Australians at War Film Archive

Lyall Fricker - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **So, Lyall, could you give me a summary of the major points of your life until now?**

Well, I was born in 1923 here in Adelaide. My father was an ex-serviceman, in fact he was on the first landing on Gallipoli, at half past four in the morning on

01:00 April 25th. He was by occupation a carpenter and builder, but he had taken a block, fruit orchard, at Waikerie. So it meant that after I was born, we moved up to Waikerie, and then when things got fairly tough he left the orchard in the care of a manager and we moved back to Adelaide as he recommenced as a

01:30 builder. After a few years we went back to Waikerie. So I regard Waikerie as my home because my primary school years and my early high school years were spent there. And then in 1936 he sold the fruit orchard and we moved back to Adelaide, and then shortly after that we moved over to New Zealand, because the New Zealand air force was expanding, this is 1938, before the

02:00 war and he obtained employment, I am not sure if he tendered for a job but at least he was working on the concrete hangers for the New Zealand air force. From there I came back to Adelaide, my parents stayed in New Zealand for a while, and I joined the education department and went back to a little

02:30 village called Qualco, which was next to Waikerie, as a junior teacher at the age of sixteen. From there I went to the teachers college and university, which were closely linked in those days. And then I joined the air force in 1942. When I came back again from the air force I went back to university, and then when I graduated I wanted to do a

03:00 PhD [doctor of philosophy degree] at the University of London, the Institute of Education, and so I applied for a short service commission with the Royal Navy and I was successful in getting that. So my wife and I and now twin babies aged three months all went over to England. All at our own expense, there were no scholarships available et cetera. So I went and had four years with the Royal Navy. Unfortunately

03:30 just after I started, the Institute of Education, University of London decided that I didn't live close enough to university to be able to continue which annoyed me intensely as you might imagine. However I had very good experience with the Royal Navy. Came back to Adelaide back to teaching for a year or so. And then I joined the Commonwealth Office of Education in the UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation]

04:00 Secretariat, the National Commission for UNESCO. I stayed with the Commonwealth for something like twenty-five years, during which time I was head of the Colombo plan training, head of the student assistance branch, that's all of the scholarship schemes. And then the one and only Secretary of the Commission on Advanced Education, at the time we were establishing colleges of advanced education across Australia.

04:30 I then returned to South Australia, firstly as the Secretary of the Tertiary Education Authority and then the minister moved me across to the Department of Technical and Further Education, it wasn't called that at that time, it was called DFE [Department of Further Education], and then I finished up the director general of TAFE [technical and further education] and retired at the age of sixty-five. Since that time I have been just as busy as I was before, I was Chairman of the Overseas Qualification Board,

05:00 and I have been actively involved in a number of professional bodies, voluntary bodies, the Order of Australia Association for example, the Order of St John's Jerusalem, the Australian College of Education and so on. And here I am.

A very full life up until now.

05:30 **You mentioned earlier that your father was in the first landing of Gallipoli, was that**

something he ever discussed with you?

No, most of the information that I have about my father's war career has come from other servicemen that knew him and they didn't tell me much either. And I have done some digging since, I have got some records from the war memorial. He was decorated

06:00 with the meritorious service medal and I have been able to get a hold of his citation and so on. As I boy I was very interested of course and I used to ask him questions, he would answer questions which didn't relate directly to the war .for example after three weeks at Gallipoli he got a piece of shrapnel in his head, and I said to him, "How did you get shot?" and he said, "Well, I was

06:30 running along the beach and then I woke up in hospital." But when I tried to press him for any more detail he used to get very cross and say, "I just don't want to talk about it," you know, forget it. And the same thing when I asked him why he was decorated, he said, "Oh, it came around with the rations." Once again when I said, "Well, I would really like to know," he said, "I don't want to talk about it." So that

07:00 whole episode was a closed book as far as everybody was concerned which was typical of course. At Waikerie there were quite a number of other ex-servicemen including original Anzacs and they were all the same, they just didn't talk about it.

Even after you returned from your service?

Yes. I didn't have much to do with him then because I came back in 1945 and he was still in Adelaide but during the war

07:30 he had been in the Civil Construction Corps working through the Northern Territory, and he had also been up there in 1936 and he loved the Territory so as soon as civilians were allowed to go back again, he moved up, intending to go to Darwin but when he got to Alice Springs he bumped into a friend of his who was also in the building game and he decided to stay there and so he spent the rest of his

08:00 life in Alice Springs. He built a home for himself and my mother and he died in 1956 and by that time my wife and I and our family were over in England. So we had very little, we didn't see each other from about the time I was married, because I didn't see him before he died you know.

08:30 **So did you feel after you had been through a war, did you understand a little more why he didn't want to talk about it?**

Oh yes, undoubtedly. There are two things, one of them is the awakening of old memoires and the other thing is this very Australian fear of appearing to big note yourself and so no Australian is going to

09:00 go out and say, "Oh yes, I was a hero and did this, that and the other." They just say, "Oh, it was tough." Or something, leave it at that.

Did you find out what your father was decorated for?

Yes, the citation refers to him running the signals office during a big operation in mid 1918, he was a sergeant in the signals at that stage and in a book, the history of the signals corps, it gives some information and there was

09:30 something like three thousand incoming signals and two thousand outgoing signals in a twenty-four hour period. So that was one of the things. Now it may have been that the citation was referring to that specifically, or it may have been that it was just one of the incidents. Some of the other servicemen that

10:00 knew him talked about him running across no man's land with a telephone wire in his fingers trying to find where the break was. And then having found the break joined the wires together and trying to get back again with all of the shelling going on. So as I say it is difficult to know, nobody talked very much about it.

And as you said that was the norm of that time. What kind of character was your Dad?

10:30 Well he was taciturn, would have been obvious from what I was just saying. But he was also very amusing, had a great sense of humour, in ordinary conversation or in a social gathering he was also causing people to roll around holding their sides. He had a way of telling the story or making the

11:00 side comment that used to reduce people to fits. He was also a leader in the community, when we – or the fruit orchard at Waikerie for example, he subscribed the journals like the Citrus Grower and he was very interested in the application of science to agriculture and I know one of the things that made him very pleased

11:30 was one year, maybe about 1935/36, the Murray Pioneer, which was the newspaper for that region said that the best orange crop in the River Region that year was Alan Fricker, so that pleased him. He also went on to become the grandmaster of the Freemasons lodge at Alice Springs, I think that it is the right term, I don't know. Head honcho

12:00 of the Freemasons up there. But I noticed as a boy that when there would be a group of men standing around having a conversation my father wouldn't say very much but when he did, they would stop and

listen. As I say he seemed to be a leader amongst his peers.

And you were the only son?

I was the only one, yeah.

And what about your Mum?

12:30 My mother was a school teacher, in fact that was how she met my father, she was in the teachers' college or training college, as it was called then, immediately after the war. And she made friends with another girl there, Kathy, Kathy Fricker. And she said, "Oh, look my brother has taken a block up at Waikerie, do you want to come with me and we will have a holiday up there?"

13:00 So they went up and he was still establishing the block at that stage, plating all of the vines., he had built the house for himself, which is still standing. So by the end of the week of the holiday, I am not sure if they had become formally engaged, but my father and my mother had signalled their intent to get married.

After one week?

13:30 That's right, so not long after that they were married, and not long after that I arrived. But just to indicate the way in which the war affected my father and presumably others as well, there was a little airfield at Waikerie and every now and then, like once a week or something, there would be a little aircraft like a Tiger Moth or something like that, would take off. And my father said, on numerous occasions

14:00 he would be planting the grape vines and he would hear this aeroplane engine and without being conscious of it he would then find himself flat on the ground. Just from the sheer reflex of getting down out of sight when the planes come over.

Well he would have developed some very sharp reflexes being at Gallipoli and surviving?

Yes, that's right.

And you grew up in Waikerie on the Murray?

14:30 Up to the age of thirteen, yes, that's why I still regard it as my home now although effectively of course I have only spent ten years there out of eighty, I still regard it as home.

You must have some strong memories of that time?

Well, I think everybody does of their primary and secondary years, the names of he kids that you played with and so on are still engraved on the memory.

15:00 **What are some of your earliest memories of growing up?**

Well it was essentially a 19th century style of existence. You know, this feature they had on not so long ago, the British TV about the Victorian house? Well, that was how we grew up. There was no electricity, the light was kerosene lights or candles. There was no radio. We didn't have a motor car,

15:30 there were motor cars around the place, we had two horses and a buggy or sulky. I used to walk to school to start off until the age of about ten I got a bicycle and I was able to ride to school. It was three miles from our house to school. And this was over – the first three quarters of a mile

16:00 would be sand, fairly deep sand so if it had been watered through irrigation or so on then I could ride the bicycle over it, it would be hard enough, but if it was dry and powdery of course I couldn't ride the bike I had to push the bike through it until I got to a road. Which was the old metal road, you know white surface. The times were hard, it was during the Depression.

16:30 But of course as kids we didn't realise it was anything different, you just accept the conditions you are in. Looking back on it, quite a number of the kids didn't have shoes, but my mother insisted I wore shoes to school and I didn't like shoes, when I was home I liked to run around home barefoot. We didn't have sheets on the bed we slept between blankets, and for a special occasion

17:00 we, not only my mother but most of the women, would take the old flour sacks and stitch them together and these would become sheets, they were at least calico. We didn't go hungry because living on the fruit orchard there was always food around and one of the neighbours had a cow so there was always milk. At the beginning of each summer my father would buy a pig and he would be fattened up

17:30 on all of the surplus fruit during the summer and at the end of the season he would be slaughtered and all of the parts would be pickled and so on and that would provide us with meat for quite a long time. And my mother of course made jams and all of the other usual things you get in the country. It was a good life for a child but there was no surplus money.

Did you know that or were you aware that you were maybe living

18:00 **under difficult conditions?**

I knew that there was no money but I didn't see that as difficulty. And certainly in the society in which we lived we were no worse off, and in quite a number of respects were better off than a lot of others. Because quite a number of people didn't have a fruit orchard, they were labourers and casual workers and so on, and they found it really hard, they were the ones that didn't have shoes through the winter and so on.

18:30 **Did your father have people coming to him for work?**

Yes, in the summer you would have casual fruit pickers and of course there was quite a number of conventions or social conditions there. The fruit pickers had to have a cup of tea and a slice of fruit cake, morning and afternoon. So my mother had to

19:00 bake a fruit cake and then I would go around when I was eight or nine, thereabouts, with a wicker basket with a thermos and some cups and fruit cake, and take it to the various pickers who would enjoy this and then get back to work again. This of course only lasted during the fruit season, the rest of the time my father would be pruning or ploughing or whatever it was on his own.

19:30 **What about swagmen did you have many of them coming through?**

I wouldn't say many but I do remember swagman coming to the door and looking for a handout and my mother always tried to give them whatever we might have had available. Of course there was all sorts of stories floating around the town about the swagmen, and one of the women in the district was

20:00 allegedly very mean indeed and the story went that one of the swagmen, when he got near the house took his shoes off and put them in his swag and put a couple of herring tins on his feet. Remember these oval tins which had herrings in them? And so he shuffled up to the door and asked for a handout and pointed to his feet and said, "This is all I have got." Whereupon she said, "You poor man, take these." And she gave him two cigarette tins to nail on for heels. That was a very funny joke at the time.

20:30 **So no one was scared of the swagmen?**

I don't remember being scared, no.

Because now days you couldn't imagine someone coming up to your door and asking for food?

That's true, it is a different society, my recollection was that it was a very safe society. Well us kids for example used to walk to school three miles each way and to the best of my memory nobody

21:00 ever got molested and so on. I have no doubt it did happen, but we weren't aware of it. And it would have happened so rarely that it didn't cause panic or alarm, whereas these days you do worry about children being left on their own.

So you were living down the Murray in the 1930s, were these the days when the Murray was a healthy river?

21:30 Yes. We used to go swimming, my grandfather was a Swedish seaman, he spent most of his life in sail, windjammers and so on and then when he retired he took a fishing reach up at Qualco which is not far from Waikerie. And we used to spend a lot of time down there, quite apart from after school every day and the river was quite safe to swim in. He used to get his

22:00 drinking water from the river. I mean he would boil it of course but it was quite safe. And really I think you could drink it without boiling it and it couldn't have caused any harm. It was quite safe for swimming.

Different river now.

Certainly is. Salinity was starting to appear even at that stage. As you would go around the roads

22:30 that were near the river you would find this white salt crust on the top of the ground and at that time it was called seepage and this was gradually invading the orchards, killing the vines, killing the fruit trees, and seventy years later it is still going on but of course it is much worse.

And did the paddle boats carry cargo up and down the Murray at that stage?

Yes I remember the Marion, the Gem, the Ruby, the Pyap,

23:00 these would come into the wharf at Waikerie and take on cargo or discharge cargo. I don't remember how often they did it, it was always a bit of an event so presumably it was pretty infrequent. The news would spread, the Marion is coming and people would congregate down there to see it come in. I think the Marion

23:30 was a wood fired paddle steamer, I can't remember now, whether the others had diesel engines or not, I don't know.

And were they bringing supplies to Waikerie or were they carrying them out?

Oh no, it was in and out, they would bring things into Waikerie and they would load things to take out.

That would have been quite a fantastic vision, seeing one of those

24:00 **pull up?**

Well, at the time we didn't think anything of it of course, it was just one of those things that was part of daily life.

So apart from taking out the fruit cake and the thermos to the workers, did you have many other responsibilities around the orchard?

In the summer I used to be brought in on cutting apricots or

24:30 sometimes picking., but mostly cutting apricots. And that wouldn't be the worst job in the world I suppose, but certainly not a pleasant job. Do you know anything about cutting apricots? You have got the buckets of apricots and in front there is a wooden tray and so you cut the apricot, flick the stone out, put the halves with the cut uppermost on the wooden tray. And so after the first fifteen minutes your hands are covered with the juice

25:00 and then they, onto the juice you get the red dust which is flying around all of the time, and then you get the flies everywhere in your eyes, so here you have got these sticky, muddy gluggy hands and you have got flies in your eyes and you have to get rid of them, and then if you're not careful the cutting knife sticks to your hand and so you go to brush the fly away and you gash yourself with the knife. Generally of course there was a bucket of water there so you would wash your hands clean and start again.

25:30 And this all took place in a shed with a thatched roof, and the thatch was of course gum leaves, Mallee leaves, thrown over so it was open on all sides to get a bit of ventilation and the temperature was always up around the hundreds, because we are talking about the December period. Even on Christmas day if the temperature was high people would have to pick and cut all day.

26:00 But as I say this was the way of life. I mean people did these things, they used to grumble and complain about it but never the less people were happy enough, they would be singing and chatting away and cursing the flies, but never the less, and when the wooden trays were stacked up probably to about five feet they would be moved across to another enclosed box where

26:30 the – you then burn sulphur and the sulphur dioxide would fill the box and the apricots would be left in there for about eight hours or so and then they would be put out in the sun. The reason for that as I understand it was just to preserve the colour. If they had just been put out in the sun to start off with, as they dried they would have gone dark brown, whereas by putting them through the sulphur dioxide first they maintained the nice golden yellow colour.

27:00 Another of the things that stick in my memory was our horse, who at the beginning of each season would have the trolley loaded up with buckets. He would then be driven up to the apricot trees and then he would be unloaded. And then he wouldn't be driven at all, as soon as the trolley was loaded with the full buckets they would just slap him on the rump and he would turn around and walk back again

27:30 to the cutting shed, unload everything, put the empty buckets on, pat him on the rump again and he would turn around and go back again. He was as good as any man on the job. Horses are very good that way.

I wondered if you got attached to any of the pigs your father was fattening up?

Yes. I did and I was never around when they actually slaughtered the pig. I saw pigs slaughtered at other peoples places,

28:00 but our own pig I think they used to make sure I was out of the way before our pig was slaughtered, butchered. And I don't even remember the – I remember the salting down and the pickling part of it but I don't remember any of the actual mechanics of slaughtering and butchering before that.

Was that the only meat you were eating in that period?

Oh no, we used to buy meat from the butcher and of course they

28:30 used to run a delivery service too. I mean here we were three miles out of the town and we were just on one fruit orchard so to get from the side track to our house would probably be about half a mile. Never the less the butchers cart, and the baker, used to come down there and they would deliver to the house which I would have thought would have been terribly uneconomic, but they would do it, it was part of the service at the time.

29:00 So we had meat and of course we had quite a number of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, so we would have eggs and roast fowl or boiled. And the hens were free to roam around an area out at the back of the house where there was a little bit of a domestic rubbish tip and so on some distance from the house. And they were effectively

29:30 corralled by the magpies, which is quite surprising. We had mallee trees all around the house and the magpies would make sure that the hens stayed in their allotted area, if a hen went too far away down would come a magpie, swerve and drive it back in again. The birds are very territorial. They recognised the limits we had set and they re-enforced us.

30:00 And we find the same here, we have magpies at the back of the house and they come down to pick up crumbs and now the miner birds are trying to invade the territory, and the magpies tolerate them for maybe a minute or two and then suddenly they lunge for them and the miner birds scatter.

You don't mess with a magpie?

No. the magpies here are very good. They are the white magpies, but in Canberra

30:30 the black magpies are the ones that swoop and attack you. Mind you, they get a fair bit of provocation too, when we were living in Canberra you would see the boys, ten, eleven or twelve shaking the trees because there was magpies up there, and then of course the mother is complaining to the police that the magpie was attacking their children. I remember one of them saying to the policeman, "We're trying to protect our children." And the policeman said, "That's what the magpie is trying to do."

31:00 **And when you were in Waikerie you mentioned that the Tiger Moth would come through every now and again. Was that you're only –**

Well no, the planes were like Tiger Moths, it was actually before Tiger Moths had been developed, they didn't come along until about 1930. They were the old fighter planes. However you have now touched upon a very vivid memory.

31:30 I mentioned that we had no money and we knew that. But one day there was a plane came over, this must have been about 1934 I suppose, I was about eleven. And he was running trips for five shillings a time, take off circle around and land again. So I was standing out, and I can remember quite

32:00 distinctly standing in the powdery clay barefoot with the clay pushing between my toes and my head back watching this, and the sun beaming down the side of my chin. And my mother was watching me from the back veranda and then my father came along and the two of them stood there watching me for a while and then my mother said, "Would you like to have a trip

32:30 on the plane?" and I said, "Oh yes, I would love to but it costs five bob." And that was the end of it you know, I knew perfectly well that we didn't have it. And then my mother turned to my father – isn't it funny, funny how you choke up on a memory like this?

It's a lovely memory though.

33:00 **Anyway she said, "I think we could spend five bob, couldn't we?" And my father staggered back and said, "What?" Anyway, the two of them looked at each other for about five minutes, well that's what it seemed like to me. And the next minute he said, "Yes, I think we could." Anyway I still remember the two florins and the shilling piece in my hot**

33:30 **little hand and that was my first ride in an aeroplane. Of course I hopped on the bike and rode of as fast as I could and when I got there all of my school mates were there and they said, "Oh, you have come to look at the plane?" I said, "No, I am going up in it." "Oh yeah?" so once again I held out the money and I suppose the trip lasted ten or fifteen minutes circling over Waikerie, but it was enough**

34:00 **to identify the town and pick out our own house, the fruit orchard and so on and it was great. As I say it was so totally unexpected, this was money that they could ill-afford. And just to give an example, in about 1933**

34:30 **things were bad and my father wanted to get as many oranges as he could for the export market. Now there were all sorts of conditions attached to the export market, first of all they had to be unblemished, no marks on them. Secondly, they couldn't be picked off the tree, they had to be cut off so that the stem was still attached to the orange. This had to be done wearing gloves.**

35:00 **Then the oranges had to be individually wrapped in wax paper and then they had to be packed in boxes according to standard pickings which were set out on a chart. Grading according to size of course and then packed by these standard packings. So my father had his own packing cases, he was a carpenter of course. Mind you a lot of them made their own packing cases whether they were a carpenter or not. But he**

35:30 **was probably a bit quicker than most because he could drive nails in like nobody's business, like a machine gun, bang, bang. Made his own packing cases, he made a grader to grade the oranges. He went through the whole process then of picking them according to the various regulations and I think he had about three hundred cases, I am not sure of the quantity. Anyway they were taken to the rail head at Waikerie and sent off to the market at Melbourne,**

36:00 **and I remember him saying to my mother, "Well at least we will get something for our work this year." And the agent in Melbourne had quite a distinctive envelope, it was a blue envelope with a crest in the corner, and I used to collect the mail from the post office every afternoon and come home with it. So I recognised this envelope and I knew this would have the cheque in it. So**

36:30 **I hurried home, gave it to my mother, and he was quite pleased and smiled at my mother, opened the envelope, not a word. Just handed the letter over to her. It was a bill. The amount which had been raised by the sale of those three hundred cases did not cover the cost of freight.**

37:00 **Did not cover the cost of freight from Waikerie to Melbourne. And there wasn't a word spoken, this was to be accepted as being part of life's rich tapestry, you know. I mean there may have been a few tears later on which I didn't see,**

37:30 **but there was none then.**

That must have been difficult to put all of that work in?

That's right, a years work. Yep. And I have got no doubt that there would have been similar stories from a lot of other people at the time.

And they just had to swallow it didn't they?

That's right, you just move along and do the best you can with the next crop.

38:00 **When did you end up moving to Adelaide? Was that a result of everything just getting too difficult?**

I think it probably was because as a boy you don't know what the financial situation of your parents is. But in 1935 or thereabouts there was a court case, I can't remember the name of the man who brought it now

38:30 but at that time interstate trade in dried fruit was being regulated. There was an agreement between the states. And someone challenged the validity of this on constitutional grounds because the constitution said that trade between the states would be free et cetera. James I think his name was. Anyway he won the case and so the bottom dropped out of the dried fruit industry. And so I think at that stage my father decided

39:00 that growing fruit was not the way to go. And so he sold the fruit orchard and went back to building. Had he held on for another three or four years when the war started, of course it would have been totally different, when the war started the price of fruit went up. And of course they moved to a totally different technique, where as we were in the process of drying fruit,

39:30 which is a very chancy business, I mean I talked about the apricots earlier on. Having taken the apricots of the sulphur dioxide box, spread them out in the sun to dry, you have got a whirlwind that comes along and goes through those, throws all of the apricots and trays up in the air and into the dust and you have lost fifty percent of your value straight away. Similarly if you have got sultanas or

40:00 raisins or currents out, they are also spread out. First of all they are on racks, and then they are spread out on sheets of hessian for the final drying, they are raked out during the day and then folded over and protected in the evening but if you get a sudden shower of rain while any of this is out, once again half the value of your crop is gone again. And so you have got a long process from the time that you first pick these until the time they are sold and the money is in the bank.

40:30 Now in about 1939 or thereabouts they moved away from that to canning the fruit. So you could pick apricots slightly green, which meant you didn't have to worry about hail stone damage et cetera, and they would go into the can and you were finished. None of this chancy business afterwards. And that too was a big step forward. And then later on you have got

41:00 Berri, for example, moving into the fruit juice industry and so the whole complexion of the industry changed.

41:12 End of tape

Tape 2

00:31 **Lyall you were going to give us a bit more insight into the relationship between you parents?**

Yeah, well, I mentioned that Dad was a carpenter builder and Mum was a teacher and they used to re-enforce one another's values. So my mother was always stressing the importance of what

01:00 she called a good tradesman's job, doing things properly, thoroughly, accurately, with a good finish and so on .and my father was always stressing the importance of getting a good education and our house always had stacks of books and so on. So I grew up reading lots of books which were probably much older or intended for an older age group than I

01:30 was at the moment. I can remember for example when I was six years old my mother was the at the wash trough and I was reading asking her some of the most difficult words like, 'Pee-oh-pull' which she

told me was ‘people’. And the book was Gulliver’s Travels. Now years later I found out nobody at the age of six was supposed to be reading Gulliver’s Travels.

02:00 But as I say the books were there and my mother was there to assist with any words that I didn’t know, so I did a lot of reading, I used to like reading and writing. So that in primary school for example, when they had the annual show they used to have competitions for what they called compositions and I used to win this every year, partly because I used to have a better

02:30 vocabulary than most of the others and the teachers used to like pretentious language, so that instead of me saying for example ‘there was the smell of bacon in the air’, I would have ‘the aroma of frying bacon permeated the atmosphere’, and the teachers thought that was great. Of course, I think it is terrible now, but at the time that was what they encouraged, to build the vocabulary.

03:00 And this whole culture that I lived in then, I realise now, affected the way I look at things subsequently, because there often used to be an argument about something that is all right in theory but doesn’t work in practice and of course my answer to that was, ‘Well, if it doesn’t work in practice, the theory is wrong, you should go and fix it. There was also a feeling that somehow academic

03:30 achievement was far superior to doing something manually, actually making something or constructing something. And I always thought that was a load of rubbish, if you can make something that is well constructed, is functional and is beautiful et cetera, that is worth just as much as solving a quadratic equation.

04:00 As I say, that sort of thinking, when I was well on in my educational career, made me pay attention to the hand side of things as well as to the mind. I suppose that’s why I went into the Commission of Advanced Education because that was the whole purpose of the College of Advanced Education was to apply knowledge at a tertiary level. Apply it to professions or occupations. Like

04:30 engineering, physiotherapy et cetera. And of course obviously, as director general of TAFE, that was the key message of our department, was to link together performance with thinking.

So your mother was a teacher which at the time would have been quite unusual to have a mother with a career as well as a father with a job. Did

05:00 **she teach at all when you were a child?**

Yes, from when I was quite small, under the age of five she was school teaching, she must have been a casual because married women of course, as you know, had to resign as soon as they became married.

05:30 But apparently in the early 1920s there was a teacher shortage as there was after World War II and she was teaching full time at primary school then because I remember going along with her on one occasion and sitting in the class she was teaching, and I was a real celebrity. I was about three or four and all of the other kids made a great fuss of me so I remember that very well. And then of course that

06:00 opportunity disappeared and she had to give up teaching. At that stage of course we were back on the orchard and she was fully occupied doing all of the things which the wife of a fruit grower does. She returned to teaching again after World War II, once again there was a teacher shortage and she went back to teaching and she continued teaching

06:30 after my father died in Alice Springs, she taught at Alice Springs and she continued until she reached retiring age. One of the children she taught at Alice Springs was Neville Perkins, Charlie Perkins’ cousin [first Aboriginal university graduate], who she described as a very bright little boy. I think he is a Member of Parliament in the Territory now, I am not sure. She was a good teacher, I don’t

07:00 just say that myself but the various teaching reports which we have all say that she was extremely good. Some people say outstanding. Even after she retired when we were living in Canberra the kid living next door to us was having trouble at school and his mother asked my mother if she could do something for him, and she said, “Yeah, she was happy to.” And so Billy used to come over

07:30 for a lesson and so you would hear my mother, she had a unit inside the house that we lived in, but you could hear her every now and again saying, “Come on Billy, you can do this. Billy, you can do it!” and Billy did, he made good progress because he had no choice you see.

And how did that impact on you growing up, you said that she helped you with Gulliver’s Travels but was she encouraging you

08:00 **academically at home?**

Yes, it is difficult to say, I don’t think I needed much encouragement. Both she and my father were very careful not to push me. I mean they let it be known that I should do as well as I could but there was nobody sort of sat over me and said, “You have got to do your homework, you have got to do this or the other.”

08:30 But they always gave me a pat on the back if I did well. And after I had come top of the class in about grade four or five my next door neighbour said, “I hear you came top of the class?” and I said, “That’s right.” And he said, “Well, what did Dad give you for that?” and I said, “What do you mean?” and he

said, “Well, didn’t Dad give you a shilling or something for coming top?” and I said, “No.”

09:00 This was a new thought and I raced home and said, “Dad, Mr ‘so and so’ says you should give me a shilling for coming top.” So anyway the message was that I should come top because that’s what I was capable of doing. I still got the shilling. But I wasn’t driven, I was encouraged and as I say the facilities were always there, there was always books around the place and my mother had a very good general knowledge, she used to like reading, her

09:30 and my father both did. And so I got a lot of home support from both of them.

So how did you education change once you moved to Adelaide?

Well, Waikerie had a higher primary school and so I was there, normally the intermediate in those days took three years after primary school.

10:00 With the higher primary you were allowed to attempt it in two years and so shortly before the examination was due to take place we moved to Adelaide and I went to Adelaide High School where I went into the intermediate class, but the school was most reluctant to allow me to sit the examination. They thought that only having studied for two years I probably would fail and they obviously didn’t want this against the school record. But my mother

10:30 went along and saw the headmaster whom she knew quite well, she had been to Adelaide High School herself as a girl. And so she said to the headmaster that speaking not as a mother but as a teacher, he should let me sit the exam because she was quite sure that I would pass it. So they did allow me to sit it and I did, I passed the seven subjects with credit and so the headmaster was very pleased, he congratulated me on this.

11:00 So the following year I did the leaving examination which in those days was the matriculation, and at that stage I was fourteen, so I matriculated at the age of fourteen. Which was of course a dead loss because the university wouldn’t accept anybody until they were sixteen so I had two years to fill in. One year was done over in New Zealand where I did the Higher Leaving Certificate,

11:30 and the final year I was back at Adelaide High School where I did leaving honours. And then the following year I started as a junior teacher.

What was the difference between the leaving certificate you had done at Adelaide High and the one you did in New Zealand?

Not a great difference in standard, it was a different approach. The high leaving in New Zealand was essentially I think

12:00 a continuous assessment kind of thing. I don’t recall a final examination. You had a test every fortnight or thereabouts and it was equivalent to the first year of university, the same as leaving honours was here. In fact if you did the leaving honours here and passed with a certain mark you were then exempt from first year university studies in that subject. So it was very similar

12:30 in standard and in concept but a different system of organization.

And why were you in New Zealand?

Oh this is when my father was working on the concrete hangers for the Royal New Zealand Air Force. He was there for three years, for the first year or so he and my mother were at Fielding, Palmerston North.

13:00 On the north island, and then they moved up to Auckland, there is a big airfield there called Whenuapai and he was working on that. But then he came back to Adelaide in about 1941. And I don’t know where he was working at that stage, he must have been doing some sort of construction work. But he was also a member of the volunteer defence corps.

13:30 And my mother at the same time was in the VADs [voluntary aid detachments] doing nursing down at the army barracks. And she was working for one of the defence industries producing the Beaufort Bomber. So the whole family was involved.

What did you think of New Zealand?

I liked New Zealand, I liked the New Zealanders and I liked the country itself.

14:00 I learnt a lot about the different way we regard each other. The Australians tend to look at the New Zealanders as our brothers, you know, Anzacs together. New Zealanders tend to look at Australians as those overbearing, over paid characters who want to come across the Tasman and tell us how to run our own country. And of course you get all of the jokes, “What is the definition of gross ignorance?” Answer, “A hundred and forty four Australians,” that sort of thing. But they are a good bunch

14:30 the New Zealanders, I like them.

So then back to Australia and can you tell me about the next year?

Yes well, once I had finished my year as the junior teacher I came into the Adelaide Teachers College which was closely linked with the university and I enrolled in not only college subjects but also university subjects,

15:00 and I had not done any science at high school and I really wanted to do a science degree because I found science really interesting, and fortunately at the matriculation level I had passed English, mathematics and Latin and to matriculate for science you needed English, mathematics and a foreign language. So I was able to do that. Interestingly you didn't have to have done any physics, chemistry or any of those science subjects.

15:30 So I enrolled in those subjects in that year and in the same year I joined the air force – no, I finished that year and passed those subjects and at the end of that year I left the college, my first year at the college was '41, and then at the beginning of '42 I joined the air force

16:00 I went into the reserve and then was called up in the middle of the year, June 1942.

So what had speared you towards this desire to be a teacher?

Yeah, it is very interesting.

16:30 At the age of thirteen I had wanted to join the navy, as I said my grandfather had been a Swedish seaman and I had this desire to go to sea et cetera and so I competed for one of the places as a cadet midshipmen and there was something like three hundred applications for sixteen places.

17:00 And I completed all of the educational stuff quite well and the interviews et cetera. And I got to the medical examination and I have a tooth which has never grown here, a missing tooth and so I was ruled out as medically unit. Which at the time I thought was a bit tough but they had to find some reason to cut back to sixteen out of the three hundred or so.

17:30 So after that I didn't really have any particular ambition at all but my mother convinced me that teaching was a good job. She had two reasons, one she enjoyed it, but secondly she thought it was a good safe job. If you became a teacher you always had a job. So that was why I first went into the education department. Now the interesting thing was that

18:00 when I started as a junior teacher I had as my head teacher then a man who was absolutely dedicated, was a great teacher, really was, he was enthusiastic. He had spent two years travelling around the world, twelve months on a scholarship and twelve months on his own expense, looking at schools in different countries, collecting teaching materials, looking at different ways of teaching.

18:30 And he was an absolute inspiration and he devoted a lot of time to me, telling me how to go about things, what to look for, what were the reasons for these, what are the objectives of education. And he really fired me up with a lot of enthusiasm for teaching and particularly the importance of education in the society in which we live.

19:00 So when I came back again after the war and we had a choice of occupation under the old Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme, I could have opted to go in for any of the university courses because I had a year of successful study behind me and I could have moved in, but by that stage I became convinced that education was really what I wanted to do, so I stayed with it. And the interesting

19:30 things is when at the teachers college, they did a survey and one of the questions they asked the students, "If you could have your choice of any occupation in the world what would you most like to be," and my recollection is that I was the only one that said teacher. Everybody else wanted to be ballet dancers or opera singers et cetera see? And I thought, "This is

20:00 ridiculous, here we are all training to be teachers." In those days the teachers college was the only way in which children of the middle class or lower class could get into university because there was no system of scholarships available. There was a small handful of what were called bursaries and so on. But they were basically taken up by the students who

20:30 stayed on at the more prestigious colleges, and stayed there until they were about eighteen or nineteen and got sufficiently high results to win one of these scholarships. So it really was a passport from what shall we say? A tradesman's family to a professional family. And if you look back at the careers of those people that went to the teachers college,

21:00 there are an enormous number of people who succeeded in other walks of life. For instance the first manager of the Housing Trust in South Australia had been a teacher of economics, there were quite a few of the United Nations experts who were South Australian teachers, who then joined the United Nations. The sales manager for Rolls Royce in England is a graduate of the teachers college here.

21:30 There's a chap called Seaber who was the under treasurer, in fact there are two or three under treasurers or senior treasurers – all started off as teachers and then moved into other fields.

So it seems like people did get their wish after all to not be teaching?

Some of them did. Others didn't and of course they were very frustrated, we had a system then, you

signed a bond, when you went into teachers college you had to sign a bond which was to

22:00 complete your course and then to teach for a period equal to your time in the college plus two years. So that if you did a two year primary teacher course, you had to teach for four years. Now in my case I did the four year high school course which then meant I had to teach for six years, so it was a ten year period that you were signed up for. Now a lot of people got very frustrated,

22:30 they didn't like teaching when they got into it, they couldn't get out of it because they were bonded, and so you got quite a few frustrated teachers who really didn't do a very good job.

How did you find your first year of being a junior teacher?

Good. It was,

Because you didn't have any training at that point did you?

No, it was an apprenticeship and for me, the system worked very well because,

23:00 as I say, I had this enthusiastic headmaster who really mentored me. It was a good experience. I had to go out in the country and find my own board and all of the rest of it. And then total allowance, you go forty-five pound a year for your basic allowance and then twenty pounds a year for a boarding allowance.

23:30 So a grand total of twenty-five shillings a week which is two dollars fifty now. It wasn't then of course and from that I had to find everything. This was a good experience for me of course. I learnt to budget, and I remember on one occasion I got my cheque, cashed it and I had nine pence left to last for a fortnight. And it did. I mean I didn't have any travel expenses because you travelled around on a bicycle

24:00 and I just didn't buy anything for the whole of that fortnight. There was a reasonable sort of a social life in the country and as a young teacher I was fairly much in demand from families who had teenage daughters, they thought it would be very good if their daughter could marry a teacher, safe job,

24:30 good career. Quite a good year for me, and as a boy I had often gone out droving on holidays, one of my close friends had a father who was a drover and so I used to go up with him on the weekends or the holidays and we would go down to Blanchetown and pick up cattle or sheep and bring them back to Waikerie and so on, take two or three days.

25:00 And so when I was a junior teacher I got on with the families that had horses and I used to do a lot of horse riding on their horses, so by and large it was a good year. And I also did Pure Maths 1 at university by external study and passed it, God knows how but I did. I really believed that I had failed,

25:30 I should never have passed really, I must have scored enough, anyway I passed it.

What were you being taught about teaching in this sort of apprenticeship scenario?

Well, there was a text book which you had to work through which explained how you prepared a lesson, what were the objectives, how you

26:00 determined your own objectives and then how do you construct the lesson, how did you motivate the students to learn what you wanted them to learn. How did you present material in a logical order so that you built from one step to another, and then how did you reinforce this by questioning or by discussion. How did you re-enforce this: by giving them exercises to do or by repetition? The emphasis there was on teaching

26:30 It was a text book on how to be a teacher whereas my view is that the emphasis should be on what most people learn. You know, and once you understand what it is that make people learn, then of course you can construct the environment around them so that they learn what it is that you want them to learn.

27:00 And you identify their main strengths and motivations so that they want to learn things. And I think that the emphasis has shifted away these days from the tricks of the trade of the teacher, to more on the psychology of learning yourself but I am not really close enough to it these days to know whether it is true or not.

27:30 **Did you receive respect at sixteen years old? It seems terribly young to be as teacher?**

I certainly had respect from the kids in the school and certainly out in the wider community, yes, I had respect.

28:00 I am just trying to think. I did – for example I joined the tennis club and they were looking for a secretary and so I took on the job as secretary. I played for the local football club. Now I am by no means an ace footballer, but already a lot of their more able and fitter bodied people had gone off to join the services, it was the first year of the war so there was still men around but not as many as there had been. So I,

28:30 by virtue of taking on some of these responsibilities and mingling with the rest of the community, I was quite well received. Nobody ever implied that I was somehow less that equal to the others, it was a good

year all around.

What were you hearing about the war at this point?

29:00 Well, the radio and the newspapers were reporting the progress of the war so we were hearing about the war in the Middle East, the Battle of Bardia, there was Tobruk of course, and Bardia sent real shock waves through the community because one of the soldiers from there was killed in the very first battle.

29:30 Suddenly made it all very real, it wasn't just something happening on the other side of the world it was one of our own, one of our own blokes had been killed. And of course more was to follow. But we had the impression that the war was going fairly well.

30:00 It's hard to recall now. Certainly there was no sense that Germany might win the war. The Battle of Britain was the highlight of it and convinced people that we were going to win. And of course we were relying on Britain at that stage and the Americans were getting a lot of hostile comment because they essentially were sitting

30:30 on the fence. There was a very strong pro-German element in the United States. And the impression for a number of the people here was that America was just waiting to see which way the war was going. And then they would come in on the winning side. I think that is an unfounded criticism, but nevertheless it is what a lot of people were saying at the time.

31:00 **Did you feel any need to be involved in this war at that point in time?**

Oh yes, I couldn't wait for the day when I could join up, as soon as I turned eighteen that was my intention, that was why I got quite a surprise when I was seventeen coming up to eighteen, I said to my father quite confidently and all,

31:30 "You will sign my papers to give me permission to join up, won't you?" and he said, "No." I said, "You were an ANZAC [original Australian and New Zealand Army Corps], how can you refuse?" "No," he said, "I think you should wait until you're twenty-one. It is not a picnic you know. I think you should wait until you are twenty-one before you join up." So I said, "I will go and ask Mum if she will give permission." And he said, "Well, if she does. It may be different in

32:00 the air force, there may be a lot of young men there that you will be at home with, but it is my view that you should wait." Anyway I persuaded my mother to sign the consent so that I could join the air force at the age of eighteen. That surprised me. Once again there were a lot of things that came out from my father, as I said before he was very taciturn

32:30 but after I had joined the air force and started my pilot training out here at Parafield and I had gone solo – I think I had about eight hours and went solo – and I came home on the weekend and sort of causally said to my father, "I went solo through the week," and he said, "What does that mean?" and I said, "Well, I was flying the plane, I was the pilot," and he said, "Yeah but somebody was with you?"

33:00 and I said, "No, just me." "Oh," he said, "You can fly on your own?" I said, "Yeah." And I, knowing full well that he had never been up in an aeroplane, said, "Have you ever flown yourself?" and he surprised me and said, "Oh yes." "What?! When?" "Oh," he said, "During the war we used to go up and do spotting for the artillery." As I said, he was in the signals,

33:30 so what happened was, they would take off with him in the back cockpit and he would have a signal lamp with which he flashed in Morse back to the camp. And on the ground they had a roll of blind which was nine feet long and three feet wide. And to signal a dash they would pull this thing out to its full length and to signal a dot they would pull it out to a third of its length, see? So they would signal up to him and he would reply with the lamp, and this was over

34:00 Germans lines you see with things shooting at them.

So he was replying from a Hurricane lamp from a cockpit?

Not a Hurricane lamp, an Alders lamp, which was a pretty powerful battery operated – almost like a miniature search light. And it had got a focus beam so you look through the sight back at the person you are signalling to, and you have got a trigger on it and the mirror at the back goes backwards and forwards you see and you can signal them.

34:30 But then he said, "Oh yes, on the way back the pilot used to have a bit of fun with us, do the loop the loop and that sort of thing." And I said, "What about your safety harness?" and he said, "What do you mean safety harness?" Because in those days they used to do a loop the loop just being held in by sheer G force, do a tight loop and you don't fall out. But if you don't do it tight enough, you do fall out.

35:00 So I wasn't talking about flying any more with Dad. But that was the sort of thing that I mean, he would never talk about it but every now and then you would get a little crumb of information.

Why the air force?

Because I wanted to fly. Originally, as I mentioned, I tried to join the navy as a cadet midshipman, so when the war started I had the great idea of joining the

35:30 fleet air arm. I thought that would be good, the flying and the navy together. But there was no fleet air arm in Australia so they said to me, “If you want to join the fleet air arm in England first of all you have to join the air force and qualify as a pilot” and that sounds easy, but it wasn’t. Qualify as a pilot, get to England and then transfer over to the fleet air arm. Well of course I did all of the first of it, I was well and truly hooked into the air force and

36:00 I didn’t pursue the fleet air arm option at all, because it was a constant competition. First of all when you joined the air force you went through an initial training scheme which was all ground instruction and on the basis of your results there, including what you might call vocational testing, you got streamed off into pilot,

36:30 observer or wireless air gunner, or sometimes just air gunner. But basically wireless air gunner. And then if you got into pilot training, first of all you had to get through successfully the Tiger Moth period, because a lot of people got scrubbed which was the technical word, got scrubbed during their training.

37:00 And then they went off to become observers or air gunners. I think most of those who were scrubbed from pilot training became observers, I know two of my friends, they have both died in the last few months, but that happened to both of them. They both started training as pilots and then because they couldn’t land they got moved across to observers.

So are observers like navigators?

Yeah, that’s right.

37:30 In fact they are now called navigators. The observer split up and became navigator or bomb aimer. In fact they split a number of these things. These days, they now have flight engineers and so on. However so if you got through your Tiger Moth period successfully you got streamed off into either fighters or bombers. And the bomber people went onto Avro Ansons and the fighter people went onto Wirraways at Deniliquin, in my case.

38:00 And then if you survived that and a lot of people were scrubbed again at various points long the way, you then might get to an operational flying unit or you might be siphoned off to become a flying instructor. So these branching things were happening all of the time and it really was quite difficult to finish up on a fighter squadron. When we left Australia

38:30 to go to England there was about a hundred and twenty-five of us in the group, and by the time we got to England, the bomber raids were the order of the day and the fighter swoops had taken a back step and so we were all being interviewed to decide where we should we go and as I say the big emphasis was to put people in bombers.

39:00 Now when I went in for my interview, the chap that interviewed me was talking about the great need for bomber pilots and so on, so I made as strong a case as I could to stay on fighters, and he kept on saying, “We really need bombers.” And so I said, “Bomber pilots really have to take responsibility for crew and I am not really that type of person. I cannot take responsibility

39:30 and I would be terrified at the thought of other people depending on me, et cetera. And they also need to be able to navigate to get back from Germany and I am no good at navigation.” At that stage, he gave a bit of a smile, looking at my record he must have seen that I came top in navigation. But anyway I finished up saying, “You have got to have some fighter pilots.” So eventually he said, “All right.

40:00 you can stay on fighters.” As far as I know and I don’t want to exaggerate, but as far as I know of that one hundred and twenty-five people I was the only one who stayed on fighters. The others all moved onto bombers, so I was lucky.

Why didn’t you want to go to bombers?

I wanted to be a fighter pilot. I mean, to me, the thought of trundling a big heavy aircraft from A to B

40:30 without any sort of, well, they would have got assaulted all right because there was a lot of flak around. No, I liked to have the feeling that I was the master of whatever I was doing. I liked doing aerobatics. And I very much liked shooting, the air to air gunnery. Air to ground gunnery.

41:00 Because I had been a champion rifle shot, I won cups in New Zealand. And I had been raised with a gun in my hand so I was a good shot.

41:12 End of tape

Tape 3

00:30 **So Lyall, at eighteen you joined up with the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], can you tell me about your training?**

Well, while we were still in the reserve, we attended various instructional classes.

01:00 The one I remember most are the Morse classes which were held in next to the post office. We had a former PMG [postmaster general] telegraphist teaching us Morse code and of course in my case I was lucky because my father having been in the signals was able to help me out at home and we had to go through a little key. And

01:30 of course I just could not believe, when we first started on this, I sent the first signal across, which was dit dah dit dah dit dit dit. And so he got that and then he answered and it went 'brrrm'. And of course to him even though he hadn't done it for twenty years or so it was just like reading a book or listening to the news or something.

02:00 After I had this experience I quite believed some of the stories we heard from the PMG telegraphist that they would have a message coming through and they would roll a cigarette and light it as this was coming through and then pick up a pen and start writing just as though someone was giving oral dictation, they would write it down. And then if another message came through they would receive that one as well,

02:30 they could write down the first message at the same time they were hearing the second and then write that out.

Well, what you were saying before about your father, he took in three thousand signals?

Passing through there, yeah. What his role was I don't know. I guess that he was distributing or handling or organising it, how it was done I don't know. Of course it obviously

03:00 made a difference to me because when we were out at Parafield and we still had the Morse classes going on all of the time though our training, when I was doing the transmitting, the telegraphist there, another old bloke probably about seventy, he asked me where did I learn this? Who had taught me? And I said, "My father," and he

03:30 said "Yes," and I forget whatever his comment was but it was along the lines of that he could tell from the way I was transmitting that who ever had taught me had been a telegraphist himself .and when Dad was in the volunteer defence corps and they were doing exercises with the Australian Army and he was transmitting for the VDC [volunteer defence corps] and at the end of the day the message came back from the army people, "Who was your signaller?"

04:00 and so he sent back, "Number 171." That was his army number, 171. That's not the last three digits, that's the total number, he was in, in the first week or so. So he sent back, "171, 1st Div." And they sent back, "Congratulations." And he was very chuffed about that, that after twenty odd years of not doing any he was able to hold his own with the army signallers.

Was that a [UNCLEAR] is that still used?

04:30 Not now. I think they closed down the last one within the last twelve months or so. It is now all done on email, telex that sort of thing. If you are a pilot, private pilot in particular and you are picking up radio beacons, that is still Morse code and that is still quite slow, probably at the rate of ten words per minute.

05:00 And I think that's still the case, I don't think they have replaced that. So you have to identify the radio beacon or whatever it is from the signal. However, having said that, there was something in the paper only two or three months ago that indicated there was a change there too so I really don't know. But I am

05:30 pretty sure that the old telegraphist with his key is gone now, it is part of history.

So signalling was an important part of your training, well learning Morse, what else were you doing? You're at Parafield at this stage?

Well, when we first went in, you went to an initial training school which I mentioned before where you did subjects like electricity and magnetism

06:00 air force law, because you were also being trained as officer, either non commissioned or officer so you had to know about law. Aviation medicine was another one, and this was absolutely ludicrous. Most of these different subjects were encompassed within the pages of a single essentially loose leaf folio. So there is one section on electricity and magnetism, another section on

06:30 law and another one on aviation medicine. And the aviation medicine one which talks about anoxia, that was the heading 'Anoxia', and the sentence started off, "The early symptoms of anoxia are cyanosis, early cortical release, and euphoria.

07:00 That was the first unit, this was for kids who had done intermediate. And of course all they had done was take a couple of pages from the medical journal and put it in there, nobody even knew what anoxia meant. For the benefit of everybody concerned, it is lack of oxygen, when the air pressure drops off and so on, you don't get enough oxygen. Cyanosis means that you go blue, early cortical release means that you feel great and so does euphoria.

07:30 Early cortical release really means that you don't have control over some of your higher functions. And therefore you feel great. It is like being drunk. We did a range of subjects, aircraft recognition is another one that was very important. They would flash silhouettes of aircraft or actually photographs from different angles and it would be up on the screen for a twenty-fifth of a second or so and you had to identify what it was,

08:00 and not just friend or foe, you had to know what the actual aircraft was and the markings and so on. And of course a lot on armaments, the Browning machine gun, the Vickers machine gun, you had to be able to strip these and put them together again and you basically had to be able to do it blindfolded.

Why were you being taught that if you were going to be in the air?

Well, you had to know of course what the limitations of your armaments were, and you were also

08:30 expected to be able to take part in any of these things if needed. I mean I don't know of any pilot who ever did have to strip down his Browning machine gun, but conceivably if he had been forced down or was in a situation, he was supposed to be able to do it himself. But the main thing was so that you understood what the problems were.

09:00 So that you didn't do anything stupid. You also had to know effectively what the rate of fire was, how many bullets you were going to be able to put into the target. As I said, I had always been interested in the shooting side of it because I had been raised that way. And so I took a great interest in the theory of aerial gunnery and there is quite a lot of theory,

09:30 particularly when we got later on onto the business of rockets, however I am digressing. Coming back to the training. So from this initial training where you were really covering the whole range of the things you might have to do in the future, together with co-ordination tests and so on. It was a very simple device, you sat in a chair like this with a piece of wood which was a control column, another piece of wood,

10:00 and literally a piece of wood that could have come from a packing case you know. And that rudder controlled a little light which went onto a screen and so you had an instructor who moved a bead of light up on the screen and you had to follow with your bead of light. And presumably they did some sort of analysis of the difference between where he was going and where you were going. And you did very well if that distance was small.

10:30 So this sorted out people who were going to be pilots. This sorted out the people who were going to be pilots or at least who were going to start training as pilots. Then, as I say, we went off to our different fields. Now at Parafield, the first thing was essentially familiarisation.

11:00 So you went up with an instructor, and

What planes were you going up in?

Tiger Moths. And you flew around and you were allowed to try and get the feel of the aircraft and for the first two or three hours this was very difficult. Looking back on it you wonder why because essentially a Tiger Moth will fly itself.

11:30 If you just sit there and take your hands off the control it will fly along nice and steadily, straight and so forth, but when you have got your hand on the column it is so sensitive that you wobble all over the place. And what we tended to do and I think this was our invariable experience, we tended to try and push it around when all you really needed to do really was hold it like a Morse key and move the top of it with your fingers.

12:00 So you got familiarisation there and the instructors would go through a series of manoeuvres, you know letting you get the feel of the aircraft, and then at some stage, I don't think it would be the first flight but at some stage quite early in the training, they would put the plane into a spin, they would tell you, "We will now practice spinning and so on. This is how you put the plane into a spin, this is how you recover."

12:30 But I discovered later that they would put the plane into a spin and then they would look in a little rear vision mirror at the student behind to see how he was reacting. And that would be quite an important part of their assessment of, if someone froze up or was terrified and so on, then I wouldn't say that he was hauled out

13:00 but they would take that into account. Whereas if the bloke looked relaxed or looked as though he was enjoying himself, well, of course this meant he had passed that particular thing.

How did you look?

I enjoyed it.

Did you get airsick?

No, I don't think – I was never airsick when I was in training, I was airsick twice, on each occasion I was a passenger in another plane

13:30 and I was just sitting there. And when I was flying, I kept my privates pilot's licence going until I retired aged sixty-five, but when I was taking passengers I always used to give them jobs to do because if people have got something to do then they are not as likely to get airsick. So I would put the map in front of them and say, "We left so and so over there." And they would have to frantically go over the map and try to find it.

14:00 So when I was in training, as I recall, I was never airsick. Anyway, we had about eight hours, maybe ten hours of dual instruction, where you went through all of these, and it is a laid out procedure, it is not a random thing, there is a sequence of events called the Gosford Training System and

14:30 you have got to do all of these various exercises in sequence and the only time you flew with the flight commander, different from your own instructor, was to do a test on how you were going. And one of the things which you did was forced landings, you would be flying around and suddenly the instructor would switch off the engine and say, "Right, forced landing." And you would have to try to

15:00 identify a field somewhere and you would have to get to it, turn into wind and land in it. And this was a fairly difficult thing, particularly for a trainee because when you are up in the air you don't know which way the wind is going, you have to look for various signs on the ground, and of course when you're travelling down wind you cover a lot of ground very quickly and when you turn up wind again you don't. You find you might be suspended in the one place and so trying to get into a field is not

15:30 the easiest of things.

I mean that's a pretty serious piece of training and for obvious reasons you needed to be an expert at it, but was there any loss of life in these training situations?

Oh yeah, my word there were. Not long after, about a week after we started at Parafield, our particular course, one of the lads in

16:00 the course ahead of us killed himself. His own stupidity, he was trying to show off and decided he would fly between a couple of trees and he didn't make it, he hit one of the trees so that was that. And we were devastated, I mean we didn't know this bloke at all, but he was killed and we were devastated. And about three months later when we were on Wirraways at Deniliquin, I remember

16:30 quite vividly somebody came into the hut about five o'clock and said, "Oh, Chook bought it today, he was doing a low flying exercise." Once again being silly but he apparently flew low over the Mulwala Canal and hit a high tension wire or something. Anyway he was killed. And so around the place there was people saying, "Oh gee, he was killed, that's bad." And then another would say,

17:00 "What's on at the pictures tonight?" and I thought then it was only three months since we were devastated by the first one and here we were now totally blasé because this had happened so often. I mean that wasn't the second one, there was many in-between. And we were quite used to the fact that people were getting killed.

It didn't sway you from what you had chosen to do?

Oh no, because we recognised that we weren't going to do stupid things like that.

17:30 **It would be different for you?**

That's right, we all thought we were immortal. I am but the rest were not necessarily. But no it does mean, well, you would expect it to mean that people become more careful and maybe some of them did, maybe some of them continued as they were, saying, "She'll be right."

18:00 It is exactly the same as we see now with people driving motor cars, I mean people are getting killed every day and –

Most of them are nineteen and –

But the rest say, "Oh no, it won't happen to me." So from Parafield,

When you first started you were at Shepparton is that right?

Well that's just –

That's where you started your training?

No, it was before I started the training. While I was still on the reserve

18:30 and there was generally anything from an eight to twelve month waiting list on the reserve until you got onto the air force itself. While I was on the reserve, things were looming up on the Coral Sea and in fact things were looking pretty grim and so they sent an appeal out to all of the people on the reserve asking if they would like to come in immediately

19:00 and be engaged on temporary ground duties, while awaiting their call up for air crew training. In fact they – the specific one I got was to join up and do guard duties, and so a number of us did that. In fact we still have a reunion every year where, of the sixty-one that went in, in my group there is only about

ten left now. We meet down at the Feathers every twelve months. So I

19:30 responded to that and said, “Yes, this will be good.” So we went to Shepparton which was the ground staff training centre and we went through the normal induction, reception training course. I have forgotten what the exact name was. Anyway this was designed to

20:00 first of all get you into the air force, so you got issued with your uniform, you got your injections, you got a lot of lectures on air force administration, air force law. And basically it was parade ground work where you marched up and down, presented, saluted and all of this kind of thing. And because we were air crew, we had a little white patch at the front of our caps, we had a fair amount of stick from

20:30 some of the senior – the old guard of the air force, who were saying, “You’re the nancy boys who think you can do all of this, we will teach you a bit of discipline,” which of course got our backs up and we were determined that we would be the best group that they had ever had, and in fact when we did pass out, the commanding officer then said that we were the best group that they had had to that date, which made us feel very pleased.

21:00 I think it may have been true, but then of course people say these things all of the time, “This is the best group I have ever had.” And then of course the next group is the best. But I remember towards the end of our training we were marched up to some point or other and there were two or three other squads up there who had come in after us and they were still in the early stages. And it was a crunch, crunch, the single sound of men

21:30 “Halt.” It was bang, bang, not bang butt, butt, butt, sort of thing. And the other new recruits all turned around and looked at us, and I realised then we really were operating as a squad and not a bunch of people going in the same direction, you know what I mean?

So perhaps the way you were treated by the old guard helped

22:00 **you in a strange way?**

I don’t know that that did but certainly the whole experience did because it meant that when we started our air crew training we were old hands. We knew how the air force operated, our overalls were now faded and limp, you know, not all new and crinkly, we had had all of our injections and we had got over all of the vaccinations, all of those sorts of problems. We didn’t have to go around asking anybody, “What do we do now?” “Where do we go?” et cetera.

22:30 So we got a flying start on the air crew training, it was a good experience.

Where were you doing the guard duty?

Well, from Shepparton I was posted to Sale in eastern Victoria, and quite apart from doing guard duties we were also used as unskilled labour. So at one stage, two or three of us were engaged in sweeping out the wards in the hospital.

23:00 And another occasion we were filling the practice bombs. Sale was a bombing and gunnery training school. The bombs were about that big, they weighed about ten pound and they were filled with a compound, stannous chloride, which on contact with the air becomes a dense white smoke, so into each of those goes a detonator so that when the

23:30 thing hits the ground the detonator blew it apart and you got this puff of white smoke. But the stannous chloride is highly corrosive and so we, perhaps a gang of three or four, would be right away from the air crew, right away by ourselves where we had a canister of this corrosive stuff, and we had helmets, gas masks, heavy rubber gloves, rubber boots,

24:00 and we had to fill these bombs, you know turn the tap on and so forth. And by the end of the day that stuff would have eaten through the rubber gloves. I don’t know about the boots, probably. So every day you had fresh equipment and even so the stuff used to get down into your lungs, through the gas mask and it was a most unpleasant job. And I guess that’s why they kept rotating the gang, so you didn’t spend too long on

24:30 the thing.

Are there any lasting effects from that?

Don’t think so. Anyway I am still alive, maybe I have got timber lined lungs I don’t know. From Sale I got brought back to Mulwala because the Battle of the Coral Sea was coming up in progress and they were forming up reserve squadrons. And so the old Avro Ansons, which we had as

25:00 training planes, they were being fitted with gun turrets, real live guns and we were being formed into squadrons and we were issued with tin hats and rifles and so forth, ready to move up north had we lost the Battle of the Coral Sea – we didn’t know any of this at the time of course. Anyway we were there for, well, I was there for two or three weeks perhaps and then we got the news that the battle had

25:30 been won and the squadrons were then disbanded and went into training and so on and I was then called up for my air crew training, I went from Mulwala across to Somers in Victoria. The guard duty, although most of us tended

26:00 to think it was a bit of a joke because you didn't expect any saboteurs or anything around the place, but in fact we were wrong. We were guarding the petrol dump at Mulwala, there was big forty gallon drums of petrol everywhere, cold wet and raining sitting out there. And anyway, when we got back to our barracks, we heard that

26:30 one of our colleagues doing a similar job down at Warrnambool had been stabbed and thrown over a cliff. So something was going on. And there was another story, whether it was true or not, you don't know because censorship was pretty tight, but we were also told that one of the guards in Sale had come across a chap putting sugar into the petrol in one of the hangers. So we did

27:00 have a job to do.

Well there must have been some forms of espionage in the country during the war?

Well yes, I am sure there was. And of course how widespread it was we don't know but we now know of course that there were German and Japanese subs operating off the coast of Australia during the war, which we didn't know then. And I think

27:30 there was a ship torpedoed not far off Kangaroo Island, and certainly off the west coast, there was enemy activity there.

Did you have true indication of the progress of the war while you were in your training?

Only what was in the newspapers.

There were not stories filtering down from soldiers who had returned from action?

No.

28:00 We only – all we knew about the war was what was in the paper and basically of course we didn't take that much of an interest in it, no interest in the detail. I mean we were so busy getting on with our training that we would listen to the radio, read the headlines and then we had to get on with what we were supposed to be doing.

Was there a sense of building up to something

28:30 **to the point that if the war had ended that a lot of the guys in training might have been disappointed?**

Well that didn't happen with my group because the war was still well and truly on, but it certainly did happen to a lot of people I know, who were in training when the war finished, or towards the end of the war and then either before the war ended, when they could see it was nearly finished they just cancelled training and so forth and they were not only disappointed

29:00 at that time but it left a permanent mark on two or three of them in Sydney who really couldn't settle down. They were all primed up for this life of adventure and suddenly it all disappeared, they couldn't settle into a normal civilian job. They went off and they did whatever sort of thing they thought might be adventurous, and basically they took

29:30 to the road and bumbled around the place looking for something exciting to do. Others were disappointed, I know one who is still a close friend, he was quite disappointed but he more or less used that as an incentive to get on with business activities and become a very successful entrepreneurial career and I think that drive that he

30:00 had that led him to want to be a pilot during the war, and then when that was killed he then put the same energy into making a success in business. But I think he was probably the exception, a lot of them were quite disoriented and couldn't settle back. In my case and I think the people in my vintage, we had gone through that. I mean I had done a tour of

30:30 operations and I had also done a course as a fighter pilot instructor. And so by the time the war ended I didn't have that hunger for excitement any more, I had done that. And I was quite happy to settle back into civilian life again.

So when you were at Parafield then you were selected to be a fighter pilot,

31:00 **why wouldn't you have wanted to be a bomber pilot?**

I thought at the time that flying a bomber would be fairly boring, it is a big heavy – it would be like the difference between a bus driver and a racing car driver so you might as well say why do you want to drive racing cars instead of buses? And the answer to that is that it is more exciting. In fighters of course you do the whole thing of aerobatics et cetera and in bombers you don't.

31:30 But of course that perception at the time was quite wrong, I mean the bomber pilots did have a lot of excitement, the bomber pilots were being attacked by enemy fighters and being shot up by flak and so on, so they were having a lot of excitement, but my perception then was that I just didn't want to fly in a straight line in a heavy aircraft around the sky. I wanted to do something that was

32:00 more varied, more exciting and so on. Also I had in mind the dog fights and so on which sounded very glamorous. Now as it happened I never had to get into a dog fight, partly because the work my squadron was on was basically ground support, you know strafing, dive bombing , rockets, we did do a few bomber escorts , in fact in my log book there I have noted a few of these,

32:30 and I have got down, “Very boring trip.” Because in the Mustangs which cruised at twice the speed of the bombers we had to put flaps down and actually slow ourselves down to stay with them and of course when the enemy fighters saw the Mustangs, they wouldn’t attack us. We knew they were up there, sometimes we would see them just darting in and out of a cloud. And if anyone got

33:00 detached from the squadron, if you had a group of say a half a dozen and someone was lagging behind, well then a Messerschmitt would dive out of a cloud, take that guy off and then go back again. So you stayed in a tight pack, but it didn’t ever happen to me. So that, as I say, the dog fighting aspect was just a –

Where did you get your imagery or your stories about dog fights from?

33:30 well, lots of newsreels and so on which were particularly relating to the Battle of Britain and then of course to the sweeps over enemy territory after that. And of course you get the vapour trails in the sky and so on, and that’s where that came from. And of course in our training, part of our training was to ensure that nobody else could sneak up behind you. If we were flying around in training and

34:00 somebody else could sneak up behind us or get alongside us without us seeing then you got fined a packet of biscuits or something like that you see. And so this made people keep an eye open all of the time. Similarly, if somebody was trying to get up on you you would spin around and do a practice dog fight in training. Especially when you got to the operational training,

34:30 then it was quite specific, you would go off in pairs with camera guns or something like that. And you would go through this whole thing of attack and have a dog fight with camera guns to try and make sure that you were prepared for an attack from any direction. And to try to get you to be prepared to use the aircraft to the limit of its ability. If you went into too tight of a turn then you would stall or get into a spin or something like that.

35:00 But if you didn’t turn tightly enough, then the other bloke would be inside you and shoot you down you see?

Did you become quite sentimental about your aircraft?

Yes. The one that I flew most on the squadron, I mean at training you didn’t have an aircraft you just flew whatever was there. But the one I flew most on the squadron brought me back reliably, even though it did get shot up with holes in it and so on, so you got a bit

35:30 sentimental, going “It’s a big strong aircraft, it got me home again.” And also you got a very good respect for the crew that serviced the aircraft. The riggers and the fitters and so on.

Well, your life really depended on them being good at their job?

My word yes.

And I imagine that instrument training would have been an important aspect?

It was.

36:00 Interesting that you should say that, because as fighters you hardly ever needed – we did it of course. But every now and then you did, you would find yourself caught in cloud and you would have to go on instruments. We didn’t do much night flying. A little but not a lot. But on the same wing as I was, was a South African squadron. And when they were coming back from

36:30 Yugoslavia, they got into cloud and the leader just flew through the cloud no problem at all, not for him or most of the others, but five or six of them got into a spin and went down into the Adriatic, killed. And so there was a big enquiry. Why did they?

Why did they go into a spin?

Well, they couldn’t fly on instruments and once you’re in a cloud, your physical senses are totally useless.

37:00 **You’re in a white out condition?**

Not only that but your sense of balance and feeling are gone. If you are cruising along straight and level as you should be, everything feels fine. If you’re doing a turn like that you don’t even know it because your G forces [gravity] are keeping you in the seat the same as they would straight and level, and if you go down in a dive like that, the same thing, all of the G force is there.

37:30 And it is only your instruments that tell you you are turning or diving or climbing. Now if you can’t operate on those instruments, then you’re gone.

What were they doing in a plane if they can't operate by instruments?

Well, that was the big thing, they had this enquiry to say "Why couldn't these people operate on these?" and it turned out that in South Africa, because the weather was always so fine, it was quite the custom for them to go

38:00 off to cruise a national park and beat up the elephants and so on, you know low flying, and just put it down as instrument flying. And so when the crunch came, they couldn't fly on instruments because they really had no experience on it. See what we used to do,

That seems extraordinary?

That's right. But these things happen. People get careless or blasé and say, "She'll be right. Instead of doing an hour of instrument flying, lets go and do some low flying

38:30 and chase a few elephants around."

And so it was almost a bravado thing that you could fly without your instruments?

Well not so much that you could fly without instruments but that you didn't believe that you would ever need to use them. Because in South Africa and in Australia for that matter, the weather was always so beautiful, you could fly around and always see the ground below you

39:00 and never needed instruments.

Very different over in Europe though?

Yes that's right. The first trip that I did in England after we had arrived and some of us were detached to training units, just to keep our hand in on Tiger Moths or Mosscraft MA2s and so the flight commander took me up on a familiarisation trip and it was hazy you know, you couldn't see the horizon.

39:30 I mean today it is a bit hazy but it was hazier than that. And he said, "I suppose you see the difference in flying conditions between here and in Australia?" and I said, "Oh no, we have had problem days like this in Australia." And he said, "This is the best day we have had in weeks!" And of course it didn't take me long to realise that he was telling the truth. And so instrument flying did become

40:00 much more of a necessity in flying around in Europe and in England. But as I say the South Africans hadn't encountered those conditions before.

Did that enquiry result in a change in the way they were trained?

I don't know. I have no doubt that it did but I have got no proof of that.

40:30 **So you were in the same squadron that had those losses?**

No, I was on the same wing but not the squadron. But different people reacted differently, I enjoyed instrument flying. Partly because it was a challenge, you have got to relate what the instruments are telling you to what was actually happening.

41:00 End of tape

Tape 4

00:30 **Lyall you were talking just before about hooding the planes, could you talk to us about that?**

Well. in the Tiger Moths for example you had a canvas hood that came

01:00 up from the back and closed down over the cockpits so you could sit there and you could see your instruments and of course the instructor he is out the front and he is keeping an eye open and making sure that everything is okay. The most sophisticated system was in one of the planes in England, I think it was a Master III where the Perspex hood had been treated.

01:30 Now I am not sure how it had been treated, may have been polarised light or it may have been that the hood was yellowish or something like that. Now if you were flying normally you could see everything outside the aircraft, but if you put on a pair of special goggles inside the cockpit, and they may have been polarised or they may have been tinted, then suddenly the Perspex hood was quite opaque, black. But you could see all of your instruments perfectly.

02:00 And that was a very simple system because you didn't get the claustrophobia of the Perspex hood and it worked well. As you said earlier, it simulated night flying to a large extent, just the black around you.

Was it, you would take off and land with the canvas on there as well?

No, I don't ever remember a take off with it.

02:30 **How would it be placed on once you were up there?**

Well, with the hood you just reached over and pulled it on while you were up there. There was no problem. Or you would pull it up and secure it in place before you did the take off, but the instructor would do take off and then he would hand it over to you and you would take it from there.

03:00 And I think that was the same with all of the systems, the only time you would ever take off under those conditions would be genuine night flying, when you were flying at night with a flare path, you would see the flare path down there and you would take off down there and climb away on instruments and so forth, but there was no obstruction to your real vision, it would just be night time.

03:30 **So these are two seater aircraft?**

The training planes were two seater yes. Once you got to Hurricanes and so forth, of course you climb in and flew it, there was no dual instruction.

Can you tell me about the Wirraways?

Yes, what would you like to know about Wirraways?

What were they like to fly?

The Wirraway

04:00 is virtually much the same as the Harvard, the American trainer, and I think it is probably still used as a trainer now. But that was the first of what you might call a service aircraft. The Wirraway, the Australian one, was designed as a fighter and it had machine guns and all the rest of it. Had all of the features of a genuine frontline fighter, it had

04:30 pitch control, constant feed propellers, it had synchronised guns, retractable undercarriage, everything which a fighter had. The only thing it didn't have of course was the power or the top speed of the German fighters. So it was a fairly big jump from a Tiger Moth to a Wirraway. Nowadays

05:00 people would do that in a series of stages, they would go from a light aircraft and they do one thing at a time, variable pitch or something first and then retractable undercarriage or something. But in those days you went direct from the Tiger Moth which was virtually a toy aircraft to a Wirraway which was a service aircraft. But the basic principles of flying were exactly the same.

05:30 If you stall the aircraft the the wing drops, the difference with a Wirraway is that one wing would drop before the other whereas when you stall a Tiger Moth it would just go straight down. With a Wirraway if it was on the point of stall, one wing would dorp and this meant that it was more difficult or more dangerous if you held

06:00 off too high above the ground. Instead of coming down on your wheels you would come down on a wing tip and sometimes it was. They also had a ring sight, so you had a ring with a little stand and a V out the front and that was what you sighted with to attack targets. They had canvas targets on the ground angled at about forty-five degrees and you would dive down and

06:30 fire at them with machine guns. And I don't know, ours probably had two machine guns which fired through the air screw arc so they had to be synchronised with the propeller itself and that synchronisation was done with hydraulic oil. So when you pushed that button

07:00 that fired the machine guns, but in between, you had a can connected to the propeller so that the gun would only fire when the propeller was directly in front of it, so that by the time the bullet came out the propeller had gone past and the bullet went between the blades of the propeller. Sometimes they got out of synchronisation, and people come home again with a hole

07:30 through the propeller blade where it had misfired, and that was unhealthy to say the least.

I imagine the possibility of that to be quite terrifying? Relying on hydraulics to keep you from firing your own propeller?

Oh no, I mean if the thing was properly adjusted, properly looked after, then you had no risk. If it wasn't then you did. But then that applied to everything you did.

08:00 If the engine wasn't maintained it could catch fire or fail all sorts of things. In fact when we got to the operational training unit in Egypt which was a nine week course, this was on Kittyhawks. Thirteen of us started on the course and six were killed.

08:30 Now that's a pretty high casualty rate. Some of that was mechanical failure. One guy took off and he got up to about a hundred feet or so and then the aircraft suddenly burst into flames, that's clearly mechanical. I have forgotten what others were. Others were getting into cloud,

09:00 but they could fly on instruments all right, there was no problem there. The story with that one was quite interesting, in Egypt we used to start flying at half past four in the morning, and then finish about midday, have a siesta in the afternoon. And on this particular morning the Met [British Meteorological

Office] people forecast cloud coming over at about seven o'clock. The CO [commanding officer] said, "What cloud?"

09:30 And he went and had a look around the place, and he said, "Ridiculous, you don't get cloud this time in Egypt, so flying as usual." So we went off flying and I was flying with another bloke, an Englishmen, and we were in pairs doing as I said before, attacks. One of the things we did was somebody to fly along with their shadow on the ground below and then the other would attack the shadow,

10:00 this was with live ammunition so you could see where the bullets were hitting the ground. And if you didn't have a good deflection line and so on then you would miss it. In other words shooting at the shadow on the ground is exactly the same as shooting at the plane in the air in so far as that goes. So we were getting on with this and then quite unexpectedly clouds started to form

10:30 and it formed in three layers as I recall, and we were between the bottom layer and the middle layer, and I had been flying up and down on the one track so that I knew in my own mind where the aerodrome was in relation to me, it was back that way because I had flown for five minutes in this direction, turn a hundred and eighty degrees and fly back again.

11:00 When this cloud started to come over I turned back towards base and my partner whose radio was unserviceable, I couldn't talk to him. He might have been able to receive but he couldn't transmit, so I flew along side of him and waggled my wings and turned and started to come back to base and he started to follow me. And then for some reason of his own he headed off in a different direction all together.

11:30 So in the meantime on my radio I could hear all of these other people calling up base, "We're in cloud, what's the cloud base? Where are you?" All of this sort of thing. And the airfield said, "The cloud base is two hundred feet." And so they started to let down through the cloud which was a silly thing to do, we were told not to do that

12:00 because you can't, if you don't know what the cloud base is you're suppose to climb up and then bail out you see, but they didn't , they were told the cloud base was two hundred feet so they thought oh that's all right , plenty of clearance so they started to let down. I in the meantime had flown back to roughly where I knew the airfield was, I found a hole in the cloud came through the hole and found the airfield was only about a mile away so I came back and landed.

12:30 Three of the pilots including, more than three, but anyway of the group that were letting down through the cloud about five or six were actually over a slight range of hills in the Sinai Desert and so while the cloud base might have been two hundred feet at the airfield it was sitting on the ground where they were, so they came down and all hit the ground where they were and three of them were killed.

13:00 And another two badly injured. And so that accounted for this very high casualty rate. It makes a very big impression on you. I have been a pall bearer in England a few times when we were training there but on this particular occasion in Egypt on the OTU [operational training unit] there, I was a pall bearer three times in two days. You know that really starts to get to you when you see your mates going

13:30 off at this rate. However the rest of us lived through.

So the Englishman that had been flying in a pair with you?

He was one of those who was killed.

So at some point he decided he thought he knew better than you?

Yeah. Yes. And he may have been misled by the radio messages from the base, I don't know.

Ordinarily you could all talk to each other?

Oh yes.

So you could talk to people in other pairs?

14:00 Yes you could talk to each other or the base, you were all on the same radio frequency.

If they were coming down through the clouds why would not one of them have come down to see if that was okay? If the cloud base really was at two hundred? Why would so many come down at once?

Well, they didn't all come down at once, they were scattered around the place.

14:30 I don't know. See, what they should have done was the same as I did was the fly back to whereabouts the base was, or to continue flying around until they could find a hole in the cloud. You know and there were holes in the cloud, well, I found one. For some reason, presumably

15:00 because they were reassured by this statement that the cloud base was two hundred feet they thought it would be safe to come down which was wrong. They shouldn't have done it either.

So that wasn't operationally advised either that was something they had done on their own?

That's right.

Cost a lot of lives.

Yeah.

15:30 **So can you tell me about when you finished your training in Australia and going overseas?**

Well, we finished training at Deniliquin, came back to Adelaide had a weeks leave and then we were shot across to Melbourne and there we joined an American troop ship, the Robin Sherwood.

16:00 It had five thousand marines on board just on their way home from Guadalcanal, and this ship had been built for pleasure cruises on the Mediterranean, it wasn't really designed for deep water sailing. However, from Melbourne we actually went down the west coast of Tasmania around the south coast of Tasmania and then headed

16:30 south by east until we went around the south of Stuart Island in New Zealand. Now by that time, and this was mid winter roughly, so that the sun was setting at about three o'clock in the afternoon and it was cold and wet and miserable. And around the south of Stuart Island we went due north and I remember as we sailed up the east coast

17:00 seeing Christchurch or the promontory just near Christchurch in the early rays of the sun and you could also see Christchurch and you could also see the snow capped top of the New Zealand Alps. Looking all nice and pink in the rising sun. and that was just off our port side .And we went into Wellington and we had about half a day in Wellington where we took on food and supplies

17:30 and then headed off, almost due east until we got pretty close to the coast of South America, all this was designed of course to keep away from the normal shipping routes. So once we were near the coast of South America we turned north and came into San Diego which was the big marine base.

And how many were on the boat at this stage?

There was about five thousand American marines and

18:00 about a hundred and twenty-five of us. Australians.

Pilots?

They were all air crew, my memory is that they were pilots, I can't remember anyone who wasn't a pilot. That's true. But it was a fairly eventful crossing because a couple of times we were hit by pretty severe storms and because the ship had been designed for the Mediterranean

18:30 it rolled really badly. And one of these the ships actually exceeded the limit of safety and the captain and the executive officer all thought we were going to capsize, we had gone past the critical point. However it didn't, the ship recovered and gradually came up again. But in the meantime some of the carly floats, you know the big life raft

19:00 rubber things? They had been washed over the side, the bulwarks were smashed. The big iron safe in the purser's office had broken away from the bulkhead and it was sliding across every time the ship rolled, this great five ton safe would scream across the deck and slam against the bulkhead there and come back the other way. And the safety doors which were just big slabs of steel, some of those hadn't been properly secured and

19:30 they were swinging backwards and forwards. One of the sailors had his fingers lopped off, he just happened the have his hand near the door when it slammed shut. And there was general pandemonium. It was black of course you couldn't see anything, middle of the night, wind was screaming and we were rolling and this sort of thing. And literally some of the Negro soldiers, Negro is a bad word these days, but at that time we said that, they were

20:00 running around with rabbit's feet, praying, "Lord save me," et cetera. So there was a considerable degree of pandemonium. But next morning of course the gale had passed and it was all nice and sunny and you would never know that we had been through it. And a couple of days later we had,

20:30 what do you call the thing that sucks the water up into the clouds above it?

Hurricane? Typhoon?

I had never seen a water spout in my life before and then suddenly this one afternoon there were three of them, about five miles distance I suppose, the nearest I suppose was about five miles away and the next about ten. But to see three of the things,

21:00 all going at the same time was really something unexpected. However we got to San Diego, the marines all went ashore and just left the Australians. I should also say we only had two meals a day on the boat because of the number of people who were being carried. But when we were in Wellington the Australians got ashore and the marines didn't and so we were able

21:30 to duck into one of the shops which I knew from when I lived in Wellington and we bought up a lot of

tinned food, tinned fruit and meat and all of the rest of it, so that we supplemented our two meals a day with our own food. And the first day I was on this ship, and they told us that the meal was ready, I am not sure what the word is. So we went looking for this and here is this great long line of marines,

22:00 along one of the passageways, so I said, “Is this the queue for dinner?” and this marine looked at me and said, “What?” and I said, “Is this the queue for dinner?” pointing up and down. “Hell no, this is the chow [food] line.” So I said, “Right.” So we joined on the end of the ‘chow line’. So I had quite a lot of American eating as you can imagine with a month on the ship. And the marines were great. We made a

22:30 good friends with them and they had a whole lot of questions about Australia. One of the things they couldn’t understand was why the pilots were only sergeants. Because if you were in the American army, air force as it was then, if you were a pilot you were automatically commissioned, and they wanted to know what the difference was. And we had trouble explaining it ourselves. They got on very well, and basically

23:00 they were very keen to learn about Australia and as one of them said, “Well, we didn’t know anything about Australia,” et cetera. “Back in Texas, in school all you learn is that Texas is the biggest state in the United States and that the United States is the best country in the word and that’s where it stops.” And that pretty well summed it up for a lot of them, but they were eager to learn

23:30 and they were a bunch of pretty good blokes really. But they went ashore in San Diego and then the next day we continued on and went to San Francisco, and we came ashore in San Francisco, went by ferry across to the other side of the harbour, loaded onto a train in Pullman cars and headed off for New York

24:00 and we were told that they didn’t want any trouble on the train, that the previous group had gone AWL and caused all sorts of problems, but if we did what we were supposed to do, stayed on the train and behaved ourselves, we would get leave when we got to New York. So basically we did that, I think we got off the train once for a one hour stop in a place called Elko in Nevada

24:30 where I picked up a couple of silver dollars. And then we went through and came through to New York. And that trip, five days of it, was an absolute eye opener for me because it was then I was starting to realise what a tremendously wealthy country the United States is. Everywhere was cultivated, there was crops, it was really rich. And you would be going along on the train

25:00 and on both sides there would be fields of maize up to about six feet high, and then amongst the maize were oil wells. I mean it is not just agriculture, here it was absolutely overflowing with riches of all description. So we got to New York, Pennsylvania Station and up onto the footpath where

25:30 there were trucks waiting to pick us up. And we were all saying, “Oh beauty, now we will go off and have our few days leave.” The trucks went down a couple of streets and next thing we were on a wharf and there is a ship with a gangway down and all around us are armed guards and we were ushered onto the ship and that was New York.

So you didn’t get any leave?

No leave whatsoever, no.

The air force has got a nasty habit of telling fibs?

26:00 That’s right, you get used to it. And so we went on to the Aquitania. Even the next morning when the ship was due to sail we were told we had to stay below deck, we weren’t allowed to come up, security et cetera, but my mate and I, we were determined that we would at least see the Statue of Liberty if we didn’t see anything else. So we played hide and seek with the guards who were roaming around the decks and tried to follow them around or come up in front of them.

26:30 And once we got caught we came in the wrong place and there was a couple of the military police there and they said, “Get back below.” And we said, “Come off it, we have come all of this way, we really want to see the Statue of Liberty.” “No, you’re not allowed to.” Anyway we were at this stage so close to it we said, “Well, is that it over there?” And they said, “No, that’s is not it over there, it is over here?’

27:00 Anyway they relented for about two minutes by which time we were in sight of the Statue of Liberty, and that was about all we saw of it. But the other thing that struck me was the tremendous difference between the British way of doing things and the American. And I don’t know whether the Robin Sherwood was typical of the United States Army but whenever we were coming into harbour or leaving harbour it was constant screaming over the public address system,

27:30 the executive officer would have a microphone in his hand, and when they actually came into Wellington they actually hit the pier and did some damage. But on the way out, it would be a matter of, “Bosun, slacken up a little, number one, will you tighten up? Number one will you please?!” You know, screaming at the top of his voice, absolute pandemonium. When we got onto the Aquitania and we could see out

28:00 in the main stream of New York harbour, the big line of the Normandy lying on its side because everything had been burnt out and capsized in its berth and we could see all of these big ships, and the Aquitania was about twice the size of the Robin Sherwood and we thought, “Well, this is going to be a

real picnic getting this out the way. And we were due to sail at eight o'clock

28:30 and my mate and I were doing our hide and seek around the deck, we were keeping and eye open and we were waiting for all of the noise and we couldn't hear anything, but then we saw the captain walk across the bridge and he looked down at the bow and lifted his finger like that and there was a bloke down at the bow with a cable that went like that and he went like that, and then he went back to the stern, same sort of thing. Now a word spoken, the next thing the ship was out and we were sailing away,

29:00 absolute silence just a couple of hand signals and that was it. The British merchant navy and they really knew what they were doing.

Where do you think Australia sits in terms of armed service attitude? Did you feel more aligned with the American way of doing things or the British way of doing things?

No, I think undoubtedly

29:30 at that time we were more aligned to the British way of doing things. The quiet understatement, get about the job and don't shout about it and so on. Whereas Americans tended to make a big fuss of whatever is going on. And I think that is still the case now, that is not necessarily a criticism, I think people do things different ways. I think

30:00 it probably – people talk about American patriotism and we often get the charge that Australians ought to be more patriotic, we ought to show more flags and so on. I don't think that's true, I think the Americans certainly are patriotic and so are the Australians, they just show it in different ways. A good example is the Davis Cup tennis. If you talk to the Australian tennis players

30:30 they would all give their right arm to play Davis Cup, even if they are the top flight players in the world who could be earning money playing tournaments they will give that away to play for the country. But the top Americans won't do that. I mean [Pete] Sampras and people like that said no, they won't play Davis Cup. They have got their tournaments and they are worth a million dollars or whatever it is. So one way of showing patriotism is

31:00 to wave the flag around and another way is to actually get out and do something for the country. And I think that the American system is that whatever they are doing should be accompanied by bravado. You see their movies, the loud mouth braggart, in my view, is the hero, he is the one

31:30 that gets the girl you know. Not for me. Does that answer your question?

It does. So you arrived in England?

We arrived in a little place in Scotland called Gourock which is not far from Greenock and came ashore there. It was very difficult to find where you were because all of the railway signs had been taken down, street signs and everything.

32:00 The enemy wouldn't know where they were if they invaded the place, I am not sure whether that would have worked in practice or not but it certainly confused us, we didn't know where we were. But from Gourock we went on a train down through Scotland and the centre of England. And once again it was a revelation to me because I had pictured England as a little island totally covered with housing and of course it is not. The train

32:30 goes through lots and lots of farmland, rolling countryside. But when you do strike a city it is very dense, you know lots of people live in a small place, and then you are through that city and onto somewhere else. And we finished up in Brighton where there were a couple of big hotels which had been taken over by the RAAF, one was the Grande and one was the Metropol. And we stayed there.

33:00 I was detached there for the best part of six months with odd detachments in between going out to these other training units. One was RAF [Royal Air Force] elementary training on Tiger Moths and one of the satellite airfields that we used then was actually the Prince of Wales' private airfield in the grounds of Windsor Castle.

33:30 And that was great because when the weather was bad and we had no flying we drove across to the castle and virtually as soon as we arrived there, a very distinguished gentleman in uniform of a full general came across and said, "Oh Australians!" because of the blue uniform. And it was Lord Gowrie who had been the governor-general of Australia and was now living in Windsor Castle

34:00 so he had a long chat with us about where we had come from and so on. And in fact he had been the governor of South Australia, Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven, before he became Lord Gowrie. And so he knew quite a lot of people and places in South Australia. And then he arranged for us to be taken around the castle and given as it were a guided tour of the place. So that was very good.

34:30 And then the next attachment was to train army glider pilots.

So you were training them or being trained?

No, I was a pilot at this stage teaching these glider pilots how to fly Tiger Moths and then they went on to fly gliders. But of course all they had to do with the glider was to steer it once it was in the air. And it

didn't matter how it landed,

35:00 provided you could walk away from it. But once a glider had been used it was never used again. They just crashed them on the ground and the troops poured out, that was the end of the glider.

How many troops would a glider carry?

They had different sizes. My guess is that some of the bigger ones, there was one, I can't remember the name of it now,

35:30 I think, a name like Hannonball or something like that, I think some of those gliders might have carried thirty or forty troops. They were big heavy gliders and I think a DC3 could carry two of them, they had two tow ropes which fell out in a V with the gliders being towed along behind.

36:00 **What were the gliders being used for?**

Well, when the Normandy invasion and after that was in operation, they brought lots and lots of troops across. Did you see the picture or read the book called A Bridge Too Far? I think you see the glider pilots coming in with all of the troops and crashing in Holland and so on.

36:30 **So you were helping in Tiger moths to train these pilots?**

Yes.

And so you had arrived in England to be attached to different?

The reason for this was that they were simply waiting for vacancies in the next training unit, which was an advanced flying unit.

37:00 We were given the opportunity to at least keep our hand in with flying and particularly getting used to the conditions in England, being able to navigate your way around the place, because trying to navigate in England is totally different than in Australia. I mean here, as I say, the visibility is good and you have lots of empty space with a few land marks here and there. It is relatively easy, you can look at something and say "Well, that must be Deniliquin," or "This must be Mildura," or something.

37:30 There is nothing much in between. In England the visibility is much more restricted, you might have visibility for ten miles on a good day, but in that area that you're looking at you have got so much detail it is just not true. I mean you have got towns and villages and roads and railway lines, it looks like a mad woman's knitting. And you have to go to try and work out what town this is. And it is not easy, you have –

38:00 after a while of course you get to recognise particular features like Guildford Cathedral which is on the top of a ridge and if you could see Guildford Cathedral then you can orient yourself to everything else. Or if you go across into Shropshire there is quite a prominent rock called the Wrekin and if you can identify that then you're okay. But as I say if you're in a sort of a cone of visibility with a diameter of about five miles it is very hard

38:30 indeed to find where you are.

And how low are you flying to be using cathedrals as reference?

Well, we generally fly around at about five thousand feet, which gives you a good distance to the horizon. Also it is low enough to be able to identify detail on the ground,

39:00 when I say detail, identify villages and cities, railway lines. You could identify railways lines as distinct from a road from five thousand feet up. What I used to do when I was moving around, for example after I left Brighton I went to a place called Market Drayton where I went onto Master III's, this was the advanced flying unit and this was quite near to a city called Shrewsbury.

39:30 So when I was doing my training just flying around the thing I used to circle around Shrewsbury and get a good idea of the layout of the town, see where the railways station was and the river was et cetera so that when I actually went into it by bus I would know exactly where I was, I could go into the pub or shops or anything like that. And know whereabouts that particular place was in relation to the rest of the city.

40:00 So it made it a bit like having a road map only instead of having it in front of me I had it in my head.

Did you find that amount of flying and the way that you are seeing things changes your perspective on the ground?

It is hard to say, I think you probably become a bit schizophrenic.

40:30 When you're on the ground you think, for example, if I am thinking about going from here to Mildura I think in terms of roads and how long it will take in the car and that sort of thing. Whereas if I was thinking of flying to Mildura I would think in terms of a straight line and what the time taken would be to fly there which might be, two hours and so on. I don't think I have much cross over between

41:00 the two.

Okay.

41:05 **End of tape**

Tape 5

00:32 **We were talking before the lunch break about the training that you were continuing to do in North Africa, can you tell me about the Kittyhawks that you were working with? What kind of plane were they to fly and what were their advantages and disadvantages?**

01:00 The Kittyhawks for their time were quite a good plane. They were strongly built and for ground support work and that, they were very good indeed, that's why they used them so much in North Africa. As a fighter, in the sense of the Spitfire, as a fighter

01:30 then they weren't as good because they didn't have the same power. A Spitfire had a Rolls Royce Merlin engine and the Kittyhawk had an Allison which wasn't as good. And the rate of turn and so on wasn't as good on the Kittyhawk as it was on the Spitfire. But as I say it was a strong aircraft and quite good to fly and handle. One big disadvantage of the Kittyhawk was that if you were

02:00 dive bombing, you had to make sure that you closed you radiator gills before you dived otherwise you would cool your engine down so quickly that when you opened up your throttle to climb away the engine might cut out and then you were like the proverbial shag on a rock. But the, I think that's about all I can say as operational. For training of course they were okay,

02:30 they were a single seat fighter they did all of the same as everything else, so as a training plane they were good. The problem that we had was of course was that the ones they used for training were ex-operational and not in frightfully good mechanical condition. And that's why we had things like the radio going off or planes bursting into flames.

03:00 They also had a tendency I think to drop one wing more than some of the other planes, although whether that is the fault of the aircraft or the fault of the pilot who is flying it I am not too sure. But we did have cases of people coming into land and I remember quite clearly watching one of our mates coming into land and he was skidding, and instead of either going around again and doing it again or banking and turning into the runway he just kept pushing more and more rudder on.

03:30 Skidding around like that and then of course when he went to hold off to come in to land it just flipped over on its back and that was the end of him. Hit the ground and burst into flames and he was dead. But I don't really think you can blame the plane for that. There was a story around some of the pilots that you needed a strong left leg and a strong right arm because it was

04:00 a bit heavy on the controls. Well, they weren't heavy on the controls, so were the Spitfire and Mustang, but not so heavy as to cause any problems.

What was your preferred plane to be in?

At the end of the war? The Mustang undoubtedly. Well, first of all it was designed later in the war than any of the others so it had all of the previous experience.

04:30 And it had a different type of wing, it had a Davis air foil with lavender flow which gave it much better lift and drag ratio. It also had the Merlin engine even though it was built in the United States, Packard Merlin instead of a Rolls Royce Merlin. It was still the same engine, more power and so forth. And the

05:00 various features of it meant that it had greatly increased speed, for one and all. And also greatly increased endurance so we could do a four hour trip with long range tanks, whereas the Spitfires could do about an hour and a half, and we could carry a thousand pound bomb under each wing, we didn't do it very often but we could do it. Whereas the Spitfires carry one two hundred and fifty pound bomb mid ship, we had ours out on the wings.

05:30 Also the Mustang had a better rate of roll and so forth than the Spitfire. But as I say they were designed for different purposes, the Spitfire was designed to be able to take off from an airfield in England, climb up high quickly, intercept the bombers, shoot them down come back and land again. They only carried fuel for about an hour, hour and a half they carried ammunition for about thirty seconds,

06:00 thirty seconds of firing time. The Mustang was about the same. None of the fighter aircraft could carry much more than thirty seconds of firing, since you only fired in one second bursts, that gave you a lot of time. But the other thing I mentioned before about the Kittyhawk, that you had to close the radiator gills before you dived otherwise you would cool the engine right down. The Mustang had a thermostatic control so that if

06:30 you went into a dive and the coolant started losing heat then the radiator gills would close automatically

and you maintained a constant engine temperature. All around it was a better aircraft.

It seems to be a lot of room for making mistakes with these aircraft, did you ever consider that you were in quite a dangerous line of work?

Oh yeah.

07:00 Several times I considered I was in a very dangerous situation at that time. For example one of the features of the Mustang was that the tail wheel locked into position so that when you were on take off if you kept your tail down on the tarmac or once you landed and your tail was down, it stopped you swinging it was a plus, a safety device.

07:30 In my case the very first trip I did I came around having gotten used to the thing, the first trip in a Mustang as most of my colleagues said you spent half of the time trying to slow it down it was going so fast. You weren't accustomed to the rate at which you were moving over the ground. Having got used to the feel of it and so forth, curved around and came down, landed on the runway

08:00 and I wasn't quite straight. So I automatically touched the rudder a bit to bring the nose around and it didn't come around. I pushed a bit harder on the rudder and still, by this time there is a line of parked Thunderbolts either side of the runway and I am heading straight for them at about a hundred miles an hour, and there are blokes running in all directions trying to get away. And then I realised of course, the tail wheel was locked.

08:30 So I pushed the stick forward in a hurry and of course pushed it too far and nearly drove the propeller into the ground in front of me but at least it got the tail wheel of the ground and I already had rudder on so it came around very quickly. And by that time I had got my sense back together again and having got it right up onto the runway I then eased it onto the ground and we were right. But for that second or two I was really looking down the barrel

09:00 and wondering what the hell was going on. It was my own fault, I had been told. This was one of the big problems, if you like to call it a problem, going from a training aircraft which is a two seater, into these things, you really are on your own. And if you haven't read the instructions and remembered them one hundred percent then you are in trouble and I had forgotten the bit about the lockable tail wheel. However we survived.

09:30 **It doesn't surprise me that you forgot something, I mean when we're learning you always forget something, we all fail. It just seems that if you fail under your circumstances then the repercussions are fairly serious and swift?**

And that applies with flying in general. You will find people killing themselves in light aircraft around the country now. And it is not because it is difficult to fly an aeroplane. As someone said, "It is no more difficult than flying a car, but the penalties for

10:00 failure are considerably higher." I mean if you are doing a three point turn in a motor car and you bump the gutter heavily, well, that's all you have done. Whereas you do a similar thing in an aeroplane and you crash the thing from a height of fifteen feet then chances are you will be dead or severely injured. That is true of flying in general.

How well prepared did you feel that you were when you first went

10:30 **into an operation? Did you feel that you were as well prepared as you could be?**

Oh yes, I was quite confident. See once I left the operational training unit in Egypt I flew up to Italy and first of all landed in Naples and took a train trip across to the centre of Italy.

What year was this?

'44.

So the Italians

11:00 **had already been defeated?**

Yeah, the Italians were now our allies at that time. So I went by train from Naples to Perugia which is very close to Assisi and there they had a unit which was just a refresher flying unit, once you have been on Kittyhawks. And so I had already been posted, to

11:30 260 squadron I think, and we put in about five hours at this refresher unit where people just checked on the quality of our flying. We had a South African lieutenant who was a very hard task master. Well, he liked to think he was, he saw himself as a 'gung ho' tough guy. And so he was saying, "You know you have got to do this and this." And

12:00 one of the things you had to do was to land, have your wheels touch down on an area the size of that carpet there. And he would be sitting there alongside the runway just watching as you came in and he had a stop watch for some reason, I can't remember why. I mean I had no trouble with that, I don't think any of us did because we had been flying Kittyhawks in Egypt and so forth. We did about five hours there, and we did strafing attacks on

12:30 Lake Trasimeno just to make sure we could still fire the guns accurately. We had an Australian flight lieutenant who took us on a formation flight around the sky in which we just had to follow him and he did all sorts of aerobatics, slow rolls and this sort of thing and we just had to follow. Basically we didn't know what we were doing, I was number two to him, so what I had to make

13:00 sure was that I stayed twenty or thirty yards behind him and he didn't get away, so whatever he did I did as well. And without seeing the ground or horizon you weren't really – didn't know what was happening. You were conscious of the fact that you were pushing hard on the stick on some occasions or pulling hard back on others or had heavy G forces, anyway when we got back, somebody said, "Oh yes, you did a couple of slow

13:30 rolls." "Oh, did we?" Didn't know. So that when I actually joined the squadron I was quite fresh. I mean I had been flying the day before. Joined the squadron, went onto the Mustang the next day so that there was no problem then, and I was familiar with the area because you fly around that same area from the refresher unit. So all of that was great.

14:00 And the controls are very similar. They are not identical. You have got the same mechanisms, the flaps and the radiators and the pitch and all of those sorts of things. But they do have the controls in different places and so you just had to get used to that. And there was also differences in the American instrumentation where they worked in pounds per square inch pressure and that sort of thing,

14:30 where the Brits were working in inches of mercury. Once again it didn't matter which one you got into, you knew what the instruments mean and basically the controls, the control column and the rudder bars, the throttle was in the same place on all of them. And it was the ancillary stuff that varied and you got used to it.

15:00 **What was the make up of your squadron? Who was in it? What nationalities?**

The squadron I was on, 260, well, first of all let's go back to the wing. It was 239 wing. And on 239 wing you had number 3 RAAF squadron which was purely Australian, nobody else. You had 450 which was Australian but which had mixed membership, people other than Australians there. You had number 5 South African squadron

15:30 which was purely South African, 260 the squadron I was on, I think 112 might have been there as well, I don't remember. They were the well-known shark squadron from the desert. Anyway, on our own squadron, which was 260, we had roughly fifty percent South Africans and they were army people. The South Africans didn't have air

16:00 force, they were like the Americans, they had an army air force and then the rest were a mixed bag, you had a couple of New Zealanders, two or three Canadians. At the time I was there we had three Australians .a couple from Rhodesia and then the rest of them were English, Irish, Scots Welsh, from the United Kingdom and so that

16:30 was the make-up. It was a good squadron, everybody got on well with everybody else. And they also had on that squadron an institution which was rare in the RAF, a pilots' mess. They didn't have officers and others, you had a pilots mess. It didn't matter if you were the squadron commander, the squadron

17:00 leader, or a sergeant you were all in the same mess and that made for a very good team spirit between all of the pilots. At any one time the strength was eighteen pilots and we used to lose about one a fortnight, so that over a nine month period you get a hundred percent losses of your aircrew. And we used to have some of our army blokes come back, because we were ground co-operation and so they used to come back and spend a bit of time with us and

17:30 see how we operated.

How many of your original squadron lasted?

From the time I joined it? I can't tell you exactly but my recollection was that of the people that joined the squadron, about fifty percent would be there at the end of it. You would have, as I say, you lose a hundred

18:00 percent of your number in a nine month period but of the people who joined about fifty percent would survive. The other fifty percent would be killed and the army blokes couldn't believe it. They said, "If we had losses like this we just couldn't go on. It's no good at all."

Did you ever thing that the percentages were starting to work against you or you just didn't think?

18:30 Well, some people did think about it and they used to get quite concerned and have breakdowns and so on. I had a fairly cavalier attitude towards it. My plane was hit by flak six times and I got shot down twice. The first trip I did for example I didn't realise that I had been hit but when I landed my

19:00 ground crew checked over the plane and they were sticking their finger up through the holes and so on, and one of them was just behind where the chair is, had gone up just behind me. And people said, "Wow, if that had been six inches over you would be dead." And my answer was, "Yeah, but it didn't, it missed me by six inches." So there was nothing to worry about, that's all in the past, history.

You can go crazy with the 'what ifs'?

Well they did. The 'what if' was a

19:30 live syndrome. But I didn't ever think of it that way. And similarly, when there would be discussions about the more trips that you did the nearer you got to the time that you would be killed – and that of course is true if you do two hundred trips without injury, then there is a greater chance of being hurt in the next hundred trips than there was

20:00 when you first started, but it doesn't work on a trip by trip basis because the odds at the beginning of each trip are exactly the same as the one before and the one before that. And so I would say, "Well this trip is no more dangerous than the last one."

Did those men who had been in the squadron a long time and survived, did they become of importance, or some kind of lucky charm or, I imagine, if there were men who had done a lot of trips and then one of them was killed

20:30 **I imagine that would have had quite an impact?**

No, I don't think so. I think it is perhaps the opposite way around. There were blokes that had done a lot of trips and they were a great source of comfort. "There is so and so there, he has done sixty trips." So you know that he is reliable and steady and it is good to fly with him because he comes back each time.

21:00 I think that if one of those blokes was killed, then the attitude would be then of course he—you have got to expect it—he had done so many trips it was only a matter of time before it caught up with him. So you rationalised both ways. And we did have, one of our commanding officers, Squadron Leader Johns, I think when I joined the squadron, I

21:30 think he was on his third tour of operations because he was one of those that joined the RAF as an apprentice back in the 1930s and had become a pilot and he had gone through, I am not sure whether he was in the Battle of Britain or not, maybe he came in towards the end of it. Then he had done another tour of operations in North Africa and he was on his third one. And he

22:00 was very calm, lethargic. Of course he seemed like an old man, he was about thirty I suppose. And it was old, our flight commander was a South African, Captain Roy Rogers he seemed like, an old man to most of us and he was twenty-two. I mean when you look back on it we were just boys really.

Boys with big fast toys.

That's right and living the fast life.

22:30 And in many cases a short life.

So your first operation was when you were posted to Italy operating out of – ?

That's right we flew across from, I think it was probably, it might have been Jesi [?], anyway in central Italy. Flew over to Zagreb and strafed and bombed a railway marshalling yard there.

23:00 And as I said before I was very keen on aerial gunnery. And if you're going to be accurate with your shooting, putting the sight on the target is only one thing. I mean it is essential of course, you have got to get the bead on the target and you have also got to make sure that your plane is on the right angle and you're not slipping or skidding,

23:30 anything like that, otherwise your bullets go all over the place. So I was really concentrating on getting my bead on this train, the marshalling yard and making sure there was no slips or skids. Anyway I fired my burst and I hit the engine, I could see the tracer bullets going into it and I went up into the cloud. So I had a great sense of satisfaction. I pulled away and all around me there are puffs of white smoke you see. And I am looking at this with interest and all of a sudden

24:00 I realised that's flak, and so then of course I started skidding and diving all over the sky to get away from it. But on that first run through there was six of us did the attack and my recollection was four of us were hit. One of them came down immediately, within a few miles of Zagreb. Another one

24:30 got further out towards the Adriatic and I am not sure whether he came down on the coast or whether he actually got out to sea a bit, but the leader then said, "Well, that's enough, we're off home now." So four of us got back to base and two stayed where they were. Both of them, one was killed. The first one that went down was killed, and the second one was picked up by the partisans who

25:00 looked after him and he got back to base about a fortnight later. He was another South African. And so that was a fairly rude awakening. It made me realise that target practice is all very good but there is more to it. However I continued to concentrate on the shooting part of it, because there was no point whatsoever in trying to attack an enemy target and missing because he is shooting at you, and if you miss him

25:30 there is a fair chance that he won't miss you. So you have got to make sure that you get your bullets on. And also the people on the ground are firing on you with cannon, which means that they can open fire on you before you are in range. So once again it is essential that you can concentrate on what you're

doing so that when you do get within range you can knock them out. And I developed little

26:00 tricks of my own, I guess. The theory of this ground strafing was that you got your bead on the target in a straight line and you flew straight down and it seemed to me that this gave the ground gunner and absolute sitting duck. Because the plane is coming straight at him and he didn't have to allow deflection in any direction so if he could shoot straight, then he had you in his sights. So what I used to

26:30 do was dive down in a much steeper angle, I wouldn't put my sight on this target straight away I would dive down at a point some distance back, closer, which gave me extra speed so that the gunners shooting at me would find their bullets going behind me because I was going faster than they expected. And then as you pull out of a dive like that, as you lose speed the aircraft becomes very stable, you don't have that buffeting and rattling you have as you accelerate.

27:00 So that gave me a nice stable platform, and I then pulled the bead up. And you had one second, the guns were harmonised for a range of between four hundred yards and two hundred yards, if you opened fire outside of that you were wasting your bullets. And we were flying at two hundred yards a second that was the speed we were travelling in, so you had one second to get your burst in and you had another

27:30 second to get away before you hit the target with the aeroplane. So I used to keep my nose down, pull it up, get the bead on, get within range do my one second burst and hold it low over the target to try and avoid cross fire and then down on the ground on the other side until I was clear and then pull back and rejoin the squadron. Other people did similar sorts of

28:00 things, but not identical. In fact the most dangerous place to be, as I recall, was the number two to the leader because the leader would go down and I suspect that the gunners would all be shooting at him and quite often they would miss him and hit the guy behind. Or they would realise where they were making their mistakes and they would concentrate on number two and they would get him instead.

So number two

28:30 **wasn't a prized position to be in? So all of this happened with you diving quickly and then flattening out taking aim and firing, all of that was happening in a matter of minutes, sometimes seconds?**

Well, seconds.

Do you recall what state you were in as you were entering into that position?

Yeah, total concentration, absolutely.

29:00 The brain goes absolutely clear, one thing in mind and that is to hit the target. And you are conscious of the aircraft around you and so you are making these fine adjustments all of the time but as I say there is nothing extraneous in your brain. The first time I was shot down, we were almost back to base and the engine cut out and I was too low to bail out,

29:30 so I looked around for a place to land and it was all fruit orchards all around me. So I –

Where were you, what country?

In Italy. We were back in our own territory at this stage almost back in the circuit area. So I lined up on a row of fruit trees to go between them but there was two roads running across with poplars along side them.

30:00 So the first one I had enough speed to be able to put the aircraft on the side to get in between the trees like that. But the second one I didn't, so I just had to take that and I could see a tree right in front of me and I thought I am not going to hit a tree head on so I swung a bit to the right or left , with the clear intention of taking it on the wing. And as I

30:30 say the feeling was absolute crystal clear brain concentrating on what had to be done. No problem whatsoever. So then I went in between the next lot of poplar trees and then there was the tremendous shrieking of tearing metal, the banging and thumping on the head, and then all was silent. Now I probably was knocked out for a while, I don't know. Because after the

31:00 tearing of the metal and the spinning around, both wings were torn off and the fuselage was broken in half and the plane spun around as it went across the ground. And the next thing that I heard was a sort of crackling sound. Suddenly I thought fire! Once again, the brain was very clear indeed and I went to eject the hood off the plane but it got twisted in the crash and wouldn't budge. So then I realised

31:30 that the perspex had been broken anyway, so I could get out through the framework of the hood. And in order to do that I had to unplug my radio, undo my oxygen mask, release the Mae West, undo the parachute harness. You get tied into these things with a whole lot of different connections. And any one of them will hold you back.

And any amount of panic would have wrecked everything?

32:00 Oh yeah.

If you panicked at all it wouldn't have worked.

As I say, the brain is a wonderful.

So you weren't panicking, you were on automaton were you?

Oh yeah, no I wasn't panicking at all. I knew what I had to do and it was a matter of doing it quickly. And having pulled all of this out I shot out through the top, got a safe distance away and two of the petrol tanks, the two wing tanks were on fire. And the

32:30 long range tank behind me was about half full, it was gushing petrol onto the ground but hadn't caught fire. And so a bunch of Italian peasants came rushing over with billy cans and what have you to get the petrol because this was worth money. And I am saying, "Get away, it is going to explode." And of course they looked at me blandly, and I thought, "What is the point of talking English?" So then I switched to Italian and said something like, speaking Italian, 'explosion' or something.

33:00 And that didn't make any difference. But quite a few of them had shovels and so forth so I got a few of them to shovel sand onto the petrol to put the flames out, which they did. It worked well and so I was standing there looking at this wreckage, smoke coming out from all over the place and an army truck came along, British Army, because of course we were

33:30 desert air force in support of the 8th Army see. So an army truck came along and the driver got out and came rushing over to me and he stood looking to this and he said, "God look at that," he said, "What happened to the pilot?" and I said, "What do you mean?" and he looked at me and said, "Were you the pilot?" "Yeah." He couldn't believe it, here was this total wreckage and there was I, unscathed. So I was lucky.

How do you get to sleep after a day like that?

34:00 Oh, no problem. That was in the morning and I was back in another plane on another exercise that afternoon which was good psychology on behalf of the doctor of course. Before you have got a chance to start brooding over what might have been you're busy doing something else. I slept all right.

Do you ever look back at all of those things and think how the hell did I do that?

Yeah, well, it is luck of course,

34:30 it has made me callous in a number of ways I think. I listen to people whinging about their problems and so on and I think of the sorts of things that not only I but other people went through at the time and I think, 'If that's all they have got to complain about they are dead lucky." And it runs over to other things and it

35:00 is probably quite unfair. And I look at the Twin Towers in New York. And I was in London when the bombs were coming down there and I look at the Twin Towers and I think, "What are they whinging about? Compare it to London, it is nothing." But because America controls the media worldwide, if America gets a bloody nose the rest of the world has to start sobbing with them you know? Look at us we got hurt.

35:30 **Meanwhile back in India.**

That's right. And then we have got the same thing in Bali. Now these things are tragedies, I am not denigrating that for a moment but how many people, we lost about eighty people in Bali, that's about eight bomber crews, we used to lose two or three times that number every night. I know it is a different world, different circumstances, but I do wish that people would get a sense of perspective. How many people did we lose on the roads over the Christmas period?

36:00 Eighty-three more than the Bali bombing but I don't see national mourning for those people.

Not as dramatic.

Not as dramatic.

And it is politically,

Yeah, once you start bringing politics into it of course, I felt that the poor old governor general –

GG.

Who?

36:30 **Hollings.**

He got some rough treatment, he got a lot of rough treatment, but on the particular one he was over in the Middle East for a memorial service for people ho were killed in Tobruk and people were screaming that he should have been back mourning the people who died in Bali. Now you have got, whatever it was, a thousand people who volunteered to defend their country got killed in Tobruk. You have got eighty

37:00 people on a holiday having a wow of a time and they get killed. Who is more worthy of remembrance by the governor general? So this has given me a different perspective in a number of ways.

I suppose that is the difference in a society that knows peace.

Yeah.

And a society that didn't.

Yeah, I think that's true and that's the point I acknowledged before, that the Bali thing happened in peacetime

37:30 and totally unexpected. I suppose that if there is a war going on you're conditioned to expect people being killed. Whereas when we have got this terrorism thing, which is allegedly in a time of peace, it comes as a nasty shock. What's the next one?

I was actually wondering who financed all of the planes? Whose planes were they that were being shot to pieces and lost?

38:00 Well, with the RAF, of course I was serving with the RAF, that all came out of the British taxpayer, well, presumably the British Empire taxpayer. They had to pay for it all. The Mustangs were actually manufactured in the United States, North American Aviation. And of course the United States Army Air Force

38:30 paid for all of their own planes and ships. But it is the ordinary citizens, taxpayer funds it all. I think Spitfires cost six thousand pounds each at that time.

Were there factories churning out the production of planes? Was that going on? Because you were losing a lot of planes?

Well yeah. I don't know what the rate of production of the Mustang was,

39:00 but when we were in San Diego, the big Lockheed factory was just nearby and Liberator bombers and Lockheed Lightnings they were both in the sky, there were other makes of aircraft too, the sky was thick with aircraft,

39:30 but as I recall both of the Liberators and the Lightnings, they was a twin engine fighter, they were coming off the assembly line at a rate of one every four minutes, so they produced a lot of planes.

That's extraordinary.

They did. Then after the war, when I was in Egypt waiting to come home, driving in towards Cairo and they were then collecting all of the stuff together, and you drive past old airfields

40:00 which were now no longer being used, and this was within two months of VE [Victory in Europe] Day and there would be all of these bombers, wing tip to wing tip, all in rows, hundreds of them. All parked side by side and all just destined for scrap.

No one wanted to look after them or no one needed them after the war?

Well that's right.

40:30 They weren't much use to anybody really. You couldn't, the transport planes of course you could use for civilian purposes, but bombers were not much use to anybody. And also I believe that probably much the same with the motor car industry, that there was an agreement between the manufacturers and the government that the vehicles which had been used for military purposes would not be sold for civilian purposes because

41:00 they wanted the industry to continue. They didn't want the motor car industry flooded with hundreds of thousands of jeeps and so forth. So they all had to be destroyed.

41:12 End of tape

Tape 6

00:31 **Lyall can you tell me about the occasion in which you had to land at an emergency strip in Ravenna?**

I had been strafing a convoy up near Treviglio in the Po Valley and there was fairly low cloud base,

01:00 so after I had finished my run I pulled up into the cloud thinking I was fairly safe there. So instead of doing my normal evasion tactic I just held it on a straight line and went up into the cloud. And in the cloud there was suddenly a god awful bang and I go thrown over on my back .Anyway I righted the plane and flew up through the top of the cloud and rejoined the squadron. My oil

01:30 pressure by this time had dropped down to zero, and the others called up and said, “You’re trailing a lot of black smoke, are you okay?” and I said, “Yes, I am all right, I have lost oil.” So I was then told to head back to base, so I slowed the engine down so that it was ticking over fairly

02:00 low revs and put it into a glide and headed out over the Adriatic. Came over the coast near Venice. And then continued trying to get as much distance as I could because our bomb line, that’s the area between the Germans and ourselves, was just north of Ravenna, so the engine continued, I flew for about twenty minutes all together without any oil pressure.

02:30 And was able to glide down and land on this emergency strip on the beach just near Ravenna. And when I got out of the plane and counted the holes, there was about forty holes all along the leading edge of both wings and in the engine itself, so I was lucky that the engine held out for that length of time. They were a very good engine indeed.

03:00 Then of course when about a week or so later they had repaired the wings, and whether they had put a new engine in it or not I don’t know but the plane was ready to fly again. So I went up there in a truck to pick it up and it was a Spitfire squadron on the airfield, on that airstrip, and when I was ready for take off I

03:30 thought I will do a bit of showing off here, in a Mustang. There was always a rivalry between the Mustangs and the Spitfires. So I got onto the end of the runway and I held her on the brakes, got the engine up to full revs and then started screaming down the runway. Picked up the undercarriage but held it low so that I was picking up speed all of the time and the control tower eventually got a bit nervous and said, “Watch

04:00 out for the trees.” Anyway when I got to the end of the runway I selected ten degrees of flaps which gives you a lot more lift and pulled the stick back and went straight up like a lift, to about five thousand feet, thinking to myself, “I let the Spitfires know, see if they can copy that.” And then having got up to the five thousand feet I rolled it over came back over the centre of the runway again and waggled my wings to say, “Thanks very much” and went on my way. So

04:30 that was a bit of bravado. I didn’t get any reaction from the Spitfire boys.

What kind of repairs were they doing to the wings? Were they actually replacing wings or just patching them?

Not at that stage, they would just patch them up. At that stage with medium or small holes they would just use the aircraft fabric, the same stuff they used to put over the port holes

05:00 for the gun barrels, just put it over and that stops the air getting into those little holes. For a more permanent patch, they might use an aluminium skin and rivet it, but basically they would take the wing off and replace the wing section or put a new wing on, yeah.

So what was the job of 260 Squadron there?

We had a range of jobs. The whole of our, the desert air force, the 1 Tactical Air

05:30 Force, that was the correct name for it 1st TAF. Tactical Air Force meant that they were in support of the army, so as the 8th Army advanced up through Italy the 1st TAF was there to support what they were doing. And there was a whole variety of mechanisms there. One was to do close support, so that we had a

06:00 an operation called ‘cab rank’ where we would fly up and down above the bomb line, or the front line of our own army, and we would have good quality aerial photographs with references and so on. And if the army came across a self propelled gun, a German gun, which might be concealed in a house or something like that, might even be under a clump of trees,

06:30 they would call us up with the map reference and we would check against the photos, made sure we had the right target and then we would go down with bombs if it was appropriate, or machine guns or later in the war with rockets and we would blast that particular target, and they could be Tiger tanks, they could be, as I said, self propelled guns. Might simply be observation post

07:00 strongholds. For example if you had a church with a good tall steeple, you would have artillery officers in there spotting for the artillery down below so you would knock out that steeple. So that was operation cab rank. And then there was another one, operation ‘rover patty’, where you would do a roving patrol, you would go up and down looking for targets yourself instead of being directed,

07:30 you would find your own targets and blast those. And the for the longer range ones we would go from the centre of Italy, we would either fly up north over the Alps and come back, but generally we would fly across the Adriatic to Yugoslavia, and we would have some targets identified to us from intelligence. And we would also look around

08:00 ourselves for things like ammunition trains, anything that was moving transport. And we would fly across to the railway line joining say Belgrade, Maribor or Ljubljana we would follow that railway line around into southern Austria: Klagenfurt, Villach and Viet [St Viet an der Glan] and then we would climb back over the Alps down through northern Italy and if we didn’t actually find a target of our own

as I say with towns and convoys, we would then attack some of the

08:30 fixed targets that had been given to us before we left. And then we would return to base, this might be a three hour round trip. Of course, I did mention shipping. We did attack ships in the Adriatic and there was one particular operation which became a bit of a

09:00 jewel in the crown for the desert air force. Venice itself was an open city and not supposed to be used for military purposes at all. But the Germans had some ships in there which were carrying arms and ammunition for their forces in Italy. And so it was decided to knock these ships out but you weren't allowed to touch Venice itself. And so it was decided that the desert air force

09:30 and particularly our wing should be given the job of doing this because we were supposed to have the precision dive bombers et cetera. Now my squadron, 260 Squadron, had been equipped with rockets only about a fortnight before, we were the first to have them. And I had been able to get in about ten hours of practice with these rockets, using a

10:00 cement head instead of a shell. Perhaps I should explain what the rocket is? Basically a rocket is a tube about four feet long with a cordite charge inside of it. And at the head of it, it had a six inch naval shell with fourteen pounds of TNT [explosive] in it. And that rocket motor, the steel tube, was fitted with

10:30 fins to give it directional stability. And that was carried under the wing of the aircraft. It was kept in place on the wing with a piece of wire and when you fired it, the rocket had to build up enough force to sheer through the wire and then fly off the end of the rail on its way to the target. A totally different system to that of machine guns bullets. Machine gun bullets come out of

11:00 the barrel very fast, like two and a half thousand feet per second and they get slower and they drop off. The rocket comes off the end of your aircraft moving quite slowly and it gets faster as it goes, but because as it does so, as it is moving slowly, it tends to drop and the fins ensure that it keeps moving in the direction that it has got to. So it has a very curved trajectory, and at the time that it actually hits the target, it's going in that direction not going in that direction. And so,

11:33 the whole business about the range which I can fire, the angle in which you're diving and particularly slip or skid because if the aircraft is moving a bit this way when the rocket comes off the rails, it is going to line itself up with the air stream and so if you're slipping the rocket will then zoom off and hit the

12:00 ground a half a mile from where your target is. So I had about ten hours practice with these things and then they decided on this particular exercise and they said, "Oh, we have got a rocket firing squadron now so they can go in first and knock out all of the flak." We were dubious on it, so four of us including myself, were detailed

12:30 to go off and attack this island in the Venice lagoon which had all of the anti-aircraft guns mounted on it and our job was to keep them quiet. We did that. I was number two, my leader was the South African captain I mentioned, Roy Rogers. As we came up towards Venice which was on the

13:00 port side we got abreast of our target and by this time there was so much flak around that my leader disappeared entirely. Gone. There was just black clouds of anti-aircraft fire everywhere. And I thought, "Oh well, he has had it." And then the next minute he appeared out of the bottom of the cloud on his way down to the island and then I was in it and it was my turn to go down and follow him. And all of this was very well. But when

13:30 we were being equipped with the rockets they had an accident and one of the armours when he slid the rocket onto the rail contact had already been made somewhere between the cockpit and that and as soon as he slid it on the rail the thing ignited and zoomed off the rail and the steel fin cut off his arm at the elbow. So in order to stop that happening again, they put a little master switch in the cockpit, and this was just a simple

14:00 toggle switch and they just stuck it on the side of the cockpit with masking tape to do the job. So when I started diving down on this island and once again concentrating like fury as I did, got to the right range, pressed the button, nothing happened. And I realised immediately I had forgotten the master switch, so I leaned forward flicked the master switch, pressed it again and away they went. But in that time I had lost at least a thousand feet and the ground was coming

14:30 up very fast indeed. So I pulled back on the stick, as hard as I could and blacked out and so I held the stick in my stomach until such times as the speed started to wash off at which time I knew I was coming out of the dive. So I eased forward slightly so that the blood came back into my eyes and I could see where I was. And when my sight returned the first thing I saw was just about there

15:00 a high tension cable looping across Venice lagoon and just about there was the top of the waves. So even though I was totally blind at this stage, I somehow managed to get between these high tension wires and the sea itself. Now had I hit the sea or the wires of course I would have been reported as having been killed in action, and I certainly would have been killed

15:30 but it was my own fault, it wasn't the enemy action, it would have been my own fault that I had killed

myself. So I was very lucky. Anyway I headed up to rejoin the squadron and we came around and did our next run and by the time we did our fourth run there was virtually no opposition at all, we had knocked out all of the anti-aircraft guns and the operation itself was a great success. They sank the ships and the only damage I think was to

16:00 one of the warehouses on the wharf itself and the city as such was untouched, so it was quite a triumph for the Tactical Air Force.

So the rockets had made a good first run of it?

Yes, they were a good weapon if they were properly used. But you really did have to understand, I won't say had to understand

16:30 the theory of it, I suppose you could have built up skill just by constant practice without understanding the theory but certainly if you knew why rockets were behaving the way they did, you got a much better result.

Did you have to do an equation in your head about the angle you were on and then – ?

No, it was all done beforehand.

17:00 I knew that the angle at which I had to attack was forty-five degrees so we set that up beforehand. I knew what range I had to open fire at, and I knew that I had to keep it steady et cetera, so all of these things were programmed before you even started, you didn't have to do any calculations at the time. Just had to make sure that you followed those particular parameters.

17:30 On another occasion we were attacking a train, a munitions train, and it was on a bit of a curve on the railway line, and as I came down to open fire I got to the point of about to open fire

18:00 and I just had the feeling that everything was right, absolutely spot on. So instead of firing a single pair of rockets I pressed the button twice and released two of them which turned out to be dead right because one hit this end of the train and the other one hit further down, they both were direct hits long the line. And as I say that's something that would happen with someone with practice even if they understood the theory or not.

18:30 **So I suppose everyone has moments of instinct in their life when they are going to do something and they just know it is going to work,**

That's right.

Whether it is taking a shot of tennis or a computer game or whatever it is. You knew?

Yeah, I was totally confident that everything was spot on and it was going to hit and it did. Yeah, doesn't always happen but sometimes it comes off.

19:00 **How many runs had you had with the rockets before that?**

Before that particular incident? I don't know.

Were you more comfortable with them?

Yes. I had had more practice with them by that time. Of course you didn't do consecutive attacks using rockets, the whole of the rocket rail assembly came off from the wing and so for some exercises you would have long range tanks

19:30 there and for other exercises you would have a five hundred pound bomb on each wing or a thousand pound bomb under each wing. Sometimes we had a drop tank under one wing and a five hundred bomb under the other. Just depending on what the particular operation was going to be. Of course if you had a petrol tank under one wing and a bomb

20:00 under the other that meant that the dynamics of the plane was a bit screwy because they had different weights and different friction and so on, so you had to adjust your controls to compensate for these things. And then of course it meant when you dropped a bomb, you dropped a petrol tank because these things operated together. So you essentially had to make sure that you were flying on your long range tank first,

20:30 you were in trouble if you leave it to last because it wouldn't be there when you needed it and you also had to make sure that you switched off that tank onto other tanks before you dropped it otherwise you would suddenly find yourself out of petrol, all of these little things added up, you really had to keep your wits about you. And all of this of course, the thing that was taken for granted was that you were watching out for enemy aircraft all of the time.

21:00 We flew in groups of six, three pairs. Rather like the pelican you see with a leader out here and the others out on the wings. And the leader, the only job he had to do in theory was to make sure that he was on the right track, map reading and so on, and that he picked the right target and that sort of thing. His two number ones were there to search the sky ahead,

21:30 the ground ahead and feed advice to him and essentially be a back up in case he was shot down and so

on. The three number twos had to weave backwards and forwards all of the time watching, not only the sky ahead but the sky above to one side and back so that as you turned around this way you would be looking over here searching all of that sky, then you would swing back the other way and look at all of this bit back here.

22:00 And you maintained your position by the width of the sweep, you didn't change your throttle setting at all, if you were getting too close to the one in front, you just took a wider sweep and come back again the other way and increased that difference. And basically the number twos didn't look at the ground at all until they reached the targets. And then they –

22:30 instruction, "Target on port side," and so on and that's when you would start focussing on the ground, picking out your target and get ready to do the dive. And you flew up along side the target, there was no point having the target ahead of you because once you got reasonably close to the target it would be under the nose and the nose of course went out for six feet in front of you so you wouldn't see it. So you flew along side the target and when you were ready to attack, you peeled off, dived off that way and

23:00 straightened up and opened fire and whipped off the other side.

Would the ones and twos have to hold off a little bit on their speed because in keeping in formation the threes could keep up with them because they had to do these extra sweeps?

The throttle setting on the number twos would be

23:30 higher than the number one. And their actual speed as distinct from their velocity would have been greater than the number ones, yes.

There must have been times that tactically it was impossible to carry the extra petrol tank as well, I was just thinking of you describing the attack with rockets in Venice,

24:00 **and thinking if you had let go at your petrol tank at that time it would have fallen pretty straight down, and you may in fact be over something that you don't intend as a target, was that ever problematic?**

Well, it is perfectly true that if you were ever in an area where this was possible then you wouldn't do it. But basically anywhere in occupied territory if a petrol tank happened to fall on something, that didn't matter, it was enemy territory.

24:30 And if it were half full of petrol, they wouldn't fall straight down of course but they would certainly go more vertically than the bomb itself which was a bit more streamlined and the bombs had fins on them whereas the long range tank was a tear drop which wouldn't have that same directional stability. But if it happened to fall on

25:00 an empty field or a house or something like that, as far as the air force was concerned that was hard luck, it was enemy territory.

If it was a case such as the one in Venice where you were trying not to cause more damage or perhaps you had troops nearby, would that mean that you would have to have an airstrip relatively

25:30 **close because you couldn't have a long range fuel supply?**

Oh no. Well, let me rephrase that.

26:00 If you only had the wing tanks, the two long range tanks, then of course you would not be able to range as far a field as having the one. And you would only have this one long range tank for a target that was beyond the usual range. Didn't happen often but occasionally this happened. Normally the range of the Mustangs was that you could carry two bombs.

26:30 Also some of the Mustangs had long range tanks behind the cockpit instead of under the wing. Later on they took the long range tank out from behind the cockpit and filled it up with electronic gear. IFF, so called indemnification of friend and foe, and this meant that people back at base could pinpoint where you were at any

27:00 time so that if you were shot down over the Adriatic, they would be able to get a fix on you and a flying boat would then come out and pick you up and so on. That was a bit later in the game, originally the long range tank was behind the cockpit.

So I am probably sticking a little too much to the fact that the trigger mechanism had to release both, given that you only had a one second window of opportunity when you were

27:30 **travelling at two hundred yards per hour,**

Per second.

Per second, rather. Having that one second opportunity and I suppose these bombs are six foot apart and more, surely the difference between one and the other must be substantial when they hit the ground?

You mean two bombs or the?

Separate wings.

No, I think the bombs were lined up parallel to each other,

28:00 now I am quite sure they weren't exactly parallel but how far apart they were I don't know. But my recollection is that bombing the convoys or bombing bridges or roads or that sort of thing which we did, if you released a pair of bombs then you would see the two explosions close together on the ground. Now they may very well be more than six feet apart but they were still a

28:30 pair on the ground. And I don't think they would be further apart than the width of the road. So if a road is say twenty feet or twenty-five feet across you might get a bomb on either side, they didn't diverge too much, no.

Most of your targets would have fallen within those parameters anyway, that would have been a hit on most of them?

Yes that's right I mean if you could get a bomb on either side of a convoy then that meant that the convoy was gone.

29:00 **Was that mentally taxing for you and the other pilots? Bombing convoys?**

No. Why should it be?

I just imagine it would be harder to do than a strategic place, because you can see the movement of people?

Because we're killing people?

29:30 No, well, other people may have reacted differently but I think most of the people that I was with, the fact that there were human beings there didn't make a difference because we were getting a beating too and you would see the tracer coming up from the ground. They were trying to kill us. In fact this was one of the things we really had to set out. I mentioned before the people

30:00 on the ground had cannons and we had machine guns and so from time to time you would be coming down on your target and the bloke on the ground would have a really good bead on you and the tracer from his gun would be coming past on both sides of your cockpit and you knew that they only thing saving you was the vibration of his gun muzzle and that sooner or later one of them was going to come straight up the centre and you just had to hope that you opened fire before that happened.

30:30 And so the fact that you were killing people on the ground really wasn't a problem, it was a matter of, "If I don't kill him, he is going to kill me." And the other thing of course was that they weren't in their convoys in their trucks, they weren't sitting ducks. As soon as an aircraft was sighted or as soon as the alert was given they would pile out of the trucks

31:00 into slip trenches beside the road and the trucks would just be there. You could strafe them and they would burst into flames and in theory at least those trucks would be empty. Now on one occasion that I can remember there were about three trucks in a row and I was coming down to strafe

31:30 them and a German soldier came out of a house over on the side of the road, raced across to get in his struck to drive it away. I thought at the time, he is a brave man. Having time just to think about it I pressed the trigger and his truck went up in flames and he was a dead man. But there were no sense of guilt or anything like that.

32:00 It was man to man combat. And one of the German soldiers said that – a friend of mine was shot down in a push across the river, he was taken prisoner by the German Army and as they were moving up through Italy, we were still strafing the convoy. And so this chap was down in the slip trench with one of the German sergeants who spoke English quite well. And he said, "I thought I would have

32:30 been ill treated when I was captured." And the German said, "Why is that?" and he said, "Well, all of the strafing." And the German said, "No, that is the war. If we had the aircraft we would do the same to you. No resentment. But don't let the Gestapo get you, this is the army, the army looks after prisoners of war." He said, "No, it's the war, that's all there is to it."

33:00 And I think that was the common feeling on both sides, there was no personal animosity, your job was to kill them and their job was to kill you.

Can you tell me about blacking out? I don't really understand what's happening to you?

All right. When you're sitting like this, you have got blood pressure et cetera which keeps the blood up in your skull and eyeballs and so on. If

33:30 you subject the body to increased gravitational force in this position, pushing down, it drains the blood away from your head and in particular your eyeballs and of course if enough blood drains away from your head, well, you die. But if you get to about five G, it pulls enough blood out of your eyeballs so that

you can't see.

34:00 It is a temporary phenomenon, as soon as the G force is released, the blood comes back again and you can see again. So that's what happened, by pulling the stick back into my stomach to get out of the dive, I got this force of five or six G and I just had to sit there blind and hope for the best and as it happened it worked.

34:30 **Sounds terrifying?**

No, it wasn't terrifying, sitting there waiting there was undoubtedly a sense of unease for sure but I would never have known it. If I had hit the ground I would still be sitting there with the stick in my stomach as far as I knew. There would have been no sensation

35:00 of suffering or anything like that. One minute I would have been suffering a force of five G and the next thing I wouldn't have been suffering anything at all.

I was pondering the rocket and something that is obviously no longer the case is that you were sent out with a plan, a trajectory, a planned angle of attack and the speed I would

35:30 **assume that you were going your ideal – and obviously that doesn't happen now with fighter planes, they have more freedom to make those decisions in the air.**

Well, I really can't answer that with any certainty but the impression I have now is that the projectiles are guided by radio. Like if you have got a target somewhere over there you can fire a projectile in a general direction, you would need

36:00 some sort of a sight on it, but once you launch it, it homes in on this target and the target can weave around and the projectile will follow it until it hits it. Whereas ours went in a straight line of course.

It seems to let you quite open for danger in terms of intelligence, if your moves are being planned out before you have to go and do them, is that opening you up for danger?

36:30 No, the only thing you had in advance was that you dived at a certain angle and you opened fire at a certain range. But that would have been open knowledge to anybody at all, anybody that stopped to think about it. All of the instruction manuals, for example, all had this information in them and the Germans would have had access to all of our instruction manuals just as we had access to theirs.

37:00 So it wasn't anything in the way of a secret.

So the only intelligence would be that that was a target?

That would have been highly secret as to what the target was and when.

So what do you think was the most difficult of 260 squadron's tasks while you were with them?

37:30 Hard to say, one of the things which the squadron was very proud of and which happened before I joined was that they were the people who actually burst the dam near Monte Cassino when that attack was going on .and that was a difficult attack from all accounts, a matter of precision bombing which they did quite well.

38:00 I think that the most spectacular thing they did when I was with them was this attack on Venice which was called Operation Pola, it got a big write up at the time. In fact they produced a little book with photos, in fact one of the photos is one I took from my camera at the time I fired the rockets, otherwise it was fairly routine stuff. As I

38:30 say, army support or attacking anything that moved. Anywhere around. The bomber escorts were as I say fairly boring and quite uneventful. We weren't very keen on those because there was no real action.

Did you go as high as the bombers?

Oh yeah we flew alongside them, we could have gone higher. These were bombers from the south

39:00 of Italy going into Austria, I don't think we went as far as Romania. Southern Germany.

I think we have looked quite well at the operational aspects of that period of time, could you tell me a bit more about your accommodations and what the men were doing with their spare time and things with a more human side to it?

39:30 Well, in Italy of course we were quite often billeted in tents and most of the time we were in tents. Sometimes we would take over a house and live in there but essentially living in tents. And of course the winter in Italy was really ghastly, I mean cold and wet and the

40:00 mud was unbelievable. People really did lose their gum boots in the mud, they would sink down to knee level and when they were pulled out their boots were still in the mud and they just had to stay there for the rest of the year. But then in the evenings there would be, not quite fun and games, just the sort of fellowship that goes on with a bunch of people together. There

40:30 would be people playing cards. We always had some kind of a bar, and about the only stuff we could buy was vermouth, the local brew. And so people would have the odd vermouth. The people who were flying the next day basically stayed off it, but the people who had completed their day's operation they would have a few drinks of vermouth. At Christmas time there would be a Christmas party and of course these – traditionally

41:00 the commanding officers and the other officers would actually wait on the airmen, Christmas Day.

41:07 End of tape

Tape 7

00:32 **So do you mind just picking up where you left off then, you were talking about your off time with each other and things like Christmas parties?**

01:00 Well, the tradition was that the airmen would all have a Christmas dinner and the officer would wait on them and this used to go down well. The airmen by and large, although they enjoyed it, they didn't push it. They didn't try to go over the top although you would get the odd one or two who would have too much to drink and try to make himself look the big man by telling the CO

01:30 what he should do and so on. But the senior officers took this very well, they used to put up with it. I don't know whether they got even with the blokes in subsequent days or what. But it was a good institution. I also had a couple of spells of leave in Italy and one was to go to Florence and there was three of us, another Australian,

02:00 myself and an Englishman and we had a week in Florence. And the RAAF had taken over a hotel on the banks of the Arno just near the Ponte Vecchio and the Brits and the Americans were quite surprised because the RAAF said, "This is for all ranks." And both the Brits and the Americans had good hotels for officers and then camps out in the suburbs somewhere for other ranks.

02:30 And they couldn't believe that the Australians just had all ranks in one hotel. But it just indicated how the services related to each other. And this was an aspect which surprised both the Brits and the Americans. I found that the American Army people quite often became more feudal than the Brits. You would find a chap who had been

03:00 a salesman in a shop in the United States would get a commission and suddenly he would regard himself as lord of the manor. And the way some of their officers behaved towards their own men, I thought was beyond the pail, they were totally arrogant and so on. The British officers by and large were not that way at all, but they understood very well with the increased privilege also came increased responsibility. And of course the Australian officers tended to be much more egalitarian even than that.

03:30 So we had a very good time in Florence. Florence was another open city. Nevertheless the Germans, before they had retreated had done an enormous amount of damage, they had blown up every bridge across the Arno except the Ponte Vecchio. And with the Ponte Vecchio they left the bridge there, but they blew up all of the approaches on both sides. So that when we were there, we had bay bridges,

04:00 the army bridges, across the Arno where the old bridges had been. And of course you had to pick your way around through the rubble to go around through the Ponte Vecchio and so forth. My wife and I went back there a few years ago, about thirty years ago now. And drove around Italy and I went back to these places and I was fascinated with how they had been able to do all of this restoration work. And in Parma, for example, where there

04:30 was an old fourteenth century theatre which the Germans had mined and blown out one corner of it, and they had rebuilt this and you couldn't see where the old work merged with the new. And similarly when we were looking around Ponte Vecchio I was saying to my wife, "Look at this, here is the old brick work here, and the new here and it is very faint, if you didn't know you wouldn't know it had been done." And my wife was going "Oh."

05:00 **Was that an agreement by the Allies and the Germans, to leave places like Venice and Florence alone because of their value?**

I don't think it was an agreement, I don't know what the background is but I think it is under the Geneva Convention that the nation concerned or maybe the warring parties, but I think it is probably the particular

05:30 country declares that this is an open city, and that there are no munitions or military action going on within the city or was permitted within the city.

But why should anyone take any notice of that declaration in a time of war? I mean with that logic you could say well Paris is an open city?

I don't know. It would only

06:00 work if the city itself had no strategic value. In a case like Paris, of course, with all of the heavy industry around the place it wouldn't work. With both Florence and Venice there was no industry to speak of, they were purely cultural centres. But I really don't know, that is a very good question, you will have to follow that up yourself.

Thank God they were saved.

Absolutely.

06:30 And then another time I had leave, we actually went to a skiing school up in the Apennines a place called Mercatino, not far from San Marino, the little republic in the middle there. And here is something that will interest you. The intelligence officer on our squadron was a chap called Flying Officer Ireland, who I suppose

07:00 was in his thirties, but he had a young offsider, a young pilot officer whose name was Christopher Lee, and he in fact was the Christopher Lee, the British actor. And Chris was sent off toward, in the winter of '45, to run a skiing school up in the Apennines and although this was allegedly a training ground to teach people how to ski and so on, in fact it was more of a rest

07:30 and recreation centre. And so our squadron was given three places and they were allocating by drawing lots. Not quite the short straw but the same thing. And of the twenty or so people on the squadron the three who got them were the three Australians. So the rest of them regarded this with great suspicion, they really did, but I don't think anybody swindled it.

08:00 So the three of us went up and we had a week up learning to ski at Mercatino which was good fun. We enjoyed this and learnt to ski as well.

At Christopher Lee's ski school?

Yeah, Christopher Lee's skiing school. I haven't seen Chris since then. It was rather funny that when Lourdes and I were engaged, we went to see a film Scott of the Antarctic or whatever it was.

08:30 And they had a Christmas scene there with all of the people singing and so on and right up near the camera was this familiar figure and I said to Lourdes, "That's Christopher Lee!" and of course at this stage he was an extra, this was the first time he had been on the screen I suppose. He went on to do great things after that.

Did you have a sense of relaxation when you had your leave?

Oh yes.

So it was possible to wind down a bit?

I had no trouble winding down. I could

09:00 wind down of an evening and I didn't drink all that much. I had had an unfortunate experience on my twenty-first birthday. I didn't drink at all until then and so when the others found it was my birthday they rushed off at about five to eleven before the bar closed and bought me some double gins and double whiskeys and said, "Here try this, it's your twenty-first." The result of course was I finished up falling flat on my face on a concrete floor, terrible.

09:30 And that put me off alcohol for quite some time. But in Italy you would have the odd glass of vermouth and so on, but I didn't ever suffer any ill effects from that. I was a pretty happy go lucky sort of a kid and I didn't have any trouble winding down.

Did you have much to do with the Italian people?

Yeah a lot. I was always interested in languages so when I was in Egypt

10:00 I learnt a certain amount of Arabic. And then when I got to Italy I searched around and found somebody who taught Italian, you know, a university graduate, a teacher and I used to go along two nights a week and learn Italian. And then when we moved from there to the next camp, I met up with an Italian family, grandmother, husband, wife, child and so on. And a couple of us used to go over and play cards there in the evenings and

10:30 obviously this was all in Italian so I learnt quite a bit of Italian there. And then after the war back here in Adelaide when they got the first wave of Italian migrants they were looking for somebody who could teach the Italians and they asked the Education Department if they had any Italian-speaking teachers and the Education Department said, "No, they didn't." which was a load of

11:00 rubbish, because I went to school with people who came from Italian families. But of course by the end of the war nobody was prepared to admit that they spoke Italian see? It was a dirty word. Somebody said, "Oh, Fricker knows a bit of Italian." And I had already been running a school for teaching English to the Balts [Baltic people, generic term for eastern European migrants in the 1950s], the displaced persons. So I was approached then to set up a school for teaching English to the Italian migrants.

11:30 That was all very interesting. These things, one thing leads to another and you never know where it is going to finish up.

It is interesting too that you were friends with an Italian family who not long before would have been your enemy?

Yeah well, they weren't really. I mean the Italians by and large didn't want to be in the wear anymore than anybody else. And I have no doubt they had some brave soldiers

12:00 that fought for 'the fatherland', rather than for Mussolini. But most of them didn't want to be in the war at all, and as we know, in North Africa they surrendered as soon as they could. And of course they hated the Germans. They hated the Germans a damn sight more than they hated the Brits or Americans so we got on quite well. I didn't have a very high opinion of

12:30 Italian men, in fact I was looking through some of the letters I wrote which my mother saved and in those letters I was quite critical of Italian men. It was typical of the Australia chauvinist if you like. I thought the Italians were a bunch of effeminate characters because even at that stage they used to always take an enormous amount of time to have their hair combed just

13:00 the right way to get the duck tail effect at the back. And I thought this is ridiculous. But when I got to know them they were very likeable people, we got on very well. I have got a lot of Italian friends now.

And how old were you at this time?

About twenty-one.

Twenty-one were you? So was there any romance on the cards?

No,

13:30 I was fairly shy. I mean I got on quite well with women I used to enjoy women's company at parties and that sort of thing, but if ever I got close to a woman I would get feelings of panic and retreat. No, I was young and in that respect shy. I wasn't the only one either. It was quite surprising,

14:00 the air force people and of course the pilots and the aircrew in particular used to have this big macho image, brag to each other about their conquests and so on. But after the war when we were waiting to come home, we were sitting around drinking and it got to about one o'clock in the morning, confession time. And it turned out that about half of those blokes there, despite all of the big talk, were still virgins.

14:30 And I just wonder how many of these big romantic stories that we read about and hear about now are true in fact.

I would say the percentages haven't changed.

I would think that would be right. I certainly had girlfriends, went out to movies and parties and that sort of thing.

Over in Europe or here?

In Europe.

15:00 **Italian girls?**

Well, there was no where to go with Italian girls. In this particular group that we were talking about playing cards and so on, there was a couple of Italian girls there but there was no romance, just friends and so on. I think some of them would have liked to take it a bit further, partly because we had chocolate and bully beef and that sort of thing. But it was quite platonic.

15:30 **So who were your girlfriends over there?**

You mean names?

No nationalities? Who were they?

Well in England quite a few English girls of course and then when I was in Egypt there was a couple of Australian girls who were WAAFs [British Women's Auxiliary Air Force], and there was two or three English girls who were WAAFs, there was also a Maltese girl, like French, Rosette Chevalier her name was.

16:00 Maltese family, French name. These were girls who it was good to go out with, go to a night club and to dinner and that sort of thing.

Sounds like you were doing okay for a shy boy.

Well, it depends what you mean by shy.

I was thinking too when you were talking about your sorties over to Yugoslavia and so on and given the high fatality rate of pilots what did you all talk about when

16:30 **you got together after you had been out for the day on an operation? Did you discuss different strategies? You said you had quite a specific strategy, did you share information?**

No we didn't. There wasn't very much talk at all about the operation side of things.

17:00 There might have been congratulatory remarks if somebody had had a direct hit or if the whole operation was successful people would say it went well today and that sort of thing. But I don't remember any detail, you had the debriefing when you got back of course and that's where all of the detail was discussed so by the time we had gone through that and got back to the mess we didn't talk about that very much. Every now and

17:30 again of course you would have a picture show. If we didn't have it, there might be something over at the American base, they would have – all of the latest films would come out on sixteen millimetre and they would be shown. But even that wasn't common. I remember seeing Rita Heyworth in Cover Girl. That was at the American base on sixteen mil [millimetres] in colour and that was quite something.

18:00 **Was there a lot of whistling from the crowd?**

Oh yes, a lot of whistling, my word. And most of the big bases had a camp cinema where they would show pictures maybe every night. When we were on the squadron there used to be concert parties, for example when we were in Parma at the local theatre they had several, one was a concert

18:30 party of Italian ex-opera singers and so on who put on Madame Butterfly. And this was very good, they really were very competent, they had retired but they really had beautiful voices and they knew the opera backwards and so on. And then there'd be an American concert party would come through with the big band style of thing. The Americans really did have a lot of good musicians. Musically

19:00 clearly a much more vital part of the American culture than it is the Australian's. I mean I get the impression that every high school, every student learns an instrument. I might be wrong there but that's the impression I have. And they had their big band thing there and so forth.

What songs did you have that were popular at the time?

19:30 **What were your favourite songs of that era or that you remember from those days?**

Well, talking about the big band, you have the Glenn Miller selection, American Patrol, In the Mood, all of those sort of things. The number one hit of course was Lili Marlene, it was being sung all of the time all over the place. Then you had a pianist called Hutch

20:00 and he used to sing As Time Goes By et cetera. I only found out just a week or so ago this was featured in Casablanca. This is because my wife said, "You have never seen Casablanca?" so we got the tape out and you know I found it was featured there. They were the sorts of things. But music never meant a great deal to me, still doesn't, but they

20:30 were the hits of the day. There must have been a lot of others but I can't remember. And on the troop ship that I mentioned before with the marines a whole selection of what you might call these folk songs, one of them was How Come You do Me Like You Do, Do, Do? A black singer and I can't remember her name now. And then others like How I Wish I was in Poirier, or I am Going Back to Where I Come From. You know the sort of

21:00 thumpy type things and they were played ten times a day, every day.

Over your radio?

Over the ships loudspeaker system. The American Forces Network, they had a whole a big program but within the RAF I don't recall

21:30 very much in the way of radio, there were not transistors or anything like that. And I don't recall anybody having a radio.

It wasn't a common thing in those days?

The bomber crews, when they were on their way back from a raid, they would put their radios onto the American Forces Network and they would listen to the pop music. Oh, the Andrews Sisters they were another one, Rum and Coca Cola.

22:00 Those sorts of things were very popular.

What did you know about what was going in the other part of the war? What did you know about what was going on with the Japanese in that area of the war?

Very little. The news of the Japanese war hardly rated a mention. I mean it probably got written up in the press in England

22:30 but the stuff that we got in Italy was just the local gossip. We didn't have any daily newspapers or anything like that. Every now and again you might get some report of some really significant thing that might have happened, but otherwise not much at all. I mean all of the stuff about Iwo Jima

23:00 and some of the other island hopping things, I didn't hear anything about that until after the war when I got home again.

Were you shocked to find out how close it all got to Australia?

Well, I knew that they were fighting in New Guinea of course, that was going on before I left. I had a cousin that came home from Tobruk and was straight up to New Guinea so I knew all about that. But the advance through the Pacific, the Battle of Midway

23:30 and all of those sorts of things, we didn't hear anything about them.

So where were you when you heard that the war had ended?

Right. Well, after I finished my tour of operations I had been selected to go onto the fighter pilot's instructor course and I was actually flying down from the squadron back to

24:00 Egypt when the radio operator, we were in a DC3 and the radio operator came out and said, "The war is over. Hitler committed suicide, Admiral Doenitz has surrendered. The war is over." And all of the English speaking people said, "Ahhh!" and I was sitting next to a Yugoslav partisan officer and he was looking puzzled, "What is all of this about?" So I then said to him in English,

24:30 "The war is over." He still didn't understand. So I then said in German, "Das krieg ist kaput." He still didn't understand so I said "Da warra is finita!" "Ahhh!" You know. So we landed at Bari and everything was put on hold for twenty-four hours. There were none of the movements which should have gone on the next day. And so there was about six of us sitting in the

25:00 transit mess in Bari that evening drinking our bourbon and listening to the radio, how in Trafalgar Square crowds are rejoicing, cross to Edinburgh et cetera., and here was the six of us sitting there virtually crying into our Vermouth because we were all thinking about the blokes that had been killed. And in my case, my particular mate Bert who came from Mackay was a married man with two small children, he

25:30 had been killed only two days before. Oh dear.

That doesn't seem fair does it?

So that's, as I say, I mean we were happy the war was over but we weren't dancing in the streets. And then the next day we went onto Egypt and I went and did this fighter pilot's instructor course on Spitfires, and at the end of

26:00 that I was posted back to – what was the sequence? I think I had actually finished the course, I had finished the fighter pilot's instructor course and was posted to air headquarters Middle East, RAAF headquarters.

26:30 And they sort of looked at me as I fronted up and said, "What are you doing here?" and I said, "Well, I have been posted here." "We don't want you here, go back to Cairo and wait for a ship to take you back to Australia."

What happens when a war ends that has been going for so very long, how does a war just end?

Exactly. I mean that was –

What do you do? Tidy up and go home?

Yeah. So that was what –

27:00 well, of course the war was still going on against Japan.

And you were clear about that you knew that that was the case?

Oh yeah, I expected to come back and train fighter pilots to go to Japan or go to Japan myself. And so I was then posted to this transit camp in the Canal Zone, St Pierre. And then of course the next thing the atomic bomb was dropped so it was just a matter of going home and being discharged.

27:30 **What was your thinking about that or what was the Australians who you were still with, what was their thinking about the atomic bomb being dropped?**

They thought it was a great thing, "Hooray, the war is over!" I mean once again there was nothing about sixty thousand people being killed. They said, "Well, this is tremendous destruction and it has saved the lives of X number of soldiers that would have been killed if they had have continued the island hopping with Japan."

28:00 So the theory was that this was a really good master stroke that brought the war to an end straight away. I don't recall any wave of sympathy for the women and children in Japan, because I mean there had been hundreds of thousands of women and children killed in England, Coventry and all the rest of it. So once again it was just, this is the war and that's

28:30 the way it is. So I sat at St Pierre until such times as a ship came, the Stirling Castle and bought us back to Australia. And in the meantime there was a lot of unrest because the Australians all wanted to get home as soon as they could. And of course so did everybody else. The South Africans wanted a ship to

29:00 go down to Cape Town to take them home. And they were encouraged in this because they started flying them home and very soon, I think the first week they started this air lift, one of the planes crashed and everybody on board was killed, so I think they then decided travel by sea was safer. And some of our blokes went up to Cairo and they

29:30 reconnoitred Shepherds Hotel, and that was the hotel in Cairo, that was where the big brass hung out and so having done this they then told our people that if we didn't get the next ship coming through the Middle East they would set fire to the Shepheards Hotel and they said, "We have done a survey of the place and this is where we are going to put our fires, and this will go up the lift well and this up the stairwell and the place will be destroyed in an hour."

30:00 And anyway this had the desired effect, we got a ship fairly soon after that. Whether they would have done it or not I don't know, but some of them were silly enough to do it, they really were. And the top brass knew that they knew there were enough ratbags in the Australian forces to do exactly that. And the Australians of course had already done it once before in World War I. They had set fire to the Berka, you know, the bazaar quarter.

30:30 And this was very much alive in the Egyptians in World War II, they knew what the Australian reputation was like.

Why had they done that in World War I?

There is lots of conflicting rumours but the main thing one is that some of the local people or some of the Egyptians had beaten up or killed an Australian serviceman.

31:00 Now he may have deserved it because it was the prostitute quarter as well and so forth. But when the rumour went around that they had done this to an Australian serviceman, the others just went through the place and wrecked it. You have only got to do that once and it leaves a lasting impression.

So after that threat things started moving did they?

Yeah. Now of course whether

31:30 the stories are true or not you don't really know but that story was widely believed by the troops there. And so we got back in early December I think it was, or late November, to Perth and then came by train from Perth across to Adelaide, across the Nullarbor.

What was that like being

32:00 **back in Australia after all of your experiences? Just your first coming home? Coming into Perth?**

Very mixed, I am trying to sort it out now that you asked me. The first thing to realise was that we were aliens in Australia. We had never realised that because we were all Australian,

32:30 and when we heard each other talking and when we talked to each other we had Australian accents. We didn't realise that Australian accent had been very much diluted because of our stay in England and working with English people and so on. So we got off the ship and we were sitting in trucks waiting to go out to the camp at Karrakatta, and a couple of wharfies came along

33:00 with a bit of cargo and one of them said, "Hey, Blue, give us a hand with this?" and all of the blokes in my truck swung around, that was a real Australian accent. And when we got to meet the people in Perth they were saying, "Why are you talking with a Pommy accent?" We didn't know we had Pommy accents. And I had that with my own family when I got home. "Why are you bunging it on the side?" But just to make ourselves understood we had to make sure what we said was intelligible to the English and that meant acquiring at least a veneer

33:30 of an English accent. So that was one of the things, we were no longer dinky di Australians, we had to become reacclimatized. And there was of course a certain amount of hostility, people who had been at home the whole time and they were getting fed up with people coming back with big time stories, what I did, where I have been,

34:00 and I was dancing with a girl at a social function and she said, "Oh yes and you're another one who has been around the world, have you?" And I said, "Well yes, that's right." And she said, "Oh I am sick of people coming back and telling me they have been around the world and so forth."

What a very welcoming attitude.

Well, it was a welcoming attitude in general but you found that beneath the surface there was a certain amount of resentment and

34:30 sometimes hostility based on individual reactions. And I can understand if a girl had bumped into about four or five blokes who wanted to big note themselves about how great they were and what they had done, she would react, the next one that came along she would tell him. And there was amongst our own people a very careless attitude of rights of other people.

35:00 I mean having lived in barracks all of the time where you didn't actually clean up anything, particularly

once you were an NCO [non commissioned officer] or an officer, somebody else did all of that for you. When you were starting off as an air crew guard or something, well, then of course you not only looked after yourself, you looked after them. So we had to clean out the toilets and all of the rest of it. But further up the ranks you had someone to look after you and all of your meals were taken care of and all of your food

35:30 and clothing and everything was provided. And so when we got home there were tensions within families where the ex-serviceman just tossed his clothes in the corner or didn't think that he had to cook for himself and do any of his own washing and that sort of stuff. And people had to readjust to civilian life and some people did it quite easily and some people didn't.

You seem to have come through it relatively unscathed. I mean I am sure you have had your private

36:00 **when it is all a bit much. A lot of men didn't come through it in such a mentally healthy way, were you aware of that?**

Yeah, you see them all around you. When I went back to university I knew what I wanted to do and I knew I had to work and so I settled down and started working hard, and I met up with Lourdes again. Lourdes

36:30 and I were at school together, and there was no romantic attachment. But when I came back again after the war and met her again and she was a very attractive young lady, I will show you some photos and I decided I wanted to marry her. Whether she wanted to marry me I don't know. And I so I had fairly clear cut ambitions, I knew that I wanted to get a couple of degrees under my

37:00 belt as quickly as I could, to get married et cetera, so I settled down. But like I said, a lot of my mates, I would go into the Richmond Hotel for a beer on an odd afternoon and there would be another three or four there, and they might have spent all afternoon there and they were generally whinging about what had to be done,

37:30 it wasn't fair and why couldn't it be like this and so on? And one bloke that I knew quite well used to always say, "Wouldn't it be nice if you could go down to like that little café at Rottingdean in England and do so and so?" and I would say, "Look, that was four years ago. Don't keep telling me you would like to go back and do that again. Forget it." People did have problems adjusting.

38:00 And of course there was no counselling service or anything like that. I mean that's another of my streaks of callousness these days, I think this counselling thing has gone to people's heads. A kid sneezes in high school and all of a sudden there are twenty counsellors to counsel all of the others. That's the exaggerated –

Good one though,

38:30 **I'll stop there. So what was it like seeing your Mum and Dad again when you got back?**

Oh very good. Yeah, my mother was naturally overjoyed, she didn't know that I had been in action at all because I had never mentioned that in my letters home. I had just said, "I am here doing this, that and the other." So when I did get home and told her just bits and pieces of stories

39:00 she couldn't believe how lucky I had been or how lucky she had been that her darling little son had lived, and my father was quietly proud of me, didn't say so but you could tell that he was. And the rest of the family, cousins and so on they were all pleased to see me back and all wanted to hear stories about what I had done and so on.

39:30 And so I suppose to a large extent I repeated my father's experience, "Nothing much to tell, we went here and did that," because as I said before, there is a reluctance to big note yourself. I mean nobody wants to come home and say, "Yes, I am the confident hero back from the war," because there were lots of conquering heroes.

40:00 I and all of my mates were just one, or a group, out of hundreds of thousands. And they all had stories to tell.

Your mother and father must have known people who didn't come back or they must have had friends whose sons didn't come back?

Well, I mentioned before that I went to school at Waikerie Primary School and at Waikerie they established a gliding club in about 1936, the first one in Australia and this

40:30 turned out to be a tragedy in many ways for the town because young men qualified as glider pilots and when the war came along, they would not have been qualified on educational grounds to go into air crew. But because they were glider pilots they were taken in and they became air force pilots early in the war and of course by the end of the war large numbers were dead. In fact families lost all of their sons.

41:00 So it was quite sad.

41:10 End of tape

Tape 8

00:30 **Lyall Do you remember what sort of feelings there were around religion during the time you were in Egypt?**

Yes, religion used to come up for discussion

01:00 quite frequently particularly when people got killed. For example I mentioned my mate Telford who was flying with me and then hit the ground. Now he was a very good upright, good living bloke, he wasn't a priest or anything like that but he was a Christian and he lived by those beliefs and so when he was killed there was a lot of soul searching, why should a great bloke like that get killed

01:30 and these miserable sinners like ourselves are left behind. And this would then move on to all of these questions about the meaning of life and is there life after death and what does religion tell us about it? And the people who seemed to have the best answers were in fact the Catholics. Now whether people agreed with those answers or not was a different matter but at least they had some clear view

02:00 of what it was all about. And this made an impression on me at the time. But of course there were lots of other people who didn't have answers but had all sorts of questions and problems, so it was a matter which was discussed, I wouldn't say every night but it did come up fairly frequently.

And how did that affect you?

02:30 It made me very receptive to Catholic teaching, in fact after the war I became a Catholic. I wasn't a Catholic at the time, but I still am. So I guess you could say the seeds of it were sewn at the time in these discussions about the meaning or purpose of life.

And then you married the miracle?

Then I married the miracle. That may have been one of the reasons why but yeah.

03:00 **Can you tell me about your work as a flying instructor in Egypt?**

Well, once I completed the fighter pilots instructor course, I did never instruct because before I got posted anywhere they dropped the bomb and that was the end of the war.

What was your course like though?

Well, once again because of my great interest in this I enjoyed it immensely.

03:30 There were various components to the course, one was air to air gunnery which was quite straight forward, there was an aircraft like a Hurricane would be towing a target across the sky and you had to attack that, dive on it and fire at it and these were real bullets and there might be three or four different aircraft

04:00 attacking the same target, and the way that they could identify whose bullets were whose, the tips of each bullets were dipped into aircraft dope but different colours. So if I for example my bullets might have blue dope on the tip so that when I hit the target which was this canvas drogue, each of the holes would have a little blue ring around it.

04:30 Somebody else might have red, somebody green. And so when they brought this target down for examination they could see what happened. And you got a different weight score for different parts of that target. So the first one third of the target which might be the narrowest part might carry a score of five, the next part might only carry a score of two and the last part, the wide part might only carry a score of one. Because

05:00 if you were attacking a bomber what you wanted was to hit the engine or the pilots cockpit, there wasn't much point in putting bullets through the tail of the aircraft. And so once again I suppose because of my interest and also my experience flying on Mustangs, this was on Spitfires, I scored very well on those things, my percentage

05:30 was well up amongst the highest on the course and then another component was camera gun and sometimes this was linked in with your target so that you would see the target on the film and then compare that with the actual score that you obtained from the bullet. Another aspect of the camera gun was to have a bomber flying around, because while we were being trained as fighter pilot instructors, the other part of the school

06:00 was for the air gunners instructors, so when you were doing your attack on the bomber your camera recorded what you did, they, at the same time, were recording what you did and they would take theirs away and analyse it. And once again I departed from the book when I was doing these things because the book said, in order to lay off deflection on the bomber, you start behind

06:30 the tail of the bomber. Then you pull your gun sight through the line of the bomber and you lay off the appropriate deflection, somewhere up there. Now I didn't do that at all, I thought that was a dead give away, as soon as you started going like that the gunner would then go ha ha and he would open fire on you. So what I used to do, if the bomber was going like that, I would dive down but I would pull around, lay off the deflection while I was still up here,

07:00 and then drop my nose down sideways and fire and continue down. One of the air gunners from one of these exercises said to me, "Were you flying that Spitfire today?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "You didn't put a finger on us." I said, "What do you mean?" and he said, "I was watching you and you didn't pull it through once, you didn't score

07:30 any hits on us." And I said, "We'll see." And of course when they developed the film and put it on the bombers I had ninety-five percent hits on the front of the bomber. So he was somewhat discomforted by that as you might imagine. So that was camera gun, and another aspect of the camera gun was the dog fighting where you were actually weaving around the sky trying to get a bead on each other and that was

08:00 quite good fun. And then in addition to those they had a small section on rocket firing which was a novelty to most other people there who hadn't come across them, but it was fairly old hat for me. So at the end of it all I got a fairly good mark there. I was quite annoyed that a few

08:30 of the films on my camera gun turned out to have nothing on them because the maintenance of the camera guns was not the best. Partly due to the climate, Egypt being very hot and humid and I also think that because the war in Europe had finished, and I can't prove this, but because the war was over in Europe, there was a general drop off in standard.

09:00 I think a lot of people were saying, "Oh, who cares? It is all over." And it was very difficult to maintain the enthusiasm which there had been previously.

So during this course you were learning how to teach but you had already taught gliding hadn't you? A long time before?

Yeah. Well, yes I had already

09:30 been a teacher too, I taught in schools. So that part of it for me was quite easy. The business about how do you arrange an instructional program in a logical sequence, how do you motivate people, that sort of thing. Yeah, and actually that part of it was pretty elementary in the RAF, they didn't devote much attention to how do you really teach.

10:00 The main thing they did was to concentrate on proving your own skills so that you could demonstrate that's how you do it. And so it wasn't what I could call teaching so much as instruction, and that's what it was called, it was called 'pilot attacking instructor' which is different from a teacher. An instructor is someone who says, "You do it like this." I enjoyed it, yeah.

10:30 **Did they teach you anything on how to cope with losses of men?**

No.

So there was really no comprehension that any loss of human life could cause any long term problems for people or was likely to interfere with their work?

You're putting your finger on a fairly contentious subject. During World War II

11:00 in the air force in particular and it may be true in the other services, I don't know. They had people who had distinguished themselves, fought valiantly against the enemy, but then had a nervous breakdown or something similar, and they were categorised as lack of moral fibre, LMF, so they were then reduced in rank or discharged and so on.

11:30 So there was no, not to my knowledge anyway, no attempt to get to the bottom of what caused all of this, not attempt to counsel or help them. They might be sent off to rest camp or something like that which was a step in the right direction. But the first thing was to say, "Lack of moral fibre," in other words cowardice and you were

12:00 turfed out. This caused a lot of ill feeling as you might imagine, because people who knew that say Joe Blow had done thirty trips in bombers and was really a first rate bloke, then to be suddenly told that he wasn't worth anything was very nasty.

Do you remember that happening?

I didn't personally know any individuals, no. I certainly know of it happening.

12:30 **I have heard from other pilots a description of the type of tiredness they would get because of the adrenalin you would be burning on operations, sweating and concentrating and burning so much adrenalin knowing what you have to do and keeping alert. Did you feel that tiredness? Tiredness that wasn't physical but more an emotional tiredness?**

13:00 Its hard to distinguish I think if you're tired, you're tired and it is difficult to say whether it is due to mental exhaustion or physical exhaustion. You would find this yourself, working hard, studying hard, you may not move a muscle but if you have been studying for three or four hours and concentrating then you're dead tired. And

13:30 whether it is physical tiredness or mental tiredness is a bit hard to sort out. I think under those circumstances what you should do, and I am talking now about the pilots and so on, if you haven't had much physical exercise you should get out and go for a run and have a game of tennis and so on, engage in physical exertion, and so that you are physically tired as well as mentally.

14:00 Certainly its true that flying on its own, just flying around, particularly operational flying, even if you're not in threat of your life but the flying itself is tiring. Whether it's the affect of altitude or the effect of pressure I don't know, but it is a tiring activity and certainly if you're engaging in operations as well,

14:30 you do get tired and presumably, in my case anyway, I used to sleep quite well. I didn't have nightmares.

And you never have?

No.

Do you know any men that have?

Yeah. I can think probably of four or five people who have confided in me that they have nightmares.

15:00 Once again you have got to know them for a long time before they will tell you, I am sure a lot of people have nightmares and don't tell anybody, unless they wake up screaming and their wives know about it. It's sometimes not so much a scary dream as actually reliving a real experience. I draw a distinction between reliving something

15:30 that has happened to you and having a nightmare which is totally scary and you have no control over what is happening.

Do you relive experiences?

Yes I have relived experiences from time to time, but not in a scary fashion. Everything turned out for me you see? Everything had a happy ending.

16:00 **Might have been a different kind of pressure if you had had a crew that you felt responsible for?**

It could well have been, yeah.

Reflecting now do you think the air force was the best place to be?

Oh yeah. Well, for me anyhow. See one of the things that we used to say to each other by way of consolation was that in the

16:30 job that we were in you either survived intact, which I did, or you were dead. Whereas in the army you could have a leg or an arm blown off or something like that. That didn't happen with us. We did get people who were badly burnt and disfigured and that sort of thing, they were a minority. Most of us as I say, if for example your aircraft was hit by a shell, for

17:00 example a friend of mine who was flying a Kittyhawk and a shell exploded in the cockpit and damaged his leg badly. And he was able to get back and land, didn't actually land on the runway, he brought it down the along side of the strip and he was actually unconscious when they got him out of the aircraft, but he survived and was quite okay. Generally if you have an injury like that, if you have a shell that blew your leg off, then you didn't get back to medical attention

17:30 because you couldn't control the aircraft, you would get into a spin or you would bleed to death before you had a time to do anything and so you were dead. So basically the pilots, air crew in general, they basically emerged physically intact, not necessarily mentally, or they died.

And that was of some comfort?

Yeah. I think a lot of people would

18:00 prefer to be dead then maimed for life, at that time. I am not sure that they would now, I mean a lot of people that were maimed did go on to get married and have children and have a normal happy family. But at the time that we are talking about they didn't think that way, they just thought, "I wouldn't want to go through life with no legs."

Did you do much operational night flying?

No.

18:30 **Did you ever?**

No operational night flying, no. We had to be back by sunset. In fact on one occasion I remember we

were called upon to do a job over in Yugoslavia and the flight lieutenant who was to lead the thing said, “No not on.” And the high command weren’t impressed with this,

19:00 “What do you mean?” and he said, “Well, time for take off is half an hour from now, time to fly there is X, time to fly back is Y, by that time it is sunset which gives us no time over the target, we are not going.” Anyway he made the point and they accepted it. You weren’t supposed to be flying at night in those aircraft. There were other people in other

19:30 squadrons who were actually night fighter squadrons and that was their job and they were specially trained to do that. Apart from the normal instrument flying with which we were trained we didn’t have any experience and we certainly didn’t have any experience flying Mustangs at night.

So having the hood over your canopy probably only ever came in handy when you blacked out?

20:00 Oh no, it was flying in cloud and I did quite a bit of flying in cloud, particularly sometimes we had to do weather reccies, go out and see what the weather was like over Yugoslavia, and we might climb up through cloud, you might be in cloud for ten or fifteen minutes just climbing until you got out of the top of it. So that was where the instrument flying came in. Going out on operations you might climb through cloud on the way out or on the way back but that is not the same as night flying.

20:30 **Were you still enjoying flying by the end of the war?**

Yes I was, and as soon as I was able to, as soon as my two eldest kids had graduated I said, “Right the money I am spending on you rotten sods I am now going to put into flying.” And so I went back and got my private pilots licence and kept that until I retired. It was very good when I was here and I was director general of TAFE

21:00 and I wanted to go and visit our college say in Port Lincoln, the normal thing then for people was to drive around, it meant to do a normal day’s work in Port Lincoln they were then tied up for three days, where as I could load them aboard, I would hire a six seater, load them aboard. We would leave Parafield at eight o’clock, at Port Lincoln at nine o’clock and do a days work, fly home again and they would be home in the evening, virtually a normal

21:30 working day. And so that was very useful, Port Lincoln, Wyallah, Port Augusta, Port Pirie.

You still fly?

No. Once I retired, my wife doesn’t like it, I mean she used to come with me on sufferance, but she didn’t enjoy it at all. And there is no point, at least I didn’t see any point in

22:00 spending money just to keep the hours up just to keep the licence alive. So once I retired I let that slide. But I would still like to do it. My eye sight is worse these days so I may not pass the eyesight test to make it possible.

What images from the war, good and bad, remain with you now? What are your major images?

22:30 It’s difficult because when you ask that question so many images crowd in. I suppose some of them are the really good pleasure images like spring in England with the blue bells and

23:00 all of that sort of thing. And although the war was going on all around, nevertheless you had all of these beautiful spring days, lovely scenery and all of that sort of thing. Putting it the other way, in Italy is the memories of these dreary wet cold nights, living in a tent with a hurricane lamp. Cold and wet.

23:30 Lots of mud. Then there are the other beautiful images again like flying along the Adriatic and the doing patrol with the rising sun, much as I said with Christchurch in New Zealand, the rising sun on the Apennines? Going over the Alps, the beautiful scenery of the Alps,

24:00 near Klagenfurt there is a lake, Wörthersee I think it is called. Well, after we had been bombing or strafing we would be zooming back home really low over the lake with the Alps right up in front of us, snow capped peaks. Really beautiful. Dangerous too. I mean we had to climb up over those and one of our squadrons got caught in a down draft and of the twelve

24:30 aircraft, five of them got smashed onto the side of the mountain. These are the images. And then the camaraderie, meeting with all of your mates, enjoying social activities. In Egypt for example there were two or three Englishmen, one Irishman, just travelling around looking at the sights,

25:00 out to the pyramids or the tombs or going to night clubs, this sort of thing. It’s really a potpourri of impressions, I can’t sort out what the major ones are. One of the major ones is coming home from Egypt on the Stirling Castle and of course there was no fresh water to speak of, the drinking water was fresh

25:30 but that was all, the rest was salt water. And then in the middle of the Indian Ocean we ran into a really heavy monsoonal downpour, so some of us went, “Beauty.” And so we got a cake of soap and got out on the deck soaping ourselves up and were really enjoying ourselves, and just as we got a nice lather up the rain stopped just like that and the tropical sun came down on us and we were caked with this dry soapy lather.

26:00 Dreadful experience, we had to go and wash it off then with salt water, that's a major impression. It is difficult. Coming out of bomb shelters in London on a winter's morning, the smell, the characteristic smell of water on burnt wood, you know charcoal, you can smell it yourself when you get the rain here after bush fires. And that was

26:30 a sort of a smell that stays in your nostrils forever. And the really good spirit of the British people and the friendliness that they showed to the Australian people, it really makes an impression. I will stop there.

You did well. Tell me about Lourdes and your life back here?

Right, well, as I said, we were at high school together,

27:00 Adelaide High School and then we were at teachers college and then I went into the air force and when I came back she was teaching at Adelaide High School and we met up again. There was a whole group of us who used to go off together, four or five blokes and four or five girls and we would go off to picnics and go to the pictures or

27:30 dances together. Anyway, I decided that Lourdes was a bit special, and so on the 3rd of January 1948 we got married. And then in 1950, we had twin boys and that was the stage, well, before they were born, before Lourdes even became pregnant, we decided that I would go off to London and try

28:00 to do this higher degree, and then she became pregnant and we said, "It doesn't matter we will still go, it is not problem travelling around with a baby." So then she had twins which we didn't know about until she was actually giving birth because there was no ultrasonics or anything like that and x-rays were dangerous to the foetus so we didn't have an X-ray so then she unexpectedly popped out the second one.

28:30 So then we said, "Well, we're all due to go anyway, who cares if we have got an extra baby?" So with the babies at the age of three months off we went, young and enthusiastic and silly. It worked like charm, the babies were no handicap really. We took a lot of powdered milk with us and I had made a couple of little collapsible cribs which folded up into a little bundle about that round and that long.

29:00 So where ever we went, if we needed to, we could just open those and drop a pillow or a cushion into it and the babies would sleep there, and they didn't have any trouble travelling, so long as they could see us, if they could see Mum or Dad they had no trouble. When we got to customs of course, in those days there were customs houses at every frontier and the customs officers would come down the line and take us out of the line and say, "Here, come through here."

29:30 And they would just cross off our suitcases and on our way. The twins were a great help, we could have smuggled diamonds you know, if we had a diamond we could have smuggled it. And when we got to Turin for example, and we had to change trains there so we looked around for somewhere to change the twins and feed them and there was a big locker room, left luggage and that sort of thing,

30:00 with a counter about twenty feet long with some grills. So at one end of the counter we started to do this and immediately there was a crowd around us looking at the babies, looking at the twins and the bloke on the other side of the counter pulled the grill down to stop anyone else coming in. And so, oh they, the Italians, well of course as you know, they love babies, but in particular because they were twins and had come all of the way from Australia, they thought this was marvellous.

30:30 And so we had no problem and it was good for the twins, they grew up for the first four or five years of their life, because in England we did as much travel as we could. In England itself and up to Scotland and we went across to Paris and down to Nice and that sort of thing, and the twins came everywhere, so they learnt at a very young age how to eat in a restaurant without causing a fuss, how to use a knife and fork et cetera.

31:00 And they were very well balanced kids and by the time they were four or five they were seasoned travellers.

And you were in the navy at this point?

Yeah, I wanted to go to the University of London and so I applied for the short service commission and was accepted. The Royal Australian Navy offered me an appointment here at a higher rank than I would have had in

31:30 England but of course that was defeating the purpose, so I went over there. And as I said it didn't come about but I did get good experience because while I was there I was able to go and visit a whole lot of teaching establishments in England, teachers colleges and so on, apart from school and I also got the opportunity to look at school in Spain and Portugal and Holland

32:00 while I was in the navy, because we went into these places, and so when I had the opportunity, if I had half a day's leave or anything, I would go down to one of the schools there and see what they did and how they did it. So this was all good experience for me.

And how were your family travelling around? I am assuming you were travelling by boat?

32:30 When I was on leave of course the family would travel around the way I just mentioned, but while I was in the navy ship they were home back in England. In fact when I was down in the Mediterranean we were under radio silence because we were doing exercises with the United States Navy and my wife was pregnant and I had been given leave to go and stay with her for the weekend on which the baby

33:00 was due but it didn't arrive, and so after we had been cruising around the Mediterranean for about a fortnight we got back into Gibraltar and then I got a telegram in the letter rack which said, "Daughter born." She was already a fortnight old before I knew about it. And so my daughter now of course has British nationality as well as Australian so she

33:30 can go to England any time she likes. There was something else that you reminded me of then, it will come back.

About your family travelling or how they were getting to places with you?

34:00 **You joined the navy afterwards but do you think if there hadn't been a war, a career in the armed services would have been a beneficial thing for you? Do you think your time in the air force was a helpful thing in building your character?**

Yes I do and the same as my time in the navy. I think outside the services there is an ignorance of the

34:30 sheer administrative ability and the organization which exists within the armed services. I mean they are very big organizations, they are very big businesses and over hundreds of years of existence they have built up a body of knowledge or expertise on how to run a big outfit. Now it doesn't always run properly

35:00 and every time there is a mistake made, everybody is out in the streets howling for blood. Nevertheless there are an enormous amount of lessons to be learnt from the armed services on how you actually organise, co-ordinate, motivate, large groups of people, both men and women., how you train them to be forward looking and ready for an eventuality which may never come. But if it does come

35:30 they're ready for it. And I think that that experience is greatly underrated in the civilian world. But if you look at some of the successful business in Australia and see what they have done, you will see very strong parallels. But if you take the navy for example,

36:00 they have a system of divisions, well, they did when I was there, and the divisional officer might be quite a junior rank. It is his job to know every rating in that division, not just know him by name but to know all about his family and what he does and what his hopes and aspirations are. And to in a way father that rating, he might only be a junior officer and the rating might be old enough to be his own father, but he is there to look after that bloke.

36:30 And to make sure that in so far as possible he is able to do his job without problems and then the divisional officer reports to someone up the ladder and so it goes on. In effect, the man up the top is getting a constant flow of information and he should be able, at any time, to say to somebody, "How is Joe Blow getting on?" and somebody is supposed to know and be able to say, he is doing this and this. And "Is he fit to do so and so?" "Yes, he is."

37:00 or "No." and so forth. And this means that when there is a command given from the top it can go all the way down to the people at the bottom and all of them know what their role is in the system, they all know what their roles and responsibilities are and they're all motivated to the same end. This is the job that has to be done and this is my part in it. And big business in Australia,

37:30 the successful ones are constructed along exactly the same lines. They have a team spirit, they have motivation, they have a series of sub-leader and leader if you like, who don't operate necessarily from the top down but who lead by example, co-operation and co-ordination. Co-operation rather than co-ordination. And these are some of the things that you can pick up from the armed services. The difference of course are that the

38:00 armed services are essentially feudal, one man gives the order and everybody has to do it. And that's the nature of the task they have at hand. If you're in the middle of the battle, you can't sit down and say, "What do you think we ought to do now blokes?" and take a vote on it. You have got to have somebody whom you trust and that's the important thing. The somebody whom you trust has got to be able to say, "Well, this is what we are going to do, you go there, you go there and you go there."

38:30 And the others say, "Yes sir." And away they go and do it. If it works that way, that's the way it should work.

How do you feel about war as a concept now?

I think a lot of ex-servicemen will tell you that war is a last resort. War, as my father used to say, is the most stupid thing that men can ever engage in. But

39:00 as I say, he didn't say this, it is a last resort. If you're in a position where you are being attacked and the only way you can save your own life or in the case of a nation your own freedom ,then you have to fight. If you can negotiate then you should but when negotiations fail, and they do,

39:30 then you have got to be able to fight for it. And if you look back through the course of history and you are on a bit of a hobby horse of mine at the moment, the barbarian always comes out on top. Because the civilised man tends to say, “This is total idiocy, I am not going to take part in that, there must be a reasonable way to approach this, let’s sit down and talk.”

40:00 Or something similar, and so as happens, the Bishop of Worms, the city was besieged by barbarians so he went out to reason with the leader of the barbarians and he went out and said, “We would like to talk terms of surrender.” And the barbarian went, “Oh yes?” and went phht with his sword and that was the end of the argument. The barbarian, because he has no regard for the rule of law or justice or morals, the barbarian will come out on top. But

40:30 then of course he becomes civilised, once you are in charge of things then you start to patronise the arts, you read about the history of the people you have just conquered and the barbarian becomes civilised and then the next wave comes in, “Off with their heads.” And bingo you have got another set of barbarians.

Do you think the barbarians won the Second World War?

41:00 I don’t know. I think they very nearly did, certainly if it hadn’t have been for the immense wealth of the United States as I mentioned before, the barbarians would have won, yeah. And that’s why I say that in those cases I think we had no recourse but to go to war, you have got to defend yourself. Now whether the barbarians have won the war in Iraq or not, that’s a different question.

41:30 End of tape

Tape 9

00:31 **I wondered when you look back at your**

01:00 **such varied experience since World War II have there been any films that you have watched that you thought really captured your experience?**

Quite recently from the Burnside Library I got out The Cruel Sea, which I hadn’t seen for some years and I thought that was very good indeed for capturing the spirit and the general flavour of the navy during the war time.

01:30 Another one which got close to it was one with John Mills, it might have been Stairway to Heaven or something like that but that captured the flavour of the RAF at war. Another one which I saw years and years ago was Thirty Seconds over Tokyo which showed the B25s taking off from the aircraft carrier and that had me

02:00 sitting on the edge of my seat because as they went off the carrier they went off like that, they were virtually on the point of stall just waiting to drop into the sea, but they didn’t, they got away.

Anything that captured your time in the air?

Not that I can think of, no.

And if your sons had come to you and said, well maybe they have, “I want to join the services.” What would your response be?

02:30 Quite happy, because if that’s their wish, then by all means. I really think there is a good career in the services, I think it is much better for a single man than for a married man but if the family is prepared to put up with the constant travel and disruption every two years, then I think, “Fine.” Because as I said before

03:00 I think it is an important job and it would be a satisfying career given those other disadvantages.

And is there anything you would like to add anything that you would perhaps like to talk through that perhaps we haven’t covered?

Specifically concentrating on war time at this stage?

And some post war experience also?

03:30 No, I think I have probably made it clear that I think that my experience in the air force and then subsequently the navy gave me a good background of experience for an administrative career both in the Commonwealth Public Service and the state public service. I think a number of the lessons I learnt

04:00 there I have been able to apply and that may have helped with my career, I don’t know. And I think also it has probably helped me to get involved in activities outside my career, professional or honorary organizations et cetera.

Well, it has been a pleasure speaking with you today and you have had, well it seems to

04:30 **me anyway an incredibly varied and rich life in which you have also given a lot back to the community, so I would like to thank you for taking the time to speak with us today.**

Thank you for coming along.

You're welcome.

Really didn't have enough time to talk about my family, did I? Some other time.

You can talk to them about them.

04:54 **End of tape**