minute around and just looking at the water there and he jumped out before we had stopped, he thought we were gone. Anyway we got down and taxied back and next day we found out we couldn't get off, the other aircraft took off, but we had what

05:30 they call a constant speed unit packed up in the engine and they had to get one back from England, it took three weeks to get there, so in the meantime we went across to Spain and Algeciras and went and saw a bull fight, quite interesting, a different way of life.

Tell me about that, your impressions?

Well unbelievable, of course they're brought up that way the bull fighter is a top man,

06:00 like a top tennis player of somebody today and right in front of me is this rat bag thought he would be a hero. Right just down there in front of us he was, not round the side, he had a red rag with him and over the front he went and jumped in to where the bull was and he's gone up into the air and I don't know whether he died or not.

- 06:30 But that was an experience to see that of course once the matador puts the spear through the bull they race straight in with the horses and put chains around their rear legs and just drag them straight off. Very bloodthirsty, not a very good pastime at all so that was one little experience there. Then came the time, you know they fixed the aircraft
- 07:00 and they were going to put me down to fly to Malta on the way, not down the west coast of Africa and I was supposed to lead two Beaufort bombers to a point off Tunisia in daylight and then make the break and go into Malta because these aircraft were wanted and anyhow they cancelled it.
- 07:30 I didn't know anything else and anyhow the next thing I know I've been asked to do it at night time to fly from Gibraltar to a place in Egypt called Mersa Matruh and it was quite a long trip, night time and I'm only getting my experience has built up and I
- 08:00 took off at about 3, 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I think it was and I climbed slowly to 10,000 feet making progress and of course as you fly from the west to the east, you fly into darkness, the darkness comes like that and makes a short night for flying so I,
- 08:30 as I approached Tunisia darkness was coming over and as we went further on, Malta was our point of no return, and you could see the flak going up, raids on Malta, which I was to go to later on in my career, going up so we went past there
- 09:00 and we were supposed to make this landing at Mersa Matruh, a night landing, and I had just started to make my descent and before I got there, I'm sorry, we got a little off course on our way past and got out in the range of the guns at Tobruk and they flew up a bit at us.
- 09:30 And I only learnt about this a few years ago now, I have a navigator, Eric Ball, lives in Perth and he rings me occasionally and he told me what had happened to the Jamaican air gunner had got on the aircraft, unbeknown to me, a bottle of whisky and by the time he got there it was in his stomach,
- 10:00 so he was off his head and he'd gone a bit crazy after the shells had burst and he was trying to jump out of the aircraft without a parachute, trying to push the door open so eventually the navigator had him on the floor in a headlock and the wireless operator, Pluto, a big chap, sat on him and kept him under control. They never told me
- 10:30 because they thought I was a bit busy up the front for these things that were going on so anyhow time comes on and were just starting to make the descent on Mersa Matruh, we got a wireless message, been captured, Rommel is coming down the desert and it was the big push down towards El Alamein. Now what can I do?
- 11:00 Nowhere to go. I'd been in enemy territory all on the starboard side and port side was all enemy territory I had been flying over 10 hours then and so all I could do was progress on and hope for the best.

What was the fuel situation like?

Yeah, well that's coming up. Dawn broke, I dropped the height off and came under the clouds and checked the fuel

- 11:30 and they were on zero, so I knew where Africa was, I had turned south. I didn't have to get a course, I couldn't miss it. I was getting ready to put it down and ditch it in the sea and as long as the props were turning I could make a belly landing maybe on the coast and I'm proceeding along there and right in front of me came
- 12:00 up a landing strip, right in front of me had Wellington bombers or Wimpys on it that had been to Benghazi. So I was around and straight in. They couldn't believe ever that I had come from Gibraltar. They had just come back from a raid on Benghazi.

What was going through your mind at this stage?

Survival, survival, you know.

- 12:30 I just had this thing called luck with me. You don't have it, you've got to get luck, if you haven't got luck going to keep going and gain experience and live, you've got to live and went in and landed and there was another Hudson that took off before me from Gibraltar but he never made it whether he went into to Mersa Matruh and got captured I don't know but I was the only one that did it
- 13:00 and it was never done again. They sent them all around the coast which should have gone in the first place so I got away with that and then I flew to Cairo, got down to Cairo and there's a big panic that Rommel's coming down the desert and they took the aircraft from me to use it in the Middle East and I was put in a
- 13:30 camp awaiting posting which eventually they split the crew all up and fortunately ...

What was it like to lose your crew at that time?

Oh, very disappointing. You get very attached and you know each other. We had to get rid of the

Jamaican, I don't know what happened to him, I reckon he ended up in jail, he was a bad egg, Pluto got killed later on,

- 14:00 shot down in a Wimpy over Italy. Eric got through and so did I and then I got a posting. Got a posting to a place called Mills Base 117 Squadron RAF and I got there and I thought I'm a qualified Hudson pilot and I've been right through my courses
- 14:30 and it turned out to be a transport squadron, never heard of it. Never heard of a transport squadron because these were the first ones, that's why and it was being re-equipped with Hudsons. So the first job I had was just after I arrived, there I was sent down to fly down to a place called Wadi Halfa on the Nile
- 15:00 just in the Sudan a long way down. I helped search for a Blenheim bomber, which I was flying in England, which had gone down. Wadi Halfa was supposed to be the hottest place in the world, well it was one of the hottest, so off we set and I wasn't going to get lost so I flew every bend of the Nile River
- 15:30 all the way down there and it took us about four and a half hours. Anyhow I got there to Wadi Halfa and I'm in the circuit area and I'm starting to make my approach to it and strange there's something wrong here, there was a row of posts across the drome, big posts way up 30 feet high or something
- 16:00 like that enormous things. I soon realized what they were there for. I was coming in and dropped the height off and as I was coming towards the ground there was a massive heat haze, like a hot day on the road, you've seen them coming through, and the ground sort of was all movement and the posts were to try to give the pilot some idea as to where the ground was.
- 16:30 No hope. Kangarooed, everybody did the same anyway. Didn't have to search far, the poor devils had perished in the heat and a bit of a funny experience happened there, there was a pilot who came in a Hurricane and what he was doing and some of us must have done it too,
- 17:00 smuggling gold from Takaradi. You see selling it in Cairo and he had it in a little bag and what he did, he had buried under the wheel of the Hurricane covered it up you know and pick it up next morning and when he come back the next morning they had moved the aircraft, it's still there but don't go back in the summer time, it's a bit hot to look for it so that was that experience, so I flew back
- 17:30 in a straight line which cut about an hour off the trip and then we started on the squadron re-equipping. And we had to go down to Eritrea, to a place called Asmara, we used to land up in the mountains 7000 feet up in thin air and that's a photo there with American markings on the aircraft.
- 18:00 So we used to bring those back and re-equip the squadron until eventually it was fully equipped. After that we started flying out to where all the problems are have been today Iran, Iraq, Arabia on a run there moving people and equipment, urgent equipment out.
- 18:30 **What sort of equipment were you moving?**
- A lot of it was wirelesses mainly that, taking nurses out to different bases and other personnel and not very good places to fly in those days. If you come down nobody could get you, it was just like when I went down in the Sudan see, heat and...
- 19:00 So we used to fly to Tel Aviv in Palestine that was the first stop, drop people off and pick them up and then fly to Ibanya [?] in Iraq fly the pipe line down to Ratbarn [?], a place called Ratbarn a big air force base, then we would fly down to Banbasra Shiva[?]
- 19:30 and down the Persian Gulf, you'd go down there, nobody would go and get you know, too risky, landed at Bahrain, they only had tents or something there and flew across the Gulf to a place in Arabia called Mersa Shagra, in those days the only thing that was there was an old fort and it
- 20:00 was like you see in the French Foreign Legion. So I always remember when you went to take off from there they put the ambulance on one side of you and the fire engine on the other hoping there would come a prang, they had no excitement.
- What were the landing strips like?**
- Oh nothing just clear desert, nothing, no facilities that's all.
- 20:30 That's where you'd get the experience you go into these places where I had no runway and you don't know which way and you have to try to work out the wind and things like this yourself.
- And how adequate was your training for this sort of work?**
- Oh good. Pretty good it was. So anyhow the last time I went there
- 21:00 I just started to feel crook so gee whiz by the time I got the wheels on the ground I was a wreck, anyhow they carried me into the fort, no medical services there, and I was very lucky I had a Canadian second pilot with me and he had converted on to the Hudsons thank goodness, he flew the aircraft

21:30 back to Abanya [?] where they put me into hospital and gee whiz the perspiration was running out of me and the first thing they do is put you into bed and put a waterproof sheet underneath you and take a blood test because they can't tell the difference between malaria and sand fly fever, there is no way you can do it. So I was perspiring, anyway I was lucky

22:00 it was sand fly fever and we flew back to our base at Mill Base in Egypt.

How long did it take you to recover?

Not long, only a few days eventually after the war I went down very badly with malaria which you don't recover hardly from and that finished my flying days. Then

22:30 I was sent down to a place called Heliopolis right on the edge of Cairo but in the desert and I was to carry out an air test on a Hudson, they had a 240 hour inspection, they pull it to pieces and check everything over you know so I taxied out to take off and I

23:00 pushed the throttle forward and I was just about to come off the edge of the ground and the windscreen started to blur and as the air speed built up it blurred a lot more and I couldn't see a damn thing. "What the devil's up, the wheels up, flaps what's going on?" And then I realized what had happened, there are two guns out the front

23:30 right in front of the windscreens, machine guns and the armourers, they are in the desert sandstorms, they put all the grease over the guns to stop the sand blowing in and they didn't remove it, here I am without being able to see, I'm laughing now but not then and I asked to see if somebody had a bit of a rag

24:00 or something, I couldn't see anything and somebody found it. I don't know whether he tore the back of his shirt or something and he gave me a bit of rag and I opened the side window, the storm window with the rag there and I put my hand outside, the wind on my skin flattened and I got a little hole, a little hole so I came round and landed it,

24:30 but I had a little bit more experience behind me. Thank God, this is the difference, if you haven't got that experience (UNCLEAR) and then one thing I do remember we started to do a training session, strange it was, what we had to do was learn to take off and fly around the circuit area

25:00 but right on the ground just come off the ground and come up a little higher and up with the flaps and right around and then you'd time it all and when you made your approach the aerodrome was ahead of you.

How high off the ground were you?

Oh 50 feet. You know it varies, it was very low right down which was a bit dicey at times but anyhow you touched down and around you'd go and up round

25:30 and of course we didn't know that the Battle of El Alamein was coming up that's why we were training, what we were getting ready for to go that way when they broke through the lines. So eventually our squadron moved to a place called Amarea [Camp Amarea] getting ready for the push just outside to the west of Alexandria.

You are in a RAF squadron at this...?

Always the two squadrons I served with

26:00 were RAF [Royal Air Force].

And what was the makeup, how many Australians were in your squadron?

Well I don't know off hand. I've got a photo there but that's a later photo.

Were there a lot of Australians in your squadron?

Eventually there were quite a few. I would say 20 and that's, I think, there was only one counting me.

26:30 I think there might have been five pilots and the rest were wireless ops, but I had one navigator later on, Johnny Leahey, warrant officer, he got killed, yes, that would be about right. I've got a photo there that I can show you later on taken in Sicily of a group of us.

The squadron was drawn from

27:00 **all over the Empire?**

Yes, yes everything we had on that squadron. Eventually we had South Africans on them and they were commissioned of course. It was embarrassing for them because I was, I ended up the longest serving sergeant pilot in the air force, we were just lost, they just disappeared. We just disappeared

27:30 and I wrote to Canberra a few years ago and got my record of service. And the (UNCLEAR) would try to give me even a crown, they couldn't find me, somebody oh well me and others but I was two years a sergeant pilot. I didn't worry I was still alive and I was the captain of the aircraft that I flew on, rank

didn't mean much you know. I flew generals

28:00 and people around later and it didn't make much difference in rank, flying every day, you live in that world.

Anyway you are in a squadron where there were Jamaicans and South Africans?

South Africans, no Jamaicans.

What other nationalities were you working with?

On that squadron I don't think there were any New

28:30 Zealanders. Yes, there was a New Zealand pilot at the beginning, I remember that. Yes, there was one New Zealand pilot that I know of, RAF of course. Englishman, yes, well of course the second squadron we were all mixed up too that I served on and that's later on that I will talk about.

So did you go down to Alamein?

29:00 **Was Alamein the next ...?**

Yes, well when the 9th Australian Division broke the coast and broke through they went back very fast, the Germans. So we used to take all and carry all the ammunition and things like that for them, first aid and bring back casualties. Eventually we advanced at a very fast

29:30 rate really and just the (UNCLEAR) and there is nothing there really and just being cleared by the aerodrome construction units that got in early and moved the rocks away and things like that. They'd mark the boundaries with 44 gallon drums and things like that.

Where were you taking the casualties to?

Well these landing strips they'd call them,

30:00 they were as they were moved up to bring the casualties back with us.

And how long were these flights of supplies?

Oh very short. Well our wheels were the first ones that touched the ground really. We were in first all the time. You had to be careful that you don't pick up booby traps or anything, very careful.

Were you under enemy fire?

No,

30:30 but we were just in range of enemy fighters all the time, at times we had fighters to escort us. It depended upon what was going on, you will see in my log book later on the flights I did, the dangerous ones, if you could call them that, you lived in that kind of atmosphere. A way of life.

Well perhaps we can examine Alamein area

31:00 **in more detail later, for now, can you tell me what your next move was?**

We moved up to El Adem which is a big drome just south of Tobruk. From there and we operated out of there for quite some time but different things happened there I shouldn't laugh. I wasn't laughing at the time.

31:30 But I had an incident happen there that when they, the ground around El Adem is very hard rock, sandy rock and they couldn't even dig slit trenches. Even so when the Germans were fighting a rear guard action across the drome area on the edge they put 44 drums around

32:00 in a semi circle, threw rocks into them to weight them down and then threw rocks up into the front of them. Now when we wanted to relieve ourselves we went to an instrument called a desert lily it was a funnel and it just went into the ground. Now to save us walking a distance

32:30 we would just go to this and just relieve ourselves in the one spot not all over the place, like a lot of little boys, all in that one spot so, the only water in the place, so right one night after that we were standing around in darkness and a raid started on Tobruk and the shells were bursting just up there, no distance

33:00 from us. The raid's on and all of a sudden we became aware that there was an aircraft circling the aerodrome, and I thought "Is it one of theirs or one of ours?", well all of a sudden God almighty, there was a bomber coming down on the drome with a night fighter

33:30 behind him, the Beaufighter [Bristol Beau fighter] after him with cannon fire and of course everybody moved like that and went to this semi circle. When I got there they were full up, I wasn't going to lie on the top so I knew where he was going, the bomber dropped a stick of bombs across the drome coming towards us sort of and I went down.

34:00 You know if you're being fired at, you can't get into the ground hard enough so I pushed myself down and you wouldn't believe it but I had my face in the mud flats, right in the mud, that's where my face was and I couldn't move and next thing the bomber's gone and the fighters still bashing after him and I got up and I was covered in mud, all urine,

34:30 no water to wash or clean off so that was another little experience for me.

What was it like being without water?

No good. No good. You don't realize what it's like. I'll tell you another thing about that, gee that brought it back to me, amazing. We had been flying that day

35:00 and you know you were in a carby, before air conditioning was invented, and you know you're all soaked in the back and the pilots are soaked and we suddenly started to dehydrate, we hadn't had any water. So they got some water and they got hold of this water and made a cup of tea.

35:30 So it was that bad that when you went to drink it, you had to hold your nose to get it down, you had to get the water in. Well, next day we found out where they got the water from, there was a well in Tobruk where they poured the chlorine down and down the bottom of the well were two German bodies, so that's where they got the water from

36:00 for us. That reminded me I had a lovely cup of tea here, one day I just drank it, it was in a brown mug and I got down the bottom and there's a cockroach at the bottom, it was a good cup of tea too.

Well we're nearly at the end of this tape and we've just got a couple of minutes, are there any other problems about or experiences about this

36:30 **part of your career that comes to mind? You're getting into about 1943 now, are we?**

We are in '43, not quite, we're still at the end of November I'd say, '42.

Tell me how you finished the year up and...?

Well

37:00 from the, how long have we got to go?

We've got about 5 minutes.

I took part in Tobruk, went to a briefing in the morning and we were told we were going to go to a place called Soluch near Benghazi, south of Benghazi

37:30 and the aircraft were going to carry 250lb bombs, four gallon containers of fuels and boxes of ammunition and we were to carry and we had been told that our aircraft had been loaded with them ready for us to get in and we were to

38:00 fly to Soluch in formation, I was around here somewhere, we were going to be escorted by Hurricane fighters who were going to get the bombs and fuel and were going to be bombed up, fly south and catch Rommel's troops at a place called Agedabia, so on my aircraft I had twelve 250lb bombs

38:30 aboard and we took off in formation and I must have been close to 50 miles, 40 or 50 miles off Soluch, with the navigator sitting along side me tapped me on the shoulder and he pointed to the engine, smoke coming out of it, belching and at this stage oil all down the side, the pipe line had gone and you can't do anything about it.

39:00 And not long after we were approaching Soluch and he tapped me again and smoke everywhere and whoop and of course this is going from one horizon to the other I found out later and not long after he hit me again, I'm on fire

39:30 a big fire there behind me. Well I'm sitting in this formation and I had to do something pretty quick with it so I said to them, "I'm going in". I just crossed my fingers, you might say and I hit the undercarriage quickly because we're just above the ground and as I pushed the power on just before the undercarriage went down the other engine started to cough on me, you know I'm just

40:00 almost falling out of the air. I pushed the nose down to hold the air speed up, undercarriage down and hope for the best and very lucky and luck was with me, she locked into position and I put it on the ground and I had the speed down to about 40 miles per hour when the port wheel hit a large boulder and took the undercarriage straight off and went on the side

40:30 and swirled around and dust and heat and the hair on your hand was all singed and around the face, shook the navigator and he thought he was in heaven or somewhere and shook and got him out of the aircraft and the wireless operator and I knew the tanks were going to blow at any time and I said "Run" and we made about 100 yards

41:00 and got down behind a pile of rocks and the tanks started to go up and then the bombs started. They had all got heated up in the flames and they started to blow up, and the shrapnel is blowing around everywhere, eventually they finished and I looked up and there was nothing there, she had just

- completely disappeared. And we had another bit of luck with us, we were seen by a South African
- 41:30 patrol, a motorized patrol and they had seen the smoke from one horizon to the other and saw the explosion and they thought we had gone and they came over and picked us up. Talk about luck, so anyhow we got driven back to the Soluch aerodrome and got aboard one
- 42:00 with Burt Eddie, an Australian, he got killed about a few weeks later and...

Tape 3

- 00:34 **Jack, tell me what happened, the South Africans picked you up and took you back to the base, can you tell me what happened then?**
- Yes. When I arrived back one of our aircraft was waiting for me. I don't know whether they thought I was alive or what, but they were there. An Australian pilot Burt Eddie. I boarded his aircraft
- 01:00 and we flew back to where the crash was and looking down there was nothing left only you could see the concentric rings, larger ones as the bombs had exploded. There were 12 explosions and there was just nothing left it had all disappeared and then we flew back to our base at El Adem
- 01:30 and that was another lucky day for me.
- What caused the accident?**
- Well an oil pipe burst. I presume the oil was all over the engine. It was one of those things that happen at the wrong time and I had a bit of experience behind me then I could handle things better if I hadn't had the experience maybe I would have had to have had a lot of luck.
- 02:00 **Tell me about an oil pipe, was that a particular hazard?**
- No, oh no it's the only one I ever had in all my flying experience. One burst like that because it's in such an awkward position low down and I hadn't had time to make the (UNCLEAR) and I had to act very quickly, so it's just one of those things that happen.
- 02:30 You know flying in a tight formation and I had to act quickly otherwise I could have easily taken someone with me, you know your wing tips are just there and you're flying with a control column, your throttle's there and you're watching all the time you see.
- What's it like working under that sort of pressure?**
- Oh well you just live with it.
- 03:00 The tension must be there, but you don't think anything of it, it's a way of life, some people go to the office every day and we did these kinds of things, it's just a way of life and it depends on your makeup. Of course some people are a bit tense and things might break at times a little bit, I was lucky that way, sort of accepted it.
- 03:30 **Tell me where you went next after that incident?**
- Well I had another incident from the same drome. I went down to what we call the flight tents in the morning to see our actions for the day and I was told that my aircraft had been loaded up with captured German drink water,
- 04:30 not drink water, trink water [trinkwasser?], beautiful containers for water about that large with a clip on the top and that I was to fly to a drome about 50 miles ahead of us and on arriving there I was met by a truck which loaded all the containers on board. We drove about 5 miles
- 05:00 to an oasis in that area and we filled the containers up and loaded them on to the wagon and back to the car and unloaded them on to the aircraft, well I knew I had a fair weight aboard but we loaded them and I taxied the aircraft right over to the
- 05:30 boundary which was marked by 44 gallon drums, one of these kind of dromes and ran the engines up full throttle on the brakes and then I released the brakes and away we surged forward. Well when I got to the next boundary my wheels were still on the ground and I had this ruddy weight and as I'm coming, the waddies, like the small beginnings of creeks,
- 06:00 are coming up in front of you and gee whiz and I just pulled it back and just had enough air speed to drag her into the air and got her up. Undercarriage up and up the air speed and flew back to my base, very lucky to get off and very close. And anyhow, later in the day a Spitfire pilot came in
- 06:30 and he was talking to some of the chaps down at the drome and he said "I nearly saw one of your chaps fry today" and they said "That must have been Jack Stronach, Jack Stronach". There was a Spitfire pilot called Eric Hanley, he joined up with me in the beginning and we hadn't seen each other

- 07:00 since then and he came up and slept in my two-man tent with me that night and flew away next morning but it was a very close call that, water's very heavy, 10lbs to the US gallon it weighed. So that was that lot from up there I don't think I had anything else as special from El Adem although we
- 07:30 we flew to a place called the Msus well south of Benghazi doing the same thing that we did on the trip to Soluch for the enemy to be cut off at Agedabia. Came in earlier, the dromes you wouldn't know where the boundaries are but we got on the ground and the same thing.

- 08:00 It wasn't long after that the squadron moved from there to Marble Arch which there are photos there of Marble Arch which Mussolini built it over the coast road, marks the border, it's in Libya, it marks the border of Botania [?] and Cyrenaica which joins Italy...

What sort of operations were you doing there?

- 08:30 Transport work and so we went in there, a very heavily mined area, people getting killed there about six weeks after we got there and we got in early. Oh I had an experience and a half there, whenever you take off you usually take off
- 09:00 one at a time and we taxied and we taxied right along the boundary the whole aircraft squadron, fifteen aircraft lined up right along the boundary of it and we all took off together in twin engine aircraft. There was a minor sand storm behind us, we took and I was very glad to see the wheels come away from the sand
- 09:30 and we were on our way and the fighters came in behind us to escort. I forget where we were going but operating out of Marble Arch we were briefed to go and move another Spitfire squadron to Castel Benito, the pride of Mussolini's air force.
- 10:00 It was at Tripoli, Port Tripoli and what happened there was the Germans used to plough up the aerodromes so you couldn't land on them when they were retreating, but on this particular one they had a strip down the side, one of the Spitfires had been over the day before and killed
- 10:30 the man on the plough so this small narrow strip was there for us to land on. They moved the squadron in they'd get the Spitfires up closer to the front and so we moved them and we came over in formation and then as we came over we fell into line astern one after the other and in the line up.
- 11:00 I was number three to land, my wheels are just touching the ground, there's one aircraft half way down and another one at the end and all of a sudden the one in front of me number two blew up, pouf, I'm on the ground I couldn't go round again I looked to the right as I went past him and there was only half an aircraft, he'd gone over a mine
- 11:30 and you know the forward movement got the, nobody was hurt so they took away the shrapnel of the mine, so we had to get down on the ground, not a nice feeling when you get on the ground and there are mines around dicey indeed from there I had another experience on Castel Benito.
- 12:00 When it had all been fixed up the aerodrome constructions units come in roll them all out again. I took off from Marble Arch to Castle Benito and ran into a sandstorm and as we were approaching Castle Benito we went over
- 12:30 the top of a small range of mountains something like the Blue Mountains only bare in the desert type, and I said to the navigator, "There's a road there, let's follow the road" and he couldn't see anything anyhow. I followed this road and all of a sudden I looked down here and we're going in a straight line and beside the aerodrome and the wind's really blowing and I turned around and I came round
- 13:00 and landed. I was landing into a gale, about an 90mph gale anyhow, Jesus, I got her on the ground touched and hardly moved, taxied over and got out of it. And whilst I was there a Spitfire tried to take off and he got flipped on his back and a Dakota Transport, he tried to take off and he went straight up
- 13:30 like that and fell back, instead of going right over, very unlucky. So I was there and I thought "Gee the time's going, I might see if we can get back", had no radio communications to find out what the weather was back there, can't go back over the mountains, so I took off in the afternoon, late, flew to the north, hit the sea
- 14:00 and flew around the mountains and out at sea and came down picked up the coast road. And I'm flying down and the sand's come up again, flying there, flying to the east and I said to the navigator you let me know left or right, port or starboard which way to follow this bitumen road
- 14:30 and it runs right through the Marble Arch itself, the aerodrome's on the left and the camp was on the right side and as we'd been flying for some time we realized that we'd flown over our base and hadn't seen it in the sandstorm and so it's getting on and the sun's starting to set
- 15:00 and it was getting a bit serious and we had to get down on the ground. Lucky again, the sand started to subside and I knew the area Adugarfield [?] it was and I found the drome and I found where it was and I'm coming in, making my approach, and I thought gee that's strange, right across the middle of the drome

15:30 the outside was the 44 gallon drums always, they were always around somewhere but there was another row right across the middle of the aerodrome, and I thought "What's going on here?", skimmed over the top of the them, put my wheels on the ground, seen around past the other boundary missed everything and there was an American C47 Transport aircraft on the (runway), taxied up to it and got out

16:00 Saw the pilot. "What's all that?" he said, "You landed on the right side, the other side mined", so I was lucky again.

How aware were you of the risk?

None. Had no idea what it was about so that night we had to sleep in the aircraft, we had nothing to eat, ever slept in a fridge? That's what it was like, I was only in shorts.

16:30 The sands of the desert grow cold, sun heats the sand but at night time it just freezes off, so I'm very glad to see the sun come up and we just flew back to our base, so that was another incident (UNCLEAR).

Where was the next posting?

Posting?

Where did you go to next?

Oh where did the squadron move to? We're at

17:00 well me, moved into Castel Benito and there we started doing trips into Malta little bit of a risk there, it was a two hours flight across the water and we used go to the east and down to the old city of Toms [?], ancient city in the Roman times and that was a corridor to go out on

17:30 so we'd fly there. I'd fly at about 2,000 or 3,000 feet and as we approached Malta we would come right down on the water so the Germans in Sicily were only 20 minutes flying time to Malta, they'd pick up and they'd be there before you, so you used to fly right in above the water. And as you were approaching Malta

18:00 there is a cumulus cloud right ahead of you and you knew you were getting pretty close and up came the ground, coming over the horizon and so you just climbed then and did the circuit area over there.

It must have been quite a nerve wracking run?

Oh, not that bad but you just fitted in with the others

18:30 and picked those things up, just on your guard you know, we had one of our own aircraft strafed by one of our own aircraft coming out of Malta, you're all on edge because Malta as you know was the most bombed, not the heaviest bombed area of the war, it was pounded all the time.

Were you witness to those bombardments? Did you witness much bombardment?

19:00 No, I didn't, we used to get in and get out as we could, and sometimes we would stay overnight. Later on when our squadron converted to Dakotas I took a Dakota in there about 2 o'clock in the morning usually when you went in there they had a double runway and all the flags. And this time

19:30 I came in they only had three flags out for me you know, what's going on, and a double flare path. What do you expect I thought, "Gee there's something going on here" and I thought "There might be a fighter in the area you know 20 minutes, circling and waiting", this is well known, so I

20:00 made my approach and coming in there they just kicked the landing lights on just as the wheels were about to touch you know and then I'm down on the ground and there's a truck there with a guy just talking to dispersal, invasion of Sicily was taking place, they don't tell us so I thought there was something up there.

20:30 And where did I go from there? From Malta we moved into Tunisia to a place called Gabes first in the Gulf of Gabes and operating and we moved up to El Gim [?] in Tunisia that's where they have an amphitheatre, like the coliseum in Rome,

21:00 way out in the desert and I believe it has all been repaired since then. Quite an amazing place and of course not long after that the war in North Africa was over. The squadron stayed in Castel Benito.

21:30 Before Tunisia fell and I had another experience, another bit of (UNCLEAR), in a way Germany still held Tunisia and one of the pilots was detailed to fly a French General

22:00 to go to Algiers. To do so he had to fly south and across to the west and come up south, for some reason I don't know whatever happened he turned back, he came back and all the senior pilots had their own aircraft so instead of, next day they detailed

22:30 me to do it, they took him off it and put me on and instead of unloading it and putting it in to my

aircraft, they said "Take his aircraft". So I don't know why he came back, I have no idea, so I took off in his aircraft with the General and his staff to take him to Algiers, General Du Pont, amazing I remember his name,

23:00 General Du Pont. So anyhow down we go, we fly down south the real Sahara Desert, you'd never get down so I'm on the northern link, we've flown over Biskra, the place that I landed at later on, French Foreign Legion place it was.

23:30 And we're at 10,000 feet and the mountains are coming up now down there and you could look down there and you could see the snowline at 5,000 feet, and we're only in shorts by the way. Mother Nature started to call again, it always was Mother Nature, so I thought "Jesus I'll relieve myself", to do that bad there was a little tube

24:00 under the seat with a little funnel on the top of it and put my hand down to follow, not there, wasn't there, oh my God, not there, panic, and there is only one pilot as I started and as you know when you get very bad and this is about ten times that, I was getting desperate now,

24:30 so I said to the navigator, there's a toilet at the back of the aircraft you see, a little toilet, I said, "What am I going to do?" work out in my little brain, the weight in my body and on these sort of automatic pilots in those days, any movement in the aircraft the pilot had to adjust, there's no computers like today where it's all worked out and I said "I'm going to work out and going to put",

25:00 I said, "I'm going to work out and put the nose in a dive a little bit so that when the weight of my body as I move back through the aircraft and the nose will come up and I will fly straight and level", I said, "You watch that instrument there and any variation you let me know", so I get out of the seat carefully and everybody their eyes are out here and I start edging past the French General and his staff, they know there's only one pilot aboard

25:30 and I get back and lift the lid, and they're all looking at me and I couldn't care less, I'm 10,000 feet up in the air and oh that was wonderful.

What was the French General's reaction to this? Did the Frenchmen know what was happening?

Well he knew I was going to the toilet. No, he wouldn't know anything about this even though (UNCLEAR)

26:00 I never even enquired why when I got back to base, I never enquired. Why. Anyhow there was another time and I thought gees, I was approached by a British Army officer he said "I wonder if you would take this crate to Tunis", I said,

26:30 "What's in it"? He said, "I can't tell." "Well", I said, "It's not going". Well, he and another officer went away and had a talk and came back and I can't help laughing now and it was in the time of the King, and North Africa was captured, finished, and the King was out touring North Africa

27:00 and in the box was his lunch, it was one time I should have had a forced landing, so they had all their glassware and plates and all the stuff and he didn't have bully beef and biscuits on an old tin plate like us but that was another experience.

Did you take the lunch to the King?

Yes, I flew it to Tunis eventually when they told me what it was.

27:30 They had to come my way you know the pilot must know everything.

How long were you in North Africa?

When I arrived out there, I either arrived there at the end of June 1942

28:00 and North Africa capitulated on the 12th May 1943, the battle of Alamein started on the 23rd October '42 so from then it was when I was, and then we moved from there to Sicily. I had a funny experience; I went into Casablanca you know it's on the west coast

28:30 of French Morocco and I had been to Fez and flying a Dakota in there and I'm still a sergeant pilot because the American pilots and navigators were all commissioned so my navigator was commissioned, he was a warrant officer, so he was...

29:00 **So we're at Sicily and we're coming to your involvement with Sicily I believe?**

Casablanca.

Casablanca, yes, I'm sorry, tell me what happened in Casablanca?

Oh yes, I'm the captain of the aircraft and I'm a sergeant pilot and I got there at lunch and he actually couldn't make it out, you know three stripes, they're all commissioned

29:30 and so they tried to work out how they were going to get me into the mess and my pilot operator. I think

he was commissioned, navigator was a warrant officer and they can go to the mess and then there's me the captain, anyhow I ended up in the mess they got me in. They were too embarrassed to think I would go anywhere else but the officers' mess but that was that, just a little incident,

30:00 different outlooks of the service.

What was it like leading, being effectively in command of officers and so forth?

You never thought anything of it. You're the pilot and the captain of the aircraft everyone knew that you were in charge, you never pushed your weight around but you made all the decisions and nobody else.

30:30 It was as simple as that, on the Royal Air Force has that big class distinction which is a big thing, which we don't have in comparison, a different way of life and you get used to it like a lot of others were and then the squadron moved from Castel Benito to

31:00 Catania in Sicily. Catania is at the base of Mt Etna the largest volcano in Europe and the second largest city and we were billeted in an olive grove there and we started a bit of a mail run up to from Catania

31:30 to Vellano and from Vellano to Casebelino [?] in the south and then back to Vellano and it was during one of those runs that I landed at Casa Villa and I never got out of the seat I stayed in the pilot's seat and as we got airborne one of the crew came up and said "We've got Gracie Fields aboard" and

32:00 I sent word back to ask if she wanted to come up into the cockpit and see what goes on and she was very pleased to come up and she autographed the navigator's log and thanked us and went back to her seat, it was only a short flight to Catania and I was the last out of the aircraft and

32:30 when I got out she was waiting for me. So I was talking away to her and she said to me, "How does a little man like you fly such a big aircraft?" and I didn't realize that I was going to fly Liberators 4-engine bombers [B24 Liberator aircraft] later so I just stayed, a very nice person after that I was.

33:00 They were getting ready for the invasion of Italy and we went to, I think first of all, we went to a place called Cagliari and just near Sorrento in the south and Taranto was the big Italian naval place and Cagliari. We were flying Dakotas and we were moving these 44 gallon

33:30 drums of fuel. We filled the aircraft with these drums and took them in to the army for fuel urgently, that's one of the early breaks in there. On this place was this tremendous big aircraft hangar for the Dorigals [Douglas airships?], the air ships, enormous things with nothing in them of course. And then, this was later,

34:00 we were told that we were going to a place that was north of Sicily called Barcelona [?] to move a squadron of American Mustang fighters to Celone where the invasion of Italy was just taking place and we took off and flew there and loaded the aircraft up

34:30 and took off. And we're on the (UNCLEAR) over the island of Stromboli, the volcanic island, where we picked up our fighter escorts of Mustangs, flew across to the Italian coastland and lost our height and flew down a valley then we burst out on to the tremendous beaches and lowlands, and of course Italy is all filled up with mountains.

35:00 And flew about 10 miles to the other end of the beach where we were trying to make this landing and as we circled, and of course there is this big armada of landing ships and troop ships with the boom barges up and as I came over they started to fire red Verey lights at us, "What's going on?", and all of a sudden the wireless operator reported that we had had a recall.

35:30 Call us back, so the squadron started to move away and I said "I'm going to have a little further look here", so I peeled off and went down on the deck, flying across the drome right down on the deck, and as I went across up on the right side there was a tremendous wall of dust right up in the air and I'm flying down now towards the ships at sea with the boom barges and they're firing the

36:00 Verey lights again at me. The Verey pistols banked away and caught up with the others, that was that and we got back to the base and we found out what was going on. The Germans were coming back, and the Americans were trying to, that dust, the big balloon that was the

36:30 artillery shells bursting and the wind was blowing the dust back over German troops and nobody could see it anyhow. The Yanks had a close call there and we had a French pilot, Secondier [?], on the squadron and he came up to me and said "You bastard Stronach, you scared the hell out of me.

37:00 You went past me that fast I thought you had all the fighters in Germany chasing you." That was another one. Now where are we up to, the invasion of Sicily? Then not long after that we moved from there into from Catania. We moved to Bari on the Adriatic [Sea] coast line

37:30 and I was only there a short time. When I came back one day and landed and gee I was feeling sick, really sick and so they whipped me off to hospital and I found I had yellow jaundice. Oh gee I was bad; they threw me up on a double-decker bed

38:00 and there was not frame there, they just put electrical wiring across in squares like that and threw me

on top of it and I just lay there delirious. So they diagnosed what I had, started to feed me a bit of lolly and gee I was crook. Anyhow while I was there the squadron got orders to move from Italy

38:30 to India and so the squadron moved and I'm left behind but there's one aircraft stayed trying to get me out.

Tape 4

00:34 **OK Jack tell me, your squadron has moved to India and you're in hospital and there's one plane...?**

Waiting to get me out. What happened was they smuggled me out of hospital on the aircraft and we flew to Cairo and from there to Tel Aviv in Palestine.

01:00 **What do you mean smuggled you out of hospital?**

They got me out, smuggled me out.

You weren't meant to be discharged?

No. They didn't want to lose me. So anyhow they'd left the aircraft there to get me see and we got to Tel Aviv and they found out where I was and they made the pilot fly back to Cairo with me and I don't know what happened to him. Anyhow

01:30 I go into hospital and get the full treatment there and I fully recovered you know I was a bad case. After that I was sent to a convalescent camp in Tel Aviv in Palestine you know where I'd been before and gee I remember we went by train and we're in this carriage and the seats are all made of cane

02:00 and finely woven and the lights are out and what's going on, everything's moving and you feel that your whole body's moving. And we turned the lights on and we were all covered in bed bugs, they'd all come out of the seats filthy, each of us, terrible so we spent the night you know I'd pick 'em off you and you'd pick 'em off me.

02:30 You know the bed bugs are about as big as your finger nail terrible little things, not like fleas, anyhow that's another little incident on the way to Palestine, so I went up there, before I went there I only had on my old battle dress that had been issued in England

03:00 and had been all through the desert and everything and I went into town and saw the Australian liaison officer and I said "This is all I've got, I'm supposed to have a uniform and I haven't got anything", so he looked at me and said "Oh well", he went over to a suitcase, opened it up and he pulled this beautiful uniform out, you know I'm a bit wide in the shoulders

03:30 and shorter in the arms, not a easy fit and he said "Try this on and the damn thing fitted perfectly". The trousers, it was the uniform of an Australian pilot that had been killed on No 3 Squadron and it was a beautiful what they call whipcord permanent air force officers, you know better than what we had, beautiful uniform, so I've got a photo of it over there with it.

04:00 But so I went away to Palestine, did my time and then I came back and I was a bit mad then of course and I went into the Australian Liaison officer and I said to him "I want to go back on ops", not very bright and he said "I'll see what I can do".

When you said you were a bit mad, what did you do?

04:30 Oh you're not too bright flying on ops better things to do work in the cook house or something I don't know.

Why did you want to go back on ops?

Oh well I suppose you're young, only you're not too bright that's all it amounts to you know.

So what did the bloke say?

I'll see what I can do, so I came back and saw him again and he said "I've got a posting in the Liberators' Squadron".

05:00 I said "I'll take it". I'd never been in one before, anyhow I was posted then.

Whereabouts was the Liberator squadron?

Right back in the desert and they were mainly bombing and mine laying Greece mainly around Greece, the roads and the islands, the Turkish all

05:30 that area so I joined the squadron.

What sort of retraining did you do?

I didn't do any of course. I am experienced by now although the pilot I was flying with graduated from Calgary twelve months after I graduated, so it was a bit embarrassing for him but anyhow.

06:00 What was different about flying a Liberator?

Oh well a different aircraft, a very heavy aircraft, a two pilot aircraft. So I teamed up with him for a while and did a few trips before I converted myself. The first trip I did was to the Salaam Straits in Greece. The operation

06:30 was to lay mines. There were Wellingtons they were going to come in on the deck from the south and this is to the west of Athens and Halifax bombers were coming in from the south and they were coming in at 10,000 feet, they were what was called diversion bombers.

07:00 They would draw the flak up from (UNCLEAR) and we were carrying mines too to fly up the east coast of Greece turn in then and then come down. So we had two lots coming from the south and we're coming through at 6,000 feet, a bad height or they pick you up, it's all times, you must come in so the diversion bombers can be drawing the flak away from everybody, so we come in and we started

07:30 the run. Then the searchlights started coming on, no master searchlight coming in, shells all bursting up above us at the Halifaxes and you think "You're going to get caught in a searchlight" and it just misses you like that and then we got away and that was the first trip it was quite interesting in a way.

08:00 That was from El Adem there so a lot of time there and I did another raid on Crete we went to Suda Bay and there was mine laying job there.

08:30 Mine laying with Wellingtons, they were coming in from the south on the deck to go through we were flying at 10,000 feet as diversion bombers to draw the flak at us and there were Halifax bombers there too and as we came in we were a bit early so we couldn't go in we had to orbit, very dangerous so.

09:00 What were the dangers?

Collision, collisions see, and as we were coming in we started to circle see, and at the same time the Halifaxes were doing the same. So he started to circle and as he comes round like that to pass he just missed us he just went over the top of us you could almost feel that you could touch him, this big black shadow went across

09:30 the top of us and of course we went in and the flak came up and the bombers went through and did their job.

So describe the flak coming up towards the plane, what was that like?

Oh well this was heavy flak, they are big shells and the just burst all around you, black smoke, reasonable, reasonably heavy. I've been through, much later on, very heavy flak.

10:00 That was just the start of it so as time went on we went to other places, went to a place called Khalkis up above Athens. I remember very well we, were laying mines at 6,000 feet and they were firing light flak at us from both sides of this

10:30 harbour that comes in very close and it goes out. And we put the mines in the middle and they were firing and the shells were just bursting above our heads, lighting up the cockpit they were that close, the shells were going that way and burst.

How do you avoid flak when you have to lay mines?

Well you don't know, you're doing it, you start your bombing runs and you don't know.

11:00 It's there when you actually start the run, and all of a sudden somebody will say "Flak coming up on the port" or something like that and you watch it come past. It starts very slowly then it gets up towards you and shoos, shoos, very fast past you. That's the tracer, there's a shell in between those lights too, high explosive shells and armour piercing

11:30 and things what they are, incendiaries.

If you're on a bombing run you can't change course can you?

No, not unless you're made to you know with the flak. No, the navigators have got you on the bombing run there. We didn't use bomb aimers, we used the navigators and that was "Left, left, right, right, steady" and then drop them.

12:00 And you did that in the Danube too, did you?

Oh that's later on I'll tell you all about that later, the Danube River. Oh you knew from your notes, yeah well that was quite an experience too and eventually I became a captain and I took over and I converted

12:30 and I had a New Zealander as a second pilot and unfortunately he got killed later over Germany. He took over from me and never came back. I had a good Canadian navigator, very good, Otto, good crew,

yeah, eventually.

13:00 I am a skipper myself now and go to Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria and Artacus [?] in the north of Italy (UNCLEAR) I think Bologna came up in that book you know, Catch 22,

13:30 and they used to get blown out of the air there but then the, what was it you mention, the Danube River.

Tell me a bit about that can you?

Well, I did three on the Danube. They're all done at low level. You fly at about 150 feet. Well you know it's pretty hard to know what height you're at.

14:00 You're travelling at about 200mph on a moonlight night and when you fly over an ocean and it's windy you can judge your height by the waves but when it's smooth you've got very little to read. So we take off on that and we go over the mountains into Yugoslavia around 10,000 feet at least, of course some point come up at that height

14:30 and then we'd sighted the Danube River. We'd come down to about 1,000 feet roughly, and we'd follow up to where we've all been allotted different bombing runs and you had to do a dummy run first to make sure you're

15:00 on the right spot; come through and then turn around and come back and of course they're all waiting for you. I would have liked to have been on the first run, it would have been a surprise that they didn't know you were coming but they soon work it out and put the night anti-aircraft along the river and put the fighters in and the searchlights and all these sorts of things. Later on I believe they put chains even across the river, you know a river flows along and it goes in and out

15:30 and the banks go up and down and you've got all this to worry about you know, it's not just straight. I can remember one night we were on the dummy run we ran in and then as I banked around a Liberator with a 110 feet wing span a big aircraft, I could see him looking down at the wing

16:00 and the wing tip was going through the top of the trees and in fact we were that close you could see there were no leaves on it. So you could see the banks of the river coming up, you know doing 200mph and you're around there and you're on it and the navigator and the second pilot told me later that "He had his hands around the control column like that ready in case he thought we were going to go, we went around and come away".

16:30 We did our run and we were coming down the river searching for boats and barges, the whole idea was the oil fields of Ploesti. I don't know if you know of that, that's where all the oil came and went to Germany. They had synthetic factories or distilleries in Germany but they were bombed from England.

17:00 But the real oil came from Rumania oil fields in Ploesti down to Bucharest about 90 miles and they would take it on the barges all the way, see the Danube River flowed from the Black Forest to Germany. It came south down to Nuremberg, continued south down to Vienna then it turned and went to the east flowing through Belgrade,

17:30 Yugoslavia and then down between Rumania and Bulgaria through Bucharest and then into the Black Sea. So it had all that way to go and that's where the barges went into Germany and so when we stopped them it was a big influence on the German war. Was that oil not getting to Germany and the mines were

18:00 secret mines and they were made that so many ships and barges that would flow over them and then the time to flow might be on number seven ship or something. They were all different size, and it was all controlled by the navy too.

How much were you told of that larger objective of the Danube operations at the time? When you were told to mine the Danube were you told why?

Nothing, no not that I can remember. No,

18:30 we were just given orders to lay the mines in the river. Yes, that's right I learned about that all later.

How long were you doing these operations in Europe?

Oh, it would have been about 6 or 7 months, yes, then of course after that I started; I did four trips on Genoa. The port of Genoa which is the largest port

19:00 in Italy. We started to take part in what they called nuisance raids.

What was a nuisance raid?

It's more like psychological warfare, the bombers would come over, not a big bombing force, the air raid sirens would go, the people would leave the factories where they were working, or sleeping or whatever they were doing

19:30 and they'd go down the shelters you see. Bombs would drop and later on another wave would come over

you know by the end of the night they might have three or four waves of bombers come across, sirens have been going, people's nerves are shattered down below, the poor devils, psychological warfare.

How is that different from a normal bombing run?

Bombing runs just come in, in one mass and they're gone.

- 20:00 But I ran into trouble there a couple times, coming back I had terrible experiences with the weather over Europe. See coming back I did bombing of Genoa and on the way back we ran into to 10/10 cloud [An extremely bright cloud]
- 20:30 in the corridor just to the south of Naples to go through to come across Italy to ground base. And we're on the Adriatic coast and we came over, we got off course and we came in right over the top of Naples and the defences of Naples opened up on us, they were all rockets all round us. It was like
- 21:00 whole clouds of orangey red and there was a lot of trouble out of that one, because we had what we call the IFF was on, Identification Friend or Foe, they should have picked us up but they opened up on us and nearly blew us apart there. And there was another time when I was back there and I had a terrible experience, the same place, over Naples, 10/10 cloud and we'd been all through
- 21:30 the ice and electricity on the windows and everything, St Elmo's fire, round the propellers, you could see all the light round there. We're at 10,000 feet and all of a sudden I thought we were gone, we just exploded, the cloud just exploded, what had happened we had flown into what is known as a Cumulus Nimbus cloud, a pilot in his right mind wouldn't go near one let alone at night time.

Why's that?

- 22:00 Oh, it's the electricity that's in them, tremendous, well you know I thought we'd blown apart, you've seen lightning flash out of clouds and it just picked the 4-engine bomber up like that and straight up 1000 feet we went and the power in them and all of a sudden I realized that we're all in one piece, so I increased the power and climbed up high above the clouds
- 22:30 and I came back over our base. And we're in trouble again couldn't get down it, had all clouded over, the base, so we'd been flying for two hours back and forwards on what they call ODMs [Outer Distance Mark] magnetic course with the bustle [?] minus variations and looked like we were going to bale out you know to get down and so what they did they coned the master
- 23:00 searchlight over the city of Foggia, very powerful tremendous searchlights and what they did they came up and I picked them up above the clouds just above and I started to circle around there and then I circled down the cone inside the cone, all on instruments. See this is experience, and then I came out over the city of Foggia.
- 23:30 Rain just like that, pouring down and what you do, the navigator gave me a course to fly to what is known as the red beacon, that's moved all the time so that the enemy can't find your aerodrome but as I'm flying towards it there's a hill about 3,500 feet high on the starboard side it's the part that projects out into the Adriatic Sea, it's like
- 24:00 a spur. And I didn't like it. I didn't feel safe because there had been many aircraft crash on it, so I turned back and flew on a reciprocal course back to Foggia and we started again and he gave me another course and found the beacon and from the beacon the course to the aerodrome. The runway came up so I went in and we landed, pouring rain still and come round.
- 24:30 We cut the engine and got out and we couldn't see the mountain over there. I had done it all on instruments more or less and it's amazing the experience.

When you're responding to an emergency like this, are you falling back on training techniques or are you improvising?

No, that's all grown into your system, grown in

- 25:00 just like these commercial pilots. We didn't have the chance to build up the hours they had but they build up hours and get experience it just grows with practice and of course in operational flying you (UNCLEAR) come up but you've got to deal with it right there.
- 25:30 But I was thinking of one of the raids that I did. I took part in one of the mining raids. I was detailed to go to Ploesti, that's where the oil fields are that I mentioned to you and what we were to do we were to drop leaflets on Ploesti and then
- 26:00 we were to go and find the Danube River and lay mines in it. So we went and dropped the leaflets, and you don't fly over a city they're there like the wind see, so you're at 10,000 feet or so and so you've got to fly north 30 miles. North so that the winds will carry the leaflets back so if you drop them over the
- 26:30 city nobody would get it so we did that and then I went searching for the Danube River. We had a hell of a time trying to find it. We dropped the mines and we spent quite some time and we were held back and the dawn started to break

- 27:00 as the we crossed the enemy coast over the Adriatic Sea and when the crew that an enemy long range fighter came up on us, they nearly died. I didn't see it but it was just out of range of our guns and it followed us for a while and we just flew on and it didn't make any attack. I often thought about that chap but maybe he was an old experienced pilot
- 27:30 not old in age but old in experience finishing his tour and he wanted to live or he was a new one and he wasn't game to come on because we were armed with .5's, big guns. So that was the first time I had ever made a daylight landing back in daylight, it was always night landings, so that was another one there.
- 28:00 **And what happened after Genoa?**
- Well I did another. I got caught twice there at Genoa coming back to the base coming down after that you know and might just grab my log book.
- Well we don't need exact dates and details just**
- 28:30 **tell me when you came to leave the European theatre of war and what were the circumstances?**
- Well I finished my tour of 30 ops that's the one to get to.
- Well tell me about coming back after finishing your tour?**
- I was just going to say, I just thought of one thing of the tour when I was on it there were only two pilots
- 29:00 on the squadron who were on their second tour that was the CO[Commanding Officer] of the squadron and myself and that meant that all those who didn't come back went on their first tours. So that's how it goes, some go on and some don't come back from one.
- Did the high mortality, was it something on your mind?**
- Maybe when you're getting towards the end, it's getting close.
- 29:30 I'll tell you what it was a marvellous feeling when I came back on my last flight I had landed about 4o'clock in the morning and I was last out of the aircraft and when my feet touched the ground I knew I had finished with operational flying. It's hard to describe the relief you know but you live with that.
- 30:00 It's part of a world, some people went to an office or something we were flying on bombing raids and things.
- What's the after affect like, after you have finished a tour?**
- Marvellous.
- Tell me about it?**
- I don't know it's just a big weight off you that's all. To me I don't know what other chaps thought you know
- 30:30 but I had been flying all that time and you're still there, I've seen a lot go, we lost a lot of South African pilots.
- Why do you think that was?**
- I don't know I flew as a second pilot to one chap. I know if I hadn't have been there we wouldn't have got back, he was terrible poor devil he flew into cloud over Crete going out, he got killed eventually. Young,
- 31:00 he was darn young and this cloud, and I tapped that instrument and made him concentrate on that instrument, he'd concentrate on that one and then I'd be tapping this one for him to concentrate on and I couldn't believe it but I don't know whether they had good instrument training where we did.
- 31:30 **What was it like going up with people who you didn't think were properly trained?**
- Not too good, not too good as I say I was on my second tour and these were all on their first tour they had to live to gain the experiences. Unfortunately a lot didn't.
- You must have been someone, were they coming to you for advice, did you talk to them about (UNCLEAR)?**
- Oh I don't know about that one, I don't think I coped
- 32:00 with anything like that, there might have been something, but not really, I can't remember.
- When your tour finished where did you go to?**
- To Australia.

Tell me how you got back.

Well we went to Naples, by train to Naples and we were there for some time and then we went from

- 32:30 there to Taranto by train. Eventually we got on to a ship. Oh Jesus, yes, I got another dose of sandfly fever on the ship and you know I had been hit somewhere else of course. I had a nice cabin to myself, nice food, couldn't eat any, I was a very sick boy. So
- 33:00 anyway we got to Alexandria and then by train to Port Said and in fact when I got down to get on the ship they pulled the gangway up to get me on, so I got pulled up by one of the strap boards it was, one of the strap boards or something, they had the big sling with all the
- 33:30 luggage and stuff in it. So I had to cling on the outside of a sling and they pulled me up on the crane. It was funny but that was how I got aboard. Then we went to Bombay and we came into Bombay a shocking place and we were there for a few days and we changed ships again there and came back to Melbourne. Nobody to see
- 34:00 us. They didn't know whether we were alive, nothing not even a wharfie in sight. I don't think a bit different to these days. Oh well good luck to them.

When did you see your family?

Well I got back in September '44 on the train from Melbourne to Sydney and they had notified them that we were coming,

- 34:30 so that's about all and we went on leave. Went on leave and came back and got a posting down to Laverton Testing Ferry Unit down there (UNCLEAR) and
- 35:00 (UNCLEAR) and see what it's all about. And I got called into the CO and he said "I want you to become a test pilot" and I thought "Jesus a test pilot, a test pilot goes to a drome and that's where he stays and he never moves", so I turned it down and I became a ferry pilot
- 35:30 and I went everywhere.

Why did you turn it down?

Well I was more adventurous, a test pilot might sound that way.

But you're feeling after you've done two operations?

I wanted to be selective. The ferry pilot did it, I went everywhere.

It was more important to you to stay active?

I liked it. That's like after the war the airlines felt very boring to me.

- 36:00 You just lived on your nerves.

What places were you operating as a ferry pilot?

Well I started down there at Laverton and the first job I did was take a clapped out Liberator under the Lend Lease Scheme you know there's a red tape in this and

- 36:30 they wanted it flown to the island of Biak in Dutch New Guinea. Way up on the top there were three of the aircraft and mine was the only one that got there, the others fell to pieces on the way scattered around the place. So I took this Liberator and that was a job and a half, no power in it, terrible, it was just a matter of red tape. They only got it
- 37:00 in the sea when they got it dumped it, they risked our necks with it on the trip and I'm the pilot officer now the commission had come through and my navigator was a wing commander, he was a chief navigation officer in Australia and the second pilot. He was a flying officer
- 37:30 and the wireless operator was a warrant officer that would be right. And then the wing commander he had no operational experience, he nearly killed us, he had no operational experience at all he was (UNCLEAR) when he was told to fly with me, pilot officer.

- 38:00 **So was rank important to you?**

No, no I wasn't interested, I was always the captain, flew like that so you are always in charge of whatever comes and responsible but he had a brother up in Tadji in north New Guinea and he was a colonel or something in the army. And the wing commander

- 38:30 brought all his fruit and vegetables you know to take up to the troops, his brother and his fellow officers I presume, anyhow they loaded the bomb bays up with all this fruit and vegetables and eventually I took off and no power. Terrible,
- 39:00 and it was one of the first Liberators that come to Australia. It was number twelve in fact and I

remember taking off down at Laverton and I went through the end of the pine trees and chopped the tops off them.

Tape 5

00:35 **Could I just ask you what we were talking about yesterday afternoon, where we finished off, about the flights you were doing were based on the Lend Lease Scheme, of the clapped out Liberators you were taking up to New Guinea?**

They were just finished just worn out and I had to fly this Liberator up the island of Biak and handed it over to the Americans under the Lend Lease Scheme and

01:00 I first took off from Laverton with all these personnel aboard, army officers, senior ones with food of fresh vegetables and fruit for the wing commander's brother who was a Colonel at Dage [?] and you know give them some fresh food something they wouldn't see.

01:30 After I took off underpowered and I went through the top of the trees and I sheared the tops off and anyhow we got up in the air and we struggled up to Townsville and I landed there and our next hop from there was to go to Hiddensfield [?]

02:00 on the tip of Cape York Peninsula. And as I started to take full power on and one of the engines cut on me and I cleared it and pushed the throttle forward with the little experience then and I got off and we were going to fly up more or less to the east coast but we ran into very bad weather and I got the navigator to give me a course to the Gulf of Carpentaria.

02:30 And we flew up that coast and missed the weather on that coast like the range of mountains and I landed at Hiddensfield and we were going to the next day we were going to Port Moresby and the weather wasn't up to it so I cancelled. The wing commander wanted me to go but he might have had the rank but he didn't have the experience

03:00 flying like I had had in bad weather. Anyway the following day we did take off and we landed at Jackson Field in Port Moresby. In fact I didn't land, I landed a four-engine heavy bomber they had trouble with the main landing strip, so I landed on the taxi strip a bit narrow but anyhow.

03:30 And the next day we were to fly to Tadj. And we couldn't get the height, so you've heard of the Kokoda Trail, well there's what you call the Kokoda Gap where the mountains come down, and I crept up, I crept just through there.

04:00 I could see where. In New Guinea when you can't see where you're going, you don't go, the clouds come down and bury you and you don't fly in clouds with rocks in, so anyhow I made my way there and we eventually got to Tadj in New Guinea and unloaded the wing commander and all his food

04:30 and personnel and I had dropped some of them off in Port Moresby. By the way and from then on we went to Biak and we navigated there ourselves the second pilot and myself to handle this I got to Biak and I landed but I was on the wrong aerodrome. It was just a strip

05:00 made of coral, that's another thing with the corals, they are pure white just like a sheet of paper and very hard on your eyes when you're landing and it's all crushed coral, pure white so when I landed I was on the wrong strip so I took off again and only had to fly a few miles really and landed there and handed it over thank God and got rid of that bomb.

05:30 But there were two other aircraft that took off but they never got to New Guinea. They sort of, I remember seeing one on a later flight to New Guinea on the Cooktown aerodrome and I think another one stayed at Townsville. They never got any further, they all should have stayed.

Because they were simply that run down?

Oh yes, worn out, Mark 3's they were that's before they had a front turret come on later, very early.

06:00 **And the Lend Lease agreement involved the Americans, planes to the Australian Government and they were being returned because they were at the end of that contract or agreement was up?**

Oh yes, it was just plain red tape you know, you're in the hands of some clerk of something I know somewhere. I delivered a Liberator to somewhere and I forgot to get a signature and the world came to an end.

Did you feel like a lot of the work

06:30 **in Australia was administrative and red tape and...?**

No, I think that was the only one that I could... when I left Laverton I went to Richmond and there I converted on to a Ventura, that's like a super dooper Hudson with 2000hp [horse power] engines.

07:00 **Can you explain in more detail about the Ventura?**

Well I have a photo that we can have a look at later.

How does it compare to the Hudson?

Oh very powerful, the Hudson had 1250 hp engines Pratt and Whitney and the Ventura had 2000 hp, that's two 2000 hp engines

07:30 (UNCLEAR) Pratt Whitney twin (UNCLEAR) wasps.

And what was her particular strength in terms of work, was she good in transportation?

Well that's what I used to do well. What I'd do from Richmond, I would lead the fighters up to New Guinea that was the idea and bring the pilots back and so we were all under control. One flight I did up there

08:00 to lead Spitfires up to Morotai that's further on about a three hour flight across from Biak to Morotai. You cross the Equator and so I led the Spitfires up on this occasion and I had aboard

08:30 I think it was 5 Mosquito crews, that's two, pilot and navigator and they, the Mosquito pilots were to bring back the Mosquitoes that were up there. They were to bring them back, should have left them there because some were and eventually we got to Morotai. But before that

09:00 when I left from Hiddensfield across into Moresby this time I was going to Dutch New Guinea to a place called Merauke very flat where the mosquitoes are, and I think I got malaria from there. They used to have where they used to examine mosquitoes for malaria, there was a base there where they experimented because there were mud flats and all this

09:30 and when I landed there I was approached by the leader of the Kittyhawks, Dutch Kittyhawks squadron to order to lead them over, I was going over the top of New Guinea a very high point to Hollandia and they wanted me to lead them because they didn't want to do it on their own because if you go down up there you're finished, you're gone, so I said right-o.

10:00 So I had Spitfires one side and Kittyhawks on the other, so I took photos of them from the aircraft.

Can you explain why you were needed to lead them; was it simply your navigational ability?

No, no I was more experienced than I realized you know when you look back and you just accept a job that you were doing and so I was

10:30 the leader and you had all the responsibility and if anything went wrong with anybody communications, it was done through me and the other pilots would have to come to me if they had a problem so they could work it out.

So it was safety in numbers with the idea behind you leading these groups...?

Yes, it all went there, we were the leaders. See I had a navigator and the wireless operator and a mechanic

11:00 on board our aircraft and any problems in the mechanical sense he could fix it.

How many, was it four man, four personnel man on the Ventura was that right?

Yes, counting the mechanic, we had no Gunners we didn't require them and anyhow we landed at Hollandia and I left Kittyhawks there.

11:30 I have a very good photo of them I coaxed them into the wing tip you know high like this and we eventually got to Morotai and that's where the Spits stay and now the Mosquito pilots they went out to their aircraft that they were going to bring back and one aircraft took off, another one started

12:00 to take off and fell to bits at the end of the runway and the pilot and they got out all right. See the Mosquito was built in England, it was made of ply and glued together and a different climate, they brought it out to the tropics and it just started to sag really, they refused to fly them, they all came back with me, they'd rather risk flying with than flying Mosquitoes.

12:30 And anyhow we took off to come back and what I should have done was to take off and fly to Biak wait the day and then fly on and take off in the morning and of course the cloud in New Guinea is so violent how they build up early. So

13:00 later on into these big thunder head clouds and which you're flying above them, which I did like they're waiting to devour you and amazing sight really and I thought I would give this a go and I'll go straight through Merauke on the south coast of Dutch New Guinea. So we set off and getting toward the mountain

13:30 and the clouds are sitting there behind me and the boys in the car are all coming back the air crew they're all playing cards and things like that. Anyhow I'm flying towards these mountains and I'm just

sitting above them but they keep coming up you see, creeping up and I turned around and looked down the back of the aircraft and they were all asleep, so what's going on

14:00 I looked at the altimeter and we were at 15,000 feet without oxygen and I thought oh my God lack of oxygen. They had all gone to sleep and I could have gone like that too, so I went straight back to Hollandia, I dropped my height straight off, not good. No, the weather up in New Guinea is totally different to the desert and flying in England.

14:30 **Was it purely getting up in the air that you were able to learn about those conditions or was it discussed amongst the pilots, was there any training?**

No, you can't, you've got to go through it. No there's no other way you've got to go, particularly if you are on bombing you know and you're got targets you've got to fly through them, not too good.

15:00 **Explain the main differences in terms of weather conditions between Europe and the tropics.**

Oh well it's totally different. In Europe it's so cold on top of it, and apart from the weather, it's so cold flying at night over Europe. There was one raid in Europe that I went on we thought we were in trouble. We thought we were going to have to bale out over the mountains but the mountains

15:30 were up at least 10,000 feet so we climbed to 17,000 feet and we thought we were going, we couldn't find our way back and from here, down, I couldn't feel a thing. Oh a terrible feeling and even my hands had gone like this but...

What's your greatest meteorological threat, what's the most dangerous element of the weather?

16:00 Well I told you the story when I was coming back from Genoa and I flew into a cumulus nimbus you know it threw us up about 1,000 feet and we thought we were gone but that would have been the worst one that I'd had but we were still there somehow.

And in New Guinea and in the Pacific

16:30 **what was the main threat on the weather? What was the most dangerous?**

The build up of clouds, you can't see more or less where you're going, don't go that's what you do.

Is there any distinction between the clouds in Europe and the clouds in New Guinea?

Cumulus clouds develop in New Guinea and they develop up to a great height, but in England,

17:00 Europe I should say, it's all Europe, you're flying into clouds just like you have here but it's so cold and you know it goes on for so long. The fronts move across Europe so quickly and the forecasts and they can only forecast certain weather conditions.

17:30 I can remember when I was on the conversion course on the Hudsons and we were up on the night cross, across country flight one night and this gale hit and came across from the Irish Sea, you know in the Atlantic, a 80 knot gale

18:00 hit us. Well, gee, I had the auto pilot on thank goodness and I reckon it saved me and we were flying like we were on a bucking horse and I was controlling with the automatic pilot and it helped a lot. I think in my opinion, don't know what others thought but I was alive and saw one of the

18:30 aircraft burning on the ground there and he couldn't handle it and I think he didn't have the automatic pilot on. It just throws you all over the sky with extreme violence. I think the weather in Europe affected my nerves more than the heavy flak I'd been through. I do and I think...

19:00 **Was it more unpredictable than the conditions you faced in the south Pacific?**

Well, it was very unpredictable the weather over Europe.

That's what I mean, in contrast to the stuff you were doing up in New Guinea, was it more unpredictable, more dangerous? Could it catch you unawares more easily?

I think I could in my own personal opinion I ran into a lot of bad weather particularly going to Genoa over there.

19:30 **In New Guinea was it a case that every afternoon you would have this big build up of cloud?**

Oh yes it started at midday and you knew it was pretty well on its way as far as I can remember (UNCLEAR) unless they were flying down low. You know underneath the clouds and over the sea and you were going somewhere,

20:00 well they just wouldn't fly. You just wouldn't fly into clouds, too many hills, rocks.

What about the Middle East and North Africa what was your most significant weather challenge?

Well sandstorms. You heard about my story when I flew over our base in a sandstorm, but a lot of times the weather was good.

20:30 But unfortunately a lot of our work on the Hudsons we flew very close to the ground and of course in the heat of the day in the desert you hit the turbulence and unless you get up above the layer of cumulus cloud and get into smoother air, but down like you're flying in formation on the deck.

21:00 Bit dangerous.

How deep were the dust storms? Were they comparable to normal cloud formations that you had experienced in Europe and ...

Oh they'd come up a couple of thousand feet and that's normal I think or three thousand maybe.

So it was easy enough to get up above them was it?

Oh yes, yes there were times you wanted to come down, you can't be up all of the

21:30 time. You've got to come down. That's how it is we flew over our base and never saw it.

How dangerous was the dust to the mechanics and the maintenance of your plane?

Yes very hard. I gave you the example when I did that test flight and the armourers put the grease over the guns trying to protect it, there's no hangars and things, all the services was done by the mechanics

22:00 and they had a hard job.

Could that be dangerous or potentially lethal within a single flight if you got caught in a dust storm or something like that? Could you get enough dust and sand through your engines to cause significant problems?

Well I have, when the air is sucked in but I never had any trouble like that. I never worried as long as the propellers turned whatever happens that's all that matters.

Tell me about your trust and

22:30 **and faith you had in your ground crews?**

Well, as I say before you live in this environment you know getting killed and this sort of thing and mechanics are working with us I personally thought you just accepted it. They were doing their jobs and I was doing mine and the air crew were doing theirs

23:00 and the ground staff were doing theirs and we all sort of worked together. You know they were trying to get us in the air, you know I never thought a great deal I just sort of accepted it as the normal thing.

Was there a good relationship between your ground crews and your air crews?

Well, there was no reason not to have any we all got on all right. I never had air crews.

23:30 Well I'm talking about in the desert; no we just all got on.

Was there much social interaction outside?

No, well in the desert there is nothing to go to, I never had any holidays or leave I was

24:00 on 15 months on the first squadron and I never had any leave there was nowhere to go.

Didn't that make the people you were with even more important? What did you spend your spare time doing?

I just slowed down and looking at the air or something there was nothing really to do.

You kept a journal of that time?

I kept a diary, a half diary, sometimes I'd, on my second tour, I kept a very detailed

24:30 diary which I have there and what I used to do the first day I joined the heavy bombers I would go to a briefing and when I came back from the briefing I would write the diary up where I was going, what we were doing, mining or bombing and the following day when I came back and had our sleep and woke up.

25:00 While it was still fresh in my mind I wrote the rest of what did occur and I kept a complete diary on that detail, interesting to look back on it at times.

Was it useful at the time in terms of helping you cope with your situation or to...?

Oh no I kept in case I didn't come back.

25:30 Oh, Jesus.

26:00 Oh boy, Jesus. Just one word was enough to set me off

26:30 **Which of those words was it?**

I actually kept it case I didn't come back; my mother would get the book.

Did you include any of your feeling or emotions in the diary, what happened?

27:00 No, I never put emotions, oh dear; I suppose it had to come, yeah.

That diary was used years later; you shared it with your wife? It gave her a chance to read what you had been through?

Yes, I think so, she's seen some of it. Yeah.

27:30 Although, not many people have seen it. I'm nearly right now. Oh Jesus.

Is the diary important in keeping your memory's distinct as well in remembering exactly what happened?

I haven't read the diary for years, not for years.

28:00 That's how it goes.

Do you remember telling us about your work operations up in New Guinea, we'd moved on to talking about the Ventura's and

28:30 **transporting troops up to and transporting the Mosquitoes back from Morotai? (VERY UNCLEAR)**

Yes, I did a few trips up around there, of course my last flight on the ferry this was. Ferrying it was on the aerodrome at Richmond. We had a

29:00 Hudson (UNCLEAR) and it was to fly VIP's very important persons] around and I knew the pilot. He was one of the pilots that had come back from Canada and he had been down with malaria and I hadn't flown a Hudson for over 2 years and he was called Gordon Werrin [?],

29:30 his name and the Hudson had two types of engines, Cyclone engines or Pratt & Whitney engines, which had different engine reading. I'd got a copy off him I must have been a clairvoyant or something so I got those from him on a little bit of paper and lo and behold they picked on me, I hadn't flown one for 2 years.

30:00 There were a lot of other Hudson pilots around but they picked me and I thought "What's going on?" and I realized after it was all over, they realized that I had had a bit of experience you know, so I had to fly a VIP, I think it was an air commodore and staff in New South Wales, that was the last time I flew before I went down with

30:30 malaria. I always remember on the flight the air commodore was worried when we were going into Tamworth there were high tension wires across the end of the aerodrome and he was worried about these high tension wires, anyway I got there I just flew over the top of them and landed with no problems

31:00 and I had to fly him around a bit and flew him back to Mascot and then back to Richmond and that was the flight before I went down with very bad malaria that was the end of my flying career really, I got wiped out.

Can we just go back one second, which squadron were you flying with in Australia?

Testing Ferry.

Testing Ferry and it wasn't a specific squadron?

No.

31:30 **So that's why you were flying the Venturas and the Hudsons.**

Oh yes, I was all set up. I had done the cockpit deal to fly Mosquitoes but was too busy to get me to fly one, I was sort of detailed away.

Was it ever a frustration to your ultimate aim of being a fighter pilot?

Oh no, I was just lucky to have survived, in the end the novelty wears off or something.

32:00 I got on to the bigger aircraft and went the opposite way. You sort of accept it.

Tell me about being struck down by malaria, what did that do to you?

Oh terrible. I can remember I was meeting an air gunner down at Wynyard station

32:30 and he had come back to Australia and he was going back to his mother's place for dinner that night and all of a sudden I just felt terrible, I got a taxi and went to this place, all the veins in my head were bulging coming right out and the taxi got over to Haberfield but my mother, and I was very bad, she rang the air force

33:00 and they sent an ambulance out and they took me to some place over in the Vaucluse area. I arrived there and the doctor said "Oh you've got the flu" and I said "I've got malaria" and they took a test off me and in the morning they had to come in and tell me that the medic was wrong and that I was right, geez I was bad.

Did you ever think it was an occurrence of the sand fly fever?

33:30 Oh no. I've never heard of sand fly fever in this country personally, it might be around I wouldn't know.

They are similar symptoms you said yesterday wasn't it?

Same symptoms.

Was it more painful? Was it more aggressive than malaria when you experienced the sand fly fever?

Well with sand fly fever you sort of went through a cycle and it finished but malaria it doesn't, you know I ended up in Kalgoorlie hospital I was

34:00 105.6 [degrees Fahrenheit] for a week, I think I would have died of it had I been up in the islands. They worked on me here and I spent weeks in the hospital and then they sent me down to recuperate at the naval base at Nowra and I was there for some time and

34:30 eventually moved up and was discharged.

At what point did the war end during that experience? Was it while you had malaria that the war ended?

Before I think, I think it was before. I had been up in New Guinea with it and come down with it very close at the time.

35:00 **Do you recall hearing about the end of the war? Did you recall the circumstances in which you heard that there was victory in the Pacific?**

I was on my way back to New Guinea or to the islands and I think we got to Townsville that's where I heard of it, that is right.

Do you recall the response, the reaction of the people around you?

I was very happy.

35:30 Pretty happy, very happy.

Was celebration too strong a word? Were people celebrating or were they just relieved?

I think relief, yes, there was much celebrating, just a few people we happened to be with, I can't recall too much about it,

36:00 you know it was over 60 years ago. We've got to go back to Italy, those experiences.

If you would like to cover them now, no we will continue on and we will come back to that later. You recovered from malaria, how long was it before you were discharged?

Oh I suppose

36:30 the malaria dragged on but...

How long after the end of the war were you discharged?

Oh I think about four months round about, that it was the 29th January 1946 I was discharged.

37:00 **And was that a happy or sad experience?**

Oh yes, well you're sort of in a lost world maybe and what you're going to do? You don't know, you only knew one thing and nobody wants an ex-pilot really you know in other capacities.

Were there any opportunities in the civil aviation?

37:30 There could have been particularly for a while back then I never looked at the money side of it and maybe I should have but after what I had been through with that type of flying. It might sound silly, but it was rather boring and I thought flying from Sydney to Brisbane and Brisbane back to Sydney, Sydney to Melbourne it wasn't

38:00 for me. I was motivated towards more active and different things and you never knew what you were

doing, that's the way I was but of course a lot of chaps went into commercial and into QANTAS [Queensland and Northern Territory Air Services] and TAA [Trans Australia Airlines] and different ones.

What decision did you make, where did you go from there?

I studied horticulture

38:30 after the war for three years and then I ended up in the Department of Agriculture and that's where I spent my working days for them.

Tape 6

00:33 **I just wanted to go back to the beginning of the story and work through and get a bit more detail. Could you tell me initially what Haberfield was like to grow up in?**

Well Haberfield was what was called the first garden suburb of Sydney, you know where they had a decent size of a block of land then the next suburb Leichhardt was a very old suburb and there was a train line

01:00 between the two and you went from one world to another, totally different. Haberfield is full of Federation houses we lived in. In fact I lived in two eventually when I came back from the war to my mother's place, she had moved back from Bondi to Haberfield where her brothers lived and

01:30 very nice suburb, no hotels or anything like that in that suburb at all.

Was there much for a kid to do?

You get into trouble like normal children, throw stones at the wrong places and yes, I seemed to grow up there all right.

What did your uncles do for a living?

One was a train driver and the other one was with

02:00 the Maritime Services Board on the pilot ship, he was an engineer. They more or less brought me up.

They were strong influences on you?

They were very good people, thoughtful and they would do anything for anybody, those kind of people.

And they were your mum's brothers?

Yes. They were

02:30 born in Scotland and my mother was born in Australia and they came out.

Did they have a very strong notion of the Empire? Was that important to them the Empire?

They just accepted it, in those days it was just a normal way of life. You didn't have all those foreign people that you have here now.

03:00 It was just the mother country and all this and you just went on, it was just our way of life, we're all descended from over there in the United Kingdom, the Irish, Scottish and the English, the Welsh and all those it was just a normal way. I always remember there was one Italian,

03:30 a red headed Italian and he had a shop in Haberfield and you know there would be just the odd one around it was just as though you were in England and not here that's because we followed the same traits of the English which wasn't right, of course we moved, blue eyes, we'd come from a

04:00 cold country and our ancestors to here and it was really wrong, that's why we get sun cancers and all these things.

Can you tell me more about being a Legacy boy and the sort of work Legacy were doing?

Well I didn't know what was going on, I was only young. I didn't know much about what they were doing themselves.

04:30 You just went here and taken there it might have been, but even to this day they do marvellous work.

Was it a financial support for your mother?

I couldn't tell you that as I have said I didn't know what they did, I don't think so, they would give the mother advice

05:00 and guide them like they do today.

And did they offer social opportunities for you or what exactly did it mean for you?

Not much really you know you're, what do you do, you wander around and you don't think much about those kind of things, so eventually they got me when I left school, they got me out of the Depression years.

05:30 They got me jobs which I didn't like but I did very well in but there was Tech and all this.

How much did you know of your father's war service?

I knew he'd been on Gallipoli and I've got his medals inside. He was a professional soldier; he was in the Gordon Highlanders

06:00 in Scotland and he went out to India and there's a medal there from Queen Victoria's reign and he went out to the Boer War with Queen Victoria's reign and she died during the Boer War but he was on Gallipoli and was taken off with pneumonia

06:30 which was a serious thing in those days of course and back to Australia to recuperate. And then he went back into France where he got gassed which shortened his life down a bit, like most people who were gassed there and (UNCLEAR) to be like heavy smokers today

07:00 damaged their lungs a lot. Don't know much, so that's about all I knew about him that he came back gassed, he died in military hospital somewhere in (UNCLEAR) at the time many years ago of course but I never knew him. I can't remember, lucky to have a photo of him there.

07:30 **Did your mother talk about him?**

No, not a great deal. As I say I was a young boy growing up so, no I can't remember much at all because I never, I must have met him of course but I can't remember anything unfortunately.

Do you think the

08:00 **influence of Legacy on your early life, did that give you a sense of civic duty or responsibility to the community?**

No, I don't think, no, I never thought much about it but I don't think so, as I say I was a child and you don't think about it much at all.

What was it then about being an air force pilot in particular, where did that

08:30 **influence or that idea come from?**

Well I have a book over there I could show it to you and it's all on the Royal Air Force and that book there, I'll show it to you later, influenced me a lot, it's just sort of me, and you know and being a printer it wasn't my way of life, I'd always wanted, just something.

09:00 Some men might want to play with dolls but I wasn't that way inclined. No, I just wanted a young man's adventure, some people aren't that way but I was and of course the war came and I got it all a bit more than I needed but.

You signed up in the August of '40

1940 it was when I actually went in, I signed up

09:30 **When did you sign up?**

Well you see I went for the interview in February 1940, that was the first interview.

Did you ever consider joining the army, was there any thought?

No, no I think I had a call up for them or something but the air force, I was in and placed on the air force reserve after that.

And what about your mates, were any of them going off and joining the...?

No.

10:00 I seemed to be the only silly one.

Did you speak to your uncles or your mother about your decision or did you make up your mind yourself?

I think I had my mind made up, yes.

Do you recall how she responded to the news?

No too far back, she wouldn't be jumping up and down I don't think, not a pilot at training.

10:30 **Your uncles, do you remember their reactions?**

No, I can't remember. I don't think they would be jumping up for joy.

Do you remember their reactions post war, were they proud of the things you'd done?

Oh yes that I'd came back.

I'll bet your mum was pleased to see you?

Oh yes. When I was away I had 46 months deferred pay.

11:00 You get paid on a higher rate on the deferred pay so that's how long I was away, you know just under four years, a long while when I think of these boys who go over to the Gulf and they're coming back in months almost, good luck to them, we couldn't get back, no way, we were all isolated over there

11:30 and that was it.

I'm also interested in the fact that this took part in 1940 when you enlisted, July and August had been the build up to the Battle of Britain and there had been a lot of aerial warfare, were you seeing any of the newsreels or newspaper coverage?

I've got a few papers there from different places but down in the garage. I've got some old newspapers.

12:00 I might be able to find them for you if you are interested in the headlines.

Did that inspire you or scare you at all the intensity of the aerial combat?

No, we just accepted it.

Did you imagine that you were going in to defend the motherland, did you think that would be where you would be flying?

Oh yes, yes.

12:30 **Was there ever a disappointment that you weren't serving in England, fighting in England that you were down in the desert later in some unit?**

I was in 2 group on Blenheims. I don't think I would be here today if I had gone that way, you've got the luck that goes with it. You've got no control over your postings. I should have gone to that squadron and for some reason they picked me for a conversion course.

13:00 The other chaps, while I finished the conversion course, most of the others are gone; I've got photos over there of that course so I just had luck in my postings. Well some poor devils never come back from one trip, I've seen that happen.

What did you know of the Empire

13:30 **Air Training Scheme when you signed up, it was a very fresh course...?**

Yes it was just starting up.

Did you understand what it was all about when you signed up?

I think so (UNCLEAR) drill, there was a lot of study involved in it and I had a hard grind. Well you know you're sitting with chaps who are already qualified, you know been through

14:00 but I was one of the younger ones, you can see by my face in the picture, the big baby faced thing.

Were you very dedicated to your study at that stage?

Oh yes, I used to grind into it, made the effort, I was dedicated to try and get through I wasn't brilliant in the theory but after I got rid of that first instructor at Mascot

14:30 I sort of took to it and never looked back and I seemed to be a natural, it just sort of suited me but.

You were on number 4 course, were they still having teething problems in the organization or were you impressed by how well organized it was?

I think I was happy, I was happy that I was still going you know

15:00 cause one seems to move sideways and didn't know they weren't making it and in my time you had to go solo when you were starting about 10 hours. You see and if you didn't make it there were others coming and move them sideways, a lot of navigators were scrubbed pilots, a big percentage.

In your initial training were you

15:30 **selected for your specialization at that point whether you were going to be a gunner, a pilot or a navigator?**

Well that was when I went before the selection committee.

Was that at the end of Bradfield Park? Was it at the end of your initial training?

No, that was in January I went before the board to be selected and you had a medical examination if you were successful, I always remember I wrote to Canberra

- 16:00 and got my record of service and a copy of that interview was there, I had to laugh on it, they wrote down on the bottom, "Excellent officer type" and I ended up the longest serving sergeant in the air force.

And they had noticed your potential that early?

Yes, you know I had to laugh, we just disappeared off the face of the earth

- 16:30 as far as the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], some clerk in the office was asked to look for us and couldn't be bothered I suppose and we just drifted on month after month but we're still alive so it didn't matter.

You mentioned being officer material, good officer material, from your experience of war time experience. What to you are the most important qualities of good leadership?

Something I've never thought about.

- 17:00 Well trying to get on with most people around you, you know setting example, in my case I never drank and I never smoked to start with I never had any trouble getting crews.

Why do you think you never took up drinking or smoking?

Well I never liked it you know, to this day smoking they've got no brains, what's wrong with them.

- 17:30 People can damage themselves and drink, there's nothing wrong with a drink but when we came back from the bombing raids frozen like a block of ice there was a rum issue, you know Nelson's blood, and they'd put it in a cup of tea for us but I wouldn't take, worse thing I ever did when I look back, it would thaw us out, you know terrible.

So just go back to

- 18:00 **qualities do you think there were, any other qualities that you expected in leaders of yours?**

Oh I think they take on certain jobs and set an example to others but as I say as a captain of an aircraft all those years as sergeant pilot,

- 18:30 the rank didn't mean anything to me. I flew generals around and people and it never really meant anything to me and they respected me and I remember I flew (UNCLEAR) and finished in North Africa the general commanding the 53rd Island division. I flew him down from Tunisia to Cairo we landed at El Adem to refuel and you know he came up

- 19:00 and talking to me and I can remember to this day he said he had his son at the Grammar School in Sydney. But you know they respect you for what you are. I was the pilot of the aircraft and eventually I got a commission and it didn't mean much to me cause I had been in that position all the time you know.

- 19:30 As a warrant officer in the RAF you were addressed as "Sir" and you didn't get a salute and you know it wasn't and I got a commission and somebody would salute you and you'd get a fright and I'd made some decisions.

Do you think your modesty or lack of arrogance saved your skin on a few occasions?

Oh I don't know about that.

- 20:00 I don't think so somebody's got their name on a shell or something in other words you're lucky, you must have luck with you.

Have you got any deeper philosophies on that luck, it must have played on your mind over the last 60 years, "What is this luck business and why was I so lucky?"

Yes, well

- 20:30 when you look back on some poor devils they went so early. Bert Eddy a famous pilot got killed so.

- 21:00 Take a big breath, nearly right.

- 21:30 **Take your time.**

Right.

Have you got any

- 22:00 **grander or bigger philosophies on luck?**

In regards to the war of course.

In general, you were so lucky, you had so many lucky escapes I just wonder at the time you spent contemplating that has given you any inside thoughts about that and what it's all about?

Yes, oh well I can't

22:30 place it really.

Are you a religious man?

No. No religion at all, no, nothing at all.

Other people that you flew with or were involved with rely on religion quite heavily or rely on their faith quite heavily to cope?

Oh I suppose so, I really didn't interfere. I never asked them.

23:00 You know all the time, particularly through the North African desert there is no church there to go to, a minister might come round once in a blue moon. I'm talking about people with religion who where involved but that was all out of respect that's all.

Did you contemplate those sorts of ideas much, that you

23:30 **were losing a lot of friends and you were facing a lot of dangerous situations?**

Religion?

You didn't contemplate God?

No, no way. No when you're gone you're gone. If somebody wants to have a drink of something well that's their business, it's the same with religion, that's their business.

24:00 No, I won't say any more on religion, it's not my line. I might offend somebody else.

I'm just wondering what it was then, what was your vice or what was the thing that helped you cope, you didn't drink or smoke...

I didn't have any lucky charms or anything like that.

24:30 **You didn't have any lucky charms, what kept you going through such difficult times?**

Well, I just did the job that was presented to me and we just took off and it just went that way.

When things did get really tough what did you think about or focus on or what did you tell yourself to push through?

Well, I did get to the stage

25:00 on my second tour, well say it was a good three quarters of the way through it and I might be lucky to get shot down, it sounds silly, and you become a prisoner of war and I'd be alive. I did reach that stage at one stage but you know I kept going and other poor devils never come back, yeah I did reach that stage

25:30 and I thought "I'd be still alive as a prisoner of war". No I can't say anything more than that and that's that.

I want to ask you about that second tour and you'd been off operations for some time, had you been ill and just recovered from

26:00 **yellow jaundice, that decision for a second operational tour?**

No, I wasn't too bright when I look back on to it.

There's got to be more to it. Was there an overwhelming sense of duty?

Yes, it was there definitely.

Were you addicted to the flying?

Maybe.

26:30 When I look back, maybe I was a little bit that way, yes I wanted to do this and I wanted to do that. When you are on operations you start to get, "Oh I've been to that target, been to that one", you know certain things happen and you start to collect them a bit, maybe, you just did your job.

Was there a macho element; is that what you're talking about, a macho or a competitive element?

27:00 No, I never thought about that, I don't think there was nothing to do. We were all in the same boat you know, we had nowhere to go.

You had the option not to go yes on that second tour?

Well, there was no reason for me to go and ask as I say I wasn't too pricey.

Did you have something to prove, did you

27:30 **have to prove yourself?**

Oh I don't know about that, I just wanted to fly in the war you know. I don't know it's just one of those things which occur when you are a young man you're a different person you know, as I say you're not too bright and you look back on the close calls you had,

28:00 the same thing happened.

Was there respect that came with having done the second tour? People that you worked with, did they look up to you?

What do you mean work?

Oh sorry, other people who you were flying with and when you returned to Australia, was there respect that came with being a tour man?

Well I don't know [UNCLEAR] would have done. I can the first time I went to England, you know,

28:30 I spent nine months in England actually and I saw a bit of it and you used to see these chaps that came back from the heavy bombing raids and it did restrict them oh very much so, now that's interesting it's brought me back. When I was on the Liberators well I had

29:00 then I went on the Blenheims, I was one of the first Australians. When I went to draw my battledress uniform they didn't have any Australian ones, they hadn't come through, so I was issued with an English one. I've still got it down there in the garage; the moths might have eaten it. So it was a blue/grey type, totally different, I wore it right through the

29:30 desert and all over and never had water to wash it. It was easy to get petrol and wash it in. I had this English air gunner come up to me and he said, "I would like to buy your battle jacket", well I thought a strange request. So I said, "Why would you want to buy this thing?"

30:00 He said, "Because it looks so operational." You see looking through his eyes, to me just an old suit but in his eyes, he knew I was a second tour pilot by the uniform, the battledress, in his eyes, I never thought anything of it and that's why when I had to go to Palestine they gave me that new uniform

30:30 from the other pilot that had been killed. So it's just through the other people's eyes, you don't know, you don't know, you accept it, what they're thinking and I said the same thing when I saw the boys come back from raids over in Europe. When I first went there, I respected them very much you know, it goes on how the other (UNCLEAR).

31:00 **Can I ask you about flying transport as opposed to being dedicated bombing, would you just do bombing runs occasionally in amongst the transport or would you be transporting and carrying bombs at the same time? Explain to me about that.**

Yes, that's right. Well it depends how the situation was. When the line

31:30 burst through at Alamein and drove Rommel back that's what we were doing all the time, we were right forward behind the troops to get the bombs in, the ammunition and the fuel and it made a big difference then. Really this is the first time transport aircraft was used to get it all up to the troops or whoever it was and the fighter bombers they could go

32:00 out and get bombed up and fuelled up and go further ahead and this is what happened. You see Rommel came down and he had these long lines of communication and they had run out and this time the aircraft brought it up to them all the time and brought the casualties back, see, army casualties.

Had your planes been modified to transport planes or were they still...?

32:30 They took the gun turret off the back later.

They were capable of being sent out on a bombing raid or simply carrying troops...?

Oh, carrying troops. Oh yes, we did a lot of that.

Were modifications necessary for troop or casualty transportation?

No, they just bundled them in and when we took off

33:00 in the Hudsons and got them all forward away from the tail and when we got airborne they could settle down and move back. Oh no, only the turret was the only thing that's it and the two front guns were still

there.

Were you ever frustrated about working transport as opposed to front line flying?

Yes. I never wanted to get into more action. I was stupid; yes I was that way I tried to get

33:30 off the squadron but they wouldn't let me go and that's why they kept that aircraft for me when I did go down to India.

What percentage of your work would have been actual bombing raids?

The second tour that was bombing and mine laying, laying the mines.

34:00 **Just while we're on the transportation issue when you were flying the Hudsons yesterday you spoke about the Jamaican air gunner, it fascinated me and I was wondering how many West Indians personnel you came across in your time?**

Well that was one and there was another one another Jamaican navigator, he got killed on Lemmings in England I knew him.

34:30 **They must have really stood out amongst the RAF?**

Well the one that I had he was just no good, he was a bad person. I've got a photo of him somewhere there too and he was bad, but the other chap he was a very nice chap.

Were they Jamaican English? They were living in England or actually Jamaican descent or were they recruited?

No, they came from Jamaica.

35:00 Oh yes they weren't there in England, in my day there was no coloured people in England they were just like us you know, we had the White Australia Policy, no there was nobody. I don't think I saw anybody; America wasn't in the war so we never saw any Americans even.

Were you able to get a sense from either of those Jamaicans that you met as to what their motivations would have been?

No, I never had that much contact with them.

35:30 **It seems air gunner didn't really want to be there.**

No, he'd done a few bombing raids and I called him "flak happy" but he wasn't a good person.

Can I ask you about prejudice in general towards dominion air crew within the RAF? Was there any prejudice towards the Australians or Canadians or the Jamaicans?

Well when I look back

36:00 I feel that they looked down on us as colonials. I think that way at times certain ones, but they were all fair you know, some chaps were very good of course they have that bit of a class distinction which don't and never had

36:30 it was supposed to mean something but to us it never meant much. No we were different at that time.

What about the drinking, in general, as a problem? We've heard from a lot of guys that there were a lot of pilots drinking in the south west Pacific and in the desert, was that...?

37:00 That's not true, there was no drinking in the desert, there's nothing there. Where did you get it from? If there was a special flight somewhere and go and bring it back, there are no hotels in the desert, the alcohol wasn't around to have, England's different.

What about smuggling and the use of planes for people to get their alcohol and support

37:30 **that black market?**

No, not at all, you never saw alcohol in the desert. Maybe at Christmas time there was an effort made to get a bottle. I've got a photo I can show off a group of us all sitting there with a bottle of beer at Christmas, an Italian fighter on its CR42 [Fiat CR 42 Falco] on its back and we're all sitting with a bottle of beer except me

38:00 and that was a special occasion no, there was no alcohol.

What about flying out of England or later in Australia, did you come across alcoholics being involved?

No, I never come across alcoholics but later on I used to think that certain flights that I had been on, early flights you know you've got to be on the ball.

38:30 You know I often think of that if somebody had had a drink or too many how the hell do they cope with it? I'm battling with a fool on and no alcohol. I know somebody, this is not in the desert of course, maybe

it happened in the islands with alcohol, they

39:00 had their hard times, but in the North African desert it was very hard you know accommodation and everything, they wouldn't sit in a tent after the war for a long time.

What was the biggest challenge out there in the desert?

Challenge?

Yes. Was it the isolation? What was the most difficult thing for you to deal with?

Hygiene.

39:30 I was lucky sometimes I would have to do a special flight down to Cairo and you'd go to the New Zealand Club and have a shower, marvellous.

Tape 7

00:36 **Just while we're on that topic I think you said something interesting to have on record, you were saying how difficult it is to deal with the emotional side of things and how it's no good to deal with that, why did you feel like that, why is that?**

Well you get the feeling and it's not nice, you don't enjoy it.

01:00 It's very distressing, emotion and it goes through your whole body, it's just not your mind, it goes through your whole body when you go back on it, I remember when my son was married, his mother-in-law asked me a question

01:30 something about flying and they knew I had been a pilot but nothing about me at all, and she said something about me. I just couldn't answer her, I just couldn't get one word out, the emotion, she hit me on something, it was something to do when I went down with the bombers on fire, something to do with that

02:00 and I was gone. I heard it described once as unseen words, all up there, but that one she posed to me, I couldn't, I apologized next day.

02:30 These things happen but we're all different in that way some of us are lucky not to have these experiences but they're there. You don't get a pension for that. They can be rather hard.

03:00 **With losing so many colleagues and friends throughout the war and you obviously had to keep focused and keep going and put that stuff to one side, did that grief or that trauma ever catch up with you.**

No. You lived in that atmosphere, in that atmosphere, that's what you did for a living.

03:30 **What about when that living was over and when you came back, did it ever catch up with you?**

If I suppose it did I forget now, the mind goes back and you can't stop it. But I remember that I had to go to the Repatriation Department.

04:00 After the war I was very upset, I'm under nerves of the stomach that's part of my (UNCLEAR) now and I had to go to, they sent me to a psychiatrist, a Dr. Page and his brother was a parliamentarian and he said "Explain some of these experiences you had during the war" and I told him about the time I went down with the bombers.

04:30 He said, "That's enough." and he gave me a free treatment and I never claimed a pension. It was one of those silly ones I was trying to do the right thing. I didn't want anything out of the government, I got free treatment but I could have done with the pension. I never worried but I got it later as time went on. It just shows you

05:00 how other people with their experiences but he chose, that's enough, I always remember that interview.

Did you feel that you were treated well by the government when you returned?

I never thought about it really. I never thought about it. I think I was like a lot of other chaps that came back.

Now when you look back were you treated well and looked after?

Well,

05:30 when I came back nobody was there to meet us, nothing. I remember coming in on the troop ship into Melbourne and there wasn't a wharfie there.

How did that feel at the time?

I never thought, you know, "I'm back". No, just nothing.

Were you expecting...?

No, I never thought about it really the troop ship came in.

06:00 (UNCLEAR) that's nearly four years gone you know. No, now of course you've got everything medals and things they give out, oh dear...

Ticker tape parades...?

Oh dear, oh good luck to them I say, they deserve it. They're flying different aircraft and they've got all the facilities on them, Hornets

06:30 and we had nothing when you look back on it.

We were talking just before about people who couldn't cope and either turned to the bottle, people who momentarily lose the plot I guess, like trying to jump out of the plane, did you witness many acts of

07:00 **cowardice or desertion?**

No, not me I never met any really. I don't know whether I told you about the time when I was going to the squadron, poor devil, an air gunner we called up at Shepherd's Hotel in Cairo to pick somebody up, an officer and I think I might have mentioned it, stop me if I did, but he asked to go to the toilet.

07:30 He wanted to go to the toilet and he was away a while and I said "I'll go and find him" and I found him still sitting on the toilet. And I said "What are you doing?" He said "I thought you might have went without me". Poor devil and I found out about him, I coaxed him

08:00 into a van and took him and I took him away. And I found out he had been on Beaufort torpedo bombers in the Mediterranean and there was no future in at all and he got through a tour somehow and he was near breaking. In fact when I was on Liberators we used to pass him around and try to get him on a few trips, and one night we took him and never again.

08:30 It was on the Danube River and poor devil saw spots before his eyes and he's swinging the gun turret around and all the other gunners are swinging their turrets looking for these aircraft that weren't there. Oh, gees it was all like that, we couldn't take him again, but somebody else got him and I hope he got through somehow, but everyone's different.

09:00 **Why did he continue flying operations if he was in that state of mind?**

Well you know the RAF is a bit harder than us, they strip them down and take their rank off them. They're so severe, we tried to get him through a bit like that but we're all individuals, some people frighten easy

09:30 and some people don't frighten at all and we're all made different ways, so we're all different. Quite different just like some people eat foods and different things and some people just don't frighten and other people are frightened of their shadow, that's as simple as that.

Can you tell me about any

10:00 **great acts of heroism that you saw or witnessed?**

No. You see in the air force you don't see anything, you don't go back. But in the army, it's there, when a soldier dies or is killed alongside you or something but in the air force, so many lay in unknown graves. No, it's a different thing, you just don't go back.

10:30 **Can you tell me about your 30th flight of your second tour? The 30th operation of your second tour, talk us through, you know it's your final operation?**

Yes well it was marvellous; it wasn't marvellous until the end.

No that's what I'm interested in, that journey. Can you tell me?

11:00 **Can you take me through it from your briefing?**

Well I just forget, it's in the log book, I think I went to a place called the Turbo [?] in the north of Rome and I was very lucky in my last three trips. They pulled us off defended targets and put us on to communications like roads and railway lines and bridges and things like bombing raids. So no, I don't think we got shot at on the last three trips

11:30 at all. We got off very nicely, so we came back and landed at about 4 o'clock in the morning and I was the last one out of the aircraft and as soon as my feet hit the ground, marvellous, I was there. Finished two tours.

12:00 **Were you proud at that moment?**

Oh I never looked on it like that way. No, I was just there and it was a big sort of relief and a wave came off you and that night I took a photo of the new lot going out and I was finished, and I took a photo of them boarding the wagon, I've got a photo of that too. I took photos of everything.

12:30 **Why was photography important to you?**

Well you know it's hard to say. I think as a photographer really, you see things that other people don't see. I think it's as simple as that and I've always been that way if I can see something that I can record. My wife

13:00 works for underprivileged children (UNCLEAR) and I've taken stacks of photos, albums, recording all the events that have occurred and we look back on them over time and what they do and it's there, it's like a history and that time and second has gone and you can blink your eyes, it won't be back, so the camera records it straight away.

13:30 So I used to see things and when you look through my photos after, you will see what I mean I've got a good collection of photos of all...

Do you think they've been an important influence on the way you have remembered the war?

Oh yes it can take you right back otherwise things can disappear. You can imagine the photos you took

14:00 but the photos tell you the truth. Oh no, it's a marvellous thing to look back not that I do it for those reasons....

What sort of occasions have caused you to pull out the photos over the years since you have been back? What sorts of things inspire you to pull them out and have a look through?

Well something might have happened.

14:30 I'm in the Air Force Association, I'm in the Air Force Association on the Liberator branch (UNCLEAR. I belong to the Bomber Command Association I went to a luncheon last Wednesday, to Parliament House with them, it was a nice day for us.

15:00 We were made welcome, we go down to the Cenotaph first and then go up to Parliament House for lunch and they all had their medals and things around and you talk. You know we're all in the same world, you talk about things, learn things that you never knew about and all different experiences and things really and then on another

15:30 group the Sydney reunion, we would meet at Bardwell Park, that's a marvellous group of air crew and they come from everywhere. Now it's built up and we get together and talk and certain ones stand up and talk about our experiences, amazing, amazing experiences really, so that's how it is.

16:00 So Kay and I very seldom look back on my photos really.

Have you ever met up with the RAF, any of the RAF personnel that you served with?

No, they're all gone.

What about any enemy pilots, have you ever had an opportunity to meet...?

No, never.

16:30 **Did your feeling about the enemy pilots change at all during your wartime experience from what you felt about them when you set off in Australia to how you felt about them...?**

No, I never thought about it, no we were just enemies that's all and they looked on us the same, nothing against them, oh no nothing against them at all.

17:00 **Did you feel any differently about flying in Australia and fighting I guess against the Japanese in direct defence of Australia versus fighting the Germans and Italians in the desert and Europe?**

Well I never got into combat ever but no I had no respect for them because of the way they carried on, the atrocities and things, no they were despised.

17:30 That's about all I can say on that subject.

May I ask you about the Polish pilot that you came across who was smuggling the gold, what did you think of the Poles?

They were good pilots; they were very strong, very strong.

I've heard that a fraction of them were cowboys, did you ever have that experience with them?

No.

18:00 No they were good pilots.

Were you ever serving with them?

No, I never served with them. The army had one pilot a French pilot, Secondier that's what we'd say foreign, being with the Free French.

18:30 That was the only one we had and had any contact with, nobody else.

What about smuggling in general, how widespread do you think that was?

Smuggling?

Smuggling?

Smuggling what?

The Pole was smuggling gold (UNCLEAR) alcohol or gold ...?

Oh I wouldn't know, I wouldn't have a clue I only had this occasion.

19:00 It was a bit of a funny thing to think about when you look back, they moved the aircraft, oh dear.

What about the occasion when you yourself were smuggled that's the word you used, can you tell me in detail about that experience about being smuggled out of the hospital?

Oh dear, I didn't know what was going on to tell the truth. I was that sick I shouldn't have been taken because

19:30 well I was a very sick boy, so they came and got me and all I know I got on the aircraft somehow after that I wouldn't know.

You don't ever recall giving them the go ahead they just sort of turned up...?

I suppose I was willing to go, I didn't know, no I don't know what happened to the pilot when they made him bring me back

20:00 to Cairo and they put me in hospital there.

Can you describe yellow jaundice, what it does to you?

Oh well, it makes you very sick that's all I can say about it, you go yellow and your eyes and you go yellow, terrible feeling and you don't want to look at food just right off, oh it's terrible so I must have been half delirious I was very lucky

20:30 to get the aircraft down on the ground you know just like with the sand fly fever I just got it on the ground and they had to carry me out of it, so very lucky.

Once you started flying in 117 squadron doing the transportation, were people often looking for favours,

21:00 **in terms of transportation of using the plane to take things to people?**

No, no it was really organized, no, only once that happened with those officers in Algiers to take the King's dinner to Tunis.

In terms of carrying loot or anything extra or anything on board,

21:30 **did that have to come through you as the captain of the plane or did it have to go through the CO of the squadron? Did you have to approve of the things to be transported?**

Yes, I had the say on what came on and what didn't. The CO had a job to do and he organized all that but anything outside that...

So there could be unofficial transportation as long as it was cleared with the CO

22:00 **of the squadron or the captain of the plane?**

Yes.

Whether that may be giving people a lift or carrying some bags?

Oh yes. I don't know whether I ever did it but there was an Australian flyer Bobby Gibbs, he was a famous flyer and he was in Tripoli and he was trying to hitch a ride back

22:30 but I was going further up and I couldn't take him. But I would have put him aboard and wouldn't have said anything about it because I knew who he was. I don't know about the rest of the crew, I remember him down there with the parachute hanging on him.

Was there a lot of paper work and red tape that you had to deal with?

No

Was there meant to be?

23:00 I have papers inside from the transport side showing you who's on the aircraft and things and no not much paper work to do.

What happened when there was an accident or an incident say like when the grease came off the guns and splattering across your windscreen,

23:30 **it almost cost you your life was there an official complaint system or was there...?**

That was the finish; I never reported anything like that.

What about something more serious like when you went down with your ammunition and the plane was destroyed, is there an official investigation into something like that?

I wrote a letter to the commanding officer, might have a copy of it even today of what I did,

24:00 and I remember he was a highly decorated man in those days, this is in '42 and he had a DSO [Distinguished Service Order], I think he had been in the Battle of Britain, a Military Cross and a Distinguished Flying Cross and he was killed later not long after and I had to go and see him and tell him what happened and all he did was laugh about it, he didn't say "You did a good job or anything", a different attitude, no "Thanks you did a good job",

24:30 not a bloody word, ha, ha, ha laughed away and this is what you're up against you see and you'd see another CO and they'd give you a good write up something might come out of it but...

There was never any sort of suspicion or concern about what might have happened, they just took your word for the fact that it was destroyed and that?

Well there is nothing there.

25:00 It was destroyed all right. Yes you couldn't find a piece the size of your watch.

What I'm sort of interested in is the amount of freedom and trust that was put in to you and the fact that flying very, very expensive planes and very capable planes around and without having to answer too much to people...?

Well they knew what had happened and it was gone.

A lot of responsibility?

Yes.

25:30 You accepted it, it was one of those things. You're only young men, you know and I remember sitting, I go back to the Liberators and the 4-engine heavy bombers and you're sitting near a captain and you've got all bombs behind you and thousands of gallons of fuel aboard, ammunition and there you are in charge

26:00 you know it's the way things are. They do the same things these days, trained to a certain degree to do it.

Did you have any problems adapting to the Liberator?

No, I just, in fact I did my conversion by accident at night time, I never flew a Liberator to practice in.

26:30 They made a mistake in the schedule or anyhow in the file that I had been placed in and I said nothing and we said nothing and I did my conversion all at night time. I was experienced, this is what you forget about at times, how experienced you really are and did my conversion at night time and never said anything and became a captain.

27:00 **What was it like working with a larger crew?**

Oh it didn't make much difference, there were 7 in the crew.

There were only 7, you didn't have gunners?

Three gunners.

Was the standard crew for the Liberator 11?

Yes the same as, no that is, you're talking about the ones flying here up north.

OK.

27:30 They flew in daylight mainly.

What were the main distinctions then, why were there 11 flying in and out of Australia and only 7 in the desert?

Well they flew in daylight (UNCLEAR) be attacked by fighters but from what I understand here, they flew a long way before they got to a target you know, no opposition. But when they got there, there could be daylight fighters around that's, they had 10 or 11 or more

28:00 and I look at it and gee the RAF (UNCLEAR), the Lancs [B-1B Lancer] had 7, the Halifaxes had 7 and the Liberators night bombers they had 7 too.

So that distinction was that you didn't have men manning the guns, is that right?

They were all manned.

28:30 Well we only had one Beam Gunner; there were two Beam Guns so...

So what were the 3 extra guys doing in Australia in the RAAF?

Well I often wonder, see we didn't carry flight engineers. We didn't carry bomb aimers, the bomb aimers was the navigator on ours, the flight engineer we had a second pilot and a wireless operator is a wireless operator,

29:00 so I often wondered myself. I get the magazines and literature from the Liberator Association and they often put crews in, they're always the ones that fly up north and so all these chaps, made us wonder at times but totally different work night work of course.

29:30 **Was there much shift in terms of flying with a second pilot, did you have to approach your job differently with a second pilot?**

Well they assisted on certain things you know put the undercarriage down on your signal and flaps down for a different reason, that's what I've got to talk about, flaps.

But you were always the senior

30:00 **captain?**

Yes, oh yes. I had a good second pilot.

Tell us about the flaps, this is probably a bit off tune this one?

Oh yes, we were in Italy and what occurred was we were going off one night, I don't know where the target was, it doesn't matter because it all happens on the ground.

30:30 And I'd like to say that that's the runway there and down each side down that side and down that side there was a taxi strip with bombers on them and on one of them was the Liberators and down this side was the Halifaxes and on this particular night I was going to be the first one to go. I was allotted that time,

31:00 pretty black night and the time was coming up to take off, so I moved the aircraft forward and taxied facing down the landing strip the control van is over there waiting to give the go. I had developed a habit since I had a second pilot to do to a check on the vital actions again myself without him.

31:30 So I had called for a 10 degree flap I can remember HTMP [Hydraulics Trim Mixture Pitch] fuel flaps gills gyro, if you miss any of those you don't come back. So it's still in my mind, it's like a telephone number.

Give it again, what was it?

H for hydraulics, T for trim, that's the control, M for mixture,

32:00 HTMP, P that's for the pitch on the propellers, HTMP, fuel check the fuel, flaps I'd called for 10 degree flaps, gills that's on the engines, they open up on you when you're on the ground and you close them when you take off see fuel flaps, gyro, gyro is the (UNCLEAR), the gyro, the artificial horizon (UNCLEAR) is on the ground because

32:30 it could be damaged .

The mix, is that the oil/fuel mix?

Yes, that's right the mixture you put it into four (UNCLEAR) for take off and pitch is all the power you can get. I went through and I came to flaps and I had called for 10 degree flaps because it gives you a better lift to lift you off

33:00 and I (UNCLEAR). I don't know what he did wrong but he gave me four flaps and it was coming right down and the flaps come right down like an air brake really and what happens is this, I soon corrected it. The poor devil was very embarrassed but it can't be helped, the thing is the second pilot starts to call your speed as you're taking off you see but he doesn't start until you get to 90mph miles per hour, not kilometres

33:30 and you come off at 130. Lift her off at 130mph, so we wouldn't have got off the ground you know by the time he got to 90 we would have been in a ditch or going up in flames with all the bombs on board,

of course this has happened on numerous occasions when men have gone in and taken off and bombed up and nothing left that was an unfortunate one.

34:00 **And in Italy, did you want to tell us about the heavy flak you came under?**

I got caught. I did four trips on Genoa, or Genoa depends what school you went to and we were on what you call a nuisance raid and the idea with the nuisance raid, the four that I did were all nuisance raids,

34:30 bombers go over at different hours say an hour apart or two hours apart and sirens go in the city and people working in the factories or in the office, get out and go down into shelters and all this business, psychological warfare. And so on this occasion we took off and terrible weather, we went into flying across Italy

35:00 through the corridor just south of Naples and going to the north and flying up the Mediterranean coast of Italy to Corsica and then from Cape Corse, the most northerly point, I started to climb still in this terrible weather, lightning all over and icicles coming off the props and hitting the side boom and bang,

35:30 bang, you know, St Elmo's fire around the propellers. Many times I have been through that, this is the European weather you know, I started to climb, I wanted to go up to 20,000, so half way between Corsica and Genoa the weather cleared. Not just clear air,

36:00 pitch black night you can't see anything and I kept climbing up and I couldn't go above 18,000 it was that cold, lost my hands and feet you know I couldn't go to 20,000. So we came up and we'd been (UNCLEAR) out the window that's the (UNCLEAR) radar pull the flaps down and as we approached and we came up on the target I started the bombing run.

36:30 The bomb doors were opened up, the navigator is guiding me in and we're just getting ready to let them go, when this mighty wall of flak came up in front of us and "What's going on?" I'd been through plenty of flak but I'm just looking at it right up there and no way through it, so I turned around out to sea and came round.

37:00 Every time I came in, I did three runs, and every time I came in here's this wall of flak. God, can't get in and I said to the navigator "What I'm going to do", he is the bomb aimer, you know, "I think I'm going to outsmart them", I didn't know what was going on. There is a story at the end of this and as I came around on the fourth bloody run, I said "I'll drop a couple of

37:30 thousand feet off and we'll come in this time underneath the flak". I didn't know what they were doing, they had me on radar, predicted radar, predicted flak you see, they knew right where I was, so on my fourth run in I'm coming in beautifully and the bomb aimer was just about to let 'em go when it just closed around us all the flak. God

38:00 help us. I gave the order to jettison and that means he jumped the lot and dropped the whole clump instead of putting down a stick of bombs. They all went down in a cluster, jettisoned and I turned the aircraft into a steep dive and dived and they followed me down all the way and I had this poor rear gunner screaming at the beam gunner and he said,

38:30 "Where's my parachute, how's my parachute?", thought he had holes all through it see. There, as the bombs and shells were exploding, the flashes of them were lighting up the black puffs, the ones that had exploded before they were all around us and crunch, and the sound of the engines. Anyhow I was lucky and got away. I don't know why they didn't get us but anyhow we go back through all the

39:00 bloody bad weather again you know.

At what point did you realize that it was predicted radar?

Oh I knew, it was too accurate they just had us every time.

So your response is just to do something irrational, not irrational but do something that is not predictable?

Oh yes, if I had kept going on a straight line they would have got me so I put it into a steep dive and twisted and turned out to sea.

39:30 **And when you say they were following me down, do you mean the bombs you just jettisoned or the flak?**

No, the flak was following us down and anyhow we came back and went through all the bloody weather again, terrible it was. That's another time I came down through the searchlights and down and it's amazing when I look back on the experiences you get to do it and to be able to have done it but it grows on you and we got back and I

40:00 found I was the only one there. The others had all come back with the weather, they had all turned back so I never got a thank you out of it or anything, nothing and what was I going to say about that, I was the only one there, so it meant I was the one plane there and every time I dipped the wing or blinked my eyes, they knew what I was doing, they were right on me

40:30 and I thought I had all the other bomber force with me and they were all back at base. All sleeping it off,

I was getting cut to pieces, oh laughing now but not then.

Tape 8

00:41 **Just talking about the Liberators and the work you were doing up in Europe on your last tape, you say you were doing mine laying from the plane, can you explain to me how exactly that occurs and how it works?**

Well to drop the mines,

01:00 it was done on a three quarter moonlight night and we'd approach the Danube River at round about 1000 feet with the navigator to find his position we had all these different areas and different runs with a different aircraft to deal and was all controlled by the navy,

01:30 flow of rivers, depths and width and all this business and we would come in at about 200mph and we had no gauges like they do on modern aircraft like our height above the ground or water, so we had to do it visually and you know experience and

02:00 that's about it. We'd try to drop it at about 150 feet, sometimes we were 50 feet and maybe 200 feet, very hard to judge because you're over smooth water and you've got nothing to guide you see and also the banks of the river undulate and go up, the river's coming in narrow

02:30 and wider and all these things, and you don't know what you're coming to at all. It's all done that fast and we had to come in on a dummy run for the navigator to know that he's on the right run and we'd turn away and come round and come straight in doing the run and the mine's gone

03:00 and the rear gunner would report that he had seen it fall into the river and it's OK and then we'd turn away and usually we'd try to fly down river looking for any shipping or barges and strafe them if we did.

Did there have to be any modifications to the planes to be able to dump the mines?

No, no modifications. Well it would be a different bomb raid because they were very large.

03:30 In fact when we went to get in, we entered the Liberator through the bomb bay and they were that large for the mines we carried six on the Liberators and on the Wellingtons they carried two but we couldn't get on with our parachutes on or our Mae Wests [life jackets] on, we used to have take them off and put them on in the aircraft because of the tight fit between getting through. They are very large.

04:00 **What type of mines were they?**

I have photos that I can show you later, they would be from about here to the wall that would be about close to 10 feet long and a good 18 inches or 2 feet thick.

Were they magnetic mines or acoustic mines?

Yes they were a secret type of mine and they were made in such a way that

04:30 they were timed for a ship to go over the top and not explode and they'd think oh two or three and say the fifth ship would come over the top and away she went. So they didn't know what was going on and made it more confusing for the enemy to clear the mines from the river. You know the mines in the river stopped the flow of oil to Germany,

05:00 which was a big thing with this happening in '44 in the middle of '44 and the bombing from Germany. well they were getting the synthetic oil from the factories or refineries where we were getting the main oil and stopping it from flowing and all that had a very big effect on the German war machine occurring now

05:30 and that's about it I think on that one.

At the same time you were also flying diversion flights you were talking about yesterday, could you explain to me what a diversion flight is?

Oh diversion bombing, diversion bombers go over and they're there for one reason to draw the fire away, usually a diversion, you might drop

06:00 them on gun sights or searchlights or somewhere to bomb, so that the mine layers could come in unnoticed. They'd be coming in low under the radar and you wouldn't know but we were on the radar and you're there to be shot at and that's how it goes.

And how are your tactics different as a diversion fighter, are you ready to pull away and

06:30 **manoeuvre rapidly under flak fire?**

Oh yes, if you can otherwise the quickest point, this is the point between two straight lines you know, so

if you can fly in a straight line you're through it quicker than having to...

Would you be out on the peripheries of the artillery range or the anti-aircraft fire?

Oh no you're in range of it, that's what you're there for to be shot at.

07:00 That's it, to draw the fire away from the people to do the job.

Was that the most concerning of operations.

No, it's just another job, no you just take it as granted.

I can't imagine doing that, you're mad all of you. Let's ask you

07:30 **about the bombing over Europe and the controversy that has surrounded it post war. How do you feel about the allegations that people have made about the lack of (UNCLEAR) and the killing of innocent people by the bombing raids over Europe?**

Well, what could you do? God knows how many I must have killed, innocent people, you know but you don't think about it.

08:00 It's the last thing in your mind otherwise you'd end up a nut case, you know. I had a job to do and that was it and you did it like that. I never thought about it, you had enough to think about flying at night time through flak and all this at times, no I never gave it a thought.

08:30 **How did you feel after the war when people were criticizing this?**

I never thought about this, who are they? The easiest thing in the world is to criticize. Oh Jesus, doing it is a different thing.

Did you think about the fact that the Germans were bombing London and killing innocents and that

09:00 **was a revenge or that you didn't consider it?**

No, no revenge. No, we just went out and did what we were ordered to do, you tried to do it what your operation (UNCLEAR) and it doesn't say you're going to do it and so many things can happen if you were successful well and good, bombs always don't fall in the right place

09:30 by any means.

Tell me about the tactics of using dummy runs.

Well that's for accuracy, accuracy makes sure it goes in the right spot, well that puts a higher risk factor around too.

It tells the enemy where you're going to come around, doesn't it?

Yes well you've got to put up with it, so that's how it goes, dummy run.

10:00 No good doing the job if it's not going in the right place, it's just wasted effort and maybe lives.

When was the most dangerous period on the actual run once you've given away through the dummy run, what your course was, did you come under the most intensive attacks on the actual proper raid?

Oh it could be either way it could be on the dummy run

10:30 or the actual run, of course they know you're coming over the mountains and they pick you up on radar when you're down there unless your right down there. It's only when you get right down on the water and then you're under the radar for instance.

You came under intense flak during your dummy run, was it just a border line call about whether to follow through, they obviously had your path that you

11:00 **were going to fly well...?**

Well yes, well if you knew you were on the right spot, you'd come back again and do it. You would take the risk, yes.

Incredibly brave, can I ask you about, you mentioned yesterday that you were kind of lost within the RAF system as an Australian?

11:30 **(UNCLEAR)**

Yes well I wrote to Canberra and got my record of service and there's these cables going backwards and forwards between Kokoda House and Cairo and nobody was finding us then. The later the records showed asking why wasn't this pilot commissioned that was another thing that came up.

- 12:00 I don't know anything about that but the cables were there and we were just lost. My first squadron that I was on we had some, one course wireless and air gunners and we were still sergeants, we were all sergeants. I have copies there that my mother got out of the paper, little articles, asking "Why these pilots who landed in England in September
- 12:30 in '41, September '41 were not commissioned?" You were just a lost force and nobody seemed to worry.
- So you did have a strong sense of, that at the time that you had fallen through the cracks of the system?**
- No, I never worried about it. I was a pilot and I was the captain of the aircraft you know. I was always in charge of the aircraft in what I was going to do so
- 13:00 it didn't make a great deal of difference. We were flying all the time.
- I know the actual rank didn't mean much to you but what about the idea that the Australian services had lost contact with you and that you had fallen through the cracks?**
- I fell through the cracks all right but I never thought much about it. We just went about doing our job you know but
- 13:30 a lot of it I didn't realize really until I got back here. It was a different world here, chaps got their promotions and things well naturally, they were in contact but we were lost over there but we just accepted it.
- Yesterday you told the story about taking off overloaded with the drink water.**
- 14:00 Yes that's right in the watering cans, yeah that trip.
- I was just wondering if the pushing of men and equipment to extreme levels was a common problem? Did a lot of accidents come from pushing the men too hard or pushing equipment too hard?**
- Oh, I don't think so not in my case, no, I don't think so.
- 14:30 You know I took off with that overload of water, you know we had nothing to check the weight of anything, no scales or anything, just put in the aircraft, fill it up which we did and lucky I made it.
- And just hope she goes fast enough to take off?**
- Yeah, that's right, oh well. Flying under these conditions
- 15:00 so, no I never thought anything of it at the time but I knew that it was very close, particularly when the waddies and I'd gone past the boundary and the waddies, little creeks, they were coming up I'd run out of ground.
- Do your recall hearing about Japan's entry into the war?**
- No, we never, oh I was in England then,
- 15:30 7th December, Pearl Harbor I remember that clearly but I was in England then I can't remember much about that.
- Did you feel as though you'd rather be flying down the south west Pacific area?**
- I think a lot of us tried to get back in some way, we had no idea. They had us trapped.
- 16:00 And of course it wasn't easy to get back in those days. You had Japan come in the war and all the sea routes are covered, not too easy it would have been more of a risk getting back than staying there for all I know.
- Did that confusion concern you about actually being involved in the direct defence of Australia?**
- Oh yes, it was always on our mind that. I would have liked to have got back
- 16:30 you know take our part but there was no chance. We really didn't know what was going on and we just went where we were told as I said. I was supposed to go to India and never got there, they changed the direction again for the better unbeknown to me, still breathing.
- When you did make it back and started flying**
- under the allied air force what major differences in the way the Royal Air Force was being run and the RAAF under the allied air force?**
- 17:00 Well it didn't make much difference to me as a matter fact, I just did what I was told, followed the directions to fly here or do this...
- Were there any significant differences**

17:30 **in the way that they operated?**

Not that I know of, you know we're thinking back a long while, this interview should have taken place about 50 years ago, I would have remembered better, a lot of water has flown under the bridge, yes.

What about the American influence, do you recall how you felt about

18:00 **working so closely and perhaps underneath American command back in Australia?**

I never flew under American command, it was always the Australian Air Force and I never had any contact like that at all.

What about working with the Americans when you were going up to Morotai?

No trouble, no they were quite good. I remember one stage, we were going,

18:30 it might have been the time when I had all those Mosquito pilots and I was leading the Spitfires up north flying the Ventura and I had never done it before and I was curious so what the idea with the Americans, we did strange things for them and I know.

19:00 I went to the mess like some of the others did and I bought a bottle of gin which is no good to me and took it up to exchange with the Americans something else they would have had (UNCLEAR) I'd load the Spitfires, they had their ammunition bays full of grog to swap it over and we got up there to deal with them and exchange. Some of

19:30 them have got these American cigarettes and they were very handy, so a bottle of whisky for exchange I had this bottle of gin which is no good to me and I just bought it as a bit of fun really to see what I could do, and I ended up with trousers, shirt, American shirt, you know good quality things and I had a palliasse,

20:00 which you can lay on and sleep on. That's for the exchange for a bottle of whisky and I remember coming back from up there in the Ventura and lifted the plates in the floor and hid all the cigarettes and things in there, not my things, but the cigarettes you know and when we were coming down, flying down, I overshot Townsville so customs couldn't check it

20:30 and landed at Mackay or somewhere. Oh just a bit of fun really to see what we could do but the bottle of whisky got me clothing and a palliasse.

Was that trade and bartering system pretty widespread with the Americans?

Oh I don't know, I don't think so. See we were coming from here, Richmond, right up so we had the facilities to get things but other people

21:00 wouldn't be able to.

Were the customs inspections regular?

Well I never had one. I overshot it, I decided that I had the range to go there and stayed there the night.

But there were permanent customs set up at, say Richmond, was there?

No we didn't have any. I don't remember any customs there but in Townsville they had them, somebody told me so I said "Right".

21:30 It was a bit of fun.

How long after your return from New Guinea did it take to find a sense of normalcy in your life and feeling comfortable with the day to day living?

Oh I think quite a while.

22:00 You know, when I put a set of clothes on to go to work, God I felt funny, peculiar, I think it was a double breasted suit, I thought everyone in Sydney was looking at me. I wasn't used to it, I laugh now but, Jesus, a different world.

22:30 **What did you miss most about the life you had been leading during your war experiences?**

I think (UNCLEAR) and the personnel which are a different group of people we all lived in a different world you see. Once you get out of civilian life you meet other people and had all the excuses.

23:00 They'd (UNCLEAR) but most of them, a lot of them (UNCLEAR) you know all types so...

Did you have any resentment to those...?

I wasn't too happy with them.

Why did you feel that way?

- 23:30 I didn't like them. You know they took advantage, you know they took the good things, look at those people who got on the black market terrible, you know while persons are away risking their lives and people making money on the black market, terrible people and they were just criminals of course, you don't associate with them.
- 24:00 You can't help resenting them, people they are.
- Did there seem to be a strong distinction between those who had been and served and those who hadn't?**
- Well oh yes, well I don't know whether they were ashamed of themselves or you know
- 24:30 they wouldn't give you the credit for what you had been through. Of course you didn't talk to them and tell them what you had been through, you weren't interested in them. So I don't know you can't not avoid meeting these people.
- Do you recall any examples where you felt like that, where somebody who had stayed behind had problems with you as a serviceman?**
- 25:00 Oh I don't know about that. I met some nasty type of people but no just a few here and there but that's enough.
- Was that feeling back towards then, was that reciprocated**
- 25:30 **by a lot of serviceman as well?**
- I wouldn't know what the others thought only me; I wouldn't know what they thought.
- How important then has your associations been, your returned service association?**
- Oh very important although for many years I had no contact and we're a mixed crew and I had to
- 26:00 thank the Liberators. I had a second pilot who was a New Zealander, my navigator was a Canadian, the rear gunner was an Australian and the wireless operator he was a Scotsman and the mid upper gunner he came from Geordie land [Newcastle, England], and Walter Ploughman, he was English, so we were a mixed crew and this is what happened.
- 26:30 That's why I joined the association many years later and followed it up now with what they call the Odd Bods in the Anzac Day marching. They came from all crews and they were all mixed up you see and we had nowhere to go. It's not like in the army and you had joined a battalion and they all came from a certain area, we didn't have that, we came back to nothing, it was very hard and I never had any contact for many years
- 27:00 with the Anzac March until about ten years ago or something you know, you were sort of a lost soul.
- Did you feel abandoned by the experience, all of a sudden, that life and the friends you'd had were gone and the recognition you'd had gone?**
- Oh yes, it was totally a different world. You were just associating with a lot of people who weren't
- 27:30 your type and no interest in what you'd done. Of course you did not say anything, you never spoke about it. I never ever spoke about my things for many, many years. I had an incident once it was the first time that I ever spoke
- 28:00 about a few things and the manager of the Department of Agriculture came up to me and I was in the Agricultural Department and he came down and we went out to lunch together and we're talking away and I realized the way he was talking he was interested in these things and I found out that he had a brother who was a pilot and they lost him over him over Germany and
- 28:30 he himself had tried to be a pilot and he failed and he found he had colour blindness so I opened up and told him a few stories and he said, "Jack, you should write a book". And he said, "You should call it Funny At The Time But...". When I told him a story I would say this to him.
- 29:00 I never knew I was saying it, funny at the time, but... a normal thing but that was the first time that I ever opened up and told anybody of my experiences.
- Was that the first genuine interest you had sensed from people on returning?**
- Yes, as I said I had people up the road there,
- 29:30 up the road there and they've moved in recent years, they came and visited, they knew I'd been a pilot but I had never told them anything and they came and talked to us and I gave this set of tapes on a talk I had given to Probus Club and a couple of books there which I knew,
- 30:00 Australians At War In The Air and they took them away and phoned me up and said "Jack, you used your nine lives up and you were living on borrowed time", so that's how, I had never spoken to them.
- Tell me how you felt about opening up for the first time to that gentleman?**

It was quite a few years ago, I've been retired

30:30 24 years.

It had been so long since you had spoken to anyone when those things started coming up again for you, how did you feel?

I never thought much about it to tell you the truth, I sort of helped him, I felt that I was helping him because he had lost his brother and no I more or less felt that I was helping him,

31:00 not myself, but that's how it goes.

Was it painful for you to revisit those thoughts?

No, I don't think so. It sort of came to me and I saw that he was very interested, anybody not interested I wouldn't say anything but I have spoken to a few young chaps of a few things that I know of, if they were that way inclined

31:30 and have told them a few things.

Has it become more important to you over the years to have the stories recorded?

Well, it's like what we're doing now, I think that it's a marvellous thing, the only thing wrong with it, it's too late. Too late in a lot of cases because I personally know chaps, pilots in particular who are now gone but had some amazing experiences.

Why is it important to you?

32:00 Oh, it's just normal I suppose.

But why is putting down the stories important to you?

Repeat please?

Why is recording the stories important to you?

Well somebody might be interested, that's about it

Did your wartime experiences change you?

32:30 Oh I think so.

In what sort of way?

You'd go away as a boy, didn't know anything, so many things happened you see, you grow up quick.

33:00 **What were the main lessons you learned?**

The main thing of course was not having the wars, nothing's gained, bloody waste time, no nothing gained, just a lot of good chaps gone.

33:30 That's all I want to say on that matter.

Did you learn skills or ways of working that stood you in good stead for later in life, any good things to come later?

Well I don't remember anything really.

34:00 Anything you had, it made it an experience to survive really, sometimes I wished I never had it you know. What I mean, it was what's left in your mind is left forever no, I don't

34:30 just all of a tragedy you see and sometimes you wish you'd never seen it I would've.

What were the best of times through the war experiences?

Oh coming back safely that was the main thing.

35:00 That was the main thing to get back

What were the worst times?

Oh the bad weather, bad weather, and gees it's terrible. I think any pilot who flew over the European area would tell you that (UNCLEAR) night fighters

35:30 and the weather would last for so long, whereas with the flak you were through it and out but the bloody weather would go on for hours maybe, apart from the cold, on top of it all.

Were they your most fearful moments as well?

Mmmm?

Were they your most fearful moments?

Oh, I don't know about fearful,

36:00 I don't know how to put it really you sort of ride with it and you're there and you've got to put up with it and keep going, there's nothing, you just can't say "Right I'll stop". I never had any who turned back some of the chaps would turn back and come back, we're all different you see, some chaps

36:30 would look for any excuse and turn back but I never found that excuse for some reason.

It seems that many of you became more tolerant of that through your work or you accepted that people are different is that how you used to cope?

Oh yes, no doubt about it, certainly people are different and you can see certain chaps and they've got a problem.

37:00 They might have a problem and I mightn't have it or it might be vice versa, so we're all so different so I don't like criticizing anybody. But at least they volunteered to go you know, this is the thing with air crew it's all voluntary, nobody forced you to do it

37:30 and you see some things and they shouldn't be a problem and they are dealt with rather harshly. I didn't like seeing some of that but I never had a problem with those things and with those chaps around me were pretty good.

Did you bring any regrets back with you?

38:00 I don't think so.

What about pride, did you have a proudest moment, were you proud of what you were doing?

Well I suppose when I got my wings. That was something.

What about seeing your Mum for the first time?

38:30 Oh marvellous. They'd gone through a lot of trouble, worries, seen other chaps, my mother used to be in a group where women, I don't know what they called themselves, but it was formed where they met as a group.

39:00 There was a group of them, mothers, wives and sisters and of course if this one comes in as being lost and this one's lost you know it was a big strain on them and it, somehow it got through, yeah a big relief, a big relief.

39:30 Fair enough! That's it.