Australians at War Film Archive

Peter Munro - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 3rd December 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1326

Tape 1

00:56 **Are you set?**

Yes

You're ready, good.

01:00 **I understand you were born in Leederville. Can you tell me what Leederville was like so many years ago?**

I wouldn't know, because I was born there.

Oh right, so you didn't actually...

I can remember as a small boy, having been taken there. I was actually born in the police station and that has been demolished, it's now the TAFE [College of Technical and Further Education] Leederville. I think some of the big trees are still there, huge lemon-scented gums, but a...

01:30 There was a paddock right next door to the cop shop, where my father was thrown from a horse and broke his leg. In those days, all of the police were mounted, 1925 this was. Cars were a very new innovation and police did have a few, perhaps two or three. So because Dad was no longer a horseman, he was drafted over to driving

02:00 vehicles. So having been a farm boy before, he was a natural, I suppose, to latch onto machinery.

Was that a sign of the times? Like if you broke a limb, it was not going to heal well, because of the...?

Yes, well medical procedures in those days were not as effective as they are now. And it shortened his leg too, so he wouldn't have had the same ability. So there you are – that's how he became to be a motorised cop.

02:30 **What do you remember about your father being a policeman?**

Always away, late work – the nature of police work that they just can't keep a normal work schedule. He used to drive some very exotic cars – I can remember one was called a Talbot, and it had huge wheels, that

03:00 were not fine wire spokes, but they were, they were, big sort of pressed steel spokes. Another one was called a Bean – B-E-A-N. And the police did have two ultra fast patrol cars, they had abnormally long noses, they were straight eight cylinders, and Bentley's, they were. They were used on fast patrol work and he used to drive those,

03:30 as well. And, he was a very kindly gentle man. He wasn't a rough, tough, bashing type cop. He used to give us all a hard time when we stepped out of gear, of course.

Because you had quite a big family.

Yes, six children, six boys, and I was the youngest of those six boys. The eldest was 12 years older than me. No

04:00 TV in those days, of course, so you had to have a bit of family to make up for it.

Well, with so many boys around, I'm sure you would have driven your mother mad.

Indeed. But as a mother of a tribe of boys, you had to be a rigid disciplinarian too. Maude was her name. Maude wouldn't take any nonsense.

04:30 Just a two bedroom house, oh it had a lounge, but a two bedroom house, and the second bedroom was a

dressing room, used by this big family of boys. Otherwise the whole family slept out on a big veranda. And in those days you felt quite secure sleeping out on a big veranda – everyone minded their own business.

05:00 I don't think it's safe for people to sleep out on a veranda nowadays. But I was just going to tell you this little attribute of Maude's. She would insist on tidiness, and if there was stuff left around in this second bedroom come dressing room, she'd grab everything and, into a big heap, take it out onto the back lawn and dump it. Shoes, undergarments, suits, everything.

05:30 "Mum, where's my this, where's my that?" "It's all on the lawn." That would soon pull them into gear, which it did, of course. And we all had to learn to cook, you had to be self sufficient, and you had to do rostered duties. Nowadays, I think people put a roster up on the wall, but this was just drummed into us there and then – you do this, you do that, you do

06:00 the other thing. And by gee, you didn't forget it.

Well, what did you have to do?

Oh shaking, sweeping, washing, cooking. And…

What sort of things were you good at cooking?

Well different dietary arrangements, in those days of course. The traditional Old English food was still on the menu. Traditional

06:30 roasts and those horrible great dumplings, big, big lumps of dough that went into gravy for dinner, or into golden syrup for sweets. And tapioca and sago, they were well to the fore, too. I don't think they're on the menus anymore. Tapioca puddings and sago puddings.

What's a sago pudding?

07:00 Sago is derived from the casaba plant in the tropics, or is it? No, tapioca comes from the casaba plant, yes, sago comes from the sago palm. They're similar, gluey looking things. Tapioca is more like frogs' eyes, and sago is fine grains, glutinous, we used to make that into

07:30 steamed puddings as well, sago.

It doesn't sound very appetising, Peter.

Oh well, you, it may not be according to our modern tastes, but I suppose in those days it was nice. When parties were on, of course, it was really fancy food – sponge cakes, cream puffs and the like. Everything had to be backed up with cream to camouflage what might have been there.

But it's an interesting point that you make,

08:00 **our tastes have changed.**

Our dietary, yes, this is true. Ah, I think people are inculcated with a greater degree of intelligence these days, to appreciate the necessity for diet, except that we have this vile intrusion of the takeaway diet, and that is bad for the nation, as a whole.

Look, I agree with you.

08:30 Oh I eat it once a week and I enjoy it. But as for the people who might be on it three or four times a week, it's going to be their own destruction. It's a sad thing really. And it's all for a matter of saving time, it's all for convenience.

What.

There aren't.

What sort of things did you boys get up to when you had some time off?

There was a gap between my next brother and me – six years. There's only two of us surviving now, he's in a nursing home, the one that's six years older, but the rest are all dead, of course. And as I mentioned earlier,

09:30 cars were coming into vogue, and that was the passion of teenagers in those days, to go to car events. You used to go out to the back of Cannington somewhere, there was a long strip of sealed bitumen road called the Quarter Mile, and on flat country, and that was a wonderful place for

10:00 time style events. And you had the old Claremont Speedway, which was, was until recently at the showground, that was a Friday night event. And come immediately after World War 11, at Caversham, just down the lower end of Swan Valley, there was a, a Royal Australian Air Force base there,

10:30 and there was a long emergency strip, and that was very popular for car racing. It's all enclosed, it's all closed off now, of course, a haven for kangaroos.

Was it a very much a male thing?

Yes. The older boys used to have their girlfriends sitting up in the back of the family bomb. Boys didn't own their own cars, as they do now. They'd borrow Dad's. And ours was a

11:00 T-model, pardon me, a T-model Ford. Dad bought it for, if my memory serves me correctly, it was 13 pounds – 26 dollars. It was a wreck, and he had to, it parked at our place for years while he overhauled it and tarted it up. Well these older boys would borrow that when they got a license to drive, and they'd borrow

11:30 Dad's car, the Ford, the family Ford, and go to these events, or take their girlfriends out for a special occasion. And it was an amusing sight. I remember they had running boards on the outside, the old-time cars. Instead of having a huge luggage boot as they do these days, they had a running board on the outside. And, when you

12:00 had a running board, you also had to have a telescopic rack to contain parcels. So all the loading was done there. So there'd be Mum, Dad and six boys all jammed into this car, and luggage on the outside, on these running boards.

Where would you take off to?

One popular place was Point Perron, that's just south

12:30 of Rockingham, and Coogee Beach, just south of Fremantle. And South Beach, that was for camping events. South Beach, which is currently starting to become very trendy, and being redeveloped into an upmarket housing place. South Beach was the popular venue on Sundays.

13:00 City Beach was the main surf beach, but there was an horrific narrow wooden road, and it was referred to affectionately, as the switchback. It was just a constant row of ripples over the hills, sealed. It was all jarrah blocks, wooden jarrah blocks,

13:30 sealed off with tar. So that was not entirely acceptable to go over that narrow thing because if you had to pass, you went off and you got bogged – it was over sand hills. So the preferable beach was South Beach, just south of Fremantle, which didn't have surf, and that was very popular. Cottesloe, too, was a surf beach, but

14:00 that was quite civilised and had a railway adjacent. People used to, not having too many cars, they used to go in hordes to Cottesloe, or Mosman Park railway stations, with all their gear, and then trek over the hills to get to the surf beaches.

So was the beach a large part of your life?

Oh no, pardon me, not entirely. We used to

14:30 love to go inland. Lesmurdie Falls was a place very much in demand, too, in those days. And Canning Dam was under construction. The Canning River up in the hills was quite delightful. And the dam… This was a big depression years effort. The dam construction seemed to go on for years. And my people were,

15:00 as they got better cars, we were able to go a bit further north to Bindoon, that's where my parents respectively, their families farmed, at Bindoon. Their ancestors were pioneers of the Swan Valley where we are at present. When they went farming in their own right, Bindoon was the chosen spot.

15:30 **Where were you actually living when you were a kid, we didn't?**

In Victoria Park. The old house is still there. It hasn't changed terribly much. My parents lived there, my mother in particular, I think, yes she lived there for 50 years in that same house. But, Dad predeceased her by a couple of years. And that's all a very trendy area now. People are

16:00 buying the old houses and demolishing them. But I did drive by there a few months ago, just to have a stickybeak. It's still much the same old house. I noticed there were two Mercedes cars parked on the verge outside, so it's an indication that money has bought it, ready for the day.

What was Vic [Victoria] Park like back then?

Well, the electric tram went up Albany Highway,

16:30 as far as the, as far as Mint Street, that's right. The Savoy picture theatre was on the corner of Mint Street and Albany Highway. That's where the Vic Park, the big Victoria Park shopping centre is at present. Just opposite that was an old state school. Our family went to the state school at the, at the lower end of

17:00 Victoria Park, not far from The Causeway. Opposite the school, the strangest thing was a music shop, sitting in all its isolation. You wouldn't have that nowadays, would you? The man's name was Weimouth. I think he may have been an Austrian or a German.

17:30 And he had this proper little shopfront set up with all the appropriate gear. You'd buy banjo strings or, a Jew's harp or whatever you were aiming for in those days, or sheet music. And in close proximity to that

was an undertaker. But the rest of that area, around about, was just sort of cow paddocks. This was opposite the Victoria Park School. In the corner

18:00 of the school there was a gigantic lemon-scented gum, which until recently, I think, was still there. Lemon-scented gums are bad news. They're affectionately known as widow makers. They have huge lateral branches that weigh several tons, and they're likely to drop on you at the end of the summer when the sap uptake is at its minimum, minimal.

I've never

18:30 **heard that before.**

At its minimum.

Widow makers.

Yes, oh I've got some of them on this property here, but you will notice they are nowhere near the house. They are right out in the paddocks, so that you can run like hell if one comes.

How did the Depression affect your family?

Dad, being a policeman, had pay, but it was very minimal.

19:00 I think it was seven dollars a week, three pounds ten shillings a week, and that had to support eight people. My mother was a farm daughter, and a very good household economist. As soon as the older boys turned 14, they went straight into work, of whatever description. You didn't have any

19:30 choice really. You just made the most of it. You were asking Depression years. No shoes. You'd have one pair that were used for social occasions only, and they were expected to last for years. But naturally enough, with growing boys they'd just… You'd outgrow them and you'd be hobbling around

20:00 in very tight footwear, but we all went to school without. And the majority of the children in the school were without. You might get one child, perhaps two in each class, that had footwear, but it was rare to see children wearing anything on their feet.

Was it a status symbol?

Girls and boys alike. No. Oh a status symbol to wear shoes, oh yes.

20:30 If a kid had shoes, you'd think, "Oh, that's the local doctor's son," or, "That's the accountant's daughter," or what have you. They were a rarity. The teachers were almost without. I can recall one married lady, but they were just about all spinster ladies and very professional teachers. They were very dedicated to their job, and they

21:00 commanded much respect, and got it. Corporal punishment was the order of the day, because if you transgressed you received the cane. And the cane was a savage, to our way of thinking nowadays, it was savage, but in those days it was the discipline stick. These old darlings used to dish out two,

21:30 for minor indiscretions, but if you were exceedingly wicked, as I was from time to time, you would go the headmaster and he would give you six – three on each hand. When I went to high school later, I thought, "Oh, this is a bit more civilised," because you used to get it on the bum then and that seemed to be a better place to dish out the stick. Because when you receive the cane across your open palm, oh, your

22:00 finger joints are really tortured. So, the soft buttocks are more receptive to the cane, and besides, no-one can see it and it doesn't impair your ability to write, either. But if you got the cane on the hand on a cold, frosty morning, oh you really suffered.

And what sort of wicked things did you get up to, to deserve such hideous punishment?

Oh, foul language, probably, mostly. If you,

22:30 if you said shit, you were evil. As for some of the lesser-known evil words there, they were just not repeatable to anyone – you'd probably be expelled if you'd come at those.

Well that's interesting, 'cause we dish them out pretty much all the time these days.

Yes, yes, society has indeed gone through a complete circle.

23:00 **How about, did, was the discipline really high with doing things like homework?**

Yes, you were, this is where the old ma'ams would come into their own. If you reported in the morning without having done your homework, you'd receive one on each hand, and, or be made to stand in the corner and be the

23:30 source of ridicule from the rest of the kids. So you just had to learn to conform to the system.

How many kids were in your school?

Oh, I think there may have been three or four hundred. It wasn't a huge school, certainly not by modern standards. The classes were very big though. I've got old school

24:00 photographs here with 50–55 children in a class. And I think that was rather cruel on the teachers. As I said, they were very professional and very dedicated, but they had a tough job. I can recall another side. We acknowledge

24:30 and respect children who have disabilities these days. But then, the child who was disabled did not gain recognition, either from the peers or from the teacher. And I can recall one sadistic old teacher, named Miss Florence Gilmore, and she was a bitch. She used to, her

25:00 punishment, she had a shoebox full of wooden cotton reels. And some of these poor kids that were mentally impaired, and had to be yabbering all the time, she would jam a cotton reel into their mouth and there they would have to sit until she released them from purgatory. Well, I think she was an evil woman. Nowadays, of course, the,

25:30 the parents would close on a person like that and she would be brought before an investigation.

Oh, you'd be charged.

Yes. I think society has done well in recognising disability, of whatever nature. There are still very cruel children in schools, of course. Kids will pick on the ones who are different. But I don't think it's quite as severe as it used to be

26:00 then. And I put this just down, simply, to pure ignorance. Yet we are a much better educated society now, whereas people were extremely ignorant in those days, and didn't understand the nature of disability, or why people had certain behavioural problems and the like. I never got the cotton reel. I can remember kids who were not impaired, but did cop it, purely for talking.

26:30 **What sort of subjects did you enjoy as part of being in school?**

I was always good at mathematics, and I think this comes from a basic of cultivating quick response. If it's a very small child and someone says, "What's two and two," and you, quick as flash say, "Four," "Okay."

27:00 But if you hesitated to think, well you were not designed for a mathematical bent, I don't think. And history, I liked history as an acknowledgement of the progression of society, but when it came to reciting dull things like dates

27:30 and dry events, no way. When I, at the age of 15, did the junior certificate, history was the one thing that I failed in, and yet people of learning advocate that if you don't have history, if you don't have that ability to record rotten, dry material, you're battling to come up with a better result on other

28:00 things. A good philosophy, I think, really.

Did you play any sport?

At the primary school, and yes, in the high school as well, I was never any bloody good at football. If you weren't, if you didn't front up brilliantly at football,

28:30 you were pushed into the background, and I was inclined to be a bit fat and flabby. But we had a very dedicated head, no master, this was in the final year of primary school. A man named Culligan. And he introduced baseball and I cottoned onto baseball,

29:00 and that was quite unusual. This was in 1937, and baseball was some newfangled Yankee [American] game that people didn't want to identify with. And then, I also took that on at high school, as well. Nowadays, of course, it's a different story. Baseball is very often the flavour of the month.

Did you manage to do much

29:30 **swimming?**

Yes, we used to swim down at Como. We'd catch a tram from the school down to The Causeway, and then we'd get on another tram there which would take us to Como, which is now one of Perth's upmarket suburbs. But in those days, Como was sort of the ends of the earth. It was sort of halfway on the freeway. It's halfway between the city and Canning Bridge.

30:00 There are a few big motels and hotels, and modern flashy apartments and upmarket private housing there. And there was a very long jetty, went right out. And halfway out, there was a short jetty where the swimming training used to take place. And far out at the very end

30:30 there was a shelter shed. And the river in those days, was serviced by steam commuter boats. They belonged to – I think it was, the name of the company may have been Tilley, but don't quote me on that too excessively. But the, the boats were all 'Vals', there was the Valkyrie, and the Valhalla,

31:00 and the Valdana was another one. And they used to commute people from the city over to Como, and

then on to Applecross – there was another point there. But getting back to the swimming, stinging salt water, the stink of seaweed on the beach and while you were swimming, fighting jellyfish. Modern baths just

31:30 were not even envisaged – they were unimagined. So if you learnt to swim, you swam in the river. And then from high school, we used to swim in the river at Crawley. There were big baths at Crawley, which is now Perth's el supreme upmarket suburb, because it's adjacent to the University of WA [Western Australia]. But, the stinging salt and the jellyfish, yes.

The river hasn't changed that much then,

32:00 **has it? 'Cause they're still in there, those bleeding jellyfish. So did you have any ideas about what you'd like to do after you finished school?**

The, this was a child of the Depression and the emphasis was get a job. As I mentioned earlier, the child of 14 went straight to work. I was

32:30 privileged being the youngest. I was privileged to hang on until I was 15. And by this time I had been thoroughly brainwashed into go for security, never mind the jobs like your brothers had, go for a government job. But that didn't suit Peter. I thought, I always had a natural extroverted nature, I suppose.

33:00 So what suited Peter was to go selling furniture in Bowens Department Store. And that appealed to me tremendously. I liked the job. It didn't pay an enormous amount – I got one pound and threepence, that's two dollars and two cents, that was the weekly pay. And of that,

33:30 I gave Maude five shillings, or 50 cents, for board and lodging, and another segment of it was to pay off a tailor-made suit, which I bought on lay-by. The suit was four pounds ten shilling, nine dollars for a beautiful tailor made suit, which was made in Bowens Department Store. Bowens, they were an old

34:00 family company who were later on acquired by the Myer Emporium, and the Myer is there on that site today. But I did enjoy selling the future. I had one amusing incident. A tough, hard-faced old dame came in one day, and she wanted to buy a double mattress. So,

34:30 in true professional manner of a 15 year old salesman, I said, "Oh madam, you know, you're quite at liberty to check the mattress out, sit on it." So she bounced up and down happily, and lay down and, "Righto, that'll do." And, I said, "Oh," signed up the order form, and, "What is the name please?" "Mrs Rocker." So,

35:00 in stupid 15 year old teenage boy parlance, I wrote down Mrs R-o-c-k-e-r. It didn't worry her, but after she had gone. Oh yes, it was to be delivered to number 143 Rowe Street, Perth. And it was beginning to turn over in my mind, I thought now, Rowe Street, that's where all the brothels are, and after

35:30 she had gone, one of the blokes said, you know who that was, of course. That was old Josie Rocca, R-o-c-c-a, Mrs Rocca, the queen bee of the brothel strip. So, that was a moment of truth for a 15 year old salesman. So there you are.

Bit of a seedy area, that area of Rowe Street, was it?

36:00 Oh yes, our high school, the Perth Boys' High School, was in the same street. And for entertainment, we used to walk down there at lunchtime – it was strictly out of bounds, you're not allowed to go out of the school ground – but we'd go out of the school ground anyhow and walk past there, and just eye the old bags off. And they were equally provocative. They'd say, "Coming in, darling?"

36:30 **So that was the extent of your sex education?**

Yes, that's right. Oh that and the Perth Girls' School next door. The schools were completely segregated. Perth Boys' School, they were both between Rowe Street and James Street. Perth only had three high schools to my knowledge. There was Perth,

37:00 and Fremantle, and there was a technical school at Leederville. But between this Perth Boys' School and Perth Girls' School there was a big tin fence so that they couldn't communicate. But they did of course. Cracks had been prized and notes passed and the like. Sacred, sacred whisperings, but all very amusing.

37:30 **It's very cute, really.**

Yes.

You said that you had a suit made. Why did you need a suit?

Well, a suit was a status symbol. You presented better at work if you had a suit. And when you were out socially, the person in the suit was always more acceptable

38:00 than the unfortunate who was, through no fault of his own, not able to afford a suit. Whose standard gear would probably be slacks and a shirt, no tie, and an upturned collar to hide the accumulated

grime. That seemed to be the fashion amongst the older teenage boys – the upturned collar.

38:30 **What sort of social occasions did you get up to, in your suit?**

Well, I came from a semi-puritanical Presbyterian background. In other words, with a name like Munro, we descended directly from Scottish ancestry and my grandfather was one of those old

39:00 puritans. And he lined the whole lot of us boys up and very proudly presented us to the Presbyterian Church en masse: “These are my grandsons. They have come for their betterment.” His name was Duncan Munro, a typical Scottish name. His parents were the migrants. And a lot of our social activity, focussed around

39:30 the church. And, looking back, I think that would have been to my detriment, because I wasn’t allowed to be as worldly as a lot of other boys. But, my views have changed considerably since then.

So what sort of social functions would the church put on?

Well, there was no piss

40:00 to begin with, although they used to have an annual Scottish night, the Robbie Burns night. And they had had the ‘Ode to the Haggis’, and there was a big old Scotsman, I think they just sort of used to get him for the occasion,

40:30 his name was Willie Frew. And he used to come half pissed, and I’m sure he was nipping it, because he would be well and truly done up before the night was out. And this was in a wowser, narrow-minded Scottish Presbyterian Church. And he would do the ‘Ode to the Haggis’. And they haggis is a filthy… It’s a… If you don’t know – it’s the stomach of

41:00 a sheep. And it can vary according to the size of the sheep, of course. But we always seemed to have big ones at this, because there was a big crowd of people there to enjoy it. The basic is all the offal, all the offal parts of the animal, finely minced with oatmeal and onion and herbs, and that

41:30 all goes inside this stomach, and then it was boiled. And they used to bring these out on a big plate, and oh God, the smell, you’d want to throw up there and then. I can’t, this Willie Frew, he used to have all this magnificent Scottish gear on, all the Highland, the plaid, no the plaid goes over the shoulder, what do you call the skirt?

42:00 **Kilt.**

The kilt, oh up your kilt.

Tape 2

00:33 **So I guess we can pick up from the guy in the Scottish finery?**

Oh yes, they always had a piper. And the, it was only a small hall, it held about 100 people, I suppose, when it was chockers, it was a big roll up. And they’d have a Scottish piper, and they’d pipe in the haggis. I think they still do this at ceremonial occasions in Scotland, or elsewhere. And this

01:00 old Willie Frew would come in with this great silver platter, with the principal haggis. I suppose that was the biggest, ugliest and smelliest, and it was set down with great aplomb. If I recall rightly, they had to double up on functions, it was the communion table it was planted on. And he’d have this great sword, and he would recite the ode. And just very roughly, I can’t, I never

01:30 knew it. But he’d say, “For frey who’re wisean prace, grand chieftan of the puddin’ race, you stinks you dirty dog, you hums,” and he’d slash it open and oh, this filthy smell would fill the whole room, “but God, I loves ya.” And that was it, and all the old ladies of the Ladies Guild would run round,

02:00 and serve it onto the plates with the mashed potato, and that’s when we had to eat the bloody stuff.

Sounds surreal.

Surreal, yes. And after we’d ingested that, you were allowed to get into the goodies then.

Disguise that flavour.

The cordial drink and all the finery of the feast.

How long were you working at Bowens for, Peter?

Only had about a year there.

02:30 And, I remember I said I was getting a pound and threepence, that’s two dollars, two cents, the pay. And nine cents tax, that was, nine pence tax, that was eight cents tax had to come off that. And I heard of a

job, in the railways that was paying 35 shillings, that's three dollars fifty cents, this was

03:00 beyond belief, to go from the Bowens pay to the railway pay. And bearing in mind my brainwashing, go for a government job, get security, so that was it. I applied for and obtained a job as a junior clerk in the railways, in the accounts branch. And because as I mentioned earlier, I'd always been good at mathematics, I suppose, I was a natural to go into that sort of work.

Where was the accounts branch?

03:30 Ah, where the Beaufort Street Bridge goes across still… Immediately this… The accounts branch was an old two storey building that was facing exactly opposite. I think it's some sort of an electrical store or something now, isn't it, if I recall? I don't go into the city a great deal.

What was daily office life like?

04:00 Oh very routine for a young clerk doing donkey work.

Which consisted of what?

Sorting, sorting through, getting things into correct order and filing. And they used to have a thing called a Sortograph, you'd sit on a tiny little seat, and this mobile

04:30 mobile filing system. You'd wheel it up and down. It would go up and down beside you on rollers. It was a very long alphabetical filing system. So that you could sort stuff into its correct order, and then take it all out and bundle it up into string, and then it'd go over to the senior clerk, so it was ready for their usage. And, I, working on this sort of rap,

05:00 I can just think of now, here's a 16-year-old boy who has joined the air cadets and is dreaming of the day when he'll get into the war and be a super fit, Spitfire pilot, you know, big deal. So sitting in this little tight-assed seat, you think, "Oh gee, this must just be like being up there, only more glamorous."

So you

05:30 **had a healthy imagination?**

Yes, that's right, yes, you had to have imagination.

You mentioned you were with the cadets?

Yes, I was a foundation member of the air training corps. They were recruiting boys to provide cannon fodder further along the list, when they were 18. I joined the cadets and had a wonderful time. It was a glorified boy scout turnout,

06:00 I suppose. We used to have camps and weekly parades. And, living in Victoria Park, I used to go on a bicycle across to the… This particular air cadet, it was called 75 Squadron, it was in the Christian Brothers College building, which is now the Duxton Hotel, at the corner of St Georges Terrace. And what's the one

06:30 that goes down…?

From St Georges Terrace?

Yes, the Duxton Hotel. God, I can't think of the name of the other one.

I can't tell you either.

You can't either.

What kind of things did you do with the cadets?

Well, well apart from the routine items of service training, that drill, and

07:00 very strict disciplinary parades, but this is purely on the military side. But on the other side, we had to do a lot of advanced high school learning, mathematics and navigation, and a bit of science, anything that related to air crew further along the track, that was the

07:30 program. Most of the officers were school teachers who were Manpowered – they were not allowed to enlist because it was necessary that they be here. So that's the nearest they could get to war service, to be air training corps officers.

What was life like here in Perth, leading up to the war?

08:00 Well, I suppose the focal was the moving picture theatre. They were rather elaborate art deco theatres. Remains of them can be seen here and there. I think the Regal Theatre in Subiaco is still fairly well in tact, as it was. The one in Mount Lawley, I think

08:30 it was called the Ritz, if I recall, the corner of Walcott and Beaufort Street in Mount Lawley, that was another one. Oh the one in Leederville, the Luna, yes, that's pretty well much as they were, externally

anyhow. Because of modern technology, they've had to, pardon me, they've had to change the insides. But that, and dancing. Dancing had

09:00 oh, nice disciplines. I've been at the Embassy Ballroom, that was at the foot of William Street, the Embassy Ballroom, it had a sprung floor. Now a sprung floor is not a rigid floor, the whole, the entire great floor, was made of wandoo timber,

09:30 beautiful timber. And instead of being fixed down, it had a slight elevation of the beams so that as people were all swaying en masse, the floor would move gently with them – it was a lovely thing to dance on. And the girls – it was rather cruel, I think now, in retrospect – but the girls… You've heard of the wallflowers? Well the girls had to sit there

10:00 and wait to be invited to dance. And the boys would go up, "May I please dance?" and, "Yes," the girl would get up, or she'd say, "Oh no, thank you, I'm sitting this one out." And I, I can remember they had an MC, the Master of Ceremonies, he was sort of the disciplinarian, he was, had a nice suit and white gloves, and went around looking important and severe. And

10:30 I was there on one occasion when he called a halt to the dance because some girl had been refusing to dance, over and over, and he thought this was not right, that she should have graciously accepted. My, how things, how things have changed from there to the modern disco.

11:00 **What was the outcome?**

And, and they used to have. Oh well, she'd be embarrassed and she'd accept the creep that asked her to dance, and the MC would say, "On with the dance." You've heard the saying, you've heard the saying 'on with the dance', well that was it. He called a necessary halt, and it was allowed to proceed after he'd given his ruling. He was the umpire, yes, the MC was the umpire of the dance.

11:30 And every year, there used to be balls. A ball was a grand occasion. Different social groups around Perth would hire the Embassy Ballroom. There'd be the Police Ball, and the Nurses' Ball, and the Doctors' Ball, and the University Ball, whatever clique you belonged to, you'd go to their ball. This ballroom, it had an upstairs

12:00 section as well, where you could look down over the balcony. And downstairs, all round they had these private logues they were called, l-o-g-u-e, and the logue, you would pay extra to book a logue, and you'd sit in there in the comfort of a lounge suit. And they were all nicely decorated with

12:30 a little arch, a little proscenium arch, I suppose on each one, so that they'd just look the part of privacy and a little bit of up-market performance that you'd pay for specially. So if you were wanting to mark an occasion, a group of you would pay to book a logue, and say, "Oh, we've got a logue." Otherwise you'd be part of the great unwashed,

13:00 that was standing at the end, waiting at the end for the next dance.

So you were inclined to book the logue occasionally?

If you had a small group that you were wanting to book with.

What group would you go to the dance with?

Oh, sometimes with the air cadet kids. They were all teenagers looking for excitement, and that was the most exciting thing you could do, go to a dance.

13:30 **Well, sorry, what other kind of things did you spend your weekly earnings on, given that you were being so well paid?**

Oh yes. Well, we were trained in the Scottish tradition to be compulsive savers, of course. Nowadays, the nature of society is spend, because you may never have anything. But then

14:00 it was save, because you would want it to acquire something. And of course, economically society has gone through a renaissance, I suppose. But, apart from saving, and a bicycle, you'd have to buy the accoutrements for the bicycle.

What kind of bike did you own, Peter?

14:30 A Malvern Star. And when you wanted to proceed to something bigger and better, you got a generator, which was a small generator that had a little drive that used to go over onto the rubber wheel. And you were a big deal, the boy that had the generator and a Philadyne lighting set,

15:00 oh, he'd really spent some money.

Impress the girls?

Yes. Philadyne, Philadyne was no doubt Dutch origin, from the sound of it, from Phillips I would think. Yes, you would impress the girls if you had a nice bike with lighting gear on it.

What about clothes?

And another thing was a carrier on the back.

15:30 A carrier would be supported on the rear hub. And, you could put a parcel load, or a girlfriend sitting there, but she wouldn't stay there too long, though. Clothes you were asking about. I, I'm still no great gun on clothes – I think this would reflect back to the Depression years. Clothes are… They're basics.

16:00 They're something to hide your nakedness. Yes, we had clothes, but nothing ultra flash – once again, money was tight. And when you could go to the pictures of a Saturday afternoon for threepence, two cents, that's an indication of how little money there was about. Or if

16:30 you went at night-time, six pence, five cents. And Saturday night, that's when the rich people went and paid one shilling, ten cents. And because they were paying ten cents, or a shilling, it attracted amusement tax, so they had to pay one and tuppence, one shilling and two pence, that was to go into the upstairs, the

17:00 lounge area of the picture theatre, that was really big deal. Only the rich people and the wanton spendthrifts went up there. If you wanted to impress a girl, right, that's where you went. But if you were going with your mates, down in the el cheapo for six pence.

So what about discussion of the war, and what were you hearing about the war during those years?

Everything came over the radio, or

17:30 the print media. And, as nowadays, you believed implicitly in the media, what the media has spoken is truth. We know it's grossly distorted, but it was very much a propaganda thing. You hear, from time to time, the episode of the [HMAS] Sydney and its sinking. Well in

18:00 those days, we were not allowed to know anything about it. But, on recollection, at the time, there was, the day the Sydney was sunk, there was a report of a foreign aircraft. And we had in Perth, an air raid emergency, and I was working in the accounts branch railways, and I remember we all had to rush down into the vacant block at the rear of the place, where the railways

18:30 had built these magnificent air-raid shelters. They were slit trenches, made of old railway sleepers, home for redback spiders and dirty black sand. That's just a little thing that comes back, but. Transport – all of the motor cars had either been ordered

19:00 off the road or acquired for the national effort, the war effort. Most transport was by train. I had brothers up at Geraldton for instance, and they'd go on this long, wearying trip from Perth to Geraldton by train and back when they were on leave. Or on a couple of occasions, I went from here across to the

19:30 eastern states over the Nullarbor on the old steam trains. Modern vehicles have really revolutionised transport, there's no question of that.

That was the end of the tram, I suppose?

Yes, well, the trams, they were funny old things. They, Perth, oh, they had a couple of trolley bus routes, there was a trolley bus went from Perth down

20:00 to Claremont. In fact if you go along Stirling Highway, the old steel poles are still there all rusting. And there was another one went out to Inglewood, a trolley bus. They were very effective means of transport, they were just a smooth, silent tram really, they were on a fixed route. Trams have all but had it,

20:30 except in very big cities in the world. And Melbourne is a point in question, they're coming back there more vengefully than ever. I was in Melbourne just about a week ago, and they've got these very modern trams from France and they're really superb. And once they're away from the cluttered car traffic routes, they really open up and go like the hammers.

21:00 Once they're in a confined, little railway of their own, or railway reserve.

What thought were you giving to the war before you enlisted?

Get it. I could hardly wait for the day. As I mentioned, I was the youngest of six brothers. They had all enlisted and I was anxiously waiting for the day of approval. I must have been a con man, because

21:30 my father had signed an authority for me to enlist in air crew, long before I was 18. And I must have sweet-talked him somehow. You weren't allowed to enlist unless you had your parents' approval. The age of 18, they wanted you for cannon fodder, but you had no legal status. Your legal status commenced at age 21. So you were still a minor, until

22:00 you were up to that legal age of majority. Nowadays, of course, the age of majority is at 18, and they're not fitted for it. You think yourself, you were not fitted for it.

No.

And I think society would really be better, if we still had this majority at age of 21. It's an anachronism

22:30 now, but a lot of people still go through the pain of having a 21st birthday, and having notices in the paper and so forth, but it's three years too late. It's too late to re-educate the kids, they've already strayed into the ways of wickedness. If that's what they've done.

When did you enlist, Peter?

I think it was the 19th

23:00 of June 1943. Yes, I was 18 on the 19th of May, 1943, yes I enlisted on the 19th of June. That's at His Majesty's Command, of course, that was not of my choosing, that was the date they nominated.

Whereabouts?

Oh just in Perth. That's where you go through the routine of being

23:30 quizzed by the lords of the air force, and the medicos of the air force, and the like. They say, "Right, you're in. Off to Initial Training School." And the Initial Training School was at, it was referred to then, as the Clontarf Orphanage. It was over on Manning Road – it's still there of course. I think it's an

24:00 Aboriginal learning institution now, if I recall. But this was something the air force had just taken over compulsorily, the whole premises, to be used as an Initial Training School for air crew enrolments.

And what did you do as part of your initial training?

Discipline and learning, just an expansion, a gross expansion on what the

24:30 air cadets was about. And here for the first time, you learnt what the real bastards where, the disciplinarians, the foulmouthed warrant officer and sergeant disciplinarian. I remember, ah, the gunnery training, there was a corporal, oh he was an evil person, but

25:00 they were so very, very strict that, as kids, you had to sit there rigidly and listen. You weren't allowed to have your thoughts wandering off elsewhere, as you would when you were in high school. You really had to come to the party and listen to what they were doing. And even though this character I just mentioned, I can recall him, he was a nasty bit of work. In retrospect, I can see what it was all

25:30 about. The Browning machine gun, for instance, it fired twelve hundred rounds per minute, and it had, it was about 65 moving parts, don't quote me to a technician or I might be shot down in flames. But it had several

26:00 dozen moving parts. And this fellow trained us, so that we could sit there with a blindfold on, and pull this complicated mechanical gun to pieces, and set out all the pieces in order, and then reassemble them in order, still with the… I mean, that was pretty good, I think. That a person

26:30 authorised to train a bunch of stupid kids could achieve that result. At the time of course, it was pain to us, but we did it.

I was going to ask you if you enjoyed it, or…?

Ah, when you eventually attain the result, yes you enjoy it. Another one was the radio. There was a radio sergeant, he was a very dour Scotsman, and he used to say, "Come on here boys, we'll be

27:00 having a look at this." And you've have to… You had to learn the Morse code exactly as… But then he would be sitting there with his key, and you with headphones on and madly writing down what he was transmitting. And that was something that we learnt there, most effectively. I suppose, because of my

27:30 application in those two particular areas, I was drafted to a Wireless Air Gunners' School from there. I may have been a bit too dumb. The real smart boys who had good mathematical and physics ability, well they were categorised to go into navigation, or pilot

28:00 training areas. However, from this school, this Initial Training School, I was sent to a Wireless Air Gunners' School.

Were you happy to accept that offer?

Oh yes, I was quite satisfied. Went to…

Sorry, if I can interrupt. What about the dream of being a Spitfire pilot?

Oh well, that all went out the door then. Once you are in a strict, strictly controlled situation,

28:30 like this Initial Training School, and as I mentioned the extreme discipline. And, you learn to sift out the, in your own mind, you realise that there is wheat and chaff, there is cack and clay, and you realise that you can't all be up there flying bombers, or you can't all be up there flying Spitfires. Some of you may not be all that smart, and you're

29:00 not going to go into air crew anyway. Even though you initially interviewed with that in mind. Some of

the kids just didn't make it at all, which is a bitter disappointment to them, but they're only a handful. You realise they… That you were… They had what they referred to as categorised, you were categorised into that hole, that hole or that hole and that was it.

29:30 **Can I just ask one other question, Peter, were you living at home during your initial training?**

Oh God no, you belonged to God then. Yes, the lords of the air force owned you then.

What was…

No, once you enlist – I enlisted as I mentioned on the 19th of June – that's it. They kicked you out, give you your big elephants boot, and a goon skin, you lived in a goon skin. A goon skin was a one piece overall,

30:00 and a floppy big beret, and that was it. When you left the base, you were allowed to wear the formal uniform. But on that training school, you were just nothing.

What was it like leaving home?

Ah, it didn't worry me in the least. I enjoyed the thought of adventure.

No second thoughts about what you'd got yourself into?

No, no, not at all. As I mentioned earlier,

30:30 being the youngest of six boys, there were five already in the services and that was my ambition, to get into it.

Can you maybe describe the daily routine in the initial training?

Ah, I'm trying to think if they woke us with loud music there or not. But it was very early in the morning. No, I think it was the foghorn voice of the

31:00 disciplinary sergeant. There were two, there was the warrant officer disciplinarian. And there was the sergeant, and his name was East, Sergeant East, and he was a loudmouthed, foulmouthed, yes, that's right. We were all sleeping out on this big veranda of a large building on this old orphanage establishment. And this East character, from the moment that voice went, God, you were

31:30 out of the bed like a flash, it's all go, go, go, go, go. No time for stop. And you, whether you wanted to go or not, you go. Oh, that was amusing. This was an old orphanage, and because there were little boys in the orphanage, they had little boy pans, porcelain pans, that were very low to the ground. That was highly amusing to have to sit on these

32:00 tiny things down near the ground. If you were lucky you got a regulation height among the big boys, but you didn't necessarily get one. So, that was it. Up like mad, go to the ablution block, and then back, make your beds. And the beds had to be absolutely meticulous. Now, I think I loaned you an old grey blanket for a

32:30 lighting effect. They had these old grey blankets, which weren't necessarily cut perfectly square from the factory, but they had to be so beautifully folded, and they were just like lovely, lay layers of wafers, and then you had to put the last one around the whole lot, so that it presented perfectly on the top of your bed. And that was it. No sheet,

33:00 you just slept in between those. And as we discovered later on in our careers, well, the sheets are for people who are up there, the officers and the like.

Was it a dormitory style barracks?

Oh yes, as I mentioned, I in particular was sleeping on the veranda, and there was probably about or 40 boys out along the veranda, whereas there were a lot more

33:30 in the bigger rooms inside, but very much dormitory, all packed in like sardines. Mattresses, they were a palliasses, a huge chaff bag which you had to go to a great heap of straw, and fill your own palliasses, and that was done strictly to time, so as you didn't overfill it too much.

I can't imagine what it'd be like sleeping on one

34:00 **of those?**

Not very nice, especially if you had hay fever, which I used to get, you'd sneeze a great deal. I suppose, like most things, you get used to it.

What about the mess or the canteen, what was that like?

Well, all queue, queue past the cookhouse window. War time, nothing too fancy, everything was

34:30 very basic. I can recall powdered egg was baked in gigantic trays, and I can also, not that I was unfortunate enough, but I can also recall kids leaving the dining hall and going straight out and throwing up masses of yellow powdered egg.

35:00 Jelly. Occasionally, if you were unlucky, there'd be a blowfly set in the jelly. But you dare not complain or you'd be regarded as peculiar. Part of routine, of course, this applies right throughout the services, orderly officer, any complaints. So the orderly officer of the day, would come in,

35:30 and he would have an NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] with him to write down the complaint and the complainant. So that's when the orderly officer, any complaints, that was in the eating mess.

Any complaints lodged?

Yes. We were snotty-nosed, 18-year-old teenage boys, new recruits, but we also had a lot of ex-army types

36:00 who were sort of middle 20s, more of a tough lot. We learnt a lot off them as we went through out training.

Where had they come from?

They seemed to be blokes that... You couldn't have the entire Australian Army sent overseas, which was the done thing then to fight the war offshore. They were in Europe

36:30 and Asian theatres, the people who went overseas. But you had to maintain a certain number here in Australia. And some of these blokes had just been sitting around, waiting for action for years. And they applied, and received approval to join the air force, and to go into air crew training, so that's how we acquired them. And in answer to your question, they would have been the people who complained,

37:00 if there was anything out of line, because they knew the system. But we youngsters, oh no, we wouldn't dare do such a thing.

Did that gain your respect for them?

Oh indeed yes. Yes, they were good mentors, these old boys. We called them old boys, they were perhaps 23 or 24, but compare them to an 18-year-old teenager. And as you go through training with these blokes,

37:30 you have a different perspective. Two of them, one I remember was called George Rankin, and the other one, I never did know his name, he was Dagwood. Now Dagwood used to be a cartoon character, an American comic strip character, with straight sort of dark hair. And this old Dagwood,

38:00 I think he had a big family because Dagwood used to do all sorts of things to get extra money. The single young blokes like myself, who had the money, we'd pay these unfortunates to do our laundry, washing these horrible goon skins for instance, that overall which would get

38:30 dirty quite easily, they were a bugger of a job. Well poor old Dagwood, he used to do them for two bob a time, 20 cents a time, and that's how he'd spend his leave, his weekend leave, he'd be at the washtub. And George and Dagwood, they teamed up, they sort of stayed together, and they eventually went into the same air crew in Europe,

39:00 and they suffered a horrible death. They were shot down and they escaped in a parachute, but they were murdered by peasants, just took at them with pitchforks, a sad end. These things you do hear about when the war is over.

Just on that note, how would that information eventually reach you?

Oh well, it leaks through.

39:30 There's always someone who shoots their mouth off, and when it happens, it doesn't come to light then, but.

I'm just surprised that even the air force would learn that. Sounds like it would be more likely to be listed as Missing in Action?

Yes, well the procedure is initially you're always missing in action, and men missing presumed dead, and so on. I've got some documents there concerning my own brother who was killed in the war.

40:00 This is letters and the like that I went through, this is the routine. But eventually someone talks on the side, and the truth comes out. There was another. When I was a boy at the Victoria Park Primary School, there was a bloke there called Wally Calder, and he went into air crew and suffered a similar fate, yes.

40:30 So the story goes. I can't prove it. Can't disprove it.

So when did your time in initial training come to an end?

I think it was about six or eight weeks, if I recall.

Did you make some good mates during that time?

Oh yes.

Any mates that continued on throughout your career with you?

Ah, not really. I think, you know, when war is over,

41:00 people sort of go their own way. They get married and assume other mantles. I belong to the Air Crew Association, and there is one friend there that I was in the air cadets with, and he became a pilot. But bear in mind that I enlisted in 1943, and

41:30 the people who were with me who became pilots were never admitted to operations. This man went to England and the peak of his performance was to become an instructor over in England, probably in a training school for English blokes over there.

Interesting.

But in answer to your question,

42:00 in the main, you don't sort of maintain...

Tape 3

00:33 **Just wondering how your mother felt about sending off all her sons off to war?**

I think she was utterly devastated. As I mentioned, I conned my father, who was the legal guardian. People, society as I mentioned earlier, it's undergone a lot of changes, and women have a much greater status now than they used to have. But

01:00 the father used to be regarded as the major next of kin, legally. He was the next of kin, and what he said went, even though he may have had a wife. But poor old Maude, I think she was devastated having six sons, and four of them overseas. And one was taken a prisoner by the Germans and he was in a prison camp for four years.

01:30 Another one was blown up over Germany, in a bomber. And these things must take a toll. She used to… You may have seen the small silver badge "To the women of Australia," I think, "in appreciation," it said. And under this silver badge, there was a bar with a little gold star on it for each son who was serving overseas. And Maude was very proud,

02:00 she had two. Two of these bars with four stars, for the four sons that were overseas. But it was a never-ending job of writing letters, and trying to keep body and soul together at home, I suppose. And she had the wife and small child of the brother who was killed, living with her too, so I suppose that provided some relief.

02:30 But she would have been very pleased when the day come, that was all over. And women in those days, were forever knitting things too, for Red Cross and the Australian Comforts Fund, too. She was a good knitter, and that would have been one of her specialities. Maude was a character, she used to talk incessantly, and she'd knit, and in her old age she'd be watching

03:00 the TV as well. But war time, it would have been the radio she would be listening to, she was an avid listener to all the radio soapies [soap operas] of the day.

What actually happened to your brother? You mentioned he was shot up over Germany. Was he in Bomber Command?

He was in the master bomber of the Pathfinder Force. The job of the Pathfinders

03:30 is to precede these mass raids of bombers. You might have a thousand bombers all dropping bombs on a particular target. The master bomber goes at the head of a formation of Pathfinders and it's just like an arrow. And I think they,

04:00 once again, I could be corrected by Pathfinders here, but I think they probably had as many as seven who were the Pathfinders. And it was their function to make the target. And then this massive formation of bombers dropped their bombs on the target. My brother showed me several

04:30 photographs – before he was killed, of course. He showed me several photographs of his own aircraft that had been damaged by our bombers, up above. And our bombs had just gone through the wing, here and there, of our own planes. And another one, a bomb had gone straight down and sheered off the tail

05:00 turret, and there were just all these ammunition belts, just hanging out – the whole turret had gone. And this poor unfortunate gunner, he was just rubbed off. That was by our own people, it's inadvertent. But the odds were just against him, I suppose. So, getting back to your question, my brother was in the master bomber, it was skippered

05:30 by a Squadron Leader Everett, and they were a much decorated crew. The whole crew had the Distinguished Flying Cross, except my brother. And this Squadron Leader Everett, had the

Distinguished Flying Cross awarded twice. And they were marking… With the Pathfinders, they were marking a big oil refinery

06:00 at Hemmingstedt, up in the north west of Germany, that's around about the Kiel Canal area. Now, Hitler had a new toy, this was the 7th of March 1945, the war had almost ended. And Hitler had a new toy, these jets that they were experimenting with. As behove jets,

06:30 they were very fast. They were small and chewed the fuel rapidly, so they would just go up, do a kill and back again. And another brother and I, through the air ministry over in Europe. Once again, we were talking earlier about matters of confidence. You can sort of probe through and get unofficial answers from the right people. And the

07:00 the story was that seven of these little jets attacked the master bomber, 'cause if you rub the master bomber out, you've done wonderfully well, and they just blew them to pieces, that was it. My wife and I have been to his grave in Germany. And that's something that I noticed, just the overall horror of war, that is a gigantic cemetery outside

07:30 Hamburg, and there are tens and tens of thousands of German graves. You can see how the Allies hit back, most vengefully. Hitler thought he was doing a wonderful job in starting the war. But when the Americans came in and we got on top, we inflicted dreadful injury on the Germans. It was too hideous to behold.

08:00 **Yes, sometimes you forget that there was another side that lost a lot of people.**

That's right.

I think your brother was certainly in a situation where he was a sitting duck, from what you're saying.

Yes, that's right. I think that was a, a brilliant piece of strategy on the part of the Germans to eliminate the master bomber.

You said that you had another brother as a POW [Prisoner of War]?

Yes, he was in

08:30 the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. And, oh he started off going over to England, and then France, and then they sent them out to Greece, and he was captured on the island of Crete. That was when the Germans were masterful at airborne troops. That's how

09:00 Crete was taken evidently. There was a great mass of armed soldiers dropped down by parachute and that was it. So he went into the coop for four years.

How did he find that experience? Was it difficult?

Oh yes, very hard. I think it left him mentally impaired too. He was very volatile of temperament.

09:30 And, the [Department of[Veterans' Affairs recognised this, insofar as they made him a TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension], that's a Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Ex-serviceman. He's dead now. He died from cancer a couple of years back. Oh yes, he was quite a nice man, but I think it unhinged him a bit, that

10:00 confinement. And a very hard existence. They, of course, any POW would tell you this, especially those that were prisoners of the Japs, they had a really cruel time of it. At least the Germans recognised the Geneva Convention, but not so the Japanese.

It's quite crazy really isn't it, considering some of the atrocities that the Germans got up to, and they were still with POWs, they were actually recognising the Geneva Convention.

10:30 Yes.

It's quite strange really.

Yes it is indeed. But they, as a military force, they were torn asunder by their own evil elements, too, I think. Within the German war machine there were the good and the bad.

Certainly. Well getting back to where we are with you…

Yes.

Are you actually in Ballarat at this stage? I can't be quite sure.

Yes, I think I had just ended the

11:00 Initial Training School and went to Ballarat. That would have been in August 1943.

We haven't talked about Ballarat yet, have we?

No.

Well, how did you get there?

By train. We went across the desert in cattle trucks. They called them cattle trucks, but they were big sort of goods vans, I think. Because they had just… Over in one corner

11:30 was a toilet, just a crude, as you get on railways anyway, just a hole in the ground. And we had to fill our straw palliasses and just drape them all around the floor, and that was it. And you'd stop at

12:00 specified places where you were fed, and the Australian Army were the experts at feeding troops on the move. I suppose really, the trains were owned, operated and managed by the army, because they seemed to be doing all these ancillaries. Ulday was one place where we used to stop,

12:30 I've been over a few times. And Ulday was sort of on the western fringe of the Nullarbor, and there was… That's where old Daisy Bates [anthropologist] had her association with the local native tribe there. And I can just remember as the train was pulling out, all these Aboriginal people would come along scrounging

13:00 oranges or tobacco or anything that could be thrown down to them. And after the troops had been fed, the swill was all upturned and, as the train was slowly pulling away, all these people, these black ones, would come swarming in over the sand hills, and into it. Not nice,

13:30 but it was something different, a variation in their diet, I suppose.

What were they wearing? I'm just wondering if they were still in a tribal sort of situation, or if they were in a…?

Very basic. They were truly tribal, those people. I can remember one young male, had a magnificent head dress,

14:00 it was really, it was for all the world like a lovely red and pink chrysanthemum. And I said, "What that." He said, "Carkies feather." Cockatoo's feather, cockie's feather, and I realised they were the feathers of the Major Mitchell cockatoo, and he'd made them into this exquisite headdress. I'd never seen anything like it. It was just like a lovely big chrysanthemum. And this was a male.

14:30 **You wouldn't see that any more?**

No, a piece that's probably sitting up in an exclusive museum in America.

You could quite honestly be very right. What other sorts of things did you do to pass the time on this train journey?

Oh writing mostly. Everyone in those days, I mentioned my mother had to be writing, but the blokes were

15:00 always writing, that was your communication, and the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] used to, in fact I think I've got some papers there, it's either YMCA or Australian Comfort Fund paper, they always kept the forces well supplied with writing paper, writing material. And wherever you were, you were invariably writing,

15:30 or reading, if you had the capacity to carry a, a cheap soft novelette, or playing cards.

Any gambling going on?

I was just going to say gambling was taboo, but it used to go on. Gambling was taboo, because it creates bad relationships. I mean you know the basic there, even to this day.

16:00 **You've just mentioned the Australian Comforts Fund, what other services did they provide?**

I've got a… They used to sell items to us, and also ancillary items of wearing apparel. They were donated, of

16:30 course, scarves, socks, these sorts of things, anything that was outside the standard kit issue.

Underpants?

No, they were regulation, you were dished out those things. God, they were awful too.

Underpants?

They used to be referred to by the blokes as romance busters. Well,

17:00 I don't know how they did it, but a lot of them were knitted lambswool.

Hand knitted?

Oh no, factory knitted lambswool, which has a greater durability than soft cotton of course. And they were sort of trunks, trunk type wearing apparel. They may have been because we were people destined to go to Europe, too.

17:30 I wouldn't say that the blokes who went to New Guinea jungles were wearing these particular items. They probably had soft cotton apparel of some sort, which is more absorptive for perspiration. But we were given very… The greatcoat, it was a very heavy big garment, and boy we needed it when we got to Ballarat. Boys from Perth suddenly going to Ballarat, which was a high plateau, west of Melbourne.

18:00 It was the coldest place on earth to our way of thinking. Well, it snowed on Christmas Day, that was in 1943, you could check met [meteorological] records for that, snow on Christmas Day in Ballarat, and I thought, "God, this is unreal."

That's quite unusual.

Yes, but that's Ballarat. Any Victorian will tell you that Ballarat is the coldest place they have, or one of them.

So what did you actually do

18:30 **on that Christmas Day?**

I was invited, remember the Presbyterian Church connection, I had to keep following the church. Yes, I was invited by a local Presbyterian Church family to their home. I remember the people's name was Hutchinson, but I think he was with the Ballarat Banking Company, which is still a bank to this day, to my knowledge.

19:00 They were nice people anyhow.

So there was quite an opportunity for you to go outside and meet other people?

Oh yes, yes. You used to have your weekend leave. Through the week it was all go-go-go. As with the other place, the discipline was extreme in this gunnery, ah, wireless, it was a wireless training school, not gunnery, wireless training school. And, we were given our first

19:30 air experience. They flew us up, I've got my log book there, I could confirm just, it might have been a 15 minute flight in some funny little plane, I think it might have been called a Wackett. Wackett was an Australian manufacturing, aircraft manufacturing company, if I recall. But that was just to give us air experience and make sure we were happy. There was no radio experience

20:00 up there because it was too short. But, endless hours in radio rooms playing around with these things, and of course I was a dummy, didn't come to terms. Practical radio wasn't too bad, but they were red hot on radio theory, and oh God, that's for the fairies.

Well, what is radio theory?

Well, the theory of what's happening.

20:30 When you're listening and fiddling, I suppose.

The actual scientific process?

The scientific side of the radio, why it does, what it does, I suppose. But that was for the birds and the fairies as far as I was concerned. So, once again, you go through, because of examination results and interviews, you go through this process of saying, "You

21:00 are not fit to be a wireless operator, you can be a straight gunner. As a wireless air gunner, no, but we'll make you a gunner."

Well just rewinding a little bit back, what sort of things were they trying to teach you in the wireless field?

Oh, they were just procedures to go through, code procedures and endless

21:30 keying, and listening and writing the messages that were coming over. Everything was in Morse code, of course, all did-did-a-da-dit. Yes, it's not dot, dash, it has to be sung, did-a-dah-dah-di-dah-dah.

And this didn't appeal to you at all?

No.

Why not? Too fiddly?

It just seemed to be fiddly. It wasn't sufficiently hands-on to my way of thinking.

22:00 **Anything else that they were trying to teach you in Ballarat as part of the wireless operator course?**

No, I don't think we did any gunnery there, it wasn't really necessary, because we were going to a gunnery school later on. It was all strict discipline and theory of radio, and hands-on radio. And

22:30 the endless parades, of course. And, it was, even though we, sort of August leading up to Christmas, it was bitterly cold the whole time, and…

Can you give me…

We had to keep running. Oh earlier on, you were asking about waiting at the I-T-S [Initial Training School]. I remember this place, we were awakened every morning, they had these monstrous big PA [public address]

23:00 mouth pieces, the broadcast funnel. And Scottish bagpipe music. You imagine teenage kids in the deepest of sleep in the early hours of the morning, and suddenly this blares out, and then these screaming disciplinary sergeants and corporals would come in, “Out, out, out, out.” So that’s when you moved.

That’s torture.

And the,

23:30 once again, discipline. This was more of a formal air force place, rather than that orphanage building we were in out at Clontarf. This had an enormous parade ground in front of the administrative block, and the administrative block was referred to as, ‘bullshit castle’. That’s where the flagpoles were, and the flag raising ceremonies

24:00 would go on. And if you were required to report to the administrative block, no way would you ever dare to walk on the parade ground. The spies would be there with their binoculars or whatever, and suddenly you’d be screamed at and ordered off, and that was, you know,

24:30 an unforgivable thing to walk on the parade ground. The parade ground was for formal parades, not for mere mortals to walk across to get to the administrative block, to the castle. You had to go carefully around the perimeter if it was necessary for you to go to the orderly room, or whatever. This is where you learned discipline, discipline, discipline, because when you were up there later on, and the skipper of the aircraft

25:00 gives a command, it’s just automatic. It seems cruel at the time to a young boy, but you can realise the necessity.

Do you think it’s brainwashing?

Oh absolutely, yes. It’s good brainwashing. Well-chosen word.

Thank you. What were the facilities like at Ballarat?

Barrack rooms, straw filled palliasses.

25:30 No, wait a minute, no, no, I tell a lie there. We went a little bit upmarket at this point. They had a thing called a biscuit. And the biscuit, it was probably stuffed with old waste cotton or something. They were like, if you imagine a mattress in three sections, and, jam packed tight

26:00 and buttoned down, God, you’d break your bloody back to sleep on them. And that was the standard fare there. Our pillows may have been stuffed with the… We were given a pillow case, that may have been stuffed with the straw, I’m a bit hazy now, old and stupid and forgetful. But the usual grey blankets and the strict discipline on having them beautifully presented for the

26:30 inspection.

Would that be a regular thing, the inspection?

Oh yes, indeed. Orderly officer’s inspection every morning. And if you were out of order, “Take that man’s name.”

Can you give me a rough idea of what would happen in any given day, just an average day, how would that look?

Well similar to the Initial Training

27:00 School, up with these hideous bagpipes in this instance, and then off to the ablutions and the toilet – whether you wanted to go or not, you went, and then back. Breakfast, and straight after breakfast, the inspection of the bed, etcetera, that you’d already tarted up, and then off to the classroom of a day. Oh,

27:30 there would have been, I’m sorry, there would have been a parade, yes there’d have to a parade on that notorious parade ground, and then you’d break off to be ordered to go to your hut, to pick up your gear and then to the classroom.

What were the instructors like in the classroom?

They were mostly school teachers. I mentioned applying to the

28:00 the air cadets earlier on. They were school teachers who had been Manpowered, and quite knowledgeable men, and introducing us to mathematics and physics at a higher and more complicated orbit than you’d been accustomed. And, oh, they knew what they were on about.

28:30 One or two of them were a bit hard to take, but mostly they were good quality high school teachers, imparted the necessary message. And of course you were examined on their performance.

And how long were you actually in Ballarat?

I think it was till just before Christmas.

You've got it written down over there.

29:00 Well yes, I have, but its not relevant to this, anyway. Because I went home for Christmas.

I'm just wondering how they informed you that you were going to go off to gunnery school, rather than stay in the wireless operating area?

This business of categorising, you were categorised either as a straight gunner, or as a wireless gunner. And you were

29:30 informed there that you were going to gunnery school at West Sale in Victoria because you're not up to the standards expected of wireless operators, that's in my case anyway.

That seems to me to be quite a hard combination, being a gunner plus a wireless operator?

Well, on operations, the

30:00 wireless gunner, he's just a wireless operator. He services a gun, if required, that's how it works out in a practical sense, but basically he's a wireless operator. He's called a wireless air gunner, and his little logo on his single wing had WAG [Wireless Air Gunner] on it, and the gunner had

30:30 AG, A-G [Air Gunner].

So how did you receive the news that you were going to go off to gunnery?

Oh, I was happy. I can also see that the Allies were gradually gaining the upper hand, and the war had to come to some sort of a logical conclusion in the not too

31:00 distant future. When the war started, you envisaged years of this, but this was late 1943. And then in 1944, that's when D Day, the big invasion of Europe took place, in June '44, so I wasn't too much out in my timing, I suppose.

31:30 **Did you talk about the situation in Europe to some of your mates in training?**

No, not really. Teenage boys have rather limited imagination, and it was more, "Let's get over there. Let's kill them." And these older ex-army fellows that I mentioned, well of course, they were really keyed up because

32:00 at last they had the chance to get into it.

What do you think was the general consensus around the time in Australia? Were they really behind sending everybody off to go and fight the war?

Oh yes, indeed. Patriotism ran very, very high indeed. The begging bowl was out constantly

32:30 at the government level to buy war bonds, because that was important. Even when the war ended, they were still selling war bonds. Even subscribed myself when the war was well and truly over. Just to prop up the economy, a necessary thing, you know. Squeeze

33:00 the last drop. 'Give till it hurts', was I think one of the standard propaganda messages of the day, 'Give till it hurts'.

I don't think it would work very well today. Can you imagine people buying something like that now?

Ah yes, when the back is against the wall, and propaganda is a wonderful thing too. If once again, your comment on the brainwashing, if they're brainwashed sufficiently, they'll succumb.

33:30 We can give in as individuals, we can give in as nations. If the pressure is on, you'll do it.

We are but sheep.

That's right.

So you, going back to yourself. So after Ballarat, you come back to Perth for some leave?

Yes, correct. I was home for Christmas.

And what was that like, being home for Christmas?

Oh it was very nice. Once again, to the boy who was,

34:00 couldn't get away overseas quick enough, we were beginning to get the feeling that, "Oh, we must be going overseas," and that's it. But that was probably an occasion for misery for the old people. I didn't drink at all, as befits this Presbyterian upbringing, accept for old Willie Frew, the haggis master.

34:30 And, my father was a drinker. He was a quiet gentleman cop, but he used to enjoy the grog [alcohol], as did some of my older brothers. But for a boy of under 21, no way. So, after that Christmas affair, off to the eastern states, and went to Bradfield,

35:00 which is north of Sydney.

And what were they?

And that was a holding camp.

Right.

And…

What were the facilities like there?

Oh just the usual, communal, communal living. Oh we were. I'm sorry, I've fouled something

35:30 up here. We didn't do the gunnery school, did we?

I was thinking.

Yes.

Hang on a second, if Bradfield…

I went home for Christmas. Now look, I'm going to look at my memory tickler. No, went to the gunnery school at West Sale.

Right, we're back on track.

Right, yes.

36:00 Yes, this is when we knew we were going overseas, because we were given pre-embarkation leave. Yes, we hadn't got to Bradfield. I jumped ahead there.

That's okay.

We were in the air gunnery school at West Sale, and we were in Avro Anson Aircraft training. And the Avro Anson

36:30 was a twin engine trainer for pilots, but they also fitted a gun turret on top of them to train gunners. So you just stood and sent this gun turret round manually.

So it wasn't hydraulic?

Oh no, no, you just went round with it. And

37:00 there were aircraft called Fairey Battles, that were a single, they had a single in-line engine and they used to tow a thing called a drogue. A drogue was a – you've seen the air sock at a small airfield – well a drogue was a very big air sock, towed on a cable behind the Fairey Battle. And from this, the Avro Anson

37:30 gun turret, we had to shoot at the drogue. Not shoot at the Fairey Battle, that was unforgivable, shoot at the drogue. And the ammunition, it all had to go and be dipped in paint, which was, I think the paint was a strong mix of turpentine because it was that thin, it was almost sticky. It wasn't

38:00 paint that was destined to stay on. But if you can picture turpentine with a dash of colour in it, it would be very sticky. And these, the guns, with the bullets rather in their belts, were all dipped into this different colours for the – I might be red and the bloke in the plane near me might be blue and someone else green and so forth. So you were all firing at this drogue, and the Fairey Battle

38:30 would go back. They'd examine the drogue and see how many hits you made. And three percent wasn't bad. I think I got five percent on one occasion, and I was elated. But, a gun, when you're firing a gun, it's like, if you picture you're out with the garden hose, and waving it around, well you couldn't always hit the target with the nozzle of a

39:00 hose, but if you scored a percentage, you'd be doing well.

Would the Avro Ansons be actually flying in a straight line, or would they be darting?

No, no straight line. Absolutely. And the Fairey Battle was straight too. Oh no, they weren't up to giving us any challenge at this. This was the theoretical side that they gave us there.

39:30 We had to study cones of fire, and…

What's a cone of fire?

This hose business. So that you can concentrate without wasting ammunition. And I'm trying to think of the name now. When the pilot has to

40:00 take the aircraft into an evasive situation to give the gunner an advantage, that's another one of the theories they just give you at that juncture. Having gone onto flying boats later, and my actual operation of flying, I was not put through

40:30 the routine of an operational training unit. Now operational training unit is when these fellows form together, group together as a crew, and went to an operational training unit. That's where they would have been given gunners more detail. But a flying boat is a different conception. It's flying at very low altitude,

41:00 just shadowing convoys for their protection. Their main function is to see that U-Boats [Unterseeboot – German submarine] do not surface, and if they do, it would be more in the nature of straight shooting than…

So theoretically, you've, you've got to be pretty accurate to ping off a submarine when you're flying really low. Is that right?

That's what we're taught.

41:30 To strafe the deck. But never fired a shot in anger.

So going back to the training, what are some of the difficulties in negotiating guns? Is it wind or weather conditions, or…?

No, the main problem with guns is if you get a blockage, which can occur. And remember when I was telling…

Tape 4

00:43 So on the 7th of January 1944, I graduated from the gunnery school, proudly wearing my gunner's brevet, the single wing with AG on it, and was sent

01:00 back home on pre-embarkation leave.

How did you get home?

By the train again, across the Nullarbor, on the old thingo. And built-in chockers, troopships, troop trains, they used to really pack them in like they did on troopships, too. And…

How did you spend your leave, Peter?

Well, I was attached to a place

01:30 called 5 Embarkation Depot at Subiaco, that was sort of out round that industrial factory area of Subiaco, I think towards Daglish.

It's near Jolimont.

Out there somewhere, yes. That was just sort of biding time until they could put us on another train. And then on the 13th March, over to Bradfield,

02:00 which was north of Sydney.

Just before we take that leg, how did you spend that time, biding your time during the embarkation leave?

Oh, that'd just be mainly domestic, farewelling doting aunties and the like, and perhaps send-off parties and I can't quite recall, but it would have been something quite conservative, nothing too sensational for a non-drinker. Probably had to go up to the church to another haggis party.

02:30 And, so from there, after that pre-embarkation leave, across to Sydney.

On a troop train again?

Oh yes, yes, no luxuries.

So you'd come all that way for a fairly non-eventful pre-embarkation leave?

Yes, that's right. Just to say goodbye to the old folks and away.

03:00 And, didn't seem to be at that Bradfield Embarkation Depot for very long. Visited by my grandfather's instructions, visited a few family relatives domiciled in Sydney. And I hadn't been to Sydney before. It was an exciting new place too, Sydney.

A lot bigger place than Perth to see.

Oh indeed, yes. I still like Sydney. It's quite an

03:30 exciting big city.

If I can just interrupt you Peter, just try to be not too distracted by those notes.

Oh yes, the dates aren't terribly relevant, righto, you want it all from here.

Yes, we want to see you, hear you.

Yes okay. Yes, I think it might have been about a fortnight we were at that Bradfield, and then they shoved us on a dirty, filthy little ship at Darling Harbour,

04:00 just around under the…upstream a bit from the [Harbour] Bridge. It was called the Cape Flattery. It was a Victory ship, so-called Victory ship. There was a, a Yank named Keiser that came up with the concept of a Liberty ship, and then this was supposed to be an improvement on the Liberty, the Victory ship, but basically they were mass-produced welded hulls.

04:30 The conventional form of shipping was all big plates, riveted together, as the Aquitania that I came home on. But these welded ships were, it was a quick fix, an American idea, it worked okay for conveying all of the essential stores across the Atlantic to the European theatre of war, and

05:00 also into the Japanese, the Pacific theatre of war. But they were very unstable ships – they could split their seams; they could do all sorts of horrible things. And they just had one cannon mark, down at the tail end. And whether there was anyone properly trained to use the cannon, I'll never know. But we just set out on our own, in this rotten little ship, no

05:30 escort or anything. The Australian Red Cross had given us, they must have, sort of, had liaison with the officialdom, knowing that we were going to some very cold regions, because they had given us sheepskin jackets. And we put these on, over our uniforms entirely, just to give that added bit of warmth, because boy. That ship, it wove all round the Pacific

06:00 before it got... I don't know how far south we went at South America, but eventually we got to San Francisco, anyhow.

What were conditions like on board?

Bloody awful. Oh before we got on board – this is where these old army blokes came in handy. This ship had previously carried a cargo of rotten potatoes and it was filthy. Oh, you, you wanted to throw up as soon as you got near it.

06:30 So these army fellows, called, "Right, all out men." They called a strike. So the ex-army types, you know, the old toughs among us, "This is not good enough. We're Australian servicemen going overseas to fight the Nazis. We're not going in that filthy thing." So we hung round and hung round for several hours, while the wharfies [wharf workers] gave this Cape Flattery a thorough scrub-out, and that

07:00 was it.

Did it come up all right?

Oh yes, within reason. And in typical troopship fashion, all the tiers of, sort of hard, webbing bunks, with a bum in your face, except the man on the top who bumps his forehead on the ceiling, and…

How many on board, do you think?

07:30 No, look, I'm sorry, I can't give you an accurate… Yes I could because I've got the lifeboat complement there. I pinched the…when we were leaving, just as a souvenir, I've still got it. I pinched off the noticeboard the lifeboat emergency stations, and I think it might have been about 350 from the

08:00 the number of lifeboats there were. Oh mostly, life rafts, actually, not conventional lifeboats. But these hulking big life raft things, I suppose they were big sort of cork platforms with ropes and floats all around them. And, there, the routine of… Oh there was a few British

08:30 army blokes on that, too. Yes, they must have been. They'd come from India I think, and they were going over to serve in Europe, or rejoin their British regiment in England, and then go to the European theatre of war, I suppose. But the usual routine of queuing for meals, you'd spend half the day sort of, going

09:00 through the meal routine because of the great number of men that had to be fed under tight and difficult conditions. The food was the basic – it was done by the American merchant people that were running the boat – just basic food again. Nothing to get excited about. And, oh we, we did a crossing of the line,

09:30 too here somewhere. They had a crossing of the line ceremony when we went over the equator. And they went through the usual King Neptune shaving routine.

Did all hell break loose?

Not really, there was no grog. And we had to do duty in the crows nest. This was one stupid little ship on its own

10:00 weaving all over the Pacific. So we had to have constant watch for the odd Japanese submarine that might just pick us off, but luckily we survived it. And another thing too, the Pacific lived up to its name. This was mid summer of course, well, late summer anyhow, March, yes March.

10:30 So the Pacific was fairly even. It was just enormous swells all the way.

So a comfortable journey.

We became fascinated with albatross for the first time, too – these magnificent birds constantly patrolling, looking for a handout. And all of the filth had to be accumulated and that was thrown overboard, right at the

11:00 very last light. So that if a Japanese submarine should happen upon all this floating debris, they wouldn't know exactly when it had been launched onto the ocean. But that was a routine, every evening.

So what kind of debris would be discarded?

Oh, all the muck from the… Not all the food was edible, remember.

11:30 I suppose that's why the sea birds used to get their cut. And anything else, just the usual routine rubbish, smokers' cigarettes packets and chocolate wrappers or whatever happened to be around, you know. But I can remember there was some dreadful bowel disease broke out which affected the whole tribe, and oh God, that was awful.

12:00 These communal latrines, there was no privacy and an abundance of flowing sea water to keep the place clean, as much as they could. So it was a… We were allowed to go up on deck if we thought we'd prefer to just drape ourselves around on deck, but

12:30 you wouldn't, you realise you wouldn't have any mattress support, no comfort underneath you. If you chose to just lay out on the open deck with just a blanket over you, well that was up to you. Salt water, was the order of the day. The only fresh you got was the water that was available to go into your water bottle to drink. I remember we went through a tropical storm

13:00 at one stage, and some of these old army types collected – they had a big canvas sheet up on deck – and they collected all the rain and had a good fresh-water wash-up, which was a privilege, of course. And that was it. We went to San Francisco and they shoved us onto a place called Angel Island. And

13:30 Angel Island was an American army holding camp. And to get to Angel Island you had to go by ferry. And we went right past Alcatraz, which fascinated us, to see the famous Alcatraz prison, which was an operative prison then. And on Angel

14:00 Island, we were told under no circumstances were we to go to the west side of the island as there was poison ivy growing all over the place. And poison ivy is one of those American plants that can devastate you if you come into personal contact with it. But the rumour leaked out that that was a load of rhubarb, anyhow, that the west side of the island was a big Japanese prison camp, so there's another little interesting aside.

14:30 **Did you ever verify that?**

No. But rumours run rife when you're in the services and you've got hundreds of people who profess to know the truth. We were all sergeants, and as sergeants we were qualified to be members of a non commissioned officers' mess.

15:00 In America, they have segregation of the non commissioned officers, but they are required to do what the Yanks refer to, as KP, which is kitchen police. So the non commissioned officers are required, on duty,

15:30 in the mess, the eatery, to fill a supervisory role. Probably to make sure that the peasants are cleaning up everything correctly. And we had to acquaint the Americans with the fact that we were non commissioned officers of the Royal Australian Air Force, and

16:00 no way did we associate ourselves with kitchen police, KP as they called it. So this was communicated at the top level from our commanding officer, who was the man in charge of the troops, was a Squadron Leader Dudley. And he won the point anyhow, and the Yanks were rather upset over that. To think, these goddamn Aussie bastards, they come here,

16:30 raving like God, when we've got to do the goddamn duties, 'dooties'.

That's how it should be, isn't it?

Yes, it's how it was.

And how had you been promoted to sergeant?

Well, that's on graduation. At the gunnery school, once I was qualified as a gunner, that would have been February, I think, in 1944, and that's it. When you're awarded your brevet, your wings, you're also

17:00 a sergeant.

So what was life like there on Angel Island? How long were you there?

Oh it might have been a fortnight there, and…

Can you describe the facilities?

Oh typical barrack accommodation, of course. We, we weren't given anything fancy by the Yanks at that level, but that was okay. And we went

17:30 into San Francisco on a couple of occasions, on this ferry boat business. And eventually, the day of moving, we were taken by ferry to a rail depot and put on this enormous great train, and for the first time we came to know train luxury,

18:00 because it was all Pullman cars. You've seen them on the movies, the old original Pullmans, where the seats of the day convert into beds at night, and they've got all these green curtains all the way, either side. And the bunks, bottom, top. And black Negro porter in charge of – car attendant – in charge of

18:30 each car. And that was quite a revelation for us to travel in the luxury of a Pullman train, and coal-fired locomotives of enormous proportions, very big things indeed. And this train seemed to do a lot of weaving.

If I could just, just rewind a bit there for a moment, Peter. So you went into San

19:00 **Francisco a couple of times?**

Yes.

How did you spend those visits?

Oh, just going around with a mouth open. Probably went into the slot machine arcades or something like that. No, we didn't have anything organised by way of any communal hospitality or the like, no. That came later in New York.

So the Pullman carriages were a little more comfortable than the cattle trucks?

19:30 Oh indeed, yes. We thought we were really whooping it up.

What observations did you make of the black porters on board the carriages?

Very, very gentlemanly people. Sterling, that was the name of the one we had, my name's Sterling. But true to Australian naivete, we didn't realise that Sterling wasn't

20:00 on a payroll. I think he must have been on gratuities, because they took round the hat at the end of the trip, and in typical Australian unionised fashion, we weren't giving any massive gratuities to any help. And he said, "That wasn't enough. I was expecting more."

Did he get more?

I don't think so.

20:30 Probably, probably muttering, "Tightfisted Aussie bastards." No, even to this day, we have a country which is very unionised and everyone gets a fair go, wage-wise. Gratuities are not really necessary. But as soon as you go abroad, where it's been the done thing, you're

21:00 expected to shell out. You must pay a tip, otherwise they won't acknowledge you. And we went to Salt Lake City, that's the principal city of the state of Utah, where the Mormons run the show. And we all got out there, and these old Mormon ducks were giving us doughnuts and coffee, and the train seemed to be there for a long time,

21:30 probably taking on water and more coal, or something. We went to Laramie in Wyoming. Laramie, Wyoming, was a long stopover because we were turned loose in the town there. And they said, "Oh, you've got two hours," or whatever it was, "and you're free." So you ran around America like mad. And that was a revelation. They were still trading

22:00 with silver dollars. Laramie, Wyoming, that seemed to be the standard currency, instead of folding paper money, which was in use elsewhere up till then, they were using the dollars. So we took a lot of

these as souvenirs with us, over to England.

Why doesn't that surprise me?

Because it was so unusual. Oh, we weaved across… Oh, Chicago…

22:30 I remember we went very slowly through Chicago and we saw all these gigantic… That's a big industrial steel area. These gigantic blast furnaces seemed to be everywhere. The whole place was under smog and you could see these enormous big fires. And then Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I can recall, there's a place there

23:00 where the train did a gigantic loop – it went to the head of a valley, and then back down the other side. And those at the front of the train could look straight across and see the tail of the train snaking its way around – it was an enormous, great, long train. Somewhere, I think it was more over in the Rockies [Rocky Mountains], we stopped for a long time, and it was really deep,

23:30 under snow. We hadn't seen really deep snow like that before. And some of these big bronzed Aussie types were shying off stripping to the waist and getting out and having a game throwing snowballs at one another. I think they were just putting on a front. Stripping down – it was quite unnecessary because it was bloody cold. And yeah, when we went over the Rockies.

24:00 I can recall at one of these mountain peaks, a big railway junction and there were some enormous engines. The one that we had on our train was big enough, but these were very, very big indeed. They must have been for hauling colossal big freight loads, built for enormous strength as against speed. They were far bigger than the things that the steam locomotives that we had over the Nullarbor

24:30 in those days. But, that was just an observation.

What was the tucker [food] like on board the train?

Oh, that was good, yes. Typical American. They're great on the corn, which was something we hadn't known before.

You hadn't eaten corn before?

Not that I recall, no. That was a… As we would have a heap of peas on a plate, they would have a heap of corn. It must be around the clock, it must have just come out of a

25:00 tin when it was out of season. It seemed to be one of their staples. And some decent meat and the likes, an escape from the army hash stews that we'd been accustomed to. And we went to New York, and

25:30 just where we were dumped I can't recall completely. But we were taken to a place called New Rochelle, which is up north of New York. And then from New Rochelle, a ferry across to Fort Slocombe – the Yanks are great on these island army establishments, evidently.

26:00 The blokes can't go AWL, absent without leave, so we were put at this Fort Slocombe. And once again, there, this business about KP came up, and we didn't do KP because we were gentlemen of the Australian air force. And, oh one amusing thing,

26:30 I wanted a haircut. On this Fort Slocombe, this American army base, there was a civilian barber and he had a sign over the door, 'Haircut $1.00'. I think, if I recall, our haircuts in Australia were 25 cents, 2 shillings and six pence. So that's it, right,

27:00 haircut $1.00. So I had a haircut. Now the, the standard hair, in those days we didn't have dry hair as you do now. In those days, the young men used to have their hair slicked with Brylcreem, that was the, the thing, you looked right if you had your hair smoothed with Brylcreem. So,

27:30 when I came to pay, he was an Italian barber, when I came to pay him it was a dollar thirty. I said, "A dollar thirty? Haircuts one dollar!" Oh, but you had cream on your hair. So, I got the message, "This is America."

What were the names of some of the popular cuts in those days?

That would have been contained in Australia, the

28:00 smearing of Brylcreem would have been contained within the haircut, but that was an add-on there, obviously.

Peter, what were names of some of the popular cuts, do you recall?

No, I don't. We, we just always joked about basin cut, and short back and sides. Basin cut was supposedly where you just put a basin on a bloke's head and cut off everything that poked out. In other words, his hair was always thick, but neat and even all round. And short back and sides was the conventional,

28:30 such as I'm wearing now, if I had anything up here. And New York was fascinating, anyhow. We were given a fair time there. We were given a ferry, go over to New Rochelle and get, a high speed electric train, it was called the Newhaven line, yes Newhaven, and that would take us down to the main city of

New York.

29:00 I was always a lover of live theatre. Oh, and in San Francisco, I forgot to mention, I saw the live performance of 'The Student Prince' there, which fascinated me.

Did you see that with a few mates?

Beg your pardon?

Did you see that with a few mates?

No, one, if I recall. And in America, yes, mates, now.

29:30 This is a non-drinking type who liked theatre. Most of the tribe were looking for the fast lane, I think.

Which consisted of?

Well, you remember I told you about the old army types, we had a lot of them. Ah, yes, New York. I saw

30:00 a few plays there, and it was quite fascinating. 'Oklahoma' had had its first release. I'd never been to a grand opera, I'd been to Gilbert & Sullivan in Australia, but a grand opera I'd never been to. And I went to Rigoletto with a young New Zealand officer, and oh my God, we didn't cotton on to it. And

30:30 this was something that hit home too. They're not afraid to take an overflow audience. Here in Australia we've got rigid fire regulations, you sit or you're not admitted. There, all the seats are occupied, and they have a sign, 'Standing Room Only'. So they're letting people pour in, in their hundreds, to stand in the aisles,

31:00 and along the back and all this – that's dangerous. So we went to the standing room only, and we'd only been there about half an hour, and, oh no, we hadn't come to terms with grand opera sung in Italian. So we backed out and resold our tickets to this enormous queue of people waiting outside.

You've got to be happy with that?

Oh yes, they were happy and we were happy.

31:30 'Cause they got immediate admission. We must have had pass-outs, I just remember, but I can remember selling our admission to these people. They were probably Italian mommas, or something, waiting in the queue, I just forget.

They were probably hoping to get seats.

Yes, they might have been too, but boy, were they in for a shock when they got inside. And the, the American Red Cross and YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], they were very generous.

32:00 **How were they generous, Peter?**

Oh, just extending hospitality for the servicemen, of whatever ilk. You'd just go into these huge places for coffee, doughnuts and hot dogs. Oh, there was an official reception, we were there for Anzac Day. This was organised by the Australian legation, and the air force, I suppose. And we were entertained to a cocktail party,

32:30 which meant nothing to a wowser. In fact, there was no soft drink, and I can remember having a sip of a martini cocktail and not liking it. And they had a few weird looking things like stuffed olive savouries or something. And this was in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, that's the monstrous big

33:00 traditional upmarket hotel. And there were a few high-class looking American mommas there, sort of entertaining the Aussies with a bit of polite conversation. And one of our cheeky types asked, yeah a bloke named Guthrie, he asked one of these mommas, "How much a head would this be?" Oh, I think she said, "I guess somewhere around 15 dollars."

33:30 Well that was a hell of a lot of money, 15 dollars a head just to appear with a little finger crooked at a cocktail party in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. It went right over my head, anyhow.

It doesn't sound like value for money, does it?

No, not at all. The actual Anzac Day service, I've still got it there amongst all that memorabilia, that was in

34:00 one of the prominent Episcopalian churches, yeah, that's the Anglican Church in New York. Yes, that was something different. Oh, at this cocktail party – this always nauseates me, it nauseates me more so, even to this day – you'll get a throng of Australians in the public arena and they've got to sing

34:30 Waltzing bloody Matilda, and they can't. They're incapable. You can go to any sporting event here, any major public event, and these clowns get up en masse, mainly half pissed most of the time, and they're trying to sing 'Waltzing Matilda'; it goes down like a lead balloon. So that happened at this Waldorf Astoria, too. Yes, yes, it was just a non event, that must be why it went right out the door

35:00 for me, not enjoying the grog or anything.

What nobody cared to hear it, or they didn't know the words themselves, or...?

They don't know the words. Oh the Yanks would have been thrilled to bits if they'd heard it sung by a massed choir.

Did the Yanks...?

But that was this old Squadron Leader Dudley's idea of putting on a special treat, I fancy.

Did the Yanks make any difficulty out of understanding the Aussies?

Yes, they did indeed. Now,

35:30 I can remember one old girl, she... Not the idioms of the language, so much. But she said, "Oh, you boys sure do speak mighty beautiful English, not like us." So that was her impression, she must have been able to understand a plain version.

What other impressions did New York make on you?

36:00 **It's a hell of a big bustling city.**

Yes.

Compared to Perth.

By instruction, I had to visit some rellies [relatives], just more connections on Long Island, and going... I was on my own at this stage. Going in the... What's it called? The underground there?

The subway.

The subway, that's right, yes. It's the Metro in France and the Underground in London, yes the subway.

36:30 And that was quite interesting. These were terribly nice people. I just went there for lunch if I recall. They were relations of a cousin of mine, who married a Yank naval man.

Distant relatives.

Well they weren't relations at all, they were just skins connections. And, that was something new to me.

37:00 I was an 18 year old who experienced strawberry shortbread tart, it was really nice. Something new on the menu, in fact I don't think its invaded Australia yet.

Did you put any in your pocket?

No. Yes, they were nice people and quite friendly.

37:30 And, oh well, after that Fort Slocombe episode, we were trundled on a, a personnel barge and across to port, and put on a big troopship called the Athlone Castle. The exact number I couldn't vouch for, but this is where these servicemen rumours come about, rumoured to be 8,000 men on this

38:00 big, it was a big, it belonged to the Union Castle Line of Britain, the Athlone Castle. And that was under command of the Americans. They had a vast throng of Americans going over to the war, so we... This is May,

38:30 yeah May 1944, and the European Invasion took place in June. So they must have gone hot off the ship and into a final training camp, just to polish up before the European invasion. So there was this vast throng of Yanks, and hundreds of Australians, and a few

39:00 British that I mentioned earlier had come from India. And that ship was, because it was under American command, it was just swamped in luxury to our way of thinking. We'd come from Australia, where rationing was well in command, or in vogue, and they had all sorts of lovely luxuries, like

39:30 an abundance of chocolates and exotic biscuits, and... That was the first time in my life I'd tried smoking, these big fat cigars that the Yanks specialise in, that they were selling for peanuts. And I thought, "Oh gee, this looks good." And a few puffs and I thought I was going to die, so that was the end of my interest there. But I bought lots of chocolates, Hershey's chocolates they were called. I bought lots of chocolate

40:00 and took them to my rellies in England, which they were duly grateful.

How did you hoard them away?

Hmm?

How did you hoard them away?

Oh, you can always squeeze something more into your kitbag, or throw out an ACF [Australian Comforts Fund] scarf or something. Anything to squirrel a bit of space.

A bit of Scottish know-how?

Oh yes. There's always some blokes used to

40:30 carry their impossible loads. I don't know how they did it, but they did it. You'd see them struggling along with a kitbag. You can keep pushing, pushing, pushing. "Oh, I lost my kitbag in America, through no fault of my own. It was going through some process of baggage handling, and went onto a wrong loading somewhere." And

41:00 this old Squadron Leader Dudley just about had a baby because I'd lost my kitbag, but we found another one. I suppose they carried a few for emergencies, and they must have had some emergency items too, to go into it, whatever our standard kit was.

So you'd lost your kitbag and your kit?

Yes well there must have been kit in it, whatever it was, I'm trying to recall. It couldn't have been my uniform, 'cause I had that on. It might have been that

41:30 horrible goon skin thing, if we still had it. But we must have, it might have been an overall, because you had to have that overall to, have for a working garment, wherever you were.

Tape 5

00:31 And the Poms have it at the setting of the sun.

Did you manage to meet many of the Americans when you were on board?

Not really, they were just sort of passing shadows. We're a cliquey lot, so we stuck together, I suppose. For good relationships, they may have kept them reasonably segregated.

So what part of the boat were you?

Oh, down there

01:00 somewhere. I mentioned there were supposedly eight thousand on board, which I believe because there was a vast horde. And we got to Liverpool.

What were the conditions like on the boat, first? Beds? What were you sleeping on?

Oh these, woven fabric things, webbing, I suppose. Yes I don't recall, I don't recall any mattresses, as such. They were steel, steel frame

01:30 with a webbing insert, and they would have been five or six high, and everyone had a bum in their face, except the one up top who had the ceiling pressing on his forehead. You sort of got out like a sandwich tray. You couldn't leap into bed, that's for sure.

Was there much seasickness on board?

No, I don't recall, no.

Because you were travelling

02:00 **a reasonable way?**

And across the wild Atlantic. But this would have been the onset of summer, wouldn't it? Spring, yes spring, early summer. The weather may have been subsiding a bit, I can't recall that.

What were you doing to pass the time?

I can only recall escort ships, so we must have been part of a big convoy. Passing the time.

02:30 Isn't that awful, coming back on that Aquitania I can remember how we passed the time. Oh, I know. The Yanks played housie or lotto or bingo, and they call it bingo. You've played lotto have you, the board, housie. What do you call it?

Bingo.

You call it bingo, yeah. Well they call it bingo, but they have…

03:00 It's not the straight-out numbers as we have. They say, is it, five isn't it, bingo. Under the B-49, under the 0-28, under the, you know, we played a lot of bingo, coming. And cards. Not too much reading, I don't think.

A bit of gambling on board?

I don't recall there. Oh wait a minute, wait, wait, wait, it's coming back to me, yes, yes. We had a wild man

03:30 named George Mellick, M-e-l-l-i-c-k, he's dead now. And George Mellick he was a very handsome Spanish looking type, we called him Pedro. And, no Pancho, that's right, we called him Pancho. He looked like one of these handsome Mexican moustachioed gentlemen. He was Lebanese

04:00 I fancy, Mellick, I think it's a Lebanese name. He came from North Queensland. And on that Cape Flattery he was gambling furiously and he won about three thousand dollars American, which means that he was in America with plenty of money.

04:30 And he must have been horribly gifted sexually, 'cause when we were on this Athlone Castle going over the Atlantic, "Oh, look at this fellows, look at this, oh." And he brought out this… The Americans have lovely sort of gifts, Christmas cards, and this was a magnificent diary with all red velvet and gold fittings all round it, and

05:00 gold clasp on it. And inside it, it said, "To Pancho, the only man who has ever satisfied me." And he was flat broke, don't know where his three thousand went. So then he got straight back into the gambling again and won a lot more on this ship. That's one of those canny people. As we progress, I'll tell you another story about Pancho. So we landed at Liverpool around about May 15th, I think.

05:30 **How long were you on the ship for then? Was it a week?**

Yeah, about two, I think. Because we went to that Anzac thing on April 25, and then diddled around at Fort Slocombe again. Yes, I think it is about a fortnight. Convoys, of necessity, had to weave. They certainly wouldn't be going straight over or the Germans would pick them off, no trouble

Were there any…?

Alarms?

06:00 **Yes.**

No.

That was lucky. So you managed to get to Liverpool.

Liverpool. And then there was a group of us detailed off. The Poms took over now and said, "Well, you half dozen, you're getting on the Queen Mary." And behind a big army truck was this enormous trailer. We found out later it was used for carting

06:30 aircraft around out on open strips, like, if things were bombed madly and they had to shift planes in a hurry and they weren't fuelled up, or driveable or anything, they'd put them on these Queen Marys, this huge trailer. So the Queen Mary was loaded up with all this air force luggage and five of six or us were told, "You ride on the Queen Mary. See the luggage doesn't drop off." So, that was our introduction. And it was bitterly cold, and here we were, huddled in our greatcoats,

07:00 that was mid-May. And we went to a little, it was called 11 PDRC, Personnel Despatch and Receiving Centre, 11 PCRC at Padgate, a small village, oh between Liverpool and Manchester, there's a fairly large town called Warrington. And Padgate was a village just on the fringe of Warrington.

07:30 So, we holed up there for a couple of months. And once again…

Is this a holding camp?

A holding camp, yes. Personnel Despatch and Receiving Centre, 11 PDRC.

Are you there with some of the folk that you came with from Australia in this holding camp?

Oh yes, yes, the same tribe. That was when we first ran against

08:00 wartime austerity. Australians have a fetish for showering daily and hot water, and there just weren't none. Oh no, I think it used to be on for half an hour in the morning or something, if the system was working, so everybody would run like mad to get to the hot shower before it died.

Did they have any heating in the holding camp?

No, no, no way. That was a waste of fuel in war time, the only thing

08:30 that was heated was hot water, and water for cooking too. And that's when you're introduced to the English wartime diet, which was extremely basic.

Which was?

Just gooey stewey stuff, and cabbage and potatoes and stodge. Stodge pudding, sinker we used to call it, sinker. You know the nature of a steamed pudding. Well, you know, steamed puddings aren't so relevant now, but they used to be

09:00 years ago, another old colonial hand-me-down from Brit [Britain]. Just a stodgy white, oh, they can be tarted up a lot, as I mentioned sago earlier on, that was another favourite, but you wouldn't get sago in wartime Britain. So we used to eat the sinker, and the luxury with sinker was a bit of golden syrup. If

you were lucky, that was imported from Oz [Australia] probably, or the Caribbean Islands, maybe.

What was for breakfast?

09:30 This powdered egg stuff, and porridge. The porridge is very much a standby and it's a good filler. And that's about it. As for modern sophisticated cereals, what were they?

Were you doing any sorts of training when you there, just to keep up fitness?

No. Oh yes, we had to do PT [physical training],

10:00 that was all, physical training, running on the spot, and round in a circle and so forth. But it was a holding camp – we were just sort of waiting there, to find out where we were going. And we used to get a lot of leave.

Where would you go?

And I used to indulge my pet love of going to the live theatre, which we didn't have a great deal of in Perth. There was the Repertory in Perth, but Warrington had

10:30 several theatres; we used to go there. And to Manchester. And dancing. I met a Scottish girl who's father had a business in Lee, they lived, Lee, Lancashire, which is sort of, well on the outskirts of Manchester, so I used to go haring off there at every opportunity.

How would you find out about

11:00 **these sorts of dances?**

Oh well, just hear of them through the, they, they have a thing there called the, the NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute], the N-A-A-F-I, the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute. You ask any English person that, the NAAFI is well known to them – they just called it the NAAFI, that was it. And they would communicate there was to be a dance held there, or there.

11:30 It was the first time I'd ever seen roundabouts, they captured my imagination. Australia is now chock-a-block full of roundabouts, but they did not exist in my childhood or youth. But gradually they've crept up on us. But the Poms had lots of roundabouts, in Lancashire especially, which is as flat as the Nullarbor Plain.

Did you manage to convince any of your mates

12:00 **to come with you to any of the theatre productions?**

No. They were toffee-nosed in that regard. I don't really know. I might have gone on one occasion, had one on one occasion, but that was my particular bent.

I think that's lovely.

A lot of them were heading to the boozer [pub], of course. Because they were in old England where boozing is a wonderful pastime. And the Padgate village pub,

12:30 in war time, it was just chockers. And of course, this was early summer and they'd be pouring out onto the footpath.

Did you get to mix with any of the other services?

No.

So Padgate was really a…

We used to see the Yanks. There were lots of Americans hurtling around, all over the place, mostly in jeeps or big truckloads.

13:00 Now and again I'd be with a mate, and we'd hitch-hike and get picked up by a Yank in a jeep. But it was always just a courtesy transport. Buses, provincial buses, were our main means of transport at that time.

What were the Americans doing there?

What were they doing there? They went over to win the war, girl. And boy, they won it. No, they were assembling in their tens of thousands. Remember

13:30 the ship I went on? It was predominantly American.

I'm just wondering if it's…

They were just going over to feed, you know, the classic comment, cannon fodder, just going over to feed the system.

Yeah, I was just wondering if they were doing any training there, or if it was a base, or if it was…?

Oh, now, this is interesting. There was an American base. It must have been right next door to us, because I'd never seen a bazooka, you've… A bazooka is a

14:00 big rocket-propelling gun that you hold over your shoulder. The counterpart now is the rocket propelled grenade that you see these mad…

Terrorists.

Terrorists launching. It's got sort of a fancy-looking head on it, that's the counterpart now. But the bazooka was a new gadget then, and we did have a Yank training camp right next door.

14:30 Because I can remember with a mate wandering along idly and studying this, and one of them said, "Say guy, come over and have a go." So we went and had a go, and the hearing's never been the same since, I don't think.

'Cause that would have been.

One of those new experiences.

Really new technology back then.

Oh it was indeed, yes. Rockets, for modern warfare, hadn't really been used.

15:00 **Were they using these on the ground, or were they using them from airplanes?**

No on the ground. And rocket-propelled takeoffs came right at the end of the business, if I recall. This enabled an aircraft to go up quickly. Instead of taking off gently under its own thrust, its own power, the rocket would get it there in a hurry, then its own power could take over.

15:30 But you're right, that was a new technology, to my knowledge, when they introduced it in the bazooka gun, first up. Right.

Are you talking amongst yourselves as to where you might end up, or do you already know where you're going to end up?

No. Postings – that's the word. Yes, "Oh, you've got a posting to so-and-so. You've got a posting to so-and-so." And

16:00 we were there for… I didn't move out of the place until early August, but there were blokes sort of moving off successively through that time. Oh, I was going to tell you about Pancho. The day we arrived, we were being accommodated in a long hut. Not in private cubicles or anything like that, just

16:30 barrack room accommodation. And this George Mellick, the great Lothario, he was a nice man, I always like him, he had a real personality type. And as soon as we walked in, selected beds and there were slates, that's right

17:00 Each bed had a slate. You had to write your name and rank on it. So, he wrote, 'G. Mellick, WAG.' Wireless Air Gunner, that's right. He was G Mellick WAG. And smart-arse, to my dying day, when he wasn't looking, he went to the toilet or something, I wrote WOG. Now, here is an

17:30 innocent, stupid, Presbyterian-raised, ignoramus who'd never heard of a wog, not at all, I say that in all innocence, I'd never heard the word used at all. And just for a joke, I wrote WOG, and poor old George came back, and oh God, he nearly went insane. He was rushing around and reaching for the nearest knife and wanting to kill everyone in the place. And he psyched on me and determined that I was the only one with a

18:00 mentality stupid enough to do this. And of course, I vehemently denied it, told the most blatant lies that, "No way George would I ever have said such a thing." I didn't even know it was going to offend anybody, a word like that. How does it? You know, little innocent... He always had his suspicion that it was me, but he never discovered conclusively that it was. But as the years have gone by, I've remembered this and always felt regret, you know, how you feel

18:30 regret as you go through life. No, it was a cruel thing to do because of the, oh, the stigma attached to the word in certain circles. He was a Lebanese, I think. Oh, an Australian of Lebanese extraction, and that word would have been just anathema to them.

Well now it's almost a form of endearment?

Oh, you've got to be careful

19:00 who you say that to. The Greeks have embraced it as a joke, with Con the Fruiterer, or whatever he is. I wouldn't use it, not now.

After your bad experience so many years ago.

That's right.

Well now it's on record, you can, you can.

Oh, George's dead. He's older than me. I did enquire.

19:30 Hazel and I were in Queensland on holidays some years ago and we met up with some one named Mellick, and I told him the story about having been with George Mellick. He said, "Oh yes, he's a distant cousin of mine. He's a wild bugger. I think he's dead now." So there's relief to have him out of the way.

So he was still a wild bugger even in his older years.

20:00 **So how long are you hanging around this place in Padgate?**

The whole of June, the whole of July. And, say two and a half months, because I went to... I was sent straight to the 10th Squadron down in the south of Devon on August the 3rd.

Was there anything in particular that you were hoping to get posted to?

Yes, I always fancied these flying boats, I've always had a

20:30 passion for them. And, I don't know if it was strict, pardon me, strict policy or not, but I already had a brother there. There was another two brothers there, Tom and Harry Derby, they were businessmen in West Perth here after the war. And just in the broad sense, I think, were the

21:00 government were able to accommodate, they would put brothers, an older brother to sort of, be a mentor or an overseer, or protector or whatever, for a younger brother, so that may have come into it.

So your chances for getting into.

But you were not allowed to fly. They were very strict on that. I've never flown with that brother. The time I flew with another brother in a Lancaster, I think that was very much

21:30 under the lap.

Can you extrapolate as to why it was a big no-no for brothers to fly together?

I'll draw a parallel. There's an old movie, an American movie called, The Sullivans. Five Sullivan brothers went into the navy, trained together, went onto the same ship, ship went down, and grief forever for the whole family.

22:00 And our policy, our government's policy, was such a thing must never happen to our people, so, you know. Yes, I wasn't even allowed to fly with my brother even on a test flight, on our squadron. He had preceded me by several years – he's nine years older than me this one. And he married a girl in a village near the squadron. And they had

22:30 one baby when I arrived, and another one was born not long after. That was an interesting thing, on censorship. Audrey is my English sister-in-law, Michael their baby. And I've got an old letter there that I mailed from Sydney to my POW brother in Germany.

23:00 I don't know how, but it had to go through my sister-in-law, a civilian link. In war time, all service letters were mailed at a discount, where you have discount rate for Christmas cards here, well, if you were addressing a letter to Sergeant Joe Blow, or a parcel to Nurse

23:30 Mary Brown, it had to go at a concession rate. This one I wrote from Sydney was an aerogram. Aerogram – you'd write a letter and they'd do it on little microfilm and then send that over and then blow it up at the other end. It was returned to me unacceptable, not sufficient postage for a civilian address. So it's there to see, the way censorship worked.

24:00 I wrote this from the camp at Bradfield in Sydney, to my POW brother, and I said, "Dear Don, Tomorrow I'm going to visit...," or just the usual blah, blah, and then in the middle I said, "Oh, tomorrow, I'm going to visit Audrey and Michael." And that told him, the day after I wrote that, I was going on this horrible Cape Flattery across the Pacific. But the letter

24:30 never got to him anyhow. I've still got it among my memorabilia. But that was censorship. If you dared to say anything direct, the censor just cut it out, or they'd have a razor blade and chop out the relevant pieces in case that letter ever fell into enemy hands. That would have been disastrous.

That would have been an enormous task to censor every letter?

Oh yes, indeed. Every, every unit right throughout the entire services had a

25:00 censorship officer. It was his job to read everybody's private mail. It was absolutely essential. He was privy to their private thoughts and their romances, and their griefs and whatever. If there was something that he thought was doubtful regarding national security – out. For the same reason, we weren't allowed to have cameras, we weren't allowed to own film. And yet I was speaking to a man just through the week,

25:30 and he said, "Oh yes, I managed to sneak one." And I said, "Your film. You must have been getting, buying it illegally on the black market, off the, the squadron's cameraman, or photographer or whatever." Some people are determined to get around. And you weren't allowed to keep a diary, no 'Dear diary, Today we are going to Afghanistan or Timbuktu', no way.

Still there were a lot of fellows who managed to keep diaries.

26:00 There were, yes.

How about yourself?

As I said earlier, I was a little innocent stupid, and I didn't dare do anything venturesome.

So is that something that you regretted in later years?

Yes, yes, I could have made an interesting diary with the only one I've got now, and it hasn't got any written fact to prove.

You mentioned that there was a squadron cameraman, was there, for...?

26:30 Oh, see the big photographs I have here? They're all from the squadron-based photographer. This is a word that you may have encountered before, a foreign order, or a foreigner: "Oh, I see you've got a foreigner there." Now a foreigner was something that was produced on His Majesty's premises,

27:00 and on His Majesty's money, but it was capitalised by the foreign order makers. The instrument section on the squadron. Now an instrument maker, he does tiny technical work, well he was good at wedding and engagement rings and fancy brooches to give to girlfriends or mothers or whatever, lockets or whatever. That was their hobby on the side. And all of

27:30 those photographs I have, they were purchased off the squadron photographer. They weren't bought off any welfare agency or any official avenues. Oh, they'd take...go around and visit your barrack rooms, where you're accommodated, and, "Oh fellows, here's a new list of good shots. Some of you may be interested. Four and sixpence each." "Righto, I'll have two of those and one of that." That's how I got that. There's one with the

28:00 the Duke of Gloucester, you know, the King's mother. These old high ranking characters would visit from time to time and go along and inspect the ranks, and, "How do you do? What are you doing here? Where do you come from?" Oh, it's just a formality.

So what does this squadron base look like?

Well there's a photograph there, if you want to put it on your close-up. It was a

28:30 peninsula, peninsula jutting down into Plymouth Sound. And Plymouth Sound is where Sir Francis Drake amassed his armada. And you went down a very steep hill from the top down to the flatter area where this peninsula projected out into the Plymouth Sound.

29:00 And the end of it, there was an enormous breakwater, just to protect the safe anchorage of flying boats, or rather, shipping at anchor, against the inroads of the English Channel. And on the end of this, before the breakwater, on the end of this peninsula, there was a Martello tower. I've since discovered that's what it was.

29:30 Have you been to Britain before? The whole of the south coast of England has these ancient Martello towers. They are big medieval stone fortresses against the invading French, Spaniards or whoever may have been coming towards them. And that's what this one was, obviously. It's all been... The whole place has been bulldozed and converted now, I understand, into a very

30:00 upmarket housing estate. It's probably a millionaires' alley because it had wonderful views in every direction, you know. The protected water, they could set up fancy pleasure boat piers and the like. That's just something I've heard in latter years, that it's gone very upmarket. No records of what was there before, which applies to most old air force bases, I think.

Was this a bit of a step up, as far as facilities were

30:30 **concerned, going to 10 Squadron?**

Yes, it was a permanent Royal Air Force base. A very solid looking place. The barrack rooms weren't mission huts. They were big, solid, but sombre grey looking buildings. Naturally, they had to have a lot of camouflage on them, too, so that could make them sombre, anyhow. The officers' mess,

31:00 it was quite a substantial looking big residential castle on the side of a hill, it used to be referred to as the pigs castle, and the pigs mess. And some person at one stage, donated a pig to the officers' mess, and then subsequently, the collection was added

31:30 to, and they had quite a collection of china pigs. And when the war ended, someone in authority had them packaged all up to have them sent to Australia, but they just seemed to have disappeared. It was called the pigs' mess, because someone had nicknamed those hulky great flying boats, flying pigs. They were such big

32:00 grotesque looking fat things, so that's how it came about, the pigs mess and the pigs castle to go with it. It was all just a clever ocker joke, I suppose.

Well, that's pretty, very Australian way to treat a situation?

Yes, that's right.

How many people in the base were actually Australian? What was the break-up of nationalities?

It was entirely Australian, roughly

32:30 a thousand. I think this squadron was unique, insofar it was all Australian. When we were getting very close to the end of the war, Jamaica put their hand up to say that they wanted to be in it, and we started getting a lot of these black Jamaicans, who were good seamen evidently. They were coming as drivers of the little service, the speedboats,

33:00 that used to go out to the flying boats to take all our gear out. But up until then. Oh, there might have been RAF [Royal Air Force] men off the boats, but there weren't too many English in sight. Everywhere you went it was the Australian blue uniform. Oh, the girls working in the messes, they were all Royal Air Force, and the girls working on

33:30 communications, and nurses and so forth, they were all Royal Air Force. But the people running the squadron, all the way down, whether they were engine fitters, aircraft fitters, photographers or whatever, they were all Australian.

So you did actually have some women on the base?

They were right up the top of that big hill that I mentioned, and they were either wireless or

34:00 lackeys.

Did you manage to socialise very much with some of the women?

Yes, when there were… We used to have dances. And you'd get very friendly with some of them, some of them not so friendly. A lot of the blokes married them, too. They were older and more eligible, married. There was one I knew,

34:30 she was a wireless operator, a Phyllis Duke, a nice girl. She was the daughter of an Anglican parson up in Exeter or somewhere up there, further up in North Devon. I inquired after her when my wife and I went across 25 years ago, but they said she'd died. Oh and that girl that I had in Lee, in Lancashire, she'd died too, of cancer. That's the way,

35:00 the world turns around, isn't it?

As far as facilities were concerned, did this have a little bit better cooking than perhaps you'd found so far?

No, it was still the same basics. Even though we were in a sergeants' mess now, we weren't afforded any special privilege. These nondescript stewey-looking messes.

35:30 And the porridge, the inevitable porridge for breakfast, and burnt toast. Oh, this is funny. We, because we were in air crew, every few weeks you had to front up to a flight lieutenant and receive your egg and orange. And

36:00 and this particular officer, he had done a tour of duty and then was assigned to administrative duties on station, and his name was Barney Fogg. And all of the jokesters, titled him Barney Fogg, EO, you know how you have a, a title, an AO or whatever. Well, he was Barney Fogg, EO, Barney Fogg,

36:30 eggs and oranges. You'd have to go into his office and salute and, "Thank you, sir," and step back. So if you were feeling lucky, you'd get that egg fried for breakfast, or you may take it out on your flying boat. And the cook, who was, every trip had to be me, they'd cook it for you. But an egg was like gold. But my egg, it'd always used to go to my sister-in-law and her babies.

37:00 I've no regrets. I was well padded on the stodge and the like.

Oh, that was a nice thing to do.

Well they were so precious, things like that, and they're essential parts of nutrition.

What was it like to be around your brother again?

Oh, I never saw a lot of him because he was a married man living off the base.

37:30 And I wasn't allowed to fly with him, of course. So I'd just see him in passing. And he was an officer, so I'd have to salute him, you see. Yes, he was living in this little village where he and his wife married, off base. I think when they were flying they had to stay on base that night because we had to get up at 3.00 am to go out on patrols. That's when you had a long patrol, anyhow.

38:00 So he'd have to stay in one of those rooms at the officers' castle, then. And, what else were we coming at there?

Well your mum must have been pleased to know that you were both within cooee of each other?

Yes, it was probably some sort of relief to her, having had one a POW – who

38:30 is missing for a long time and then subsequently turned up a POW. And to later in the piece, towards the end of the war, to have this one killed, too. So I suppose she felt some degree of security there. It's bound to have.

So up until this point, you really don't know much about flying boats, but you're in a flying boat squadron. How do they go around

39:00 **training you in order to pick you up to speed?**

You're given to the, the gunnery officer, and the gunnery officer is the manager of gunners and guns. And he was a Flight Lieutenant Don Conaker, who came from Sydney. I think he was a pharmacist, a much older man than me, of course. And he had ceased flying and was doing this administrative job, so

39:30 he'd put you through the whole routine again of the gunnery training, which you'd learnt before to give you a refresher course, so to speak. And once he considered you were capable of going out and getting behind a gun, in action if need be, he'd turn you loose on the system.

Were there any practical exercises, you know how you were…?

40:00 Oh yes, yes, I beg your pardon, there were. Yes we had to go out and do… Oh, I think that was, we had some locally and also at Pembroke. I can remember doing them at Pembroke, which was in Wales. Yes we had to do a little bit of that air-to-air firing, it's called, just to make sure you knew what you were doing.

Was that still with the coloured bullets?

Yes, you had to have a marker indicator, to show what score

40:30 you were capable of attaining, just that sticky paint.

How much of a score do you have to have, before you're let loose on the world?

Well as I mentioned in the training, if you got 5% you were doing very well. I think most of mine was about 3, and I got one at 5. That was in the air gunners' school.

41:00 **How did they know that you were effectively trained up to be put with a flying boat?**

Oh, I suppose a lot of this is done on chitchats with an officer who has been there, done that. And, as I may have mentioned, these flying boats were prewar luxury. They were very big hulky things. They had two decks.

41:30 And everything was expressed – because they were a waterborne craft to a certain extent – everything was expressed in naval parlance. Up where they flew, it was the bridge. Where we cooked the meals was the galley. Next to the galley was the wardroom, that's where the spine bashing took place, when you were off duty. And,

42:00 the bomb.

Tape 6

00:32 After some preliminaries with the gunnery officer, you're released for flying. You'd already undergone some specific training in air-to-air firing and local flights, just to get the feel of crewing procedure, they'd be test flights and the like. Or another favourite one, was compass

01:00 swings – they had to go up to check the compass was working happily.

How did you check that?

I don't know, I'm not a navigator. But the compass is the vital element in… This is hands-on navigation. You didn't have all the modern technology that they do now. That's why, the navigator, he was the most important man on the whole

01:30 show. I admired them very much. But you only had one navigator. All of the other fliers were in multiples, but not the navigator, he was one lonely soul. And the only time he could get a rest was when there was a straight course – he'd given directions to the pilot and he could go down and have spine bash for half an hour or whatever. But,

02:00 it was towards the end of 1944, I went on my first trip, and that was to blazes down the south of the Bay of Biscay. We went very close to Santander, you know. Santander was in neutral Spain, right at the north end of Spain, quite a pretty place to see. All the orange terracotta roofs, terraced

02:30 down the hill slopes, but that was strange. And, the object of that, of course, was just to patrol the Bay of Biscay, because the German submarine bay was at St Nazaire in France, and that was an enormous sphere of their operations. And the Allies had to try to keep them bottled up in there.

03:00 **What would happen on a regulation operation on board the plane?**

When you get on board, you had to stow the ammunition in its drums, and link it up, and fix your guns in their mounts. The tail, where I was flying, had four guns. They were hydraulically controlled and they were in a hydraulically

03:30 operated turret, as well. And as you worked, it was just like riding a motorbike. As you turned the handlebars, the turret would go round. And with the throttle on a motorbike, that was how you get the elevation or the depression of the guns. And then there was a…

04:00 I suppose nowadays you'd call it an electronic site, it was a, an illuminated site, a red ring with a red spot in the middle. As distinct from a manual type, which was called a ring and bead, that was like a metallic ring with a piece up in the middle, with a bead on it. But this one, I think it was called a Sperry gun sight, if I recall.

04:30 That's probably the name of the company who made them. It was quite a clever gun sight, anyhow.

Did it improve your aim?

Oh yes, it was more specific than this other type, but it's purely visual of course, unlike modern which is dependent on a lot of button kicking as well.

All computerised.

I don't know if I mentioned earlier, the flying boat

05:00 being a boat that flies, everything hung on it from British tradition, I suppose, had to be expressed in naval terms. The bridge is where they were flying it, the galley is where we were cooking the food, next to the galley was the wardroom. Now, the wardroom in the navy is where the officers eat. Well,

05:30 this wardroom was just where anyone ate. Oh, it had a table in between these two bunks where the off-duty people would lay and rest. And then there, you always referred to forward and aft, and the catwalk, which is common parlance on the ships. The catwalk is the bit that went from the bomb room right down the tail, to the tail gunners' positions.

06:00 And we, this being a turret that spun right around, we knew, you opened up to get in, and when you were in, you just closed those doors and they locked behind you so that you were in a little capsule on your own. That Lancaster fellow I mentioned, on my brothers' crew, that got chopped off, see his whole capsule just got disintegrated with a falling bomb, sad thing. However.

06:30 **How many degrees could you rotate in your turret?**

They'd go right round the 180, and may have been a slight margin over that, just to make sure you didn't hit your tail plate. That would be sad to do that. But I think there may have been an overriding factor for perhaps another five degrees. The guns may have elevated

07:00 automatically just to take in that extra little bit so that you didn't shoot your own tail. That was to give you maximum advantage of the available space.

Was it comfortable riding in the tail turret?

No. My God, all you did was sit on a very tiny cushion about that wide and that deep.

07:30 That was solid leather, green. I stole mine at the cessation of hostilities. You were asking earlier about squeezing things into a kitbag, well I squeezed that in and brought it back and had it for years as a garden kneeler. It was a beaut little ornament, using around. But I donated it to the Air Force Museum down Bull Creek, so I hope they've got it in their collection now.

Could you see

08:00 **pretty well vertically beneath you, when you were in the turret?**

Not straight down, but you can see a fair bit down.

You wouldn't want to suffer vertigo, I don't suppose?

Oh no, no way. I always felt very secure actually. You're sitting out there on your own, and you're just in communication with headphones, and there's no idle chit chat or music or

08:30 anything of that order going on, it's just strictly business. The captain makes a comment, or the

navigator might just call up and say, “2 degrees port,” and the captain would turn 2 degrees port, and, “Roger,” and that’s it. Or else. Or that’s something we used the gun turret for, or the gun sight. When you’re right out over the Atlantic

09:00 we were flying at about 1200 feet. It wasn’t very high – that’s good visual sighting. If you get too high, you don’t see anything. Most of the sky over there, it’s just a dirty, dull, leaden grey, and you’ve got this dirty, dull, leaden-grey ocean of the Atlantic – it’s not the sparkling bright light

09:30 as we have out in this country, that’s just not on at all. And the navigator, to facilitate his dead reckoning, he would ask for a flame float to be thrown over. Now a flame float is a big pyrotechnic – it’d be about that long, big bright yellow thing. And the off-duty

10:00 gunner would tear a seal off that, that would expose it to the outside air, and at the given instruction, he’d throw it overboard out one of these hatches on the side. And then the gunner would be called into action now to look at that flame float. I think the actual flame probably

10:30 roared up about ten or twelve feet high, but to look at it from up there, it’s just like a flickering match or a candle. And the gunner had to focus, quite specifically, he’s dead spot sight on that little flame down on the grey water. And the inside of this turret, which moves hydraulically, it had calibrations for

11:00 the port, or the calibrations for the starboard. And the gunner, as he was watching that, he would be calling out to the navigator, “Green four, green five, green four, green five and a half, green four,” just. This indicates the amount of drift. The engines of a plane are sending it straight ahead. But

11:30 because of the wind a plane can be going ahead but be moving slightly to the side. The same thing applies now, but not quite to the same extent because jets are so powerful. They can just fly through the wind. But a big lumbering plane like this, it is very susceptible to wind influence. That was important that the navigator have an absolutely correct reading of the drift. So that was a little function that

12:00 had to be performed there. And there was some other thing I was going to mention on navigation that, it was all very much hands-on. Oh, if I can hark back to… This was one of those onerous duties we had to do, the lower mortals of

12:30 the air crew, of which I was one. We had to do duty on the flying boat, at anchor, and the idea of this was, if bad weather came up, the plane, it was on the starboard side, yes, up on the starboard wing, there was a, a bilge pump. If bad weather comes up,

13:00 rain will, the water will gradually get thrown in, and the depth of water will rise up and she’ll sink. So we had to be on bilge duty out on the water, just in case this event took place.

How long would you be rostered on?

Oh you had to sleep there all night, just in case.

13:30 And a friend of mine on the squadron, he was in a violent storm doing just this duty, and he thought, “To hell with this. Let the bastard sink.” So he took off, and it sank. Oh well, he would have sunk with it. But such is officialdom that he had to appear before the panel, and I don’t know whether he went as far as a court martial, but oh, it was frowned upon, to think someone would

14:00 do such a dastardly thing as to neglect a million pound plane in the face of duty. Duty was more important, never mind. And you’d be battling to start the damn bilge too in a hideous storm. Oh that was one of the duties that had to be performed before we could take off, too, a routine procedure. The hull of a flying boat, overnight, or since the previous trip, has got lots of water down in the bilge that’s got to be

14:30 pumped right out. Any boat on the river even has to be pumped out, otherwise you’ve got this great lump of water sloshing around, it’ll throw everything out of kilter.

What was the routine on an operation day, from your briefing, sort of through the day?

I never went to a briefing, ever, you know that? That’s strange to say, but I didn’t. Once again, “You lower orders, we’ll tell you all about it when we get out there.”

And how were you told?

Oh, as soon as we were airborne

15:00 we’d be given the story, “We’re on a box patrol today,” or, “We’re escorting the Queen Elizabeth,” which we did on one occasion.

If I can just interrupt, who would go for the briefing, Peter?

Oh, the pilots, and the navigator and one of the engineers, to my knowledge.

Where were they briefed?

Up in the operations centre, which was one of these bombproof sections,

15:30 right up away from the accommodation area. It was sort of sitting on its own, under heavy concrete camouflage.

And what would you do with the time that left you to spare?

Oh, we had to be going out and getting the guns and all this other gear, take the food out and so forth. If we were on a long patrol, 14 hours to feed 11 or 12 men, there had to be a fair amount of food going out.

Can you tell me where you picked up your food and ammo [ammunition] and stuff?

Yeah, that had to be

16:00 picked up from the gun store in the morning. Also the food, when we went to have very early breakfast, we'd pick up the other items there then.

How did you collect the ammunition?

Oh well, it was carried in boxes, and then when we got it on board it had to be stored in the drums, and fed in,

16:30 ready for action. And, oh, after we took off, that was always an instruction the captain would say, "Righto, test the guns." One of the routines. Our guns were always, because we were seaborne, our guns were always heavily caked in lanolin and oil and goop. After every trip, that was one of our routine jobs, the gunners, we had to clean the

17:00 blasted things thoroughly and lubricate them with, I don't know what it was, it was referred to as gun oil; it was bright red. And it's bitterly cold, your hands are just about frozen off, but you had to get this red oil all over you, and your hands felt worse after they came out of the oil than when they went in. But the permanent non-moving parts,

17:30 they were all the external parts, they were heavily caked in lanolin, a heavy sheep's wool grease. We didn't wash that off after every trip, but all the moving parts had to be scrupulously cleaned, and through the barrel and soaked in this horrible red oil.

And what about the, the ground crew. Was there a ground crew that was responsible for most maintenance?

18:00 Oh yes, there were, there was quite a big operation there. There was an engineering officer. I think he had one of the very frustrating jobs, too. He had to be a very, a man very much, strict in control. He would be a peacetime mechanical engineer. And it was his responsibility just to keep those engines functioning, and laying the whip on the peasants that were working for him, all down the line.

18:30 They had fitter, fitters 2Es, they were the engine fitters, and fitters 2A, they were the aircraft frame fitters of varying descriptions. If a plane had a hole in it, well the fitter 2A would have to repair that.

What were your relationships like with the ground crew?

Very good, yes, I'm still. I belong to an association here and still meet up with some of the old crowd there. They were

19:00 very good.

What about your relationships within your crew?

Now this was a strange thing. I mentioned earlier when we were at that holding camp, some of them were drafted off to go to an operational training unit. And at an operational training unit, a group of blokes gradually got to know one another and teamed up to form a crew to go onto a bomber or whatever. But these flying boats,

19:30 perhaps because of the nature of the work being less high pressure than bombing, they used to be, not hire and fire, but as one dropped out another one came in, they were sort of rotating all the time. So that a new bloke would go onto a crew that were already experienced, and then perhaps the navigator, in a

20:00 few more trips, perhaps he would drop out because his term of duty had expired. And then they'd bring in a new navigator and he'd have to learn the routine. It was an odd arrangement in that regard.

Did it ever cause any complications or concerns?

No, I don't think so. It seemed to work. But I would have thought the other system would… You'd form a tighter social group

20:30 with the other system, I think. I could probably nominate five pilots that I'd flown with, whereas, were I a gunner on a bomber squadron, I'd be only able to nominate only one or two because I'd been through the whole show with them.

So what you're essentially saying is

21:00 **that you didn't bond that closely?**

I don't think the same degree of bonding was there. You'd bond with the people in your own category, the gunners or the wireless gunners, or whatever. The pilots were, of course, all commissioned officers, too. Some of the engineers were commissioned officers.

21:30 Most of them were warrant officers. Yes, I can remember, it was our skipper's 21st birthday, he was a pretty bright boy to be flying at the age of 20, 21, to be flying a Sunderland flying boat, which were regarded as sort of a cream situation, so to speak. And the whole gang of us went to Torquay

22:00 and stayed in a hotel together, that was good. But, such instances were rare, I fancy. Clarke was his name, Flight Lieutenant Laurie [Lawrence] Clarke. He came from Sydney.

Apart from the crews being relatively transient, did rank ever come between your relationships?

No, no, not relevant. That was just

22:30 your own personal acknowledgment, I think. No, there was no rank problem. No-one ever stood over the other bloke, "I'm a sergeant. You'll do what I say," sort of thing, no way. Or a flight lieutenant, the same thing.

So to put it really simply, the pilots or the navigators weren't snobs to the gunners, or…?

Oh no, no, no way. The pilot, he was always referred to as skipper

23:00 in that English naval term again. But, you addressed everyone by their particular position, not by their personal names.

Just while we're on the subject, what was it like saluting to your older brother?

You know the story – you're not saluting the person, you're just saluting the commission that he holds.

So there's always a bit of a wink, or?

That's no big deal, no.

23:30 And if the officer is doing the right thing and he doesn't get a salute, well he pulls you into gear. You salute the Kings' commission, as it was then.

What about watercraft skills, because you're on a flying boat?

No, we just had to hang on tight on the little speedboat, it was called. I'm calling it a speedboat, it was a tender that took us out. And then

24:00 there was a thing called the bomb scow – that was a great big ugly barge with depth charges on it. The depth charges weighed, I think they might have been about 300 pounds each. We had six of them. And the bomb scow would come alongside, and there'd be a crew whose duty it was to install those. All we had to do was – or the captain through the

24:30 peasants working roundabout – had to check them to see they were going to function. They were on a solenoid, a release, a release mechanism, and they'd test the solenoid just to make sure it was going to drop, if it was required to drop.

Before they were attached?

Yes. There'd be a bombing crew from ground staff who had to install those things.

How long was spent in preparation

25:00 **before you were ready to take off?**

Hmm?

How long was spent in preparation before you were ready to take off?

Oh, it was probably an hour and a half. It seemed to go on for quite a while, while the mere mortals were fiddling around with these basic jobs, and the officers were doing the briefing session, and then they'd come on board later. Sometimes we'd go out on the same thing, depending how long they were taking at the briefing.

25:30 There was a forward compartment, right up at the nose of the flying boat. You've got what's referred to as the forward compartment – that's where you go in the little door to get into it. And, at the very nose, there was a gun turret installed, and that retracted to expose

26:00 the mooring bollard. You've seen a bollard on jetties, a big thing for tying up ships to, or whatever? Well there was a bollard on the flying boat, and it was in that forward compartment, and it was hinged at the base, and it used to have to lay down when you were flying, but you had to bring it up and lock it, so it was held firmly,

26:30 at the top, while you were undoing the moorings. Then you've got three enormous factors here, especially in England where you've got tremendous tides – you've got a tide race, you've got the current, and you've also got the wind. So this is where you want a very clever captain, someone who is really capable of doing a good job, so that he can get close enough to the big mooring

27:00 buoy, for the toad in the nose to dress the buoy, or undress the buoy, that's the 'boo-ee' as the Yanks call it.

So which crew members were responsible for mooring?

The gunner. Yeah the gunner who was the cook, the cook of the day, he had to do that. There were three gunners, and the one who was doing the odd-sod jobs, he would do the mooring and the unmooring. My older brother,

27:30 this was a long time before I got there, I was a boy at school, I think, when I heard this one. He was doing the mooring, and this big bollard, it had a hinge pin down at the base. And there… It must have been an enormous strain. I think those boats weighed about 30 tons, and then you've got these factors of tide, wind and current, pulling tremendous

28:00 force. And the thing snapped at the bottom. It was held at the top, snapped at the bottom, and came up into his groin and did him some horrible damage. He was in hospital for a long time. He had to have a lot of massive muscular repair.

Sounds dreadful.

Yes, well it was, I'm sure. He didn't get a medal for it. If he'd been a Yankee, he would have got the Purple Heart, I suppose. I might get gunned for saying a thing like that.

28:30 **We might get into trouble for laughing, mightn't we?**

Yes. And in that forward compartment there was a magnificent big, brass bell, that was a fog bell. If ever you were caught, as fogs were quite common in the English Channel, you might have landed in a fog and been fortunate enough not to have crashed in the fog. And this bell had to be rung all the time.

While you were taxiing?

Well, it was just there as a protection,

29:00 in case. Like one of those things that may never be used, but it had to be there. And I mentioned that I stole my tail turret cushion, but there was an extreme penalty for stealing one of those bells. When the war was all over and the show was finished and they were selling all these things off to the scrap merchants, no-one dared to take a bell – big trouble.

Not even at the

29:30 **end of the war?**

No, not at the end of the war, no. They were all melted down. They could have been magnificent souvenirs sitting in bowling club bars or anything now, mementos of a war passed.

I imagine most of them would have found their way to Australia.

They would have, but I've never heard of one having been stolen, 'cause they were… It was extremely frowned upon.

What was the process for taking off?

Thou shall not steal the bell.

30:00 **What was the process for taking off, Peter…the procedure when you took off?**

We weren't in our positions, that's for sure. We had to be cosied up in a bunch, ready just in case of a prang. Backs to a bulkhead. Bulkheads – that ship thing again. It was divided into bulkheads; it had bulkhead doors.

Which bulkhead would you gather at?

In case. Right up under the bridge.

30:30 From this galley there was this little ladder that went up to the bridge. The oddbods that were round about would just have to be in a take-off position. We'd get the call, the same as when you're flying. The captain says, "Prepare for takeoff," or, "Prepare to land," or whatever, we'd just get the instruction.

31:00 **What was take-off like?**

Prepare. Quite good actually. A lot of people imagine that these things take off like an aircraft does on a tarmac, on its rubber pneumatic tyres, but that's not on with a flying boat. You would find it exceedingly difficult to take a flying boat off on static, like placid water. You've got to have a bit of a

31:30 swell, or a little bit of chop, not too much, just enough, so that at the strategic moment, when he wants to take it off, you've got enormous drag, there's all this water down there, holding the hull down, it's only a boat that flies, and it's being dragged back. So, this is where you've got to have a clever pilot, just at that strategic moment, he bounces it off on a little wave, if he can find one. So the

32:00 more cosy the waves are, probably the shorter his take off. But you'll see from photographs, there's a first step and a second step. Well they had to get up to the final step before they could launch off with the least resistance from the water at that point.

Did the novelty of landing and taking off in one of these flying boats ever dwindle?

32:30 I'm sorry.

Did the novelty of landing and flying on one of these flying boats ever dwindle?

Oh no, it's like everything else, it's just a routine procedure. Of course, I have heard people say oh, they'd be nice to have them now, but this drag factor is something that kills them. You've got a readymade landing strip with water, but there's got to be an engineering limit,

33:00 to what you can use on that water. Flying boats, some countries tried them but they're not economic. There's a limit to their loading.

Just from what I've learned about them while working with the archive, I'm kind of really intrigued. I'd love to have the opportunity to land and take off in one. I don't think I'd ever, ever like…

Yes, very slow and unusual. As to whether they've ever had one with jet engines, I doubt it. It would only

33:30 be an experimental thing, and the jet might tear away from the show before it could get airborne. That Howard Hughes built the biggest one ever in America. It's still there, the Sea Goose, I think it was called. It was a huge thing.

Spruce Goose?

Oh, Spruce Goose, yes, you're right. That was made of spruce timber on the frame. But I think he might have been in fairyland somehow. It did fly, just

34:00 a couple of kilometres and then land, and that was the end of it, they just, it's been on ice every since.

It was a dud, wasn't it?

Well, it probably got to the point where it just couldn't fly, it was too big. But, there's got be limits, engineering limits, I think, to these things. I was, I was saying to someone the other day, that didn't appreciate, concerning submarines. We look at the TV or go to the movies,

34:30 and we think, "Oh, a submarine is a fantastic undersea ship." It's not. A submarine is a ship that travels on the surface, but it just has the capability of going under when it's required to go under, that's all. But as for them being down under all the time, doing all these wonderful things, well, that's another matter.

You're destroying all these wonderful myths, Peter.

Oh, oh now, perhaps I may

35:00 may be unkind to the very modern submarine. I'm going back to the war years. There's a very interesting book, it's called Operation Drumbeat and it goes into all this. And Operation Drumbeat exposes the gross negligence of the United States Navy, how they concentrated their effort in the Pacific and ignored the Atlantic.

35:30 It was an Admiral King who was the Chief of the United States Navy, and his thoughts were firmly fixed on the devastation in Hawaii at Pearl Harbour. And he just sort of shrugged his shoulders and said, "There's no problem in the Atlantic." And Churchill [Prime Minister of England] and Roosevelt [President of United States] were pleading with him to get stuck into the German submarines, "No, it'll never happen here." So all

36:00 up and down that east coast of the United States, as fast as the ships ventured out, the German submarines were picking them off. And these were big submarines that were going across, they were surface ships, just going across to the west, to the east coast of America and picking up the supply ships that were destined to take fuel and other vital commodities over to Britain. Even

36:30 cargoes of vital wartime minerals that were coming from South America, just going up the coast to deliver them to America for manufacturing processes for the war effort, the Germans were just knocking them off like billy-o. And this went on for about 18 months before this stupid old King got the message, they nearly lost out.

How important do you think your function was in patrolling those waters?

37:00 Well, it was an essential. If you didn't do it, the submarines would just be taking over and picking off the ships like mad, as they were on this east coast factor that I just mentioned. But because there was substantial patrols on all the time, that forced the submarines to stay down. They knew if they reared their ugly heads, they'd get picked off.

37:30 And right at the very end of the war, the Germans introduced what they referred to as a snorkel. The submarine, it only runs on diesel engines, but it has electric engines for these brief periods when it's under. And the submarine must come to the surface to charge those batteries up. There's a limit to

38:00 electric power. So the Germans discovered what they referred to as a snorkel. It was a shield that went over the exhaust pipe. And they could go along slowly on the surface and recharge their batteries, and to we people up top it looked to all the world like a white capped wave. So the water was just flowing over, just like a shower bath,

38:30 but the air could get in to get rid of the exhaust gas and allow fresh air into the diesel engines while they were recharging the batteries. So that was one of our functions, we had to look very careful for suspicious waves. If we saw a white capped wave that looked a bit different, we had to report it to the skipper, "Suspicious whitecap bearing 24 starboard," sort of thing, and he'd go down and take a look.

39:00 It was too late to say, "Oh, we missed that one." But that was a clever strategy that the Germans, Admiral Donitz I think it was, who implemented that one.

Do you recall making any such sightings?

No, that was just one of our routines we had to be on the lookout for these things.

In retrospect.

The basic function is… See people think that

39:30 it's all glamour and kill, but it's not. The basic function is patrol. You hear the odd sensation. I can quote you one there, where some flying boat, I think it shot down about five Junkers 88, but that's not on every trip. As I mentioned, I never fired a shot in anger. But you had to be there to patrol,

40:00 just to keep the peace.

As a young man and being in the role of a gunner, was it ever a disappointment to you that you didn't engage with the enemy?

Yes, oh indeed, after we'd been trained to engage. The job's getting a bit dull; there's no action.

And would you joke about that amongst yourselves?

No, not at all.

40:30 **In retrospect.**

No, we were all content to know that we were there, just maintaining this patrol, and to hell with them. Let them stay down, 'cause we don't want them up.

In retrospect, are you pleased that you didn't engage with the enemy?

Yes. War is a dirty, nasty business and the less you know about it the better off you are. You've only got to look at the horrific things that have taken place since, and are still taking place

41:00 in various parts of the world. And modern warfare, in particular, is a very cruel thing. One blast and you write off a whole mob of people in a flash.

It's not a sporting chance.

That's sneaky, too sneaky.

Tape 7

00:32 **I just wanted to pick up a couple of questions after, what are you laughing at?**

Enter the high pressure interview. Sorry viewers, sorry.

Having a go at me?

Come on, on with the dance.

I was just going to say…

Remember the MC?

01:00 **You mentioned when you were talking to Julian, the box patrol…**

Yes.

What is that?

A box patrol is an extreme navigation exercise, when the navigator is very much in command. The pilot flies the thing and is the skipper, or the captain,

01:30 but the navigator, in this particular air force, is the key man, really. Without a navigator, you're nothing. So the box patrol had to be undertaken when there were people who had been downed and were floating in a little life raft. And you'd have to do a very careful search of a particular area, and you'd be detailed off

02:00 to do a box patrol of an area which might have been say, eight miles by ten miles. And he's got to go round, and then he goes back the other way and repeats that. So that visually, anyone in the plane that's only being an observation platform visually, anyone can see something or someone down on the water.

02:30 That was the nature of a box patrol. There's the usual, would be, just a line ahead, escorting a convoy or whatever.

How difficult is that to negotiate, this box patrol?

Oh, I'm not a navigator, but I think it would be very difficult.

Do you have to call out any signals?

It would require enormous

03:00 accuracy. Oh yes, the navigator and the pilot – the pilot is under constant instruction. Because the navigator is plotting manually, it's no fancy technology then, it had to be done perfectly. That's where the navigator is very much running the show and just calling the instruction,

03:30 so many degrees starboard, or so many degrees port, whatever it happened to be at the time. And everything relates very much to time sequences on navigation, of course.

Did you ever do patrols at night?

Yes, indeed.

Were they more difficult than the daylight?

Once again, the navigator, you're nothing without a good navigator, you're nothing.

04:00 **Can you give me…**

It always surprised me why there was only one. He was the hardest workman in the whole show.

'Cause you did mention that you had three pilots on board, is that right?

Yes. On the long patrols, we'd have another one.

Is there was two and a spare?

Yes, and the spare would be sleeping, or resting. At night, this was a…

04:30 We had some big magnesium flares, like big candlesticks. And this was to illuminate the whole sky – they were really brilliant. Down at the rear end, just outside the tail turret, there was a chute, just a tube, and this off-duty gunner,

05:00 that was his job, too. There was a rack with these big magnesium candles. And it was his job to feed them in manually. And this was one of the exercises that we had to be trained and timed on, too, so that there's no lapse, you've got to be pew, pew, pew, pew, and you're feeding these things. It's all manual. And as they drop down this tube, there's an electric contact would ignite them,

05:30 and from the front end, from the bridge of the aircraft, the whole sky, the ocean is brilliantly illuminated, so it shows up anything that would be of interest. One of our crews, this happened while I was there, the fellow was feeding these things down and one jammed, and of course this instant fire.

06:00 They only just got back. They screamed, grabbed the fire extinguisher and put it out, then limped back. The tail of the plane was only just capable of landing it. Just one of the hazards that occur.

Can you think of any other hazards that you might have on the plane, or flying boat?

The bombs,

06:30 they were big cylinders, the depth charges. They had to be run out under the wings on an electric motor, a cable, you'd run them out. And we would have to open the doors manually, then run them out ready for the control up top to drop them. And they were capable of jamming.

07:00 If you wanted them to go out, they might not necessarily go. And I remember. We had an emergency dinghy, in case of a downing, and the dinghy had a big oar, or a couple of big oars. And one of my mates had to grab an oar and keep

07:30 poking this thing to get it to move out to where it was meant to go, to be dropped. On one occasion, it's in my log book there, we were coming back and our own base was completely snowed in. It must have been the winter. It was. Devon was under very heavy snow in the Christmas of 1944, so it

08:00 would have been that winter. And we couldn't get into our own base, because of a big snow storm, and had to go further east along the English Channel, into the Solent, that's where they have the famous yacht races, that area in behind the Isle of Wight. And that was all under heavy snow too. But

08:30 one of our engines had died, and this is a political thing too, I imagined. Those original aircraft had four Bristol Pegasus engines in them. Now, we of the Royal Air Force determined that there was nothing quite like a Bristol Pegasus engine, you see, and that's the most…

09:00 And if you lost one, boy you had trouble. So we lost one, it died and we had to keep coming in in this dense fog situation, with the snow at our own base, and snowed in at this other base we were going to divert to. And at the western end of the Isle of Wight, you may have heard of the needles – there are these big limestone cliffs –

09:30 and we were cruising very dangerously close to these and someone up top said, "Oh shit," and there was a sudden turn to get away. And prior to this we had thrown everything overboard that was not men, because by lightening the load, most of your fuel has already gone, you're not carrying weight there. And bombs, guns, anything else that you can get rid of

10:00 is not as precious as men, is it? It can be replaced. So that was it, we came in very low because we only had three motors. Now I contend this was a political thing, because the Americans had a far superior engine that they had on their Flying Fortresses, and somewhere along the line, the Yanks visited

10:30 and there was a party on or something. And somebody said, "Why don't you, oh, put a set of your motors at our disposal, if they're that good?" And the Yanks did just that. That was a Pratt & Whitney Wasp Mach 4 engine, and the Yanks supervised the installation of their engines into our crummy old English flying boats.

11:00 And that was a turning point. They took off like rockets and they could fly happily on through. And the air ministry, oh, there was supposed to have been big trouble up there, because who dared make such a decision to do such a thing. This was giving prestige to American technology, you see. That's what it was all about. That's how I say, some of these things get very political. But the Yanks

11:30 proved a point, and the mad Australian engineers that did the swap proved a point. Further down the line it became official policy. As the war was closing, they were installing Pratt & Whitney Wasp Mach 4 engines into these British flying boats. And their old Bristol Pegasus', they were out. And they were probably owned by some of the House of Lords you see, the Bristol Engine Company, or whoever.

12:00 **Like you said, it sounds very political.**

Yes, I think you get a political element creeping in. This has always happens.

Can you describe what it's like inside? How much room have you got to move around?

Plenty of room. They were big, roomy, you could walk about. This is why they were so glamorised, I suppose, or the thought of going in them was attractive. They were a

12:30 a luxury passenger carrying aircraft before the war. And amongst these attributes, they also had a proper toilet. And a proper flush toilet, it was. All aluminium and everything. It had an aluminium lock door. Can I tell a funny story?

Sure.

Everyone has a Daniel Boone.

13:00 There was a Daniel Boone on the squadron, he was an ACHGD [Air Craft Hand General Duties]. Now they are the lowest forms of life.

What is, sorry, a Daniel Boone?

Daniel Boone. Probably wasn't his real name, but he was Boone anyhow. But if you're name's Boone, you're called Daniel, so that's it.

Right, I've got you now.

Yes, and he was an ACHGD, so that's Air Craft Hand General Duties. They're the boys who scrub the dunnies [toilets] and sweep the grounds

13:30 and pump out petrol manually, any odd-bod jobs that's got to be done by the lower forms of labour. So

this Daniel Boone, he was always wanting to go for a flight. And he'd talked one of the crews into taking him, just on a test flight one day. And from time to time, test flights had to be done to make sure the things were capable of going out on a long patrol. A test flight might be half an hour, it might be an hour

14:00 and a half, or two hours. So he went out on a test flight, and he wanted to go to the toilet urgently, and rushed to the toilet, and the door was locked. There was someone in there. "Bugger off, Daniel." "Quick, quick, it's urgent, I've got to go, I've got to go." And they said, "Oh well," one of the wags there said, "Oh quick, down the rear facing camera hatch." Now down at the tail

14:30 end, where those big steps are towards the tail turret, there was a rear facing camera hatch. It was a nice round hole, just like a toilet, and you undid four big bolts, and that's where this big camera was mounted so that after an attack you could get photographs of the submarine that had been done. So this Daniel, quick as a flash, rushed down, undid the bolts, slammed

15:00 his bum onto the hole and then the truth dawned. He came out with his hair all beautifully gelled up with his own excrement. It got caught in the slipstream, and straight up his back and neck; that was his episode. There was another story, there was a WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force],

15:30 she was affectionately known as 'crockery mouth', because she had those big false teeth which were most noticeable. She couldn't camouflage them, that was it. The blokes called her 'crockery mouth'. So 'crockery mouth', she'd always been at them, "Why don't you take me on a flight? Why don't you take me on a flight?" So she chatted up the lower echelons of this crew to take her out and

16:00 right-o, she went on a flight, and it happened to be about a 12-hour patrol. And, as I mentioned, the lower echelons were the ones that she'd conned, and the floor of the flying boat was where you had to lift these aluminium sections to pump out the bilge. So what did she do? She spent most of her flight, not sitting up there like the queen, but down in the bilge with a bloody lid on her, because every time

16:30 the officers from up top happened to appear, "Quick, you bitch, down." So, that fixed her up.

That was very funny.

I shouldn't have been telling that story, but it's in public now.

I enjoyed it.

It's over 50 years ago, who cares!

Exactly. Got any safety

17:00 **features on board the flying boats?**

No parachutes. There's the first thing, because you don't need them because you can't use them. Because we flew at such low attitude, we had to wear the Mae West [life jacket], as it was called. That's an inflatable waistcoat. And that was it. I think that was the only safety device we had.

17:30 **Was it noisy at all, up there?**

Oh ear plugs you're thinking of, yes, no ear plugs. No. Sounds like my wife now. A fire extinguisher was available, yes. Oh a story I can tell you, didn't concern me, of course, I wouldn't be here to tell you.

18:00 But prior to my going to the squadron, a flying boat took off and went out over the breakwater into the open English Channel and disappeared, just like that. This particular crew, so the story related at the inquiry, they had been in the habit of lighting their kerosene Primus stove – have you seen these old-fashioned? –

18:30 there were two burners in the galley, where we cooked the meals. They had been in the habit of lighting up prematurely, to have a quick cup of tea after take-off. We'd got up very early in the morning, grabbed a quick scratch of whatever to eat, and then off. So the chances are they were dying for a cuppa. And the story was, they were in the habit

19:00 of lighting up after very quickly after they took off. And when a plane, any plane, these modern jets, that's the most dangerous time, when they take off, they're on their maximum load of fuel, that's why you've got to be so careful. So, one theory was that these people just went 'poof' because they lit their Primus and the vapours were still around from this high octane fuel and just the blew the lot of them to kingdom come.

19:30 The other one was, it may have been an Arado sea plane. The Germans had a tiny little sea plane that used to fly very close to the water, and of course it was all camouflaged up top and couldn't be readily seen. And they thought this cheeky plane may have crossed the English Channel and just been patrolling around at this time, waiting for the flying boats to take off on their patrols, and they picked it off.

20:00 And once again, you had this enormous big load of fuel, so, bang, they'd go in a flash.

How long could you fly in, with the amount of fuel you had on board?

I think 14 hours was our maximum if I recall. Most of the patrols were 10 or 12 hours, but it I think 14, I've got a few there at 14, that's with the fuel load. The engineer is also a very important

20:30 member of the crew, because his function is to make sure that the motors are functioning as required. And control the fuel consumption. He's constantly liaising with the man who's flying the thing, to acquaint him with the limits of endurance. And we'd have two engineers. There'd be one on the job,

21:00 and another one resting. But that poor navigator, a loner.

How many people would be on board at any given time?

About ten. Three pilots, three gunners, that's six, two engineers, eight, two wireless operator gunners, ten.

That's quite a big crew.

Yes, it was. Did I count the navigator? No. Eleven.

21:30 Yes, they were a big crew.

Can you take me through one of the days that starts at 3.00 am in the morning. What process do you go to in order to get out on one of these night shift patrols?

Well, the duty orderlies had to wake the tribe – you didn't have alarm clocks, probably weren't allowed to use them, I don't know. But the duty orderlies would come and stir you up. And once again, you had to go to the

22:00 toilet on time – that's why you were trained as boys to go on time. And have the quick scrub-up or shave or whatever. And then gather your gear and go down to eat. And then pick up the rations for this long trip.

What sort of rations would you pick up?

Horsemeat was one

22:30 I remember, they used to give us. You'd eat that when it was all stewed up in the mess and you wouldn't know. But when they think they're dishing out a privilege to you, and giving you the raw meat, you can see it's got this awful shiny blue tinge. Oh a lot of people eat it and love it, some European races go for it. But we just weren't bred to it, were we? We were red meat beef eaters.

23:00 That was the meat side of things, which…

How do you cook horse?

Well I was going to say, it was only a piece of tough old steak, which the duty cook would grill under those kerosene Primus burners. Bread, to be toasted. Another one that was on every trip, never missed, was those tins of herrings – Scottish tinned fish.

23:30 **Well that doesn't sound too bad.**

Yeah, but it gets monotonous when it's on all the time. And bread, stodge bread and margarine of unknown origin. And tea and coffee and I suppose that was about it. And we probably had, no we didn't have condensed milk. I'm trying to think what sort of milk it was. It must have been powdered. Condensed milk, that was a luxury. Once

24:00 the Australian Comforts Fund, you could buy condensed milk off them when they'd have a distribution of these things. And once a friend and I went to Kent, and we were staying on a farm in Kent on a hospitality scheme, and we were there in the fruit season, and we came back with these huge containers of cherries and

24:30 strawberries, and they were really lush. So we put them all out on improvised plates – your tin dixie [metal pot] I think they were called, a food tin – and invited all the blokes to come to the feast. And we poured condensed milk over the lot, fresh fruit smothered in condensed milk, that was lovely. But we didn't get condensed

25:00 milk as a ration on the flying, no. Britain was an enormous encampment, millions of people on that tight little island, and every civilian housewife, or householder, I should say, was growing as much of their own subsistence as they could. Everyone had their tiny

25:30 plot to grow a few onions or potatoes, cabbages or whatever they could handle. They seemed to concentrate more on vegetables because they were an ongoing staple, whereas fruit was more of a seasonal luxury, I suppose. But they were really amazing, the way they – the food ministry controlled all this – the way they rallied people's action to

26:00 ensure the nation's survival. We've got no conception now of what was afoot, but it happened, and they won.

How many planes were actually a part of 10th Squadron? I'm just trying to get an idea?

Oh, I knew you were going to ask me that. Oh, there might have been about eight. I'm just trying to visualise. There'd probably be a half a dozen at anchorage, ready for action, and about two up on the deck at the maintenance

26:30 hangar. Yes, that'd be my estimate. I don't really know.

Oh just trying to get a rough idea, really. Did you guys have any superstitions in regards to operations and flying?

No, I don't think… Australians aren't as a race superstitious people, I don't think. St Elmo's Fire, I saw that once, that was marvellous.

What happened?

27:00 Oh, you're just out there and suddenly the sky is lit up and these huge balls of fire are running up and down the wing as though they're monkeys on patrol, and it just goes as it came.

What sort of weather conditions strike that up?

I don't know. St Elmo's Fire is something that goes back into medieval history.

27:30 The old sailors used to look for divine intervention when St Elmo's Fire descended on them, but that's some sort of a natural phenomenon. Some of those bomber pilots who encountered it reckoned it was like a green gas that was there. They couldn't smell it or anything. But it was just this green… It wasn't green when I saw it. It was blue. But they said there was green

28:00 cloud that come all around them inside the plane and around about, and they couldn't feel it or anything, they could just see it. And it disappeared just like it came.

It's quite bizarre.

Yes, it is indeed. If you look it up in the encyclopaedia or play the appropriate internet buttons, you'll find about St Elmo's Fire.

I'll make that a point to do.

That was an unusual experience, anyhow, to see that.

What…

But superstition, no

28:30 I don't think there was any superstition. That was left to those old sailors.

I wanted to know if you had any more duties as part of being a gunner in the Sunderland?

On the shore, no. From time to time there'd be a ceremonial parade,

29:00 and you'd play a bit of tennis and go to physical training and you were supposed to be kept fit. I used to go catching shrimps sometimes, just down below the hangar. There was a little jetty went out, and I found if you dropped an old bag in with a bit of bait you could pull it out with a lot of shrimps, or prawns as we called them. Just a little aside, in the summer.

29:30 But we seemed to spend a lot of – when we weren't actively flying – we seemed to spend a lot of leisure time in Plymouth, which had been, by this time, horribly devastated. There wasn't a great deal of it left. My wife and I went there 25 years ago, and Plymouth was looking very modern now. Oh my brother had an old motorbike, that

30:00 he made available to my mate and I. We used to go cruising on that a lot. You weren't allowed to use the hundred octane fuel, which was dyed green, it would show up. And hundred octane fuel is devastating to engines anyhow. But, nevertheless, my brother authorised us to use it, and as long as you didn't open out too fast, it would go.

30:30 If you gave too much power to it, it would blow the head off the engine. And I think the cunning people who used to steal this fuel and sell it devised a means of getting rid of the green dye so that it didn't show the evidence any more. Ah, there's all sorts of clever people in these places. They've all got their stunt.

Was there any, sort of, well, liberating,

31:00 **or stealing, I should say, of things around the base?**

Not, not pilfering, as you're envisaging it. It was all just pretty fun stuff, I think. I had a beautiful…

Hang on, can we just pause for a second. We were just talking about fuel, I believe.

Oh the motorbike I think, was that it.

Yes.

And how there are

31:30 blokes that have their little private lurks. But there's no really nasty pilfering of essential things that are going to wreck the war effort. Don't get that idea all. They were just minor indiscretions.

Wondering if you could tell me about the big escort, as part of the passenger ship escort?

Yes, that was an intriguing patrol.

32:00 I think it was in December 1944. And we had to escort the [HMS] Ramillies, which... Now Britain didn't have that many warships, ah, battleships, I beg your pardon. Didn't have that many battleships. And the battleships are the biggest and the most formidable, so much so that they in turn, have to have

32:30 escorts to protect them. And this was one of the most fascinating patrol, one of those really memorable ones. It was in the Irish Sea, around Lundy Island. Now where the, the River Severn opens out into the Bristol Channel. Further down the Bristol Channel, into the Irish Sea, you've got Lundy Island. It's that far out, you

33:00 don't see the land of course. And we were patrolling in the vicinity of Lundy Island and giving escort to this Ramillies, the big English battle ship. And I think there was about five warships escorting it, and the whole lot of them were clustered, like a mother hen, around a magnificent ocean liner. And the ocean liner,

33:30 I suppose was about 25 thousand tons, it was a beautiful looking ship. And it's always intrigued me as to what. That was a rather formidable naval escort. I have no doubt royal naval records would reveal just what it was. But there are always rumours in war time. One popular rumour was that it was a

34:00 big consignment of gold that was going. And well it could have been. This was after the invasion of Europe was on, and it may have been necessary to shift a very precious cargo of gold to America. But this, whatever it was, was headed west to the

34:30 open Atlantic. Somebody said it might have been VIPs [Very Important Persons], but you don't give that sort of escort to VIPs. If old Churchill or somebody had wanted to go over to America, they'd probably fly them with an appropriate escort, fighter escort, at either end. But once they get out beyond the reach, we'll they're beyond the reach of the German fighters too. It was common for VIPs

35:00 to be flown, but I don't see any VIPs going via a magnificent ocean liner. Just an intriguing little one.

Yes, it is unusual, isn't it?

On another occasion, we escorted the Queen Elizabeth. And we actually zoomed low over it, and shot it up to give them a cheer.

Shot it up?

Yes, well, that was an expression – to go low. You'd say, "Oh, you did a shoot up." And

35:30 that was an enormous ship for those days, it was. You could see people playing on it, playing tennis up on the deck and waving to us. They were probably just doing a back load heading to the United States to pick up more troops to bring across, that's all I can think. But there were a couple of those very big ships in use during the war in some of the convoys,

36:00 carrying troops. As I mentioned earlier, that one I went on had a vast number of men on it. It was not to be compared with the Queen Elizabeth in size. These were just different little jobs that had to be done.

How much did you know about D-Day before it happened?

Just rumour-wise,

36:30 there were lots of American forces in particular amassing around about. And the English Channel... Oh the beach strips along the English Channel were out of bounds to Allied personnel, insofar as I suspect they were doing training

37:00 exercises, ready to launch these people out in their thousands, to take that trip across to Normandy. But the whole of Britain knew it was coming, but as to when, it was up to [General] Eisenhower and the other strategists. And if you've seen the movies, well they had to decide on a

37:30 particular day, relative to the weather, and then they said, "Right-o, it's on." As it is, I mean it was a bit unkind to them, and those men were being mowed down willy-nilly as they tried to land.

I was going to also ask you about the barracks at Mount Batten. We didn't actually find out what it looked like inside. I'm thinking you might have been a little bit more upper class

38:00 **than some of the digs that you'd been?**

Oh, it had more orthodox beds, and more orthodox mattresses. We were Senior NCOs after all, and they didn't want to make us too uncomfortable. And wooden floors. But substantial brick buildings externally

and concrete stairways going up.

38:30 I remember another instance there, people do stupid things for fun. Everyone's lying cosily in bed, and some bloke picked up a small amount of the hundred octane fuel in a tin, flicked it under the open door, under the gap under the doorway, and then flicked a match into it. Of course, it went whoosh, it was all over in 30

39:00 seconds, but boy, you've never seen a gang of blokes move so quick out of bed. It was meant to be entertainment, but what a stupid, thoughtless sort of an act. These are the pranks blokes can get up to.

It's amazing somebody didn't get a bit of a fist in the face?

Oh, there was a bit of that went on too. I can remember one bloke who had a reputation for being an obnoxious and aggressive drunk, he planted his

39:30 best mate and smashed his jaw horribly. And the jaw went around, all done up with elastic bands and the like, while it healed. There are happy drunks and there are aggressive drunks, and that was an unfortunate aggressive drunk – he was bad news. A big powerful man, and a very good crew member when he was at sea, but out on patrols over the sea,

40:00 but when he was on it, look out, keep right away.

What were the medical facilities like on the base?

Oh, there was a small hospital and a French letter salesman. You know how I mentioned the lurks. Well the sergeant medical orderly, he was known affectionately as the French letter salesman.

40:30 He used to get Her Majesty's ration of condoms and sell them to the peasants. And there was a small hospital, it was probably only about four beds and a sister and couple of nurses, as I recall. I was in there once – I jumped stupidly off the back of a truck and turned my ankle.

41:00 And when you turned your ankle and sprained it, well that's it, you're no good for a few days while you mend, and I had to go into this place and hobble around. It must have been an absolute disaster area when there was a real emergency on though. So while I was on that squadron there was a dreadful tragedy. It involved some of our blokes and some civilian

41:30 divers as well. This flying boat sort of sunk at anchor and killed some of our fellows, and the depth charges were down there, with the boat sunken, and then civilian divers had to come in, and the things went off and

42:00 killed some of them too. I can just remember going to that funeral. There was a local cemetery.

Tape 8

00:34 **You were just sharing those couple of sad experiences with us, and the funeral you attended, Peter.**

Yes, these things unfortunately happen. Not too often on a base of this nature. I think they were more routine on Bomber Command, where people would be coming back quite regularly, horribly shot up, or been blown up in the case of the fighters.

01:00 But, not too much to report in our area of performance, but this one I particularly mentioned now, it was an accidental type of thing, it wasn't an operation, it happened.

How many operations did you complete while you were there, Peter?

I'm not sure, but I think we were

01:30 regarded as done a tour of operations if we did 50 – that was only on coastal command patrols. The people on bombers did a much shorter tour of duty, and I think theirs might have been 30 to be regarded as a tour because of the more hazardous nature of the flying they were involved in. But

02:00 ours I think was 50. But I did 36, in answer to your question.

When you completed your tour, what developments or what had eventuated in the war?

That was as inscribed on my log book there, by the flight commander, cessation of hostilities. In other words, you were written off, you were no longer wanted, go and have a holiday. So we went and had a holiday.

Where did you go?

02:30 Oh, they send you to a holding camp, and that was, that was Beckles, a RAF station in Suffolk, but they don't want you hanging around there. And they give you a leave pass, so you just clear off somewhere.

So where did you clear off to?

As long as you're holding a leave pass, that's it. Oh, I went to the nether regions of Ireland and

03:00 Scotland. Actually we used to get leave, even operational, every three months. This was a prerequisite of being a member of air crew, because of the so-called stress of the job you were given three monthly leave, which was very nice. And that entitled you to a rail pass. Rail pass, leave pass,

03:30 were one in the same thing. I've got these things there. And we would invariably… I usually used to go away with one particular mate on my crew, and we'd choose the most far distant place in the British Isles that we could, like Cork in the south of Ireland or something like that. And that would entitle you to travel on the various transports available.

04:00 **Did you choose those places at random?**

Oh, only in so far as we chose the furthest that we could. Within limits, you could cross the route a bit, I suppose, as you went. We used to just stay in country hotels and the like.

Must have been a few memorable experiences on those?

Yes,

04:30 they were very nice, the British Isles are. And the rural areas, that's pretty country, and something quite different to dry old Australia, especially this part of dry, old Australia.

What about some of the people you met?

Very nice people, yes. All very open hearted, the fact that you were Allied servicemen, actively involved

05:00 in the war effort, they were pleased to meet you and greet you. And we were non-drinkers, and some blokes who were quite close to us as crew members, their idea of spending their leave was seeing England through a pub window. As young non-drinkers, we wanted to be tourists and go and see the country at large.

05:30 Well, within the limit of our resources. Trains, of course, were the means of travel and to a lesser extent, country feeder buses. But the trains, they had a very big network of railways throughout Britain, still have I suppose. But boy, were they chockablock full. I mentioned earlier, on the squadron there's always

06:00 the bloke who has his little lurk. The lurk man was the corporal in charge of the carpenter workshop. And when he wasn't actively involved in doing essential maintenance repairs, he was making the most exquisite suitcases. They were made of plywood. And

06:30 he would carefully cut the lid off… He'd make a box out of plywood then carefully cut the lid off. And then the whole thing was overlaid with what is known as dope. Now dope is a grey glue of unknown origin. You can ask anyone that was in the air force, "What is aircraft dope?" and they don't know. It smells strongly of paint

07:00 thinners, grey in colour, and when you put it on, it stays on. You can appreciate, that supposing a Spitfire flying at fast speed up there, it, it's got to be able to resist the action of the wind tearing at it, so dope. So this man used to make these lovely suitcases, smother them in aircraft fabric and dope,

07:30 put beautiful aluminium bands around them, fasteners, the whole works, and you had a good strong box to carry things in. It was light weight. A good strong box to carry things in, and most importantly, when you went on these train journeys, you sat on it. 'Cause the train was chock-a-block. People were jammed tight in the corridors. There was a corridor with all these compartments.

08:00 Now that case has been my faithful servant until last May. Hazel and I went to Canberra, I took it and donated it to the national [Australian] War Museum, and they were thrilled to get it. They said they'd never seen anything like it before. And they've written down all its history. I think I paid three pounds ten shillings for it, if I recall, which was a fair bit, but that was, that was okay, it was a good case.

08:30 And they listed it on the… As when you people had to sign an acknowledgment that ownership was passing over to the national war archives, and they listed it as an item of heraldry, if you please. Don't ask me why, but that's how they titled it, an item of heraldry.

Sounds grand.

Perhaps heraldry is something that you carry around with you all the time, like the scabbard of a sword, or a

09:00 bag thrown over your shoulder or something.

Have to open the dictionary to find out.

I'm very pleased that that has gone now. He was a nice man, personal friend in latter years. He lived in Adelaide. He's dead now. But they've acknowledged his name, and that'll go into the war archives in Canberra.

09:30 **Why would the trains been so full of people?**

Well it was the only means of commuting for the British civilians as well as the service people, and people always had to be on the move going somewhere to do something. Granny might have had to go to visit her daughter in Glasgow who was having a baby or something, and she'd get a travel permit. Everything was done by travel permit. You couldn't just walk along casually and say, "Here I am. Here's my

10:00 fare. I'm off."

I just thought that during war time people might have stayed put.

Well, I suppose this was their prime intent, but if necessity arose, well just get moving. On one trip, this other fellow and I went to, up to Scotland, and we were actually able to

10:30 acquire a sleeper on a night train. But it wasn't a formal affair as we have sleepers on trains in Australia, it was one in, all in, and just sort of sleep in your clothes, and women sharing the same compartment as the men, and so on. And in the early hours of the morning, the train rolled into some remote little place up in the Highlands,

11:00 and some woman was patrolling up and down, selling tea. "Penny a cup. Penny a cup. A penny for a cup of tea."

What were you doing on V-E [Victory in Europe] Day?

I was on squadron, but not… I didn't go into operations till August, as I mentioned earlier. So

11:30 we just had to stand around and listen for the reports as they came in from the people who'd been there. And everything was unfolded officially through the BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation, which was a very active medium, under close propaganda control too, I've no doubt. As the stories came through,

12:00 I suppose they gradually became more and more authentic as the Allies got more and more on top.

Do you remember the celebrations breaking out?

Not V-E Day, no. Oh, I beg your pardon, I was talking about the Invasion Day primarily. Oh V-E Day, yes, I was in London then, oh yes, oh that was Victory In Europe Day, I beg your pardon, I gave you…

I thought you were sounding a bit apprehensive there.

I gave you the wrong information there.

12:30 No, in V-E Day I was on leave in London, and oh God, I was still a non-drinker, but boy the people who drink, they really got into it. But just these massive throngs of people just screaming with delight and pressing around madly, and it was something to behold. Like a waving ocean of people and bands playing and screaming mass hysteria for joy.

13:00 Yes, that was quite an occasion. And we went to… This other crew mate and I, we used to get around quite a lot. We went to the palace gates and joined the throng there and saw the royal family say their piece, oh, come out and perform their piece, I should say. Yes, it was quite an exciting occasion.

13:30 **How long was it after V-E Day that you made your way home?**

I think it was… We were in this holding camp in Beckles and then they sent us to another one at Brighton. We were domiciled into old hotels along the seafront at Brighton. That was a popular personnel holding depot.

14:00 And Brighton was sort of the final thrust, I think. I think that was in November. And from November we were carted by train to Southampton and onto this Aquitania, which I have the photograph of there. And the Aquitania was an enormous… Oh, it was a

14:30 World War 11, World War 1 ship, an enormous ship, very similar in appearance to the famous Titanic, a big four funnel job. And it was steam driven, by turbines. And the fuel was coal that was crushed up and sprayed with fuel oil, and, oh God , it was filthy.

15:00 You had to be very careful if you got to the stern of the ship. The closer you got to the stern of the ship, the more filthy and the more you copped of this black trash, just like black-flecked rain fell on you. So you stayed forward. This mate of mine that I mentioned, and another mate who – he lives in Sydney – the former one I mentioned lives in Brisbane. We had a little syndicate and

15:30 we bought the necessities in England to run lotto or housie or tombola, the British army call it. Or bingo, the Americans call it. So we ran this game.

What did you call it, sorry?

Housie, housie. Yes, that is

16:00 an original Australian name, I suppose. Housie, housie. You just fill in the gaps and the numbers as they're called, and they call, "house." In other words, you've filled the house.

I think bingo's taken over.

Yes, well as I mentioned earlier, the Americans had the same game but they used to call, under the B-29, under the O-41, and so on. So that you had to follow this word 'bingo', which was written across

16:30 the top. That's how the name bingo came in to being. And yeah, the Poms got the name tombola. Don't ask me, I'll never know, but they called it tombola.

That was a game of marbles when I went to school.

Yes, true, I agree, I can remember marbles being called tombola, or the big tor was a tombola, I think. However, there was a lot of British army on that Aquitania. They were going for service, probably to

17:00 relieve people who had been on service in the Far East. But we ran this professionally. Oh, the whole ship was a shocking gambling ship. The war was over and anything went.

Was discipline just out the window?

Almost. We had a very officious British army colonel. It was a British troopship, and this man, he was determined

17:30 to try and run it according to the rules. There was a, a British regimental sergeant major who was a very nasty looking bit of work, too. And I was ordered to front up to him, and I duly fronted up. And he said it had been observed that we were running a very successful game of tombola and we were required to pay ten percent to the British

18:00 bloody canteen fund or some damn thing, or other. I just forget. We gave him three and a half quid, and you know where that went. That shut him up anyhow.

In his pocket?

Of course it would. When we got to Cape Town. Oh, we called in first, oh we didn't call in there, but we went very close to the Canary Islands, which were quite fascinating to see.

18:30 **What did you see of them?**

Mountains, dark mountains up out of the sea, it was quite interesting.

Picturesque.

After, after Britain to see something like this. And then we went to Sierra Leone in West Africa. We had to take on water there – evidently that was a vital ingredient. We certainly would not have been taking on fuel. But we slipped in there very early one morning and saw a lot of interesting

19:00 performances from the African natives and heard some of their colourful English language. And then went on our way, and down south to Cape Town. Now Cape Town, we anchored offshore, and in spite of our earlier belief that we were going ashore, we were told we were not. Can I interrupt just a second? I've got a very interesting

19:30 poem there, that one of the fellows…

Sure we'll just stop the tape. Okay, we're recording now. You're on.

So we anchored offshore at Cape Town and they were giving us, the officialdom, this British army colonel running the circus, he gave us the official record that no way were we going ashore. There weren't the facilities and the seas were too dangerous and all sorts of rhubarb. So

20:00 we went anyhow, by what ever means we could muster. There were all these fuelling barges, water barges, coming out to this monstrous great ship, heaving in a heavy sea. And all these scallywags, myself included, we just swarmed down rope ladders, nets,

20:30 anything we could, to get onto any smaller vessel that happened to be down at the side. And it was dangerous, this heavy sea throwing these small things against the side of this massive great ship. Once again, rumour has it that one bloke slipped and just got crushed like a walnut, but I can't vouch for that. And when we got

21:00 on to one of these tenders, we were immediately approached by a lot of… I was a warrant officer. And we were approached by a lot of very baby-faced, immature looking commissioned officers who had been obviously told by this higher authority to wag the finger, "You're jeopardising your entire future with the air force." You know, we were only a few weeks from telling them what they could do with the air force. "And

21:30 worst of all, you'll have your," this was a funny one, "You'll have your deferred pay withdrawn." Deferred pay was your honorarium at the end of your service. But we didn't believe it, so we just went ashore anyhow. So some fellow wrote… One of the blokes on the ship wrote this poem, which was quite

clever I thought. I'll read it to you. It's on the

22:00 paper which was given to us by the Salvation Army, the ACF, the Australian Comforts Fund and the YMCA. And it's headed up 'A Description of the French Leave from HMS Aquitania', there's that, it was a British troop ship, Her Majesty's Ship, Aquitania, at Cape Town on Sunday the 11th of November, 1945.

\n[Verse follows]\n 'Australia will be there.\n One Sunday we reached Cape Town after many days at sea,\n

22:30 The boys prepared for leave ashore to break the monotony,\n

But they anchored in the harbour quite a distance from the wharf,\n Then a tannoy message told the boys they'd not be getting off.\n The head said they were sorry, then, and added one thing more,\n That the swell was far too dangerous to take them all ashore,\n So, they hung around the railings,\n

23:00 And they wandered up and down,\n

And they cursed the rotten knowledge that they wouldn't see the town,\n Then a rumour gained momentum as troopship rumours do,\n That a crowd was there to greet the sons of others they once knew,\n There'd been many preparations for the Aquitania's stay,\n There's been many disappointments if the boys were kept away.\n So the boys began to realise in the waning evening light,\n

23:30 That to leave their hosts up waiting, was surely never right,\n

Would they disappoint the party, or disappoint the mayor,\n Like hell they would, they reckoned, Australia would be there.\n So they scrambled down the hawses, and defied the ship's MPs [Military Police],\n They slid down ropes from portholes, and swarmed around like bees,\n They filled up all the tug boats, and the launches waiting round,\n

24:00 Soon many feet were marching high and dry on Cape Town ground,\n

Buying presents without coupons was a treat in every store\n That they'd never seen in England, since the early days of wars.\n Cape Town girls turned out to help them in their choice of gifts for wives\n Without exaggeration, 'twas the best leave of their lives,\n Then they had to part the friendships in such a short time grown strong,\n

24:30 But they left there with a feeling that they had done no wrong,\n

Though discipline was broken, they'd proved here as everywhere\n If Australia is expected, then Australia will be there.\n

And I went. I didn't have any money. We had

25:00 these button-up jacket pockets and the most precious thing I had was my Commonwealth Savings Bank book, on the branch of the bank in London. So I thought, "What on earth can I do to get money?" And being naive and stupid, I marched into the Reserve Bank of South Africa. Now, the Reserve Bank of South Africa, that's like the Reserve Bank of Australia, it's the

25:30 government's official controlling bank. And I said who I was, where I was from and what I wanted, and a girl said, "Just a moment please, sir. I'll see if we can help you." So she wandered into the God of this circus, the general manager of this Reserve Bank in Cape Town. And he said, "Oh, would you mind coming into my office?" And he said "Look, I'll help you. I don't know who you are or what you

26:00 are. You've got a document there saying you own so much money. I'll give you money right now out of my pocket." He said, "If you're crooked and it goes to the wind, well I can't help that. It just means that there'll be some Christmas present or other that my kids won't get, and you look honest enough to me." So he gave me the money out of his own pocket. It might have been 30 pounds, I just forget. And he said, "I'll get you to sign a

26:30 sight draft just authorising his bank to claim on my bank in Australia when those funds eventually… when I eventually transferred them through from London to Perth. So I honoured my commitment and got my money, and he got his dough back. So that was a very nice thing he did, anyhow.

So you're still welcome in South Africa?

Yes. So, in, in the course of spending, in this spend-up, my

27:00 widowed sister-in-law, I bought her a lot of dress fabrics. This is Kelvin's grandmother I'm talking about, the Kelvin you know, his grandmother. And the Kelvin you know, his father, he was a little boy then, and I bought him a magnificent big train set. There's a thing [receipt] for it.

27:30 One train set, secondhand, electric, eight pounds, which was a lot of money. It wasn't one of these little Hornby things. It was huge and it had real wide gates. It was a funny-looking train. Anyway.

That was a great gesture.

Yes, oh we had a lot of fun there. And back onto the ship and back over to Perth.

How did you board the ship again, once you'd left illegally?

Oh well, they acknowledged they had to get us all back. They just

28:00 provided all the launches to deliver us back to the ship then.

Did you get a dressing down when you were boarding?

Oh yes, oh this, this old British army colonel, "You men have broken every rule in the book."

How was he met by all the Aussies?

It might have been, it might have been after that this nasty looking British regimental sergeant major screwed me for the money. We were pleased to pay him anyhow.

28:30 Oh between the three of us we made 70 pounds. That was our take on the gambling game that we were running, so that was the foundations of my fortune, I suppose.

You came home cashed up.

Yes.

Who was on board the Aquitania on the way home?

Mostly Australian airmen. A lot of British Navy and a smaller number of British Army. And they seemed to be

29:00 going to the former Asian, or the Pacific theatre of war to just replace the people who were already there. There was so much to be done in post war, by just maintaining control and re-establishing orderly government and so forth.

Was there talk about Japan entering the war?

Hmmm.

Was there much talk about Japan entering the war, and the Pacific theatre opening up?

Entering it, well they'd been defeated

29:30 at this stage.

Japan?

Yes, it was over.

Oh right.

And then we had our post-war occupation force, that could be what these Brits [British] were doing too, going to the occupation force. Japan was swamped with Allied forces, just keeping control after the war, 'cause they had to be

30:00 nursed carefully back to the democracy that they are today, which they didn't have before. They still have a monarchy as we do, but they do have, pardon me, a democracy.

Do you remember discussing the dropping of atom bombs on Japan?

No, no, it was just a sensational headline. And we thought, "That's it. That fixes it up. They'll come to heel

30:30 very quickly." Which they did, because they realised this was a hideous new weapon that they had no answer for. They had already suffered a lot of conventional bombing prior to that, of course. I think the Japanese were happy to surrender.

That's an interesting way of putting it.

Yes, well. As I mentioned earlier, the Germans

31:00 were happy to surrender because the Allies hit back most vengefully. You can speak to any German civilian who was on the receiving end of the bombing raids. They were cruel. Fire bombs especially, just wiping out vast cities. And Hitler thought he was the big noise at the beginning when he started the war going, but probably why he

31:30 bumped himself off, he realised he'd copped the dirty end of the stick.

So you've had the opportunity to speak to Germans about…?

Didn't want to face the music. Oh yes, post-war German migrants here have German friends who were there and know what it was all about.

What…

And some of our fellows…

32:00 Getting back to the flying boats, some of them have had special reunion with former U-boat people that they were actually engaged in warfare with. There was a remarkable coincidence. Dudley Marrows, who… Well, last I heard of Dudley he was a big orange grower

32:30 near Mildura in Victoria. And Dudley was the skipper of a flying boat on Squadron 461. And he blasted out of the sea U-boat 461. It's an amazing thing. That featured in Believe It or Not by Ripley, you know, that international publication of tall stories.

33:00 And that German skipper has been out here and socialised with Dudley Marrows, and Dudley Marrows has been over to Germany and socialised with him. As I mentioned earlier, war is a… It's ordained by politicians, but its fought by people of

33:30 a kindred ilk. They're all just family people. They don't ask for it, they just get it, whether they like it or not. Nowadays of course, if we do get involved in warfare it's highly technical and there's only a minority who are active participants. You're never likely to be an active participant.

Fortunately.

But anyone

34:00 trained specifically to perform in that area, well they'll be expected to front up, as some of our service personnel are fronting up right now overseas. That's it.

So we need less fodder these days.

Yes, correct. That's a crude way of putting it, but you need less cannon fodder, that's right. A bigger result too, somehow.

What was the atmosphere on board the Aquitania

34:30 **as you neared Fremantle?**

Very joyful indeed, yes, the homeland approaches.

Your pockets were full.

Yes, mine were anyhow. And those scungy looking sand hills that loom up round Cottesloe, most people that have seen civilised shorelines don't appreciate it, but to see that showing up was really something. And the ship anchored offshore

35:00 and we were taken by tenders into Fremantle Harbour. The ship didn't go into Fremantle Harbour at all. And that was it.

What was happening on the wharf?

We unloaded with all our rubbish. That was that.

What was happening on the wharf, Peter?

Oh, on the wharf, that's where the teeming, screaming, thousands. Perthites were there to greet us.

Your family?

Yes.

Friends?

Yes, there was.

How were you greeted?

35:30 Ah, this is strange to say. Being in Pommy land for a couple of years, and you've got a smoother, cultivated accent there. And suddenly we felt the jar of the Australian accent, the girls especially, it was a bit nauseating.

They sounded a bit rough on the ear, did they?

Yes, but you soon get used to it again. It just did sound unusual.

36:00 I can appreciate why the Poms…

They were still all right on the eye, though?

Oh yes, yes, that's right. It was nice to see them.

Did your family whisk you away?

That was a sentimental one. Ah, yes, oh well you wouldn't want to hang around Fremantle, I mean. Fremantle is all trendy now, but it was the pits in those days. It was just a typical old grotty port.

36:30 I hope people from Fremantle don't take umbrage, but that was it.

So where were you whisked away to by your family, and how?

Oh, up to home in Victoria Park and family reunion party. And there was a big sign out, 'Welcome Home'. And the rest is history. I don't know if I've got a lot more to tell you, have I? I've taken you through the epics of pre-war, and…

37:00 **I don't know. You haven't said much about how…**

War service.

How your mother greeted you, or the rest of your friends and family. How you spent that evening celebrating?

I don't remember. As I said, I was still a non-drinker. Whether they offered me grog or not, I don't remember.

Well, what's your excuse?

But I do remember. Well, I was strictly an observer of decorum, and remember the evil

37:30 Presbyterian upbringing. As I told you, I got pissed on my 21st birthday 'cause that's when I was legally allowed, so I did.

That's when it all went downhill, was it?

Yes, that's right.

What about Anzac Day? What does Anzac Day mean to you in your post-war life, Peter?

Early on, I didn't get involved. Anzac Day was

38:00 no, I'm sorry, I shouldn't say that. The RSL [Returned and Services League] of those days were a bit fussy as to who they had as members. And I never chose to identify. There was fish and there was fowl.

38:30 I was one of six brothers who enlisted to serve overseas, four of us under orders went overseas, two of us under orders were told they stayed here. And the RSL initially was exclusive to people who were on overseas service. The servicemen who served the war

39:00 in Australia were not welcome. So it took me a number of years before I sort of came to terms with this. But now, well they have opened the door wide, and I go to Anzac marches and that's it.

What does Anzac Day mean to you today, Peter?

Well it is an important national day. I know it

39:30 it celebrates one of the most horrific defeats in history, and certainly for this nation. But on the other side of the coin, it is a day of reunion. In time it will become more important than Christmas. Christmas is a day of reunion now.

40:00 Not for Christians, for families. Christmas is smothered under a blanket of commercialism. And I do think that in time, Christmas will fade into the background because Australia is more and more a hedonistic nation. They might openly profess Christianity, but

40:30 that's a lot of rhubarb. And further down the line, I think Anzac Day will become more and more important as a national day of reunion, for whatever reason. You'll see. It is important right now, and each year there seems to be more and more people attending these public parades in, right throughout, in the cities and the towns.

41:00 And I think it remains to be seen. Nations must have some cohesive power, and that could be it. I may be wrong. Australia Day, at present, it commemorates the day that the Aborigines claim the Poms invaded them. And if they keep harping on that theme, I think Australia Day

41:30 will die. And I do see Anzac Day becoming more important, in due course. After you're dead, come back and quote me.

Well thanks very much for sharing your experiences with us today, Peter, and I look forward to seeing if that prophecy does come to fruition.

No you won't. You'll be well and truly underground, or wherever. Did you get that, Denise [interviewer]?

41:55 - tape ends