Australians at War Film Archive

Eric Germain - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 21st January 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1356

Tape 1

00:38 **So Eric would you mind giving me a five minute summary of the major points in your life?**

Yes. The major points of my life were more or less begin around about the year 1937. I joined the defence corps. Then in 1938 I joined the air training

01:00 corps. In December 1941 I volunteered for service in the Royal Air Force as a wireless operator air gunner because I'd done a bit of wireless in the air training corps, but when I got the reception centre at Warrington I failed on vision, on colour vision. So I re-enlisted as a ground crew as a transport driver. From there I spent about three years in bomber command. Later joined transport command.

01:30 Saw service in India and eventually in Australia. Went back to U.K. [United Kingdom] for demobilisation 1946. Was demobbed in 1946 and we were married in 1947.

And you moved to Australia?

Yes. Sorry. We moved to Australia in 1964 and we've lived in South Australia ever since.

02:00 We've never been back to the U.K. Um we've two children and about eight or nine grandchildren and quite a few grandchildren. I'm connected with 460 Squadron. I attend the lunches once a month in Adelaide. We meet in Weymouth Street. I recently attended the unveiling of 'G [for] George' aircraft in Canberra, which I found very moving and very

02:30 eventful and very well planned. My war service, my first commanding officer the first squadron I was with was Guy Gibson and Guy Gibson of course left that squadron to eventually become leader of the Dam Busters. I spent a lot of time on the ambulance in the air force. Sometimes not very, very good. I stationed at a place just

03:00 outside Boston called Coningsby and Coningsby was a former peace time bombing station and 106 Squadron was then converting twin engine aircraft to four engine aircraft. Unfortunately we did have one or two bad accidents with the conversion and I wasn't always on the ambulance. At times I drove the crew buses.

Eric that's perfect for the for

03:30 **the summary of things.**

Yeah.

And what we can do is, I can go back and I can ask you in detail

Yeah.

About all those incidences that you had..

Right.

In your service

Yes.

And don't be afraid to look at me either.

Right. Okay.

I'd like to think I'm fairly okay to look at.

Oh yeah. She's nice. Yes. Yeah.

So Eric you grew up in England. Can you describe the area in which you grew up?

Yes certainly. I grew up in a town called Bolton, which was about twelve miles north of

04:00 Manchester. It was a very, very large industrial town, a cotton town actually, and I think there was probably nearly as many mills in Bolton as there was anywhere in Great Britain. I was born in 1923. In 1928 another brother was born. In 1930 I had a sister who was born and in 1932 my younger brother was born.

04:30 A lot of the time in Bolton was spent in a typical northern England town. I can remember on one day we were playing this game in the street and we heard a sound above and I saw my first aircraft and it was a twin engine biplane and it was being piloted by a World War [I] flying ace called Sir Alan Cobham and we found out later that it was giving a display at an air field just near

05:00 where we lived. So along with a lot of my little mates we went to see this marvel. After that I didn't really see any more aircraft 'til about 1937 or even 1938. One or two started to appear.

So you really had a strong memory of the first time you ever saw a plane.

Yes that was it. We were playing a game in the street at the time. It was more or less to do with 'Cowboys and Indians', because that was all the rage then, and the way it worked out it was that if you had a few gunners you were the cowboys,

05:30 but if you had nothing to offer you finished up as the Indians, but it was a poor area. The Depression was on. Times were very, very bad, as they were in others parts of the world.

Did you recognise that times were bad or was it only in retrospect that you knew that?

Well we knew that there were never very much around. We were very lucky. I was very lucky because Dad had a job. He was a tram conductor and Dad had seen service in World

06:00 War I and mother wasn't able to do any work or anything like that. She was at home with us. So we always had a meal on the table, but there was never a lot to spare for any luxuries, holidays or anything like that, and I know that a lot of families 'round about us they were even sufferin' more because there was good men, willing men, that were willing to work and they just couldn't get work and it was a really, really bad time.

Must have been quite distressing for your parents to see their friends

06:30 **and their neighbours...**

Yes.

Out of work.

That's right. There was a lot of poverty 'round about and oh well I never went to school with a bare backside. I know there were children that made their way to school and they weren't all that well-dressed. You know they were very, very poor people.

Can you remember a typical meal of those days? What would you have on the table for your...?

Well of course it was all cooked food and Mum did the cooking and basically it was just potatoes and gravy and a bit of meat,

07:00 if it was available. We used to have dumplings a lot. Mum used to make suet dumplings, which were very, very nice, and if we had any sweets or anything made she probably would make us an apple pie or something like. There was very, very little money for extras such as lollies, or sweets as we'd call them, and holidays and that. They were virtually not available.

Do you ever do you remember feeling that you were deprived of anything or you just felt like that was

07:30 **how it was for everybody?**

Well I really felt like it was that way with everybody you know. Luckily I had my mother's parents were a little bit better off than we were and they helped out with food. They lived a few miles away from us and sometimes I'd make my way up to their place on a tram. I'd come back with a basket of food for us and

Did people grow their own vegetables at that time?

Well the streets that we lived in were typical just terraced houses. That's all.

08:00 There's no back yards, no gardens to them or anything. It was just a bare back yard, which was typical of that part of Bolton. There were better areas where people had more wealth and they had their own gardens but there was nothing there that we could grow. So we were dependent on vegetables and fruit from the vendors that used to come 'round the streets or what we could buy at the local shop.

And you were a lucky family 'cause your father was working as a tram driver, is that?

A tram conductor.

Tram conductor.

08:30 Actually his father had actually worked on the horse trams and I eventually became a bus driver. So we kept the transport business in the family. I was bus driving when I came out to out of the air force at World War II. Dad

What kind of person was your dad?

Oh he was good. He was he was fair. He was very good. He'd not had a very happy life as a boyhood because his father was a drinker and I never met his father. I never met my

09:00 grandfather. He died and before I was born but I can remember my grandmother. She lived in a very little old cottage just outside Bolton and she was very good to me. What I can remember of her. Sadly she was killed in a car she was knocked down by a car about 1936 and I was about probably about thirteen years of age and I always felt it very badly because I were I wasn't allowed to go to the

09:30 funeral. They thought it'd be too upsetting for me you know and I felt it very badly at the time. I got on very well with Dad's mother.

It was more the tradition in those days wasn't it?

It was.

That children wouldn't go.

Yes. Yes. Yes. She were probably were one of the first people in the town to die from injured in a car accident because there weren't all that many cars about. She just crossing the main road outside her cottage that she lived in and later on that evening there was a knock on

10:00 the front door and of course the bad news was that she'd died from fractures, cuts, other injuries.

She probably didn't even think to look because they were so uncommon.

No. No. She was getting on in years too.

And your father had served in World War I?

Yes he was in the British Army. The British Imperials. They came out here to Australia. We sponsored them about two years after we arrived and on Anzac Day Dad used to march with the British Imperials. Our son was in the Royal

10:30 Australian Navy, so Brian marched with the navy, and I marched with the air force. So we had three generations marching with three different services.

That would have been a proud day.

Yeah, very proud time. Dad died in 1980 I think it was about '85 but they lived they lived Adelaide and he had a trust flat at Oaklands Park and so it was very good. We took them out wherever they could do, took them away on holiday, and they never regretted coming out here.

11:00 **And what did your father do during World War I?**

He was infantry. He did get wounded. He got wounded in the foot. He never spoke, I can't ever remember Dad saying hardly anything about World War I. The man that he worked with on the trams, he had a regular driver, he eventually died from gas. Result of mustard gas. I know that Dad wouldn't be very old

11:30 when he went in the army because he was born 1898. He was in the army about 1916, so he wouldn't have been much more than about eighteen years of age when he went in. I know he saw service in France and that was about all he said about World War I.

And do you know any more of his service?

No. The regiment that he was with I tried to do a bit of tracking down. I'm not didn't have a very good job of it though.

12:00 I know he was with the East Lancashire Regiment. He was an infantry man.

I don't think there was much pleasant about that war at all.

It was a terrible war.

It was a terrible war.

It was a terrible war. I've read a lot more about it since. That the, what the men went through. It was just nothing but slaughter and a lot of it was organised by generals that probably couldn't have cared less. All they had to do you know was to get results. It was a war really that should

12:30 never have been and I'm afraid there was many, many thousands of men 'cause lost their lives in it.

Well thank goodness your father wasn't one of them.

No. He was very lucky there.

Did you know or were there any after-effects of his time in the war that you were aware of?

No. No. No I didn't.

And what kind of character was your mum?

My Mum was born in a country Cheshire, which

13:00 was about place called Marple. About forty miles just out of the Peak District and she was working the cotton mill; the family came to live in Bolton because her father became a gardener to a fairly wealthy lady that lived just on the outskirts of Bolton and Mum was working in the cotton mill and some time or other she met Dad and…

On her way to the cotton mill or how?

I don't know how they actually met. He was working on the trams at

13:30 the time so it is possible that's how they met and I eventually arrived. Little premature, but I arrived.

A little bit before the wedding.

Yes, exactly, which didn't go down too well in those days with the all the members of the family. They eventually got over it because I had two aunts that were fairly strict on the what should be and what shouldn't be, but

14:00 nonetheless

How long after you were born did they get married?

Well I was born in I was born the 12th of June 1923. I think they were married probably about two or three months after I was born, which wasn't too bad really. Oddly enough, sadly enough really, we've just heard from Christmas friends from friends that Lara and the lady that's just

14:30 died her husband's father also worked on the trams and his parents were pregnant at the same, her mother was pregnant at the same time as I was, so my Mum and his Mum used to walk together with us out in the prams and eventually they came to live in Australia but they lived in lived in Woollahra. So there was a bit of a connection there you know.

Would that have been a bit of a scandal that that happened?

Well I

15:00 dare say it was in those days because I mean even anyone living with someone that wasn't married that was definitely a no-no and they were looked on with a bit of disdain and I know there was one lady that lived near where I was, she wasn't a bit of a lady of the streets and she was really sent to Coventry and yet to me she was always a very nice person you know. She always spoke to us, but oh yes. Not being married wasn't just wasn't on or living as partners and whatever

15:30 that was that was a definite no-no.

And what were the majority of people involved and employed in the cotton mills?

Yes.

Was that the main work?

Yes. There was engineering as well in Bolton. Quite a bit of engineering but the bulk of it was the cotton mills and then of course after World War II the cotton industry more or less disintegrated because everything was being made in China and Korea and Japan and wherever you…

Must have had a huge effect on that community.

It had a very big effect,

16:00 but other things were brought in. I think probably in Bolton now there's more engineering and other types of industries but the cotton industry's virtually gone.

And you said during the Depression there were no holidays or things like that but did you do did you have any outings as families?

I think…

What kinds of things did you do?

I think I was lucky. We had one outing. We had one out one relative that lived somewhere near a place called Carnforth. That's near the Lake District and I can remember that

16:30 we had this holiday with them and these people had an iron mongers and they had a car and to me that to us that was it. They had a car and we actually got to have a ride in that car and of course when I got back and told me friends, we only went for about a week or ten days. I told them about you know that we'd been for this in this car we just felt like it like royalty and so that was about the only holiday that we ever had.

17:00 **And do you remember much of school?**

Yes. I can remember much about school. I know I was very reluctant to go in the early years. I just couldn't settle in and on two or three occasions Dad had to take me to school. This was in primary school and I probably arrived late on one or two mornings and the headmaster was a man called Mr Blinkhorn and he was a very, very fierce looking man

17:30 and this school was probably about three or four storeys high and I can always remember Mr Blinkhorn leaning over the balcony and giving Dad a verbal lashing because I was late for school. Of course Dad being Dad who he was he give it him back but other than that, the teachers were good in the primary school and I settled down alright in the end.

What, you just didn't fancy being away from

18:00 **your mum or?**

I think it was that and Mum wasn't in the best of health about that time. She started with trouble with her legs, with abscesses with sores. So she wasn't too well, but the school I went to of course it was all fenced in. There was no open space or anything like that you know. There was railings all 'round the school and once you were in, you were in. The gates were shut. There was no open space

18:30 like you get today with the schools.

And no play area?

There was a play area. There was a yard but it was all concrete. It was all cement. There was no grassed areas or anything like that but

No wonder you didn't want to go.

No. No it wasn't it wasn't the best of places but it was only typical of a lot of schools in that part of the country, even in Britain. It was only the better class people that had schools with open spaces you know. The colleges and places like that but it was of course it was in the working class area

19:00 too and the education department probably spent just on what they needed for education and that was it.

In those days teachers were still allowed to hit children weren't they?

Yes. Yes they were. You were allowed to get spankings. Actually I only I only ever got caned once and that was when I was at high school and what happened was our regular teacher was away from school. I think he was sick or something and we had another teacher's filled in for him

19:30 and there was a was a bit of a thing going on about where you scribbled a message on a piece of paper and you passed it on. It was something silly and this class that I was in, just as I was in the act of passing this paper piece of paper on, the headmaster taking over the class saw me. So of course I got called to the front and explanations weren't necessary. I got whacked on the hand about three times. That was the only time I was ever caned actually but other than that no,

20:00 they were the teachers were good and high school was very, very good. One of the teachers at the high school was called Mr Jones and we were talking about careers and what I wanted to do when I leave school when I left school and, "Oh" I say, "I'm gonna be a test pilot" and he just smiled knowingly you know. He musta thought, "You're not gonna get there" but they were good. They were really good oh and whilst we were at school they arranged a trip for the whole school to

20:30 go to Edinburgh and I had to go 'round collecting jam jars and all sorts of things for bottles to get the money for this trip. I think there was about two and sixpence, or five shillings, which was a lot then. So I had one day in Scotland.

That would have been a huge adventure.

It was. They put a special train on for the school and we went straight up to Edinburgh, saw 'round the castle and we came back. So we were very lucky because a lot of other children never even went there. So I did have a trip into

21:00 Scotland from that school.

And you got your first idea of life outside Bolton?

About life outside Bolton. The headmaster of that school was called Mr Milner and funnily enough Mr Milner when he was a teacher taught my father when Dad was growing up and then Mr Milner's son eventually became the leader of the Holly Oak Cluster in Manchester, Martin Milner but Mr Milner was

a wonderful man. He was different again to Mr Blinkhorn. He was very humane and very

21:30 understanding.

Yeah, it sounds like the other teacher who you said, "I want to be a test pilot"...

Yeah?

It sounds like that teacher didn't have very high aspirations for his students.

No. No he didn't. No.

Was that a working class thing?

Probably more so. I never really shone in everything in anything at school and yet I never did badly. I always managed up I think the highest in the class I probably would have gone about the fourth off the top but probably 'round about the middle. I was never very good in maths. English I liked. Composition,

22:00 reading and music. I used to get two marks out of twenty for music and the music teacher used to say, "I've given you two marks out of twenty Germain because you've wrote your name neatly on top of the music sheet, but don't worry about anything else in music" and yet I loved music. I really liked music. I never learnt to play any instruments, but Mr Colling as he was called... I was in a few music lessons and that was it.

It wasn't your forte?

No it wasn't my forte.

22:30 **And what did you do at home? Did you have a wireless or**

Eventually

How did you get your news?

Yeah we eventually about 19 must have been about '38 or '39 Dad became the owner of a wireless set and of course we thought we were we were well and truly we were somebody. It was called a Philco set and it was made I think it was made in Britain and Dad eventually worked it out with the dial that he could even get a radio station in France.

23:00 Oh I think it was Luxembourg I think he could get on this radio and we couldn't believe it you know that we were hearing music coming from another place. Probably a world away to us.

Did you get news of the war over the wireless?

Yes we did. Actually that came along. We had that wireless. The declaration of war.

You remember hearing that?

Yes I also remember Neville Chamberlain [Prime Minister of the United Kingdom] going to Germany to try to make peace with Hitler and

23:30 I always felt that Neville Chamberlain was maligned a lot because he was called a traitor and other things, but he knew what was coming and he was just stalling for time to give England and the other countries chance a bit more time to prepare themselves for war. He went over in 1938 to Berlin and although he came back and waved a paper in his hand and said, "Peace in our time" I think the people that read between the lines knew that it wasn't going to come, but at

24:00 least it gave Britain another twelve months grace, which was a lot then, to get ready.

What did you...what did your mum and dad think about the impending war?

Well naturally enough they were concerned. Eventually we got word that we were to get our gas masks. So we went down to one of the local churches nearby and we got kitted out with these gas masks, which we had to well we were supposed to carry about with them with us with all our all the time and then later

24:30 on we got an air raid shelter dug into the back garden. Steel shelter.

Did everyone have one in the back garden?

Most homes did. Most homes got them put in. It was called an Andersons shelter. It was named after one of the government MPs [Members of Parliament]. It was it was his idea and we didn't always go in it to tell you the truth if there was any raids on because it wasn't the best of places to be in for length of time. It was cold and damp, but we did use it, the shelter.

25:00 There was just enough room in there for the family in there, that was all. We just put a few basic things in. Bit of a bit of a seat to sit on and we did what we could to make it comfortable, but really Bolton was lucky because the places that got more was places like Manchester and Liverpool, which was thirty miles away. They had a lot of heavy damage around the dock areas. As I say as probably Manchester did in the industrial area so Bolton, although bombs were

25:30 dropped in and around Bolton there weren't a lot of casualties. There were some people killed but not a lot.

And what did you think about it all? I mean you were still a young lad then.

Yeah.

Was it all a bit exciting or were you frightened?

No I don't really class it as being exciting. It was a worry and yet day by day you grew along to accept it you know and the restrictions came along of course and they were very, very tight. Ration books were there

26:00 and occasionally you might be able to pick up a little bit of something extra but it was it was very hard.

So you'd come out of the Depression and into the war.

Exactly. Yeah and yet I have heard people say or even read where people said that the British people were probably in better in a better health state during World War II than what they've ever been since because they were on a more fixed diet. I think I would argue with that because essential things like fruit and stuff like that

26:30 they just weren't around.

Your mum must have been worried about the kid the children's health and...

Yes.

Making ends meet.

Yeah. They were actually at one stage my health went down quite badly and there was on the outskirts of the town there was a place called an open air school. It was a school where they could send children to that were you know not too strong. Anyway I didn't eventually get there. I think my health just started to pick up a little bit. I probably wouldn't have been much more than about ten years of age and

27:00 actually the street that we were living in Bolton we did eventually get a house, what you would call a corporation house, which was in like a council house and that was in another part of the town which'd probably a bit more outside Bolton and there was a bit more greenery around there but this was about 1934, '35 when we moved. So the new area that we moved into was a step upwards.

A bit healthier.

A bit healthier yes. We had we did have a garden there. It was on an estate about

27:30 two or three miles outside the town and of course all the people that moved onto the estate, they weren't the best but that was something you had to live with.

They weren't the best?

No. There was a lot of trouble you know. Police were forever around. Yeah but we had some good neighbours. We were lucky we were the part that we lived in I and my sister's been back recently and she said most of that estate now is occupied by people from other countries. So it's not looking too good now from what

28:00 she told me.

And so you were sick for awhile were you?

Yes I wasn't picking up as I shoulda done.

What was wrong?

I don't know. I was a bit of weight loss. Was a bit on the thin side and the family doctor that we had he was a bit you know I'd need to have a few spells where I was in bed a bit and the getting into this open air school wasn't all that easy but I didn't go in the end anyway. It was a place called

28:30 Lostock just outside Bolton. I believe it's quite you know I'd seen it from time to time.

But you didn't get in there.

I didn't get in there. No. No.

And when you were sick, you apparently your father brought you books about aeroplanes is that right?

Yes he did. That's right. Yes. Yes. Seeing that aircraft that sowed the seed. I was also interested in planes as well, ah in trains as well as planes and yes, Dad did bring the books home from the library for me and I

He sounds like a good

29:00 **dad.**

He was good. He was good. Yes. He was never cruel to us. I've been smacked through misbehavin', but if I was if I was punished I'd asked for it. It was my fault. I never saw Dad drunk. He was good. He remembered what had happened to him, to his father was a very heavy drunk drinker and he was never one for shirkin' his work. Dad set off to work many mornings when it was pelting down with rain. There was no transport and he'd probably work all day and clothes were absolutely wet

29:30 through and of course trams were very open then. They weren't enclosed. Yes. So…

Cold miserable weather.

Cold miserable weather, yes that was another reason why…

And he and your mum got along well?

Mum was good. We had a railway station in the town and there was two footbridges used to connect each side of the town and I had a fascination with trains so I would walk down to the town and I would press my face to the railings and of course the

30:00 trams trains were all steam trains. As they came underneath the bridge you can imagine what came up off the train. So when I'd walk back home Mum used to look at me. She used to say, "I've no need to ask you where you've been. I can tell with your eyes you've been at the station again" because there was rings 'round my eyes with pressin' my face to the bars you know. So I was a I was planes and trains. Eventually buses.

And it all got you over to Australia in the end didn't it? Your…

Yes.

fascination for planes and trains.

Yes. That's right. Yes.

So

30:30 **the war had commenced in England?**

Yeah.

Was your dad too old to be called up at that stage?

Yes. Yes. Yes.

And what was your thinking about joining up with the war effort?

Well the thing was I'd been in the air training corps. I was interested in aircraft. I wasn't interested in the navy. Although if I'd a gone in another service it woulda been the army. So I think probably being in the

31:00 air training corps did help me to eventually get in the air force. I volunteered in 1941 but I knew eventually I would be called up, which I was at the beginning of '42. So I did I did get in the air force.

What did what did your father think about that?

Oh he knew that you know I would eventually have to go. A lot of my friends had gone into different services. I'd already lost one mate at Dunkirk in the army. A very like very nice

31:30 bloke called Gordon Singleton. They never ever found out what happened to him. I think from what they can make out he was probably one of the many men that was you know machine gunned in the sea at Dunkirk and a short time after I lost another mate on the Hood. It was a navy ship. Shell from another German cruiser hit the magazine on the ship that Sam was on and every one of the men was killed. That was two mates that had been killed.

32:00 **So the war was already affecting you quite profoundly?**

Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah but most of the people I knew actually went in the air force. They weren't all in the air training corps but I think one of them did eventually become stationed not far away from where I was in Lincolnshire. He volunteered for our crew as a flight engineer and actually I learned later, the day I'd been shot down over France they'd all bailed

32:30 out of the aircraft and when they landed when Tom landed he could see two buildings. One on his left and one on his right and he tossed a coin up that he had and he sorta said, "Tails you know the one on the left and heads the one on the right" and the one that he went to the French people took him in. They told him, "If you'd a gone to the other place that were Gestapo [German secret police] place." So the toss of the coin probably saved his life. He eventually made his way back to England.

33:00 **What was the feeling about the progress of the war? Was it that you volunteered in 1941?**

Yeah.

Was there a sense of despair in England or a sense that eventually it would we would win or that it was just going to go on and on? What was the feeling?

I think there never really despair. There was always a feeling that it would go on for a long time. There was some terrible things that happened of course. Dunkirk really rocked Britain and then after

33:30 I can remember attend attending a church parade one Sunday morning and word came through that Singapore had fallen. Lots of the Royal Navy ships had been sunk. I think there was sort of gloom over that lot and then of course we'd had the bad raids in 1940. Even in 1941. I think about the end of 1942 things started to seemed to be picking up a bit but of course by then I was in the air force.

34:00 **So the air raids, the constant air raids, must have been taking their toll on people.**

Yeah they were because people that had to work they were up during the night. You know they were going to work at during the day but even that they seemed to get 'round, which was really amazing. A lot of the factories that probably manufactured things like cotton goods of course they went on munitions and things like that.

Oh so the factories in Bolton changed?

Yes changed.

What they were doing.

Yeah. Not all. See now Sylvia was interested

34:30 in the girls' training corps and I think she rose to the rank of sergeant in the girls' training corps, which she enjoyed, and she was really keen, but she the cotton mill that Sylvia was working in they were turning out jungle green uniform and stuff for the troops and they wouldn't release her. So she had to stay where she was, but their contribution to the war was just as big an effort as people that were in the services. I mean the people making munitions

35:00 and a lot of other things you know that they were all led to the contributions to the war. So everybody that could do something was you know it was making the effort.

Did you go straight from high school into the air training corps?

Ah I joined the air training corps in, it was in 1937 when I was fourteen it was called the air defence cadet corps, but that only lasted twelve months. I've even heard that it was the air defence cadet corps

35:30 in Australia too. It became the air training corps the following year and of course it's carried on ever since then. So I just continued with the air training corps.

And they didn't pick up at that time that you were colour-blind?

No. No. No. I did not pick that up. I walked into the reception centre at Padgate, which is near Warrington, for air crew and went in this room with this, you see the medical I passed grade 1. There was nothing absolutely fit

36:00 you know for flying duties and I went in this section room. It was only about I think I'd only been there about two hours when I reported and I went in this room and he bought different charts out got the books out and some of the numbers I could pick out of the charts. Some I couldn't so he just said, "I'm sorry." It's funny because I worked with transit in Adelaide and we had a contract with the air lines and I was talking to one of the pilots of one of the air lines some

36:30 years ago you know about aviation. He said that even now it applies but it's not it's not as important with air lines now because a lot of it you've got all you've got all computerisation all that sorta stuff, but the colour vision is still there and I think it, from what I can make out, it is possibly it's hereditary because my next brother had colour vision trouble and I learned later that my grandfather had trouble with colour vision

37:00 and we think we might have one of our grandchildren that has a colour problem too.

A male grandchild?

Yeah one of the males you see. Never any no trouble with any of the girls. Some of the colours I can pick out alright. Others I get a bit mixed up with the greens and the browns but the white, the black and the yellows and I mean let's face it, I done x number of years as a coach driver. I spent umpteen years as a driving instructor and I've never run a red light. So I musta known some colours of some sort.

You know your reds and your greens.

Yes, that's right. Yes.

37:30 **But you must have been very disappointed?**

Aye it was it was. Yes it was because a lot of stuff that I'd learned in the air training corps you know I felt that but I had done some driving you see and the interviewing officer he said, "I see you" there wasn't any licences because no licence in war time you see. He said, "I can see you drive" he said. So he

said, "Well there's a big shortage of transport drivers in the air force so" he said, "I'll put you down for that." So they sent me on to Blackpool

38:00 to do this foot slogging course. That's where one of the photographs was taken and the billets that we had in Blackpool they were run by you know the civilian population and some people were lucky, they got a good billets, and others weren't so lucky and the people that we were with I think they were doing a bit of work on the sly with the coupons and all that you know so the meal that we got weren't the best but in comparison to a lot of people I guess we were very, very lucky.

So you were billeted while you were doing this training?

Whilst we were doing the training. Foot slogging.

Foot

38:30 **slogging?**

Yes.

What do you mean by that?

Oh going up and down the promenade. Promenade in the middle of winter in shorts and shivering and marching and all that and we had we had NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] that weren't very over-friendly, but when we'd finished the course they came along with us. I think they even went for a drink with the lads you know, the NCOs. They'd done what they had to do and somebody else would come along after us. So I got through that part of it and I was lucky, they of course at this time my grandparents had moved to a place

39:00 just outside Blackpool. Place called Cleveleys. So once or twice I managed to nip up there for a bit of a meal. So

And what was what was it like being out of Bolton?

Well very strange for me because other than the trip with the school that's the only travelling I had ever done. Oh wait a minute, wait a minute. Hang on. Before I went I finished up driving for a medicinal firm before I went in the air force. They manufactured medicines and that. So I was delivering medicine to areas that needed it

39:30 in the north west. So I did do a bit of driving.

Had a bit of a look around.

Bit of a look 'round, yes. I went down as far as Nottinghamshire and delivered a lot of medicine and medical supplies to Merseyside, which was I saw a lot of the damage in and around Merseyside.

The bombing damage?

Very bad. Very, very bad because already this was getting towards the end of 1941 after the raids, which were at 1940. So

40:00 **Did people flee the heavily bombed cities? Were people or were people staying?**

Some, some, no some left. Some did leave. Especially from London. From the east end of London they evacuated a lot of people. Especially children. I think a lot of the grown ups stayed but a lot of children were evacuated but from Bolton no, there was I don't recall children being evacuated from Bolton. Probably Liverpool and Birmingham.

And where did the children go?

They went into the country areas.

And were looked after by...

Yeah.

Other families?

Foster care yes. Other families took them in and it must have been a big

40:30 traumatic time you know leaving their homes. I mean even though they were in poor homes I mean as a child leaving your home somewhere strange and I should think there were some very, very moving scenes. There were boarding trains, special trains that took them but at least they'd be safe from the bombing.

Difficult times.

It were a very, very difficult time, yes, a state of war.

Eric, we've just come to the end of the tape. So

Tape 2

00:38 **So Eric you mentioned earlier that Dunkirk had a very deep effect on the English people.**

Yes, it did.

Why was that?

Because there was thousands of troops lost. They couldn't take them off. They didn't have the ships to

01:00 bring them back to Britain and of course all time the Luftwaffe [German Air Force] was machine gunning the men and the German Army was getting nearer and nearer, but there still was a miracle happened, because they did get thousands of men off. In all types of things that would float. Even old ferries, anything. If it was possible to be used it was taken across the Channel [English Channel], which was only about twenty two miles to Dunkirk around about that and they brought a lot of men off and of course the army was able to be

01:30 re-formed, but it was still a big tragedy.

England really pulled together over that.

I think so. I think so. I think sometimes maybe this is part of life. When you when you've got your backs to the wall, maybe it's then when you realise that you've got to do something about it you know. I mean not everybody in Britain was perfect, far from it, but there was a general feeling that you know if we don't do it, we're not gonna survive and

02:00 the British people knew you know they probably weren't going to get very much in the way of good treatment from the from the German upper class as you were well the rulers, the people that ran Germany.

Was there did people think that that was a possibility that Germany would...

Oh yes.

Overtake Britain?

Yeah. Yes. There was always that chance. but thankfully for Britain that stretch of water was virtually Hitler's undoing, because he was getting

02:30 barges organised at one time on the Belgian coast and 'round the French coast. There was aerial photographs taken of the barges but along came the Battle of Britain and the Luftwaffe was virtually, mind you the Royal Air Force suffered badly too, but the Luftwaffe suffered more and I think Hitler realised that if he tried to do anything like that, the barges and you know the invasion fleet would wouldn't survive trying to cross the Channel.

03:00 So he abandoned his plans to invade Britain, but there was a lot to come after that, re-forming.

How did Dunkirk personally affect you? Is that when you felt that you were going to join the effort?

Well yeah that was you see in when Dunkirk was June 1940. I would be nineteen, I'd be about seventeen

03:30 yeah. It was about seventeen and I knew that eventually I would have to go into the services. I would be called up.

How did you hear about Dunkirk? Was it...

On the radio.

Do you remember?

Oh yes. Oh yes it was it was done all the time. I mean there's a lot been said about Churchill ah, Winston Churchill [Prime Minister of the United Kingdom], that I didn't always agree with his views but at that time he was the man for the job. There was nobody else with the character in my opinion. There might a been

04:00 that I didn't but I wouldn't know of. He was the man that was there to rally Britain and keep Britain going and he did just that.

And the Battle of Britain was a bit of a turning point then wasn't it?

It was a big turning point really.

For morale I would imagine.

Good for morale, yes. It was a boost. That was about September. That was about June was Dunkirk, 'round about June, July, August. September's the Battle of Britain and of course it was at its height about the

04:30 middle of September. The raids by the German Luftwaffe didn't stop that London especially was still getting a very, very bad hammering. Even other areas too, Birmingham and Liverpool, but the blitz had finished by then and I think after about the end of 1941 the raids did seem to taper out quite a lot. There were raids in '42. I mean places such as

05:00 Canterbury and Bath, which weren't really industrial cities. I mean I know there's been a lot said about Cologne in Germany and Dresden, which was very, very sad. A lot of German people, innocent people, were killed but ah I wouldn't like to call it 'tit for tat', but this is the sort of thing that follows on you know when things like that occur.

Well it went on and on didn't it?

Yes it did.

Night after night for some people.

Yes and day.

And as you say, some people had

05:30 **to say goodbye to their children.**

Oh yes. Yeah. It's families I mean some families, not only just one member of that family went in the services. Even two, three and four members of that family in different services. Three sons, or even sons and daughters went in.

Did any of your brothers enlist as well?

No, 'cause they were younger than I was. Next younger brother was five years younger than me, so he wasn't old enough for war service but the firm he worked at

06:00 was an engineering firm in Bolton. They were doing stuff for you know for the war effort.

So every family really was affected?

Oh yeah.

Would you say that?

Yes they were very, very much affected. It was a time for restrictions and you know even in the middle of it all there was still humour. Maybe that's one thing that British were noted for but there was always sad occasions too you know. Tragedies that occurred and but you just

06:30 had to keep on living. You were alive and that was the thing you had to be grateful for.

What kept your spirits up? You say there was a lot of comedy around, what was keeping people's spirits up?

Well I it was all on the radio. I think once or twice there was the odd film that we went to see, war time films, and

Do you remember what they were?

Yeah. I one film I saw in war time was Gone With the Wind. I saw that in Boston.

That's appropriate.

Yes. Gone With the Wind but the films that were made before the

07:00 war of course, they were if you were if you had a night at the cinema you were doing quite well and they used to be about sixpence to go to the cinema or even less than that. Sylvia worked in a cinema as an usherette at one stage. So yes, I like the movies.

And were you taking any girls on dates?

Oh yes. I met one or two girls, yes. I met first girl I met in a girl in Boston. Girl I think she was Irish actually. She was called Doris Caffrey,

07:30 C-A-double F-R-E-Y. I think there's a big beer firm in Ireland called Caffrey. She lived in Manchester actually. She was a bit on the plump side you know, but she was a very cuddly girl, but I wasn't with her very long before I got posted. That was happened you know. You just got friendly with a girl, but she was nice and there was no silly work goin' on and I wrote her a nice letter and I never heard anything from her. The funny thing was that I found out later that Doris was a downright good dancer, and I've come across a line of

08:00 good dancers, because Sylvia's a good dancer. The girl we met here in Adelaide was a good dancer and Eric's an absolute shocker as a dancer. In fact we even had a dance at the local church down here as our son went to, and it was country and western or something or other, and the vicar sorted the rings out or whatever and of course Eric went the wrong way. Stuffed all the dance up. So the vicar threw up his hands up in the air and walked away in despair and joined another group. So and yet I love music

08:30 and I love watching the dancing

Bit like your music lessons?

Yeah, yeah.

Not you forte.

I love the dancing. I, Sylvia's coached me a lot you know. I've got through a bit of a waltz and things like that, but I can do a bit of bopping with the kids you know when we anything that comes along now. Some of the stuff that they do now I can but no, and yet I like music. Not too heavy. I like

What kind of music were you listening to in those days?

Well there was the orchestra, the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] orchestra.

09:00 Strangely enough there was a girl on the radio and she used to play the equivalent of 'Force's Favourites' and her name was Doris Arnold. She worked for the BBC and the medical officer that I worked with on my first station at Coningsby was her brother, Doc [Doctor] Arnold, and he was a gem. He was a terrific bloke to work with and he eventually moved with

09:30 Guy Gibson to become the medical officer of the Dam Buster Squadron, Doc Arnold. He's mentioned in quite a few of his books but he wasn't much older than what I was actually. He was a doctor. So yes, that was the sort of music we listened to and there was a program on the, I don't know whether it was on the radio then, it was called 'Workers' Playtime.' Used to come from different factories and that was to entertain you know the people in working in the factories but most of it was just singalongs and

10:00 **What were the favourites in those days?**

Ah oh golly. Trying to think of some of the favourites now. Pack Up Your Troubles and all those songs. They were still popular, although they were world war songs. You know they were still just Hang Out the Washing on the Siegfried Line. That was one that was a World War II song and they kept morale up, songs like that you know and I mean in the air force

10:30 we never really saw any entertainment. There was supposed to be a group called 'The Answer' that was troops for the services but I think I only ever saw one concert and yet I had a spell with the Americans we were we were short a nothin'. We had film stars from overseas came along and the American equivalent of Answer. I forgot what they call it. So for a few months I lived like royalty, we lived like royalty with the Americans. So in one space of my

11:00 service in '43 I was stationed with the Royal Air Force, then I was with the Americans for about four months, then I was with the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]. So

You were getting around weren't you?

I got around a bit. Quite a bit, yeah.

Can we, do you need to have a drink?

Yes, thank you. Yeah I'll put that down there.

Just

11:30 **to go back in time a wee bit, I wondered if you could talk me through the day of your enlistment.**

Yes. Yes. That's alright. Um that was the 12th of February 1942. Funnily enough the number twelve seems to come along a lot in my lifetime. I was born on the 12th and comes up from time to time. We have a bit of a session on the 'pokies' now and again so twelve comes up sometimes. My lucky number. Not very often, but we enjoy it. So

12:00 ah yes, I reported for well actually the day that I was actually leavin' to report for enlistment at Warrington I was given a travel warrant. I sat in this carriage at the station in Bolton and there was several other the young men in the compartment with me. They were also going to report at Padgate. It was a very big station, big reception centre,

12:30 and some of them had been in the air training corps with me and I learnt later that one or two had got into air crew and they had been had been killed. I think there were about seven of us in that compartment. So

They were in Bolton?

In Bolton, yes. They were Bolton lads and I actually met one after the war. I become a… actually I thought that he'd been killed but he hadn't. He had didn't he bailed out of the aircraft but he'd had he'd been

13:00 released from the air force as unfit for line duty because he had a badly damaged foot, something like that. Anyway we got to Warrington, this was the day the 12th of February 1942 and as I say, I reported to the rec it's only about an hour and a quarter's drive from Bolton to Warrington and I went in the as I

said, a great big massive reception centre and funnily enough, I walked into the reception centre to get me uniform and who should be standing behind the counter

13:30 where you got your uniforms from was my uncle. He was already in the air force.

That was a good sign.

Yeah. He was a sergeant. He was the equipment sergeant, but he was older than me and he eventually finished up seeing service in the Azures and he was an equipment man. So I got me uniform and

So were there hundreds of people in this reception centre?

Oh very, very big. Very, very big centre. I think it's still going, Padgate, it's still going.

14:00 They still use the Royal Air Force.

And you just had to line up and give your name or?

Yes. There was a lot they had it all organised all pretty well. You weren't long. I think it was only there about one night or two nights and I was on my way to Blackpool, which wasn't all that far away, and as I say, when we got to Blackpool there was transport waiting for us to take us to our billets and then from then on it all started. The marching lasted

14:30 about four to six weeks and then of course we were posted to different places and I went to a place just outside Blackpool for the training. Actually some of the stuff that they used for training were former London taxis to learn to drive in that they commandeered.

And they became London taxis?

They were London; they were London taxis.

Oh they were?

They'd been commandeered. Yes the black, I think they were Morrises. Something like that and we did all sorts of things 'round there.

15:00 Night driving and one thing another. You had to keep in a convoy and all that and

Yeah can you describe your training?

Yes. Ah quite a bit on maintenance. I've never been a very good mechanic but there was also girls on the course with us and there was always there was always some funny thing that happened. There was one sweet little thing sat near me

15:30 and she was very, very keen and the sergeant that was running the course he said, "What was the first thing would you do on a five hundred mile inspection?" And she jumps up and she shouted, "I would grease my nipples." So the nipples on the engine you know. That brought the place down nearly but no, we it was alright and the course was good, but to me it was it was not what I wanted you know. I wanted to be somewhere different

16:00 and…

Why was it not what you wanted?

Well it was just training you know. I wanted to be where there was aircraft and eventually a posting came through to Coningsby. So I got my travel warrant. I had a few days at home, I was lucky. I went to the railway station at Manchester at London Road and showed my warrant to the guard at the barrier and he looked at the warrant and it was made out to a place called Dogdyke and he looked at this warrant and he said, "Well

16:30 I've been on this railway station, near London Road, since the end of World War I." He said, "I've never heard of this place." So he said, "Go and see the RTO", that was the Railway Transport Officer, "And see if you can find out anything about it." So I went to railway transport officers and they did some checking and said "Well all's we can tell you is it's somewhere near Boston." So ah after a long stop start journey of only about a hundred and fifty miles, it took nearly all day, I got to Boston and I found out that Dogdyke

17:00 was a little branch line that ran out of Boston and it ran it ran up to near Coningsby. Near to the air field. So on my way up from Boston to Coningsby, which is about fourteen miles, I happened to look out of the carriage window. I saw my first Lancaster [Avro Lancaster bomber] and he was just coming into circuit and it was the first big aircraft I'd ever seen and he had the under carriage down and

17:30 I felt you know I thought I was going to be doing something, something useful.

So is that that vision of the Lancaster would have been quite an impressive one.

Very impressive, yes. It was a real … 'cause I'd hardly seen any aircraft 'round where we were. Even the dog fights that were occurring over Manchester were up about thirty thousand feet. So we saw very few aircraft really. So once I got on the station it was a permanent we were very lucky really. It was a pre-war station

What part of England was this

18:00 **in?**

Lincolnshire. In Lincolnshire I think it wouldn't be much more than about a hundred miles in length and probably not much wider and yet I have had the facts that in World in Lincolnshire in World War II there was between forty two and forty eight air fields.

That's a lot.

That is a lot and you can ask any air crew. Quite a few told me that whichever way you were flying over Lincolnshire, whichever way you looked, you more often than not

18:30 could see an air field. In fact at Binbrook where we were I moved across the road to another air field, which was four miles away, and on the other side of Binbrook was an air field at Grimsby and on the other side there was at Kellston there was another air field at a place called Ludford Magna. So within that circuit was four air fields all within about four miles.

You would imagine that that would have been a heavily bombed area.

Well actually we didn't get very much

19:00 bombing actually. The only thing that I came across was at Coningsby and we came out of the mess one morning and, just had breakfast, and we heard this strange sound. It's funny how your ears get tuned to engines like they do to car engines and of course we got used to the engines on a Lancaster, which were Merlin engines, Rolls Royce Merlin engines, and I looked at the chap that I was with and this strange you know and the next minute from the distant from the

19:30 direction of Boston these two German aircraft shot across the air field, saw the markings on, and the next thing, these specks fell out of the aircraft and they were over in the area towards where the bomb dump was. Now we could never understand why afterwards there was all these people coming out of this mess and they just completely ignored you know they could have wrecked carnage on the entire field, these two aircraft, and luckily the bombs didn't go off. I think that, we liked to think afterwards, that whoever had

20:00 packed the stuff in those bombs were probably workers that had been you know commandeered from other countries and they didn't pack the bombs very well. Anyway they never went off and we learned later that both these aircraft had been shot down a little bit further north. There was a fighter station a bit further on the north that shot both of them down and one of the crews was killed and the other one were taken prisoners but the ones that were killed were given a full military funeral at Coningsby in the war

20:30 cemetery.

The Germans that were killed?

Yes. The air crew were killed and they did it I think they did it same for British air men where possible. They give them a full decent funeral.

There would have been a lot of decent funerals going on.

Oh yes, a lot. A lot.

How was the... what did you know of the way that German prisoners-of-war were treated?

Well I don't know about German prisoner-of-war in England, but I think

21:00 German prisoner-of-war were sent to a lot of camps in various parts of England. I know there was a big one in the Lake District. I don't think they were all that badly done too, very right. But I never I never, oh I'll tell you a funny thing about German prisoners-of-war too. We were coming out of Boston one day and we'd been for something and the chap that was with us said, "I can see some people in uniform up the road. They look like German uniforms" and we had curtains and when we got closer we found out it was a film crew.

21:30 They were making a film called One of our Aircraft is Missing and they filmed it with POWs in German uniforms were extras.

Lucky they didn't get shot.

That was that was that was well there was the police there and everything you know but it was rather strange that, but that was the only German uniform I ever saw. The ones that we shot down out the aircraft I never saw them. I know they were brought to the station and remember that I was told one of them got a little bit cocky with one of the air force guards so he sorted him out, but

22:00 I don't know where they were sent to.

So you arrive at the air field and you see your first Lancaster.

That's right, yes.

And what are your duties at that air field?

Well the first my first duty I think we were on the ambulance straight away. I worked on the crews and I took I took a crew up to an aircraft and I remarked to one of the ground crew, I said, "The pilot" I said, "He looks

22:30 very young." He said, "As a matter of fact how old are you?" I said, "I'm nineteen." He said "Well that's David Shannon. He's an Australian pilot and he's twenty." He was the first Australian I came across. So on the squadron there was quite a number of Australians. In fact when Guy Gibson moved to form the Dam Busters I think he took three Australian pilots with him. David Shannon was one. I think there was another lad called

23:00 'Burpy' and I've forgotten the name of the third one.

Do you know, do you remember what year that was of the Dam Busters?

'43. Yeah.

So around the same

Yeah.

Period?

Yeah and you see what happened at Coningsby was it was a pre-war air field, there was no run ways in. It was all grass. It wasn't really suitable for every aircraft because when you got a lot of heavy rain you had trouble with the aircraft getting bogged and so eventually we moved to a place

23:30 near Newark [Newark-on-Trent]. Place called Syston whilst the runways were put in. The whole squadron moved about the end of '43, '42 rather, and eventually they put the concrete run ways in Coningsby and Coningsby's still in use now actually with the Royal Air Force I think.

And what were you doing? What was your job?

Well I spent quite a bit of time on the air field ambulance. We did it was on a twenty four hour system. We did twenty four hours on, twenty four hours off and

24:00 sadly the first night I was on the ambulance we lost an aircraft just outside Boston. It blew up and the pilot was an Australian pilot called Jeff Appleyard and I went to a few crashes you know.

What training did you have to be attending crashed?

Well we had we had medical officers with us.

So you weren't

Medical orderlies. Yeah.

So you weren't specifically trained?

No. No.

No.

No I just drove the ambulance, that's all.

24:30 Some of the some of the things that were a bit lengthy. There was a lot of night flying training done, so of course we had to be on duty at the flying control all the time with the ambulance in case of any accidents and

There would have been a few.

Oh yes, because they were converting from twin engine aircraft to four engine aircraft.

And they were only young boys flying weren't they?

Yeah. Yeah and now, one of the things that did happen at Coningsby

25:00 whilst they had the Manchesters, the twin engine aircraft, which weren't very good, some of the wives of the senior officers had been allowed to go down to the air field to the flying control when the aircraft were returning from raids and tragically one of the aircraft had been very badly damaged and the pilot was trying to land the aircraft. The aircraft sort of leapt in the air a bit and twisted over and crashed and of course the crew were all

25:30 killed and the wives, one or two wives, were there. So the CO [Commanding Officer] said after that, "No more wives." They were living in the village actually you know the senior officers' wives. So from then on there was no more wives allowed to come down to the air field.

So you had to drive you would often go on ambulance duty.

Yeah.

To the crashes?

Yes. Yes. There was other jobs I did there as well. I did the crew buses and another job I did there, which was very unusual, was I went I collected pigeons believe it

You collected pigeons?

26:00 Yes I did. The reason was this. Each aircraft took a pigeon with them so that if they ditched anywhere in the sea they might be able to release a pigeon if they hadn't a been able to get a radio message out you know that they were ditching and I used to pick these pigeons up at the local police stations on the night there was gonna be raids and I never heard anything about anybody ever havin' their lives saved by these pigeons until recently I got a book out of the no longer

26:30 library and there was an account of the Hampton, that was a twin engine plane, that had ditched in the North Sea somewhere off somewhere off Grimsby or somewhere. They released this pigeon. The pigeon had flown back to base and the they got the pigeon in the loft and they sent a rescue team out and saved the crew. So someone had been saved by the pigeons and I think they discontinued the practice about '43 because

27:00 I think they thought it wasn't working. It would be very hard in emergency you know to release a bird like that when they're virtually trying to get out of the aircraft as fast as they could do. Another duty I was what we call the flashing beacon. It was like a great big light house and it was mounted on a four wheel trailer and what we used to do, we went out into the countryside, as a remote an area as we could find, and when the aircraft were returning from raids we would put this beacon

27:30 on. Now each station had a call sign, a call signal, and we would flash the beacon would flash the call sign. Now I drove the you know the beacon to its site. There was a corporal in charge, an electrician and a wireless operator and we took supplies with us to you know for meals and that and then the following morning of course we'd return back to base and if the German aircraft had followed our

28:00 aircraft back, which they did a lot at the end of raids, we were told to switch the beacon off bloody quickly. So that was another duty was a flashing beacon but eventually that was discontinued as more technology came along with you know with equipment inside the aircraft.

It must have been difficult for you having had such a passion for planes?

Yeah.

It must have been difficult for you at times to watch these planes roaring off...

Yes. Yes.

28:30 **From the air field.**

It was a strange sensation when raids were on because the squadron, probably there were twenty to thirty aircraft, and the preparation for a raid everybody was involved in it, didn't matter who you were, there were about three thousand people on that air field, maybe more maybe less. Right from the cooks you know the people in maintenance, the people in the offices, the people in the control, people in the bomb dumps, the WAAFS [Women's Auxiliary Air Force], the drivers, the WAAFS did a fulfilled a

29:00 lot of duties. So everybody in that on that air field was involved in the build up to that raid, which probably took part in night time because it was a night time bomber squadron, although they did do day light raids. So the preparation was there. Then once the last aircraft had taken off there was a sort of a quiet calm you know. The roar of the engines had gone and the air field became quiet again. Sometimes if it was early evening you could even hear the farmers

29:30 working in the fields nearby you know. Bringing in what they could of their harvest and over in the village you could hear the village clock chiming and you could see Tattershall Castle, that was a landmark near Coningsby, and Woodhall Spa.

'Cause the noise must have been tremendous before they went.

But the noise from the engines, yes the noise the build up the running the engines up was and then of course with Coningsby bein' as it was, they had to be very careful that they kept to the run way, to the

30:00 perimeter to the perimeter tracks you know that they didn't get stuck and…

What was it like waiting for them to come back?

Well it was very prolonged at times. If you could manage to get your head down, if we were on the ambulance of course we didn't even leave the flying control because in case somebody turned around and came back and they had any problems. So we always stayed there but we generally managed to get our head down for a little bit. We were allowed to go off and get a meal. Used to get down

30:30 the they always put meals on for the ground crew and then that waiting of course. Eventually did start returning. Depends who how far they'd been. I think the fuel load was about two and a half thousand

litres or something like that. Sometimes they went way down in southern Germany. That was probably about the long, they actually went to Italy on one or two raids and they refuelled somewhere else on the way back. They did a few trips into Italy from Coningsby.

Did you know ahead of time who wasn't coming back?

31:00 No. No.

So you would be waiting there at the tarmac?

Yeah. Yeah.

And you'd find out

Yeah what aircraft was in the circuit. Sometimes maybe we lost one aircraft, or two aircraft. It's a really very strange thing about the air crew; a lot of them are very superstitious. A lot of them carried momentums from their girlfriends. Scarves, lucky charms and

Did they have rituals of things?

Rituals. Yeah yes, they used to pee on the

31:30 wheel of the aircraft before they went. Things like that.

What's that supposed to do?

I don't know. It was just frustration. Just, just letting go. It's just a good luck thing you know. They often did it. I've seen them do it in groups but nobody bothered. I think even the WAAF drivers saw it, but 'course mind you they were in for a long flight you know and there was only a bit of a toilets and they never got chance to use it, so I suppose if they'd had that odd drink or two they shouldn't have had the night before, and they did do, yeah they had they had a they were alright.

32:00 They were fit enough for the flight.

And these were all bomber crews were they?

They were all bomber command. I spent three years with bomber command.

That must have been quite difficult, because the bomber crews had some of the highest casualties didn't they?

Yes we did and I think of about close on seven thousand Lancasters that were built by A.V. Rowe nearly half of them were lost. Just below half was lost. I think the casualty rate was probably 'round about sixty per cent. I think there's only the submarine service

32:30 that suffered a higher rate of casualties to bomber command.

Did you get very close to the crews?

Not to know them all by sight and name. You got to see the ones that'd been 'round more often than not. Guy Gibson had a dog, a black Labrador called Nigger.

Like in the film?

Yeah, that's right, and you used to see Nigger trottin' around. He was a bit of a scavenger

33:00 but he could sniff. If there was anythin' around any of the messes he'd be around and of course a lot of the crews used to give him well used to give them bits, bits of toast or whatever they could find and yeah, he used to trot around you know. Used to make hisself at home and sadly the night before the raid Nigger was killed outside Scampton. He was hit with hit with a truck or a car or something and the warrant officer told Guy Gibson and Guy Gibson said, "Wait 'til we've gone

33:30 and then bury Nigger." I think he mentioned that in his book.

It's funny the things that break your heart, isn't it?

Yes it is. It is indeed and unfortunately we did have problems with training exercises. I took a new crew out to an aircraft. The pilot was a Rhodesian pilot and I dropped them off at the aircraft and I went back to the crew hut and there was a young boy apprentice. The boy apprentices

34:00 were admitted in the air force at fifteen years of age. It was a scheme that was started before World War II and I think this lad would probably be about sixteen and he just said to me, "Have you taken the crew up to Jay?" Jay Jonner, the aircraft. So he said, "Have they gone yet?" I said, "No" I said, "They stood in a circle talking." He said, "I think they were waiting for me" he said, "I'm late." So I dashed up with him to the aircraft and I stood talking, the aircraft started to take off, and I stood talking to the

34:30 ah there was a flight sergeant he was a actually he was a Norwegian. He'd escaped to Britain. I've forgotten his last name, and as the aircraft started to leave the air field he said, "There's somethin' wrong" and two of the engines cut out and the pilot started to circle the air field. Turned 'round to come

back, but he never made it, and we saw it go down just outside the air field. So we dashed

35:00 in the truck very hard and by time we got there the front of the aircraft had gone. The rear gunner was still alive. Quite a lot of people had arrived by then and they got the rear gunner out but actually he died in hospital. So that crew never even got on operations. It was just an accident. Something went wrong somewhere and also the boy apprentice went with them.

It all seems horribly futile.

Yeah.

Doesn't it?

35:30 Oh yes. Yeah.

And did you so you were a driver of the crews to the bombers?

Yeah. Yes we were with the crews quite a lot.

What kind of mood what kind of mood would they be in as they when you were driving them to go on a raid?

Ah when they came back they were always fairly quiet.

When they came back

Yeah came back, very quiet yeah.

They were quiet.

Very quiet, yeah.

What were they like as you drove them?

Oh they were larrikin. Boisterous. Playin' up.

Their mood was up when...

Yeah, mood was yes. Sometimes we used trucks. Sometimes we had crew buses.

36:00 There were a third bus that had about twelve seats in but they were like a small coach and of course they put all the gear in and everything else and whatever aircraft they were at. We got to know we got to know where the aircraft were, where the dispersal was, because an air field is quite large. It were about three or four miles to go right 'round it you know and we just generally dropped 'em off at the aircraft. They never said very much. You know I mean a bit of the occasional

Were there nerves do you think?

Not all that bad. Sometimes one of them would sit in the front. The captain of the aircraft very often sat in the front

36:30 seat and the crew sat in the back and they just chatted a little bit about one or two things, but never discussed anything to do with the raid or anything like that.

'Cause the likelihood was quite high that a lot of them wouldn't come back.

Oh yes. Yes, it was. It was. In fact I eventually finished up at a place called Kelston near Binbrook and on the night of March 30th, 31st 1944 that squadron lost nearly a third of the squadron and the following day

37:00 walking around that air field and seeing the anti-dispersals. I mean you'd been used to seeing one or two. A third of the squadron had gone you know. It was very, very sombre on that station for a long time. That it was about ninety six aircraft lost that night.

That's an enormous amount.

Well everything went wrong with the weather forecast. The cloud cover that they were given forecasted for didn't materialise. The skies cleared over, over ah Dusseldorf I think it was and

37:30 the German night parties virtually had a ball and funnily enough that night I went to pick some detonators up from a bomb dump that we used a few miles away and I can remember the night how clear it was even over England you know, it was a full moon. I could even see the aircraft climbing in the night sky, you see make out heading over. So what it must have been like over Germany I don't know but at the other places, places like Coningsby, yes we had lost

38:00 we lost aircraft there. Crews came and went.

How did they bounce back from when you were at the field we've been talking about, how did the crews bounce back when you lost a plane, or did they just not talk about it?

They didn't talk about it very much. See also sometimes too, see I've got a mate now that lives at

Mitcham. Now he was on 625 Squadron. His name's Ross McDonald. He was

38:30 a rear gunner. Now on the night, I don't know it was the raid that I'm speaking of but it was on one raid, um he was having rouble with his legs and they kept him in sick quarters and Ross' crew went with a spare rear gunner and they were lost and Ross didn't know about it 'til the MO [Medical Officer] came and told him in the morning. Now in the meantime Ross had met a girl in Manchester, Joyce,

39:00 and they went up to Gretna Green to get married but they Gretna Green had been closed. You could get married there at one time without a licence and whatever. So they came back. He kept in touch with Joyce then Joyce heard that Ross had been killed along with his crew. The war ended and Joyce married another former Australian air force lad. She came to live in Australia with him.

39:30 Their marriage fell through and somewhere or other she got to hear that Ross was still alive because she'd had word from his someone else that he the air field that he had been killed. So they remarried. So eventually, they're still down at Mitchum there, she married the lad that she was originally meant to marry.

Miracles do happen.

So there you are, yes.

That's astounding.

Yes. I think with a lot of the men, a few of them were married, a few of the air

40:00 crew, but not many. Most of them were single. A lot of them had sweethearts, which is fair enough. They met a girls in Grimsby or Louth or Lincoln. They were all places that they always used to make for when they had any time off. You never wasted any time getting off the station if you had a bit of time to spare, because you never know what'd happen.

So they partied while they could.

They partied whilst they could and on one occasion at Coningsby we had what we call a stand down. A stand down meant that they'd had two or three nights on operation and they were given a

40:30 break. So I happened to be on duty, because there were still flights coming in and out, and I noticed a group of air cadets came onto the air field in

Actually Eric, we'll finish this tape

Yeah, sorry.

Ah this story on the next tape. No don't be sorry.

That's alright, yeah.

Tape 3

00:41 **Eric you were just talking before the break about the night stand with the air cadets.**

Yes. Yes, that's right. Um in the air training corps, yes I was with the air training corps. Actually

01:00 the air training corps in the time I was in to it, it was actually run by I think about two or three former World War I air force officers. So I think you know they pretty well understood our way our interest in aircraft. There was a bit of gliding available but I didn't manage to get into it. That's about the only flying that was done and of course when the war came along the air fields were very hard to be admitted to. Although one incident did occur

01:30 involving air cadets and it was, surprisingly it was at Coningsby, and it was one of these rare sunny afternoons that summer afternoons that you would ever get in Britain. It was a beautiful day and this squadron had had a stand down because they had about two or three nights' continual operations. So they were given a rest and it all seemed so peaceful and quiet and you could even hear one of the sky larks singing over the air field. It's amazing how those birds ever stuck around air fields, but they did. You know all the

02:00 noise from the aircraft. They still stayed there and I saw this bus pull up near a new aircraft that had just been brought in as a replacement for one that had been lost the night before and a group of air cadets got out of the bus. I'd seen them there before. I think they come from somewhere around Boston and ah there was a corporal in charge, a Royal Air Force corporal in charge of them. These air cadets piled into this new Lancaster and we were just underneath the balcony of the flying control tower and I could hear

02:30 somebody talking over the top, a couple of flying control people just having a bit of a chat, and it was all very leisurely and very quiet and hard to realise the war was on and the next minute this Lancaster

started to sink towards the ground and the next minute these cadets shot out of this aircraft like a group of frightened rabbits. So I don't know what had happened. Whether one of them had touched the under carriage lever or what, but the language from up above you know what were peaceful and quiet one minute, next second there's cars comin'

03:00 from everywhere and they just stood in a group outside the aircraft and the Lanc [Lancaster aircraft] just settled down on its on its fuselage, on its belly. Anyway to cut a long story short, I didn't see any air cadets there for a long time after that. So I don't know what went on and of course the corporal that was in charge of them, he got posted. So

So they'd been fiddling with something they ...?

I don't know. They must a I was a bit surprised really that they were allowed inside a new air inside a new aircraft like that because you know there was quite a bit of equipment then that was

03:30 pretty well but I think they were trying to encourage them to go into the air force and it was all part of giving them the training but and that squadron actually, every air cadet squadron had a number. The one that I was in was number 80 Bolton Squadron. I believe it's still functioning in England. They were up to a few years ago. So they'd been going for quite a long, long time.

So had they damaged the plane at all by resting it on its belly?

I don't know what happened after that. I don't

04:00 know what happened after that. Obviously they'd have did a lot of jackin' equipment. They'd raise the aircraft. It had had a once before I'd seen a Lancaster do that, just sink to the ground in its dispersal. Sometimes it's not necessarily that someone's ah touched anything. Maybe an additional weight where it shouldn't have been or something like that could just move something and the one that went in dispersal went down on its own but it's a pretty rare occurrence really. I've got a feeling with so many inside an aircraft somebody bein' boys would

04:30 couldn't keep their hands to themselves but there should a been the NCO should have been inside with them anyway supervising things but air cadets from time to time did get onto air fields and on the in flight one or two did get killed in flying accidents unfortunately but I didn't see them a lot anywhere else. I think it was only at Coningsby I ever saw cadets come onto the air field.

You mentioned that people'd come out to

05:00 **jack up the plane. Does the Lancaster have the capacity to use its landing gear to actually force the plane up or wouldn't it be strong enough to push the plane up itself if it**

No.

Pushed the landing gear up?

No it had to they'd have to jack it up first to see if the under carriage had been damaged. It's quite a strong under carriage really on a Lancaster. It was very well made. Very well made aircraft and I've seen quite a few where the you know the under carriage has been damaged and it's just collapsed they've landed quite easily on the

05:30 belly of the aircraft. Surprisingly enough, this retirement village that my sister's in at Hope Valley is a Lutheran retirement village. There's a man in there he's in his probably about his mid-eighties and his name is Douglas Taylor and he was an aircraft engineer for AV Rhodes in Manchester and he is the man that classified G George fit for service. Inside G George, I've told them about this

06:00 at the war museum, inside this inside G George there's a brass plate, so Mr Taylor told me, with his inspection number on. You know when they said it was okay to leave the factory? And his number's 919. He's not in very good health now at present. He's in the retirement home village but he was the one that okayed G George.

You'd mentioned that the weather played havoc with...

06:30 Oh my goodness, yes.

The flight.

Oh very often.

And that you'd lost so many lives...

Yeah.

Over Germany when...

That's right, with bad weather.

How had that ever affected the ground crew? Did that ever affect you as an ambulance driver or?

Yes.

The fog?

Yes, because there, sorry.

No, that's fine.

The weather um that part of England up the east coast was notorious for mists and fogs.

07:00 I mean I know they very often got bad weather over Europe, storms and things like that, but all too often along that part of Britain, 'round Lincolnshire, very often the weather closed in earlier than expected and very often a lot of the aircraft got diverted to other air fields in other parts of the country and I spoke to different air crew and they've always told me, well not very, very often told me that in very often they found that once they get a few hundred feet above the ground, just clear

07:30 the mist and fog, the sky cleared. It was quite good visibility. It was just some part to do with the sea. You know the mists and fogs that very often came rolling in and Lincolnshire got its share of it, of the fog, of the weather.

Did you ever have difficulty with the fog yourself as a driver?

Yes indeed, I did. We got a call one night there's an aircraft had a casualty on board. It was on the ambulance

08:00 and what we generally used to do, as the aircraft came off the end of the run way it came past you know flying controls to whatever dispersal they were in. The idea was always to try and get the aircraft in the dispersals you know to leave it clear, the perimeter, for other aircraft and I was told there was a they had a wounded crew member on board and we followed the aircraft with the MO and myself and we were both looking and we couldn't see any sign of damage. So we followed the aircraft into dispersal and we waited

08:30 'til they switched the engines off and then the crew the door opened and one of the crew came out and what had happened was, the flight engineer used to stand alongside the pilot and a piece of flak had hit the side of the aircraft and luckily he must have had his collar up on his flying jacket and the piece of shrapnel had gone through his flying jacket and lodged in this throat. So the MO took a look at it and he said, "It's"

09:00 you know, "It's going to be a tricky operation" and, "I" he didn't have the equipment to do to deal with it on the base. So he said "The best thing we can do is send him to the military hospital", which was at Rothley about twelve, fourteen miles away. I'd been there before actually and by now it were probably be getting on to be about four o'clock in the morning, early morning, and of course the fog had started to roll in. So the MO said, "I'll put another orderly in the front with you and two orderlies in the back to stay with the air

09:30 man", his name was Jack, and I wasn't real worried about traffic, because I knew there'd be very little traffic 'round at that time, especially with petrol rationing. The thing I was worried about was that part of Lincolnshire you've got the dykes and the dykes are on each side of the road. That part of England actually is called New Holland in parts because it's so similar to parts of Holland itself and that was what I was more worried about was these dykes and of course I'd only got restriction on lights with

10:00 the ambulance. So what I did was, I didn't I didn't use the high beam or anything like that. It had a fog lamp on and I more or less just used the fog lamp and of course I set off to go to Rothley and only a few weeks before we'd had a pretty bad accident where four WAAFs in a car got in one of these dykes. They'd been to a some do at one of the messes and I think two or three of them had been killed but anyway I eventually get to Rothley. It'd be about oh probably about six

10:30 or seven o'clock in the morning. I know it was coming daylight and we saw him safely of course inside the hospital and he was operated on and I didn't see anything more about it 'til a bit later, about oh it might a been a week or two later, the MO sent for us. The flight lieutenant and his wife sent a letter to the CO and he'd passed it onto the MO and it was thanking the

11:00 crew for getting him up to Rothley and he'd been sent on leave. He'd got two weeks leave, sick leave. I think he came back to the station. I saw him once or twice and then I didn't see him after that. So that was that was very nice you know. He'd survived and the operation had been a success. We had our breakfast when he'd been deliv, ah fixed up at Rothley and we made our way back and we got a good night's good day's rest after that. So yes, fog conditions weren't the

11:30 best.

How long had it taken you to get to the hospital? Was it six hours?

About oh no, about two to three hours.

Two or three hours.

Normally about half an hour to four minutes for

So it'd normally be about half an hour?

Oh yes. Yeah no, driving.

So you were travelling very slowly.

Oh yeah. Well I mean there's nothing to prevent the dyke, there's no barriers or anything at the side there was no there was no cats' eyes. Cats' eyes weren't I don't think they were only just beginning to come out then. I don't I think there was a probably a white line in the middle of the road and that was about it, but there was no worry with traffic or

12:00 anything like that. Never saw a thing and it were just a case of following me instinct and you know. The orderly was good, the side of me, kept an eye on things on the left but it was a long very, very slow journey but to get there safely, that was the main thing and also another thing too that was good, the crews in the aircraft had a small first aid kit and they'd given the flight engineer a shot of morphine and there was a rest bed inside the most of the aircraft. Just behind

12:30 the main spur in the aircraft behind where the wireless operator used to sit. So they'd made him comfortable and put him on the rest bed and they'd had a good flight back. Well they hadn't had any evasive action or anything like that to take and the pilot had made a good landing with the aircraft so he landed safely.

It worked out as well as it could have.

It worked out alright, yes, and yet other aircraft you'd see aircraft badly damaged you know parts of parts of the wing hanging off or parts of the fuselage and yet

13:00 all the crew were unhit. They'd had no suffered no injuries and yet just a freak thing like that. Just a piece of shrapnel.

So was Jack in much pain on the way to the hospital?

No because he was sedated. Well I and of course I didn't know what was going on in the back of the ambulance anyway. No, I he'd he was made quiet. You know with the MO had a quick look at him. I don't think he I don't think we even got him in the sick quarters. He just checked him out at the air field. I think his idea was to get him into the military hospital as soon as he could do.

13:30 It was quite a big hospital at Rothley. It was used by all services I think. As a matter of fact I think Guy Gibson went there at one stage. He had a bit of a break down and there was you know facilities for things like that and

So they had facilities for shell shock and

Yeah for everything there. Not it wasn't the biggest in Britain but it was a big one for northern England. I don't know whether it's still used or not now. It's pre-war hospital, quite a big hospital actually.

Was that common

14:00 **for you to be driving an ambulance and the patient would be relatively under control?**

Well yes. There's always more than generally there's only one orderly and well in emergency anything like that you know I mean he got two more orderlies down to the air field pretty quick and it was normally there's only one and the driver, that's all.

So could you tell me about

14:30 **your actual ambulance? What the was the cabin attached to the main section? Could you see...**

Yeah, yeah.

Anything what was going on?

The ambulances were made by a company called Albion, the big manufacturers in Britain, and the ambulance section at the back had two stretchers in, one on each side. Medical equipment was mainly just blankets and sedation equipment and things like that. There was never any major surgery carried out on any ambulances or anything like that.

15:00 If anybody was injured they got them in the hospital on the station as quick as they could do and treated them there.

And you'd never be driving civilians?

No, never. No. No. It was all air force property.

Did you have red crosses painted on your ambulance?

Yes the ambulance was

Yes?

Yes, the ambulance was marked with a red cross, yeah. They were good. They were good ambulances actually. They were very heavy and very sturdy but they weren't very fast you know. They were inclined to be a little bit top heavy actually to drive but once you got used to them they were okay.

Did any ambulance drivers that you know of lose their life in bombings?

Well I'll tell you what they don't but very nearly. When we left Coningsby we went to another place called Syston because they were putting the grass run ways in at Coningsby and I was on the ambulance there at Syston as well and we did twenty four hours on, twenty four hours off. So what I generally

16:00 tried to do was, if I wasn't too tired I'd get outta the way for the day. We often went to see a film or something like that. The nearest town to Syston was Newark and I went out, went and had a meal. Went to the pictures and on the way back to the camp, back to Syston, it was a few miles out of Newark. Between Newark and Nottingham [Leicester]. There suddenly was a flash, very brilliant flash, and a bang and I thought, "Oh somethin's happened" you know

16:30 and on the station. When I got on the base I found out that an aircraft had caught fire. There was operations on that night and the crew had got out. They got out of the aircraft very, very quickly. They saw there was nothing they could do to stop the fire. In the meantime the fire engine was ahead of the ambulance. The ambulance was behind, a little bit behind, for some reason or other but the I think the where the fire engine was based was nearer to the actual air field itself

17:00 and just as the ambulance got as the fire engine got near the part of the bomb load blew up and two of the fire men was killed. One of them was from near where I lived. He came from Berry, and the ambulance was a bit behind. I think there was one of the medics in the ambulance was injured but the rest of them survived and the CO, CO of that squadron, ah the station commander there was a fella called Gus Walker and he was a former rugby

17:30 international and he came out to one of the Anzac marches a few years ago but it was in Sydney. So that was a case of I could have been on the ambulance that night you know. I mean they were alright the crew as it happened, but I was off duty and that happened a lot with even with ground crew you know. Things went wrong, bombs detonated when they shouldn't do. The delayed action bombs were very, very tricky for the armourers to handle. They were very, very

18:00 very delicate. You had to be careful how you dealt with them and they were from time to time there were accidents involving bombs going off when they shouldn't do but it wasn't a very common occurrence, but it did happen. We met an aircraft one night and we always waited 'til they switched the engines off in the dispersal and then they always opened the bomb doors and the pilot opened the bomb doors and a canister in the centre of the bombs fell out and they were only about weighed about four pound. They're like a long pencil these

18:30 incendiary bombs, but none of them detonated, but everybody made a quick retreat in case they caught fire, but that's just something you know they don't go up, but they're not released when they just it had jammed the canister or something. It hadn't cleared the aircraft when they were over the target. So things like that you know did happen.

Did you have to assist the orderlies with putting patients into the ambulance?

Yes. Yes we did but we never did any treating or anything like that. We had to leave it to them.

19:00 **When men were quite badly injured**

Yeah.

Or there was any danger of them losing their life, what were the kinds of things that they were saying to you and the orderly? Was did they ever express want for you to pass on messages to loved ones or were they always confident they'd survive?

No. No. In many cases most of them were mainly unconscious anyway. They'd, as I say, they'd very often been sedated and from the aircraft. The main thing was to get them to station sick quarters as fast as we could do.

19:30 They were on the crash outside the air field, you see. He was alive, but he was barely alive and he was going blue, the tail gunner, and he never said anything and he eventually died. The casualty rate was probably about sixty per cent amongst ground crew. The tour was generally about thirty operation flights. If they got through the first five they'd done you know

20:00 they'd got away to a fairly good start. If they got half way through the tour well then they weren't doing too badly but when they got towards the end of the tour that of course that got a bit of a worrying time for them and on more that one occasion they'd probably been on the next to last trip and they've gone down. It just I from what I've from what I've heard from different air crew and different pilots, some pilots had a habit of sort of jinkin' from side to side when they were over the enemy territory, but some aircraft some

20:30 pilots just flew straight and level. They wouldn't chance it. So whether sometimes it's had a, you know had a chance of keeping them making it any better for them or not I don't know.

Would those would the pilots and ground crew express those feelings to you or to others that they were worried?

They'd tell ya if they had a rough trip but you see when the when an aircraft landed if we were doing the anything like the crew buses, not the ambulance, the first thing we had to do was as soon as that aircraft landed was

21:00 we had to get them into interrogation. They had a big area in the air field and of course waiting to interrogate them was senior officers in the air force. They'd ask 'em all questions about what the weather was like. Whether what they'd encountered. Had they encountered any heavy anti-aircraft fire. Had they any trouble with any enemy aircraft and that interrogation would go on for quite a while. I mean these guys had been probably been flying for six, eight, ten hours

21:30 and you know they were just about all in but that was the first thing they had to do before they had a meal or anything else. They had to go off for this interrogation and then once the interrogation was finished then they'd probably go for a bit of a something to eat but I think mainly they just made their way back to their billets and got into bed.

And where were you living?

Sorry?

Where were you living?

Well in Coningsby, in the pre-war stations like Coningsby and Binbrook, we had you know we

22:00 had like a dormitory and at each of the dormitory there was one crew member, air crew member, used to live in a place of his own. I think they did that to give them to be in with somebody else but on the satellite air fields they were just Nissen huts. These were the ones that were built during the war. Places like Kelston. They were just like corrugated huts and they were a lot different there. You didn't have the luxury and comforts that you had on the pre-war stations. So and they were very widespread, the air

22:30 fields. At Kelston we had bicycles to get around. If you were workin' on the ground crew the ground crews always all had a bicycle to get around the air field on because there wasn't always transport available and it used to be quite a common thing for someone to borrow somebody's bicycle when they shouldn't do and people were forever picking their bikes up in places where they didn't intend losing them and in one or two of the villages they've even pinched the village constable's bicycle and he used to come back up to the air field in the morning and collect his bike and

23:00 there's no bike. So anything that was transport, you know what I mean? And the crew buses were going 'round. There was transport goin' 'round the air field most of the time and from the MT [Motor Transport] section you know the and from time to time we'd go down to the bomb dumps to pick up different types of bombs. I think the biggest one we picked up was an eight tonne bomb. That was generally they were about four thousand pound bomb but these were the big ones and they eventually got the twelve tonne bombs

23:30 but they had special aircraft for them.

This was at Syston?

Yes Syston and Coningsby. We had a big massive bomb dump at a place called Kirton-In-Lindsey and that was just outside Lincoln and one day we'd been to Kirton-In-Lindsey to pick up some mines. Now they weren't like the mines that you had in the navy, the round ones with the horns on. These were aerial mines. They were sort of pencil shaped and you had a parachute at one end

24:00 and when the aircraft went on mine laying operations and released these mines over areas where they knew the German ships would be you know to try and sink them and I had a Cockney fellow with me. Used to call him 'Spud'. I think his name's Spudhurley or something. He was a bit of a larrikin. So we had the bomb tenners with a big trailer at the back. We had four mines on the front trailer and four on the back and these mines weighed about sixteen hundred pound. So they were pretty big and

Each?

Each. Yes

24:30 sixteen hundred pound each, sorry. Yes. So we had quite a load on and we were comin' up this hill out of Lincoln and when we were at the bomb dump you always had to make sure that you chucked these things properly because you know the movement of the trailers could very often get them rolling a bit and this Cockney lad, Spud, he mustn't have chucked his properly and we got half way up this hill and they started to roll, these mines, and of course one of them smashed straight through the trailer at the side. It was only like

25:00 a small and rolled to the side of the road and they weren't there was no detonators on them or anything like that. There's no detonators on and comin' up the hill we passed a cyclist comin' up and I remember seein' him and he's walkin' up this hill with his bicycle. So when he got up to where we were he said, "Oh we rang the police at Coningsby to get the crane you know to come out to us and he said, "Can I help you lads?" So you know he stopped. We tried to move them with planks to put these two safes that had rolled off at the side of the road

25:30 and he said, "You mind me askin' you what these are?" So Spud says, "They're mines" and this chap said, "Oh are they?" And he carried on for awhile then he said, "Mines?" He said, "Do you mean mines like the mines?" And Spud said, "Yes" he said, "they're aerial mines" and this fella said, "Bloody hell." He jumped on his bicycle and peddled up the hill and he disappeared in the distance and we're shouting to him, "They're harmless, they're not detonated" you know but off he went and

26:00 I've been up that hill a few times after that. I never ever saw anybody riding their bicycle up there.

You'd warned them off.

Well they must a thought they were gonna blow up you know but they weren't, they were quite safe and anyway to cut a long story short, I think Spud got a week's detention for his negligence. He was a real die-hard Cockney. He was always in trouble you know. Not doin' his job properly.

What were you doing with any spare time you had when you weren't when the ambulance weren't being used or?

26:30 Well I was…

Other than the movies?

Yeah, sorry. I was very lucky really because in two or three of the villages the village people were very good. They took us into their homes and that I didn't actually meet anybody at Coningsby. At another station I was at, Fulbeck, the people there were very nice. I used to go to their house and have a few

27:00 hours with them. Used to be nice taking sitting in the kitchen at night you know away from the air field. You'd have a bit of a song and a chat and they were farm people of course and very often 'round the walls of the kitchens you could see the hams and the bacon and stuff hanging up that they had to live off and they always put a meal on for us and sometimes if you were, in summertime, if you felt that way inclined you had a bit of time off you could go and help the local farmers. To help them with

27:30 a bit of hay making and things like that and very often they'd give you a couple of eggs or something like that, which was a delicacy in those days. You know getting an egg was it was like gold. So they were pretty good that way but more often than not I'd probably go into one of the towns. I'd go into Boston or Lincoln and probably see a movie. Sometimes I'd probably find the sometimes one or two service clubs you could go in. They'd put a meal on for us. They were run by the women's voluntary service.

28:00 You could get a bit of a meal there. Quite good. Reasonable and then we'd probably make our way back. You had to be in by midnight back at the base. One night we all went into Boston. There was an air raid whilst we were there and it was more down towards the dock end of the town and some of the personnel from the base stayed behind to help with the rescue work and when they got back to camp the following morning they were all put on a charge for not

28:30 bein' back at midnight, although they'd been helping you know with the raid and that's how they were, the services. They should a been back there and they should a left the rescue work to other people. Oh nobody was happy about that, but that's the way it was.

How did military discipline sit with you?

Well I've always been one for peace and quiet but I actually did get three days suspension. A black rote on my copy book. Again, ambulance.

29:00 This was at a place called Fulbeck. Fulbeck was a funny place really. It was a satellite to Cranwell. Now Cranwell was probably the biggest air force station in Britain before World War II and they had this other place built about four miles away, Cranwell Fulbeck, as a sort of an emergency air field for them you see, and I'd done the twenty four hours on the ambulance and I was in the ablutions having a wash and clean up and freshen up. I always liked to do that before I went to bed and who should march into the

29:30 ablutions but the student station warrant officer. So he said, "Do you know there's a gas practice gas drill in operation and why aren't you in your gas mask?" I was give him the story, I'd just come off duty, and he said well, "Look" he said, "If there'd been a raid and the Germans had dropped gas they wouldn't a been concerned about whether you'd come off duty or not." So he said, "I'm reporting you." So he did. He reported me and I had to go before the CO of the station and

30:00 you marched in to see the CO and you would have thought he was the most fearsome looking man you could ever wish to see. He had a big moustache, very swarthy complexions and believe it or not, he came from Chile. His name was De Satcha and I thought, "Now I'm in for it" and he spoke to me as quiet as anything. He was a gem and he said, "Well I've got to do something." He give me three days suspension. So every night at six o'clock I had to report

30:30 with full kit to the guard house to do my you know what we call detention or ‘jankers’ or whatever they called it and as it happened was, one of the policemen one of the service policemen was going out with the mate of a girl that I was going with. So I had toast and other luxuries whilst I was in the guard house with him. So I didn't do so badly out of it.

What did you have to do in the guard house?

Well it was like, see it wasn't actually a guard it was like a guard room. It's not like the military prison or anything like that. Very often

31:00 when you got detention it wasn't so much detention inside but you had to be in full kit and whatever they found for you to do you had to do and on this occasion I just had to report to the service policeman but I didn't I didn't really have to do anything. I just I got away with it virtually. That's what it boiled down to and that was the only three days I ever got and I noticed on my service record it wasn't even entered on there. I got a good report. So I must a been alright.

What

31:30 **news were you getting about the rest of the war at this point in time?**

Well we didn't seem to get many local papers really, unless you went in the village for them and you see even then getting in and off the air field wasn't easy. You more or less had to have a pass. You couldn't just get out. When you were going out you know you had to show your ID [Identification] and all that. We did get information from time to time from radios on the base like people had at

32:00 home, civilians, about how things were goin'. We very often got an update following day on the raid, how many aircraft had been lost and whatever had happened. That was the only information we really got. As I said before, sometimes on an air field when everything was quiet and a stand down, if you hadn't a seen an aircraft around it was hard to realise it was war time you know but mind you, the weather wasn't always like that. I mean very often the weather was very, very bad.

32:30 **You said that eggs were like gold.**

They were like gold.

But what were you eating on base? What was your...?

Scrambled egg. We had scrambled egg and sometimes on the odd occasion you'd get bacon. Bit a mash or anything like that. It was a meal.

So that would be your average meal?

That would be an average meal, yes. Some days oh odd occasions we got spam. On a Friday we very often got a piece of Spam [tinned meat], which was a real luxury. Got Spam. I love Spam

33:00 and of course when we lived with the Americans we had everything. It was different again. So for a few months we lived like lords. That was on another air field.

So you moved with 106 Squadron to Syston

Yes.

In '42?

That's right. The end of '42. No about September '42.

And that's when you were with the Americans?

No went with went from Syston to Fulbeck

33:30 just before Christmas '42 I think it was and then there was very little doing at Fulbeck. It was so quiet and so different after Syston because it wasn't a bomber air field. It wasn't operational at that time.

So what

It was just

Sorry. What was Syston like, yeah. Could you tell me about that? How long were you there?

Syston was very they moved to Syston about August, September '42. I was only there about three months. About November I think I left. Syston was very busy, 'cause there was two squadrons there.

34:00 There's 106 Squadron there and 61 Squadron. So they altogether'd be anything between forty and sixty aircraft operating from Syston. It was a very, very big place and that was a pre-war station too and once or twice whilst they were at Syston if an aircraft was badly damaged and they couldn't make it back to base they very often tried to land down at south coast and on at least a couple of occasions I had to ground crew down by truck

34:30 to get these aircraft serviced and fit to fly them back to the base and I think the first time I went down there was a corporal in charge and then there was a fitter, mechanic, electrician, instrument repairs. About six of us went down to this place down on the south coast. Place near not far from Brighton. Place called Ford and the corporal I was with he said, "If we go through

35:00 High Wickham" he said, "I live in High Wickham." He said, "I can fix these buds" the ‘BM’ as he called them. He said, "I can fix 'em up with accommodation for the night." He said, "If you like you can come

and stay with me at our place." So I said, "Alright." So we went to where he lived and the bed that I was gonna get for the night was actually on the settee in the lounge downstairs and all night I could hear this creaking from upstairs. So I thought, "I know why you've brought me home for the night." So anyway the following morning we set off

35:30 down to the south coast and we got the aircraft fixed up right for the crews to fly it back and that happened on a couple of times, down right down to southern England. That's the only time I'd ever been down in southern England up 'til then. I'd never been down there before. So it was something quite different. So that was the thing being a transport driver, you got all sorts of jobs you see, MT drivers. We got trips out to different places to pick things up and two or three times the crew used to do what they called dinghy drill

36:00 and the idea was that if they had to leave an aircraft in emergency, if they had to ditch the aircraft in the sea, they had to learn how to get out of the aircraft as fast as they could do into dinghies and unfortunately a Lancaster wasn't the best of aircrafts for getting out of because the exits weren't very good on it. Not like the Halifax [bomber], you had more room to get out of, and we took them down to Grimsby, to the docks there and they had an air sea rescue launch there and this launch was used

36:30 of course to pick anybody up in the sea. So I got permission to go out with them on this air sea rescue launch and watch them do dinghy drill, which is very interesting, and I think the launches could get up to a speed of about thirty five knots. So they could move very, very, very fast. So that was that was another thing too.

Did they have a motor on their escape boats?

No nothing. Just a dinghy.

Just a dinghy?

Just like the dinghies like you see in the pools now. That's all. A lot of them got in the dinghies and didn't survive. They died from exposure.

37:00 They were never found and they died. Or a lot of them didn't even get into the dinghies. The aircraft went down too quickly. The chance of getting out of an aircraft, you'd need about four minutes before it finally sank but not much longer and with all that heavy clothing on and whatever part of the aircraft they had to get out of they would be very, very lucky indeed to make it into a dinghy, but it did happen. Some did make it. They went into dinghies and did survive but they weren't in

37:30 very good condition when they were picked up more often than not.

What are your most strong memories of Syston? Were there any particular incidents that occurred there?

No, other than that night when the when the aircraft blew up. Not really a great deal. From Syston we used to go into Nottingham quite a lot and the ratio of in Nottingham was about eighteen girls to every man. So you can understand why Nottingham was very popular and but I didn't have any love life

38:00 in Nottingham. I used to just go into Nottingham for the pictures or anything like that. I was a bit on the shy side I think and so yes, we got the bus into Nottingham and then used to come back to Syston at night. There was one or two shows on the camp but I can't remember many. Most of the time you just and then you made your own entertainment. It was always good to get off the camp for awhile you know and of course if you were off the camp you couldn't be commandeered for anything else as long as you were back to time.

38:30 One of the fellas who was in the same billet as me, fella called Sam, he got very involved with a girl in Nottingham and he got more and more in love every time they met and of course leave passes were few and far between. Occasionally you might get forty eight hour pass and he came up with a brilliant idea. We used to have a what we for we used to have a car that used to carry all the waste from

39:00 the you know the ablutions and that. Used to be disposed of in another place and Sam got to know the two fellas that worked this waste truck. So what he did was, he had a pair of overalls which he put on over his uniform there in between the bins on the truck in return for a few cigarettes and once the truck got out of the off the base of course they discarded the overalls and they arranged for him to pick him up comin' back because he was what they call

39:30 an aircraft and general duties. He was one of these fellas who used to seemed to wander around the air field doing nothing. You could never understand what he was there for you know. "Who are you?" Sort a thing and this girl got more and more worried about him eventually being picked up. So she wrote a letter askin' the CO for leniency. So on this particular occasion when Sam got back they were waiting for him and I think he got about fourteen days for it or something like that, but it was a ruse that he got on, you know putting the overall on and then coming back with the overall on. Then when he got

40:00 somewhere in the a remote part of the air field on the base, take your overalls off and off he went. So things like that went on.

Did they stay together?

I never found out. I got moved on. I wasn't there all that long at Syston. I went across the road, a few miles away to Fulbeck and it was just a training station was Fulbeck and it was at Fulbeck I got my chance to do a bit of flying because as long as you got a checked or a clearance that you had you know you had taken your

40:30 you were goin' of your own free will. First flight I arranged was in a small aircraft and the pilot that took me up I always remember, he was one of the biggest pilots I'd ever seen. He was well over six foot and he took it on an air test and when the aircraft landed I'd been real and surely violently sick. So the ground crew weren't very happy about it. I think it cost me about half a crown whilst they cleaned the aircraft up, the floor of the aircraft up, but I was determined to keep on flying.

41:00 So little while later I got a chance to fly in one of the Wellington bombers that they used for training.

We might just pick that up on the next tape.

Yeah.

Tape 4

00:44 Anyway that's...

So we were talking Eric about you got a second chance to have a fly and you weren't going to let your previous vomiting etcetera...

No. Oh no, no, no.

Stop you.

This time was in a Wellington. It was they had these were aircraft that had been used

01:00 on operations but now they were just used for training flights and it was lovely. We did about two hour trip over Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and whatever and I could see the crew goin' about different training exercises in the aircraft. So this was I really enjoyed that. It was a beautiful aircraft to fly in and about a week later a group of senior officers arrived at Fulbeck for a refresher course. I think actually there was a group captain amongst 'em.

01:30 There might even have been somebody higher than him amongst 'em and I think there was one or two wing commanders. I think there was about five of 'em on this refresher exercise and something went wrong, terribly wrong, and the aircraft crashed and they were all killed and I came on duty this in the afternoon, about tea time for some reason, at Fulbeck and there was all these staff cars lined up and I said to one of the personnel I said. "What are these cars here for?" He said. "A matter of fact

02:00 they're going to have to be driven back to the bases." They'd come in their own cars, the staff officers had driven themselves. The aircraft's gone down and they've all been killed. That was the Wellington that I'd been on. So I don't know what went wrong. It could be they'd probably been changing positions in the aircraft you know from the flying control, 'cause there's no dual controls in this or anything like that. It was only one dual control column. Whether there'd been some change over on the engines or something like that and the aircraft went straight down. It crashed into some fields somewhere in

02:30 one of the counties somewhere. So they lost that aircraft, but most of the aircraft at Fulbeck, they were you know, as I say, they were just aircraft that Manchesters that had been taken out of service and they were just used for training flights and whilst we was at Fulbeck I met a Polish pilot. His name was Felus, F-E-L-U-S, and we had a little biplane that they used to use for trainin' purposes, you know refresher courses for gunners. He'd fly this little air

03:00 plane 'round the tail of the aircraft, the different parts of the aircraft, and of course they'd use him for practice, gunnery practice, and I got to know him pretty well this Pole and he'd escaped through Poland and Russia and eventually got into Europe and he'd been in the Polish air force but was deemed for old for flying in operational flying in Britain. So they give him this job in this little aircraft and he used to talk to me about you know his family in Poland. He was always worried about his wife. I think he had two sons and

03:30 this particular day he must a got too close to the aircraft he was doing manoeuvres 'round and he got caught in the slip stream of this aircraft and his the biplane went straight in and he was killed and I think he was about late thirties you know. It was very, very sad and so I lost him. That was at Fulbeck.

Did you go to any of these funerals?

I went to two funerals at Coningsby. I was a

04:00 detail for crews that had crashed. They'd bury them in a cemetery in the village. Yeah. There's quite a few graves around Lincolnshire in cemeteries from our crew that were killed.

So at Fulbeck, were the Americans there when you arrived?

No. The Americans, it was strange you know. It was sleepy and quiet, Fulbeck. You couldn't realise it was operational and Christmas Day came along

04:30 and I was in the sick quarters on the ambulance again and everybody else was had having their Christmas Day and their lunches. So they said we could have our Christmas Day in the mess in our in the sick quarters rather and we just settled down to have our lunch and the phone rang. It was the village policeman at Fulbeck, which was about only about three or four miles away, and he said, "I think there's an aircraft or something come down in the village." He said, "We've had a report of a an

05:00 explosion and smoke." Well the operation air field they didn't fly at all Christmas Day, but for some reason or other Cranwell were determined to keep things going. Anyway we set off with the ambulance, this medic and my fella and myself. Fella called Catt, Jimmy Catt, C-A-double T, and we got up in the woods near the town near the village, it was only a village, and we searched and searched and eventually found the wreckage of this aircraft. What had happened was, it had been snowing

05:30 heavily it started snowing heavily and the trainee pilot lad that was in the aircraft must have got disorientated and he'd dived straight into the clump of trees and of course he was killed and he was decapitated. We spent part of the time trying to find the fella's head. So we took him got him in the remains in the hospital morgue and then the celebrations for the rest of the day for Christmas Day were very sombre for the orderly and meself.

06:00 I mean I'd been to crashes before but it seemed very tragic that of all days it should happen it should have to be on Christmas Day '42. Anyway January came along and almost overnight the place changed. What was really a sleepy place, it became a hive of industry because masses of Americans poured in. They came in their hundreds. White, black you name it. Fulbeck was never going to be the same. They rolled in their trucks. They had their own MPs [Military Police].

06:30 They were told we could have our mess have our food with them in the same mess but the only thing that didn't go down with our fellas was, that they had the mess tin and they put everything on the one mess tin. They had peanut jelly on apple jelly on peanut butter, potatoes, although it was mixed in, and our blokes weren't too happy with it. So we had our own mess back but they were very good with us. We had ice cream, which we hadn't seen for donkey's years. They had a lot of stuff brought over from America.

07:00 They put shows on for us. To have a night out from Fulbeck before the Americans came you had to put your name down. If you were lucky you got on the bus that was sent by the local bus company. The Americans put trucks on galore. You could go to Nottingham. You could go to Lincoln. Wherever you want to they'd take you, no problem at all, and their canteen was called PX and you were allowed to use their PX. You could have about, I think it was, was it, I've forgot how many packets a cigarettes a week. I know it was a lot

07:30 'cause my father was smoking at the time and I remember I used to take cigarettes home or you could have twenty one cigars or you could have chocolate. So of course I very often did trading with cigarettes for chocolate and they put shows on. We had two or three people came over from Hollywood and one or two of the actors came put a show on and we never went short of anything with the Americans. It was every month they got paid, used to get paid monthly and I always remember they used to put a blanket on the ground outside the flying control tower and

08:00 they used to play this game. I think they used to call it crap, with the dice, and someone would lose about a month's pay in a matter of a couple of hours. They used to bet you know gamble that heavily and yes, we did alright with the Americans and one other thing too happened at Fulbeck too. Under an agreement with the Turkish and the British government, the British government agreed to learn to fly Turkish pilots, Turkish air force personnel for service

08:30 with their own air force in return for bases for Britain in and around Turkey and this particular night, this group of Turkish trainee pilots were going out in this training aircraft on Fulbeck and somehow or other they got mixed up in an air raid over Grimsby and two of their aircrafts got shot down by the Turks and they were killed and the Turks went into mourning and they went in for mourning, not for hours and days but for several weeks before they'd

09:00 even fly again and that happened at Fulbeck.

Would is that a luxury that the English or American pilots would be afforded? Waiting for a couple of weeks after the death of a

With them it was in their religion. It never happened with ours. They were, nobody else, it was just them. They flatly refused to fly. Of course I mean the German aircraft or whatever shot them down over Grimsby he wasn't concerned about how many was in

09:30 who was in some air they were just on an unarmed aircraft. They were what they called Oxfords [Airspeed Oxford]. Twin engine trainer aircraft. There's no armament on them or anything. They were just on night flying and probably they got off track and they got caught up in the air raid. So yeah, they were killed.

So you were doing quite well at this point with

With the Americans?

With the Americans.

Yes. Yeah and then about April, 'round about April

10:00 1942 I got told to report to the orderly room. Went to the orderly room at Fulbeck and they said "You're posted" and they said "You're posted to 10 ah sorry, 460 Squadron at Binbrook." So when I got to Binbrook I reported in the orderly room and the clerk in the orderly rooms I told him. He said, "No" he said, "You're not in the squadron. You're on SHQ [Squadron Head Quarters]." So that was it, 460 Squadron was there and of course this is where I came in touch

10:30 with a lot more Australian air men because mostly 460 squadron was built up of Australian air crew. There was a few British people on the base but mainly MT drivers, WAAFS and a few air force, ah RAF [Royal Air Force] personnel on ground crew duties, but most of 'em on Binbrook was Australian personnel. I stayed at Binbrook from I got there about, roughly April or May '42

11:00 ah '43 sorry and then just after Christmas 1943 I left Binbrook and I went to another satellite air field about four miles away. A place called Kelston. This was at one of the four air fields in the same circuit same group as Binbrook. Of course Kelston was as different again to Binbrook. It was a war time air field. The squadron there was 625 Squadron. That was a Royal Air Force squadron but again they

11:30 flew Lancasters and I stayed at I stayed at Kelston for a full year. That was the longest spell I'd been in any station on any station at all up 'til then. I went there about the beginning of 1944 and then in 1945 I was posted from bomber command for good and I was told to report to a place in Somerset to an air field called Merryfield and on me way down to Merryfield I nearly

12:00 got another slip up again with the traffic with the traffic police at the station. He said, "You're going the wrong way." I said, "Well I've been told Merryfield 's in Somerset." He said, "No, Merryfield 's at Glasgow", but it turned out it was Mirrerfield at Glasgow, so again I nearly went the wrong way. Anyway when we got to Merryfield in Somerset, near Taunton, I was told that we was going to be part of transport command and most of the crews on that squadron, 238 Squadron, were

12:30 crews that had done tours on bomber commands or other commands and they still wanted to carry on flying so they got into transport command and the aircraft that we were gonna use was Dakotas, DC3s, and the CO was only in his mid-twenties too, he called us together and he said that, he had a big meeting in one of the hangars. He said, "We will be going to India. Get rid of all the equipment that you don't use. All the gear that you can't use because we will be flying out and there's also a chance that we

13:00 might go on to Australia." Of course the mention of Australia ears started to prick up then, because that was really something. We'd only read about Australian history books and geography books at school and the CO said it was the first time he'd ever had to ask people to volunteer not to want a posting. So anyway we left. We flew down to Cornwall. Refuelled, got clearance. From Cornwall we flew over to France and it was incredible flying because

13:30 the war was still on. Here we were in an unarmed aircraft heading south down towards Marseilles and if we looked below it all looked so peaceful and quiet. The countryside was beautiful. In the distance we could see the Pyrenees because of course with the DC3 they weren't pressurised. We couldn't get above twelve thousand feet anyway. One occasion I looked to me right and I could see a formation of Fortresses [Boeing Flying Fortress bomber] goin' the opposite way to us. Probably comin' back from a raid and I just said to the fella next to me

14:00 I said, "Well it's a good job they are going that way because if there'd been any fighters followin' them we'd a been easy picking" with no armament on the aircraft. Anyway we landed at Istres and we could see evidence the Luftwaffe had been there. There was all sorts of murals on the wall about aircrafts being shot down and we went into the village for a bit of a stretch and there's four local girls sat on this wall. Four French girls and they were beckoning us inside to go inside this pension or whatever they called it and of course being four very

14:30 naïve air men and the MO's words still echoing in our ears about what we'd be in for if we did what we shouldn't do so we shook our heads and we marched on and we were only there overnight. The following day we flew on into Italy. Same aircraft and this time it was in a former Italian air field and the same again and as we flew in this place at Castle Benito, we flew over the harbour of Tobruk and the harbour was full of sunken ships. This was all to do with the

15:00 Battle of Tobruk, a big war battle that had happened earlier on in the war, and from Tobruk we flew onto Palestine to a place called Lod. Now we were given a bit of time off in Lod and on our way into Lod we went through a place called Jaffa and Jaffa's where the oranges came from, Jaffa oranges, and we couldn't believe it, there was oranges everywhere. In the gutters, in the street and getting an orange in war time you were very, very lucky. We hadn't seen any for years. So we got some boxes

15:30 organised. Put some of these oranges in a box and took 'em back to the aircraft with us. So from where we were from Palestine we ate oranges all the way to India. We had oranges galore that we lived off. The next stop was a place in Ibania, near in Iraq. In fact it's now the air field that the Americans are using in Iraq and we were there overnight again. There to the Persian Gulf and then eventually on to India. Now we arrived

16:00 at Raipur in India, and this is the truth, the temperature was one hundred and four degrees and we were still in U.K. clothing because we left in February. It was winter and the guys were falling over left, right and centre with the heat and the CO said, "I can't have this." So he commandeered an aircraft. He flew the aircraft down to Calcutta. He got some khaki clothing for all the ground crew ah

16:30 all the personnel. He brought the clothing back and we got into the correct clothing. We got into KD [Khaki Drill], which was more suitable for there. We didn't stay very long in Raipur before moving on to north east Bengal. It's called Bangladesh now and we were flying to a place called Meiktila and leavin' leavin' Raipur all the supplies and everything that could be put in the aircraft were piled in as well as ground crew and we seemed to be taking a

17:00 heck of a long time to get off the ground and I reported, I mentioned to one of the crew in the aircraft I said, "We seem to be having a bit of a problem" you know. He said, "We've got an over load" and I think he said it was about six or seven hundred pound over load and by this time we should a been getting air borne and I looked down the side of the aircraft and I could see cattle scattering in all directions and the natives looking up you know see the look on their faces of fear. Anyway eventually we did the aircraft kept on climbing and

17:30 there was no hills 'round there or mountains. It was all very flat. So we got to Meiktila and Meiktila was all jungle. The aircraft were flying into Burma, supplies into Burma for the army fellas and coming out of Burma they were bringing the wounded servicemen out. They were bringing out prisoners-of-war that had been men that had been prisoner-of-war under the Japanese. I don't think I'll ever forget the condition that those men were in. They were just walking skeletons.

18:00 The aircraft had about six stretchers on one side of the aircraft and six side six stretchers on the other side and they weren't fit to walk, a lot of them. We had a big military hospital just outside Meiktila and this is where these men were taken for to recuperate. During the whole of the time that our aircraft that our squadron, 238 Squadron, flew in and out of Burma or in fact the whole time that that squadron flew,

18:30 it flew the equivalent of two and a half million air miles. I've got the proof there in documents and we only lost one aircraft and that was due to monsoon conditions. The force of the wind was greater than the force of the aircraft and it ripped the speedo [speedometer] it ripped the wings off the aircraft and the aircraft went down and unfortunately the crew were all killed and the people on board were African service men. They were going back for release, for demob. So that was a very, very good record for 238

19:00 squadron. We eventually got word that the squadron was going to move to Australia and that non-essential ground crew would be going by sea to Australia and the other the aircraft would be flown to Australia. Now they couldn't fly them direct to Australia through Singapore because the war was still on with the Japanese. So what they did was, they flew the aircraft down to Ceylon. They took all the non-essential aircraft stuff out of the aircraft.

19:30 They put extra fuel tanks in. They just had the minimum ground crew that they needed to service the aircraft and from Ceylon to get to Australia the only way they could fly was through the Cocos Islands and that was a very, very long flight. They had to keep strict radio silence and navigation had to be spot on but luckily every one of the aircraft had had new engines fitted in before they left India. Everyone landed in the Cocos

20:00 Islands without mishap and some of them had only had about sixty gallons of fuel in the tanks of the aircraft. It was a long, long flight and to my knowledge that flight's never ever been done since by a twin engined aircraft. The big four engines still fly over there no trouble now, and then from the Cocos Islands they flew to Perth, to WA [Western Australia] and then eventually onto Adelaide, to Parafield.

Before we get to Adelaide could we head back a little bit.

Yeah.

Fabulous.

20:30 **Eric, when you were back at Binbrook...**

Yeah.

A fair while ago

Yeah.

You did you see G for George.

Yes. I'm sorry. I did see G George. G George G George was one of the first aircraft I saw at Binbrook. I think it had done about it hadn't done anywhere near the number of ops [operations] that it finished up doing. I think it did about ninety or something like that, eighty or ninety, but it did run a fair number of operations. It had probably done about sixty then or something like that. Yes, G George was there at Binbrook.

21:00 **Can you tell me the significance of that plane?**

Ah well of course it was it's the aircraft that's now in the war museum at Canberra and it was eventually flown to Australia to raise money for war bonds. It is reputed that it flew under the Sydney Harbour Bridge. That has been discounted two or three times but I saw it about four or five years ago in Canberra and of course it was in a pretty bad

21:30 state of repair but this recent visit that I've just done to Canberra it was incredible the work that's been done on it. G George is in very, very good condition now. They've done a marvellous job and I think probably around about eighty or ninety operations it did but that's not the that's not the maximum. There's some aircraft did as many as a hundred and twenty on flights on raids. Some went down on the first one, on the first trip. That wasn't uncommon.

22:00 Either the air got shot down or they crashed on return due to bad weather. So a lot of aircraft had motifs on them. They often had slogans painted on the side. The Americans did the same thing. Each raid they'd probably paint a bomb on the north of the aircraft. If it was mine laying they'd draw a mine with a parachute attached to it.

Where would they draw that?

On the front of the aircraft just below where the pilot sat, on the fuselage.

So if it was a bombing run they'd draw

22:30 A bomb, yeah that's right.

And if it was a flight they'd do

Well they only they put on if it was mine laying they'd put a mine on. If it was if it was a bombing raid, which it more often than not was, they'd draw a bomb and for each raid that they did, that they flew out on, they painted on the fuselage. Sometimes they'd paint picture painted a slogan like 'Miss Apprehension' and things like that you know. They had funny names that they used to

23:00 pick used to put names of film stars on and cartoons. Donald Duck, I think he was coined, and Mickey Mouse. He was painted on the actually I think the Americans more or less copied it from the British, you know from the Royal Air Force and the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], these slogans that were painted on. I can't quite remember what's on G for George now and I've looked at it often enough.

Who painted it?

Ground crew. One of the ground crew. There's nearly always one of the ground crew that was a bit of an artist. He did actually he did a very good job some of the some of the things were

23:30 you know that were painted on.

Were the Americans did they have a particular kind of slogan or was there very similar?

No. Mainly things related to America you know. 'Memphis' and 'Memphis Belle'. Names like that they christened 'em and 'Miss Kentucky' and 'Miss Hollywood' and all that business you know. They were into all that sort of business. It's funny that, because I never saw many Americans, air crew, apart from bein' at Fulbeck because most of the American bases were south of us. They were

24:00 further down England in Cambridgeshire and Oxfordshire and places like that and just the same as we never saw many Halifax bombers because they were further north than us. So most of the aircraft you saw around Lincolnshire were mainly Lancasters.

So the Americans that you did see at Fulbeck, did you get along well with them?

They were good. I never had a bit of trouble with 'em. They had trouble. They had a lot of trouble, the blacks and the whites. There was fights continually.

Why?

Colour problem. They got drunk and

24:30 not all of them. A lot of them were very, very good. A lot of the blacks were very good. They were alright with us. We never had any trouble. There was a very bad colour problem about that time even in the services between blacks and the whites.

Were they not very well disciplined?

I don't think they were any worse than any other. They had their own personnel. They had their own military police, the blacks. They dealt with them. It was just when they went you know they got drinkin' or anything like that. They had separate messes. They didn't eat together.

25:00 The white Americans didn't eat with the black Americans.

Did you think that was extraordinary or did you just accept it?

Well we didn't have many coloured men in our services, but it wouldn't have mattered anyway. They would have sat with us, but that's the way it was with America then. There was segregation, if you want to call it that, but with us we never had any problems with them, with the whites or blacks. They were

very happy go lucky. I went to open the ambulance one night at Fulbeck

25:30 to get something out of the back of the ambulance and there's two white Americans with two American WACs [Women's Army Corps] in the on the stretcher in the back of the ambulance. So in some insulting language I was told to, "Shut that such-and-such" the door. I went in and told the MO and he said, "Lock the damned ambulance up." So when they got out, from then on the back of the ambulance had to be locked up. They were using the stretchers in the back of the ambulance for a bit a cuddling. They were mad. They absolutely slap happy.

26:00 One of the village buses that used to come to the camp got trapped in a snow storm. So the whoever it was in the MT section, in transport, the Americans'd say, "Ah we can you know we'll see to it. Pull him out." So he went out with this great big truck and crane to pull this bus out of this ditch and instead of just coming out gradually to pull it out of this ditch, he shot forward with this great big truck and the bus split in half. They were very, very, but they I

26:30 got to fly actually with one crew ah one of the American crews. As long as you got the chit [signed voucher]. I got to know the, they had a pilot and a co-pilot and a wireless operator and they had what they call a load master. He saw the loading in the aircraft and I found out not all that long ago that that squadron took part in the invasion of Normandy because I'd already left by then. They'd

27:00 lost aircraft at Nijmegen in Holland in the Battle of the Bulge in that too and there's quite a lot of their personnel are buried in the church yard at Fulbeck and that division, the American Air Force, I don't know whether it's called the 101st or 31st. I think it's I think it's part of the 31st, that outfit is still operation now in operation in Iraq, the 101st Air Borne Division 'cause I've seen it in one of the papers. Different men of course but

27:30 still goin'. So that was the Americans.

So did you spend any leisure time with any of the Americans?

Didn't go out with them anywhere, no. They most they more or less kept theirselves to [them]selves, but if there was any concerts on we just sat in the different places with them you know in the entertainment place that we had.

Do you remember what movie stars they had out?

A fella called Billy Gilbert, a movie star. He never played big parts in America and then there was um

28:00 a man that was the husband of a film star called Janette MacDonald. She was a famous singing star. I can't just think of his name. He came out and there was two or three others. Used to call 'em USO shows, that's right. USO. United Services. Bob Hope never came. He was in another part of the world of course entertain the troops. He did a lot and Connie Francis, she was another, but they were very good. They were well looked after and they were very generous

28:30 and as I say, we were whatever was going on, we were welcome to be in it.

When you were driving bombs around, this was this mainly at Binbrook that you were doing that?

I drove at Coningsby when I wasn't on the ambulance. Drove the bombs out to the aircraft and at did that at Binbrook too actually and Syston. Coningsby and Syston. I wasn't always on the ambulance.

Did you not feel like

29:00 **a sitting duck?**

No because they weren't armed. We used to pick them up in a dump in the bomb dump on the edge of the air field and we put them on what we call trailers or trolleys. Five hundred pound bombs, one thousand pound, two thousand pound, four thousand pound they were and they were the detonators were never put on 'em 'til they were actually on the aircraft.

So if another plane had flown over and put a few machine gun bullets in there…

Oh yeah

29:30 they were could have gone off. Yeah. Oh yes but they were well hidden the bomb dumps. They were very well camouflaged. To have seen them from the air you would have been very lucky.

What about the actual trucks?

Um well the trucks that we used to carry the bombs onto the bases they were from the bomb dumps but the ones that we used the ones that we used on the air field to tow the bombs around they were tractors. They were tractors made by Ford or they were tractors made by a firm called David

30:00 Brown and the armourers used to load them on and we used to come up in trailers. We used to have a whole line of these if there was operations on we were bringing them out of the dump and we'd take them to each aircraft. So many to G George, so many to A Apple, so many to such and such an aircraft and this would go on all day. If there was a raid on at night the preparations began very early in the morning because aircraft had to be taken up for flight checks to see that everything was working alright

and

30:30 one of the things actually we were involved too with the aircraft was what was called swinging the compass. What we used to do, we used to attach like a long bar to the tail wing of the aircraft and we had a very wide area between the hangars and we'd do a bit of weavin' and detourin' moving around with the tractor and the aircraft and whilst we were doing this the navigator and the other crew members would be checking the compasses to see they were true bearing you know true reading. That was called what they call swinging the compass. So we did that a bit, yes.

So you were moving the actual tail?

31:00 Yeah. We were pulling the tail of the aircraft and whilst we were moving it they were setting the compasses and making sure that everything was alright. When they thought they got those things right, everything was okay, they'd take the aircraft up for an air test. Probably about half an hour or twenty minute ah forty minutes, not long. Go for a bit of a flight. Check all the instruments, everything's working alright. Then they'd bring the aircraft back to the air field and then the armourers would start putting the bombs in the aircraft ready for the raid, whatever time they were due to leave at. If the air raid wasn't very, very

31:30 far away, say just in southern France, or parts of France or wherever, they wouldn't leave until pretty late but if it was well into Germany then of course there'd a long flight in front of them. They'd leave early evening and they wouldn't get back 'til probably day break.

Squadrons had a bit of an advantage in that a group of men on a plane

Yeah.

Would obviously get to know each other pretty well and...

They did. They did.

Care about each other?

Yeah.

Did you experience that kind of camaraderie?

32:00 **Were there men that you were able to stay with most of the time and**

Yes. Yes.

Who got transferred to the same places you did?

Yes. Different places, yes. You got on with you found different friends. Some people were loners. It was just their nature. It wasn't that they were being funny or anything. They just kept themselves to theirselves. See, very often in an aircraft you could get two Englishmen, two Australians. You might get a Scot, couple of Scots, an Irishman, a Welshman, whatever. Even a South African.

Where's the punch line?

It were, no. I mean different

32:30 **Sounds like a joke.**

Yeah. Sorry. Sorry. Yeah sorry about that. Yeah different ah so very often crews were not all from one country. You did get all Australian crews in some of the bombers in 460 and in the Royal Air Force you'd get all British crews more or less but very often crews were mixed. You see, how they came to be crewed together, once they'd done the training, the pilots had done the training, and the wireless operators had done their training and the gunners they'd they'd assemble in some

33:00 big hangar somewhere in one of the training air fields and you've have a pilot walking around and he'd say to one guy, "I'm looking for a navigator. Have you got a crew?" "No I haven't." "Are you interested in crewin' up with me?" And off these two'd go. They'd look around. They'd see another guy, a wireless operator you know. "Have you got a crew yet?" "No." "We're looking for a wireless op [operator]" and this would go on 'til they'd eventually got a crew together. So those meeting those men meeting in that

33:30 in that hangar had never met one another before but they became a became a crew and that's how more or less you know they came to fly together. If there'd been any when they started operational flying and one of 'em'd been badly injured or anything like that then of course they'd bring somebody in from outside to fill in that space in the crew but when they originally began their first flight together they were a crew of new of new men. One or

34:00 two of them had come from other commands. Coastal command and I think one or two pilots might have come out of fighter command but I think mainly they were all new all raw recruits more or less and they had their own identities, but as a crew in an aircraft that's the way it had to be. They're all reliant on one another. There's no there was no, from what I can make out, there was no silly work or anything like that. They from start to finish

34:30 you'd have to be spot on. They couldn't afford to relax until they got back and got out of the aircraft

even comin' back off raids at night the Germans, the Luftwaffe, used to follow the stream of aircraft comin' back and two or three times we got alerts on the air field that German aircraft were in the vicinity. To no lights to be shown or anything like that and actually at Kelston we did it we lose an aircraft with a Canadian crew. They were in the circuit to come into the air field and

35:00 this German fighter had shadowed them and just as they were about to land they shot them down. There was a bit of a stink about it because the rear gunner they found out later had taken his guns out of the aircraft ready for landing. You know dismantled the guns. So maybe if he'd had the guns in position he might have seen the fighter but I don't know. It was very hard for them to pick aircraft out, especially at night time. So they did that did happen.

Did you who were your closest friends during this

35:30 **these moves from base to base?**

Well amongst the personnel I don't recall anybody from my home town. There were people from parts of Lancashire and also whilst I was at Fulbeck I met a girl called Phyllis. She worked in the NAAFI [Navy, Army Air Force Institute] there in the canteen and she had a friend that was going out with, another air man, and they weren't getting on too well and Phyllis was with this other guy.

36:00 So we swapped partners. So whilst, that was alright. So whilst I was at Fulbeck I never even bothered going out with any of the blokes really. I was out with you know we used to go to the pictures and go out together. Phyllis was a country girl and she hated the land. Her family lived between Boston and Skegness and there were two brothers, one I think one was in the army but she did not like the land. She wanted to get away from it and

36:30 she went with me on leave once to Bolton and when eventually I finished up here out here in Australia she wrote me a letter, said, "I've heard that in Australia the Australian girls are very, very flighty. So I'm ending our relationship." This is what a sailor had told her. So I got what you call a 'Dear John' [letter ending a relationship]. Nothing had happened in Australia actually. I'd known one or two girls but there was nothing had gone on

37:00 and in this hut that I was in, this was in Sumatra actually, in this hut there's a there was a notice board and everybody that got a 'Dear John' pinned it up on this notice board you see and by the time I left that place that notice board was full a 'Dear Johns'. So it wasn't only me getting one. So I never heard anything from her since but if I went out any time at night with anybody maybe somebody else that I knew we'd go to the pictures together but I didn't do any drinking. Believe it or not I didn't do any. I never had a glass of

37:30 beer at all when I was in the air force. I only started drinking when I came to Australia and if I went out anywhere I used these places that were for service men. Very often got a good meal and, as I say, I was quite content to go to the pictures and go and have a look around. Lincoln was nice. Lincoln was very nice. Quite a nice place to look around. It was quite interesting, Lincoln. Had the river flowing through the centre of town, the River Witham. Incidentally, mentioning rivers, that same river flowed through Boston

38:00 and whenever the air crew went on leave of course they suffered from the hi jinx syndrome, which you couldn't blame 'em for, and one or two of the service policemen in Boston were not all happy at all happy about the behaviour and they made it pretty uncomfortable for some of the air crew. So from what I from what I was given to understand, one particular night these servicemen went these policemen went a bit too far. One of the air crew tipped 'em over the bridge of the river, which ran

38:30 through the town, and luckily for the two MPs, SPs [Service Police] whatever they were, they landed on the mud flats and they got you know they survived. So after that they left the air crew alone. So things like that did happen.

What were the air crew suffering from that you said before?

Ah you mean amongst themselves?

Some kind of sickness?

No you mean with the SPs, sorry. With the service policemen?

No, no.

Oh in the..

Just when they

39:00 **they took time off they quite often had...**

Sorry?

Some kind of problem did you say?

No. Maybe I got that wrong. I'm sorry. When they're off duty when the crews were flying, when the crews weren't flying quite a few of them had girlfriends but they didn't all they didn't always they often

did go out together, crews, you know they did quite a bit of drinking together but I never

39:30 some seemed quieter than others. I suppose that was their personality. I mean if I ever went down to the crew room to pick 'em up some of them were joking and you know fooling around and all that. Some of them were very, very quiet. It was just their personality but from what I understand when they're in the aircraft they all had to be together as a team and they were all reliant on one another you know completely. There was something that came out during

40:00 World War II about what they call LM, ah what was it? LMF. Lacking Moral Fibre and this did crop up from time to time. If a member of an air crew suddenly became felt that he wasn't fit to fly, he was taken off that flight, off that crew. He was posted somewhere away, completely away from anywhere like that, and it was virtually equivalent

40:30 to a dishonourable discharge. He was sent to Coventry. I never actually came of any of it happening. If it did happen nobody ever knew about it anyway because I mean you've got to work out I mean if a squadron if you had a squadron of say twenty aircraft and there's seven men to an aircraft, that's a hundred and forty men and very often there was more than that you know. There was spare crews and all that. So whether it happened in the sick quarters I in the hospitals themselves I

41:00 never came across it. There was never a lot of people in the hospitals what I knew of it.

Tape 5

00:38 **So Eric, just to go back a little bit.**

Yeah.

I wondered, you are obviously a keen observer and also having a natural interest in planes I wondered if you could describe the different aircraft that you primarily had at your at your air bases.

Yes. Okay.

01:00 Well of course the bomber command bases there were apart from Coningsby at first there was a few Manchesters and then Lancasters but at Syston it was all Lancasters. They'd already phased out the Manchester. They weren't very safe. They were

The Manchesters weren't safe?

No, they weren't very safe if they were they were only twin engine and they were a very heavy aircraft. From what I could make out they were inclined to be pretty sluggish on the controls and they had like a triple tail or tail fin on

01:30 the fuselage itself as well as the two at each side which I don't think it made them very manoeuvrable. I don't think the Manchesters were really meant to last. They were just a sort of a fill in between one aircraft and eventually the Lancaster, 'cause they were built by Avros and I don't know how long they were in service in 1941 for, the Manchesters, but they did start phasin' them out very, very quickly.

Because there had been a number of accidents?

Yes, they weren't and I think they lacked the

02:00 range as well of the Lancaster. I think that they had a pretty good bomb load that they carried, but there was so many faults seemed to crop up with the Manchesters and sluggishness you know loss of power and things like that and with the coming of the Lancaster of course that was all eliminated because they were a four engine aircraft virtually on the same type of frame and fuselage as what a twin engine aircraft had, so they give them more stability and more power.

Must have been a

02:30 **time of a lot of advances in the building of aeroplanes. The design of the aeroplane.**

By that time there was a lot of aircraft were coming out. Also an aircraft known as the Mosquito [De Havilland Mosquito bomber]. That was being built about that time. It's funny you should just mention that about aircraft, because that base near us at Digby, which is a bit further north than Coningsby, that was that it was a fighter station and they had Spitfires [Supermarine Spitfire bomber] there and

03:00 the pilots were told that they would be getting a new aircraft called a Beaufighter [Bristol Beaufighter aircraft] and they got these Beaufighters and they weren't very happy with them, the crews. They said oh they were sluggish. They were heavy, hard to manoeuvre and this that and the other and one day this Beaufighter came over and the type of flyin' that the pilot gave it was brilliant and some of the pilots were on the field. This is quite true, this. Some of the pilots were on the field and this aircraft

03:30 eventually landed and out of this aircraft stepped a lady ferry pilot. So after that there was no more

complaints about the Beaufighter.

They weren't quite happy about that.

She showed them how to handle a plane other words. Plus quite a few women did ferry the aircraft, replacement aircrafts, down from Avro and other places. You know they brought them down. They had white overalls. They didn't have a uniform. They were actual civilians.

They weren't though allowed to be piloting any of the planes in...

No. Oh no. No way. No,

04:00 they were just ferry pilots and they did a good job actually. Ferry command. Quite a lot of women were in it too. They flew aircraft across from the Atlantic from America to Britain and all that.

And the Lancaster, what you talked a bit about the advantages of the Lancaster. Did they find that there were fewer accidents with that plane?

Well the big the biggest advantage over other four engine aircraft like the Halifax, they could get higher and they could carry a bigger bomb load too but the

04:30 disadvantage with the Lancaster was the escape and the exits and entrances weren't as good as the ones on the Halifax. They had a wider cockpit area I think on the Halifax and in emergency the Lancaster wasn't the best to get out of. From what I've read and been told.

And in your opinion what was the better aircraft that the British had at that time?

Well you mean as a bomber aircraft?

As a bomber.

It was undoubtedly the Lancaster.

And what about as a fighter?

05:00 Well if you're referring to 1942 I suppose the best aircraft there was the Spitfire. That eventually was replaced by other aircraft but around 1942 you know that was the number one aircraft, but that type of aircraft they went they went in a series but those series they used to call Marks. You have Mark I, Mark II, Mark III, Mark IV on and towards the end of World War II I actually saw a Spitfire that was Mark XIV. So there must a

05:30 been about fourteen series of that aircraft.

It must have been a very good plane.

A very good plane, that's right. Yes.

And how did those planes compare with what the Germans were flying?

Well we used to hear a lot of things about the quality of the German aircraft but I think it's since been proved that the majority of their aircraft were well-built.

The German aircraft was well-built?

They were well-built. They were very good. Very good indeed.

And did and because of that did they have an advantage over the allies'

06:00 **air force?**

They did they did more with the smaller aircraft. They didn't have the bombers that other the Royal Air Force had, the RAAF had. They didn't have the four engine bomber like, well they had one or two but they weren't very good but their defensive aircraft, the twin engine and single aircraft engine aircraft they were very good.

What did they have?

Well they had the Messerschmitts, the ME109s [fighter plane]. They had the Junkers 88s, the Dornier [German fighter plane].

06:30 They were all from what I've been told they were quite good aircraft.

And did you ever have any occasion to see the Japanese aircraft?

No. Only on an air field only on an air field which is a later on in the story. I came across some at the end of towards the end of my service career but they were they had been broken up. I never saw any flying. I never saw a Japanese aircraft flying.

And we spoke before about the problems that weather had. Were raids ever called off

07:00 **because of weather?**

Oh yes. Oh yes indeed. They have even been known on more than one occasion to call off at the last minute. If the crews were already in the aircraft and even probably starting to taxi towards the run way for take off we had a big van like a control van, like a big caravan, and the take off was organised from there not from the control tower and if the raid was suddenly called off they would fire a big red very light

07:30 in the air, which everybody would see, and that was the idea then. Cut engines. It was cancelled.

What did the crew tell you about their raids over Germany? Did you must have overheard conversations or

Yeah. Probably the main conversations I overheard was mainly probably in the crew buses and that. Once or twice they'd speak to you but they'd probably say that they'd had a they'd had a rough trip. The defences had been very

08:00 active. Once or twice they commented that they'd seen other aircraft goin' down, been shot down, and they didn't say too much about the weather over the German targets. I think whether it was on a similar pattern to the weather in Britain you know that we were gettin' in Britain, but no, the the defences were first class 'round the German cities. They were well-protected.

08:30 **And did the German intelligence seem to know when the raids were going to happen?**

Yes.

Were they forewarned?

That's you know you brought a good point up there because even somewhere like Coningsby I mean the village was virtually on the edge of the air field. The from the village they could see the tankers goin' 'round during the day fuelling the aircraft. They could probably even see the bomb trolleys and the bomb

09:00 stuff being movin' about. So they knew that something was coming off. They didn't know where the target was going to be but it would probably going 'round the village that, "There's ops on tonight" but on the night when there's operations on, you were very lucky to go out of the camp. We weren't allowed to leave the camp, whether you were on duty or not. You were not allowed out.

So it wouldn't have been hard for an observer to be passing information?

It could have happened. It could have happened. See that that's that always puzzled me with Coningsby that,

09:30 those two aircraft. I mean they could a strayed they could a just it's a lot of personnel and yet they knew seemed to know where that the bomb dump the bomb dump was at the far corner of the air field and that's where they were makin' for and the well the fella that was with me he felt the same thing but strange but nothing was ever found out about anybody passing

Were you under tight security as far as what you could say and to whom?

Oh yes. I mean you didn't say anything to an officer unless you were asked to you know but you

10:00 see with senior officers and that, especially on a place like that, you were you didn't call them by the first name. I mean it was 'sir' but you didn't have all the palaver that you would have with top brass in bomber command headquarters or something like that. It was more of a close knit community, 'cause everybody was dependent on one another in many ways on an operational station.

But I imagine the pilots would have been under strict security that they wouldn't

10:30 **have been able to divulge to people**

No that's right.

Perhaps where they'd been.

Yeah.

And what they'd done.

Yeah. Well the pre-briefing before a raid started I mean what happened was, there was a large building that was used as a briefing room and all the crews would assemble in this briefing room and the doors would be closely shut and guarded by service policemen. There was no way anybody could have got in and eavesdropped or anything like that that I know of and then senior officers would come onto this platform, probably the

11:00 met officer, station commander. One or two other senior officers connected with navigation maybe and other things and they would all say their piece about what they could expect in the forthcoming raid. Where the target was going to be and from what I've been told of one or two crews a groan would go 'round the room if you know if the target was Berlin or somewhere like that, which was a very hard target and very well defended and this briefing took quite a long while. They were given routes to follow and

11:30 what areas to miss you know not to attempt to fly over because they were well-defended and they were given alternative landing strips if anything happened, break down, the weather problems and all that. So the briefing was quite very, very lengthy. Probably more so for the pilots and the navigators than the rest of the crew you know. The gunners it didn't really affect them too much, apart from the wireless operator and possibly the bomb aimer.

What do you think was the most difficult position in a bomber crew?

12:00 Well the men in the turrets weren't in very comfortable positions. I mean some of these fellas were well over six foot and they were really sat with their knees virtually under their chin. In fact my friend down at Mitchum, he's about six foot-odd and I always said however he got in a turret I don't in fact he still has trouble now with this knees. 'Cause he went for treatment.

And they were quite exposed.

Oh yes, the draft and the noise. It was I mean I've never flown in a Lancaster but I suppose in comparison to one or two other aircraft it was probably quiet,

12:30 but it was still very, very noisy and they made up a turret and they didn't have too many front gunner turrets because that was mainly operated with a bomb aiter, bomb aimer but yeah, there was they weren't the quietest of aircraft but they were I suppose they were better than the predecessors.

And earlier today you mentioned Guy Gibson, who...

Yeah.

What can you can you tell me a little bit more about him? How you met

13:00 **him and**

Yeah.

What you knew of him?

Individually I didn't know anything at all but because he was a station commander but he was a station commander at Coningsby when I got there. He'd already done a tour of operations on twin engined aircraft at another base. I think there was one up near Doncaster somewhere. I've forgot the name of the place. I think he was a squadron leader then and he must a taken over 106 Squadron. I think he came about February

13:30 '42 as I arrived there about April '42 and I saw him knockin' around from time to time. From what other people say he was a very strict disciplinarian. He wouldn't stand any nonsense and he was small too for a commanding officer. He wasn't the tallest of officers. I'd see him around the air field from time to time going different places. He flew on ops with the rest of the crews. Once or twice he shot the field up shot up flew low over the aerodrome,

14:00 give everybody a fright. Things like that, which he got away with, which other people probably wouldn't a done, but he had a good crew and he knew what he was doing. Later on, there was one incident where a crew member of a crew blabbed something that he shouldn't have done and Gibson got him up on the table in this mess and he said to the men 'round about him "Look at him. Look at this fool. This man can't keep his mouth shut"

14:30 and they were just stayin' off the squadron you know. He ridiculed him. So that was a warning. They knew found out who he was but whether any other information ever got out I don't know. There was what we call the fifth column. They were agents probably about Britain and they weren't always German agents. There were probably other nationalities that didn't like the British or whatever but I never actually call came across anything like that.

And Guy Gibson went on to be

15:00 Yes.

One of the Dam Busters?

Yes he left Coningsby, sorry he left 106 Squadron. Well I left about towards the end of '42 and I think not long after I left he was taken off 106 squadron and he was told to form a new squadron and of course this turned out to be 617 squadron and I know for a fact he did take he did take about three crews from 106 with him because he was allowed to pick his own top men. You know men with a lot of experience and they moved to Scampton

15:30 to form this new squadron, which was very close to Lincoln. That was a pre-war station too and from there of course, I didn't know anything about this dam buster business going on. I didn't know what it was being formed, what was going on. Nobody I knew ever knew anything about it. We didn't know anything about it until we saw it the following day in the paper we knew that the dams had been raided. That was how close security was where I was.

Well it was obviously effective wasn't it? The security?

Oh it

16:00 was very, very, very effective. It had to be. I mean one you know one slip of the lip. Even there was all sorts of decoys I've read about that we used to mislead the public you know and anybody that might be watching and so forth. They did everything they could to keep everything quiet, which they had to do because I mean there was there was the lives of about, I don't know how many crews were on the raid. Fifteen to twenty crews took part in that raid so and the success of it all of course too because had the Germans got wind of what was going on,

16:30 they would have moved more defences in around the dams and that would have been a different story. I mean as bad as it was, it was bad enough, it was well defended they were, but I mean they would have probably brought more in.

And there were Australians in that...

Oh yes. Oh yes. There was Australians yes. Quite a few of the Australians took part in that raid. Yes. Very much so. Australian men. One of them I think that took part in that raid was Mickey Martin. I don't think he was registered with 106, Martin. He came from

17:00 another squadron but I could be wrong on that, but I know Gibson chose him to be one of his flight commanders, I think that's what it was, and Mickey Martin survived that raid. In fact he did survive to eventually settle down in Melbourne although as far as I know he may be still be alive, I'm not sure, and he was a brilliant pilot. In fact every one of the crews that Guy Gibson picked were you know rated top crews. Not just from the pilot, but everybody down.

17:30 They'd all had experience and well they had to be to do what they were doing.

And the crews would generally stick together over a term of service would they? They'd have the same captain, the same rear gunner?

Oh yes. Yeah they were very I think I think the air men they were very reluctant to do any swapping and changing because I mean it's not a case of over being over familiar. It's a case of being together, working together. I mean you get that with anything. The more you work with a person the more you understand them and the more you know the more

18:00 they understand you and I can't, unless there was some sickness. I mean if some sickness occurred and somebody had to fill in that would be alright but I never heard of anyone complaining about they couldn't get on with a crew member. It might have happened you know that somebody'd be taken off a crew and sent to another crew but whenever I saw any of the crews they always kept together. You know before they boarded the aircraft and at the end of the aircraft they were always together. I never saw any rows or arguing.

18:30 Sometimes they were very, very quiet. More often than not they were very quiet. Occasionally a bit of joking with one another, but before they boarded the aircraft they were doing a bit of fooling around you know having a bit of fun with one another but once they got in the aircraft I think they were from what I've heard they were pretty quiet.

You wonder how that impacted on them...

Yeah.

A lot of those men...

Yeah.

Being bomber crews knowing that...

Yeah.

They were killing hundreds of people and...

Yes.

And sometimes...

19:00 Yeah.

Inevitably innocent...

Yeah.

People. It must have taken its toll on some of them.

Yeah. At the last station I was at I got another job involving aircraft and what they decided to do was to start putting nitrogen into the tanks, because the shells from the German fighters they were they caused fire when they detonated. You know they were sort of a mixture of magnesium and powder and all the rest of it and they decided if they put this nitrogen

19:30 in the fuel tanks, if a shell did hit the tank it wouldn't explode and cause a fire but this was only done about 1944 and yes, that was another duty I did. Yeah.

So when you were loading bombs onto the plane, I know you've touched on this before, but can you just talk me through the routine of how they prepared the planes

Yeah.

And what part you took in that?

Yeah. Well as I say,

20:00 more often than not word got 'round in the morning that ops were going to be on that night and to get things moving, first of all of course they'd have to notify the bomb dump, the armourers, what type of load they were going to carry. They didn't always carry the same type of bombs. If they were after factories or anywhere like that it would be a different type of a bomb that they'd carry for dams or other types of buildings you know what I mean. Plants that were manufacturing rockets and all that. Different type

20:30 of bomb load for them. So that would all get under place under way pretty early on and the flight mechanics and the riggers and the fitters they'd be out working on the aircraft early on to make sure that everything was absolutely A-okay. They did a lot of testing with the engines of course, the ground crew, to make sure that everything was alright there. The met people they'd be busy with the you know keeping touch with the weather forecast, that what bit there was

21:00 coming through, which was very sketchy very often than not and the yeah the met people and, well this would probably all come under the work for the navigator anyway, the met reports. Other things around the station was, well after the early morning briefing what they very often did, they used to go back to the to the base to the billets and just have a rest for awhile if they have time

21:30 to do this. They'd just go and have a lie down. Quiet. They wouldn't be allowed off the air field and there was no way would they ever discuss with anybody else where the target was. In fact I think at one time it was only the pilots and navigator that got to know what the target was, you know what I mean. The gunners got to know later on about where the target'd be, but I think after awhile they did start bringing them all in together. Whether it was to get a bit more cohesion between 'em but

22:00 **And what part did you play in all that preparation?**

Well it'd depend what whatever duties I was on. I mean I'd report to the transport depot. It was quite a big depot. There was quite a lot of people working in it and we all had allocated duties. I'd probably report about eight o'clock in the morning after breakfast and I'd be detailed to do my twenty four hours on the ambulance or I might be detailed to go and work in the with the bomb dump, with the armourers. That's

22:30 that would be with the tractors towing the bomb kit trailers to each aircraft and otherwise I might be ordered to work with one or two of the senior officers. Take 'em 'round to different aircrafts you know. Just run 'em 'round, acting as a chauffeur for them because they were big aerodromes to get 'round on foot you know. A lot of time spent tryin' walkin' 'round so generally they'd always give them transport and sometimes repairs were required

23:00 for the aircraft at the last minute. I would have to go out and fetch them and bring them back to the air field but that didn't happen very, very often really.

You probably knew more people on the air field than anybody.

Well you probably knew I probably knew more people by sight than name. Names were never very sort of passed around a lot. It was just that was A person working on A aircraft and I recognised that mechanic from G George or B Beer or L London

23:30 or whatever they were the ground crew on the aircraft. That's how you'd know 'em. Occasionally you'd hear a Christian name but beyond that and as far as the crews were concerned, it was unless it was one crew that you knew really well you couldn't really remember many of their names. Probably the name that you mostly remembered was such and such, that such and such a person was a pilot of that aircraft. It was Pilot Officer Jones' crew, you know what I mean? The rest of the crew you probably wouldn't know. I think once or twice one or two asked me where I came from. They asked picked the

24:00 accent up you know and probably chatted a bit, but there's never anything said about what was goin' on with the if there was an operation on.

What were the I mean a lot of the you were talking earlier about how they would paint the bombs on the

On the fuselage.

Fuselage.

On the fuselage, yeah.

Did you have any planes when you were working on the air fields in England that were quite famous in their time? Ones that survived a lot of raids or

24:30 **that seemed to take on almost mythological proportions?**

Yes, there was a few that did this. There was some of the other air fields that had aircraft that got up to about eighty or a hundred or even a hundred and twenty trips and survived operations but I can't remember any on 106 Squadron. 460 had a one or two I think. G George of course was one. He got up to quite a good height with the trips and Kelston, I'm not too sure about Kelston. I don't think any got up that high but some of the older air fields

25:00 they'd been operating longer. One or two of their aircraft had done quite a lot of trips. See a lot played a large part in these raids. You could be in the right spot at the right time and the wrong spot at the wrong time, and that's the way it happened with a lot of them. There was no fault of theirs. They were just unlucky.

You must have thought quite a few times you know, "That could have been me that had been in that plane and didn't come back?"

Oh if I'd a gone air crew. I mean especially '42. I would a been

25:30 if I'd a got through for wireless operator/air gunner the course was about maybe three months. February rough March, April, May I would probably have been flying about August or September. I would a been posted to a squadron and well I would a been along with the rest you know in survival chances,

Which weren't too good

Which weren't good.

Were they?

Oh no. No. No. Yeah. Incidentally that raid when they lost ninety six aircraft was Nuremburg and not Dusseldorf. I know I said Dusseldorf. It was Nuremburg. That night actually on that raid I worked with a

26:00 padre the following morning because when crews went missing their effects were normally collected by the service policemen and then sent on to the next of kin but they lost so many that they brought a few of us in to help the padre and we were given cardboard boxes, not unlike a large shoe box, and in these boxes we put the few personal effects that the fellas had had. Generally a photograph of a girlfriend, family member. Bit of a

26:30 keepsake. It wasn't very much.

That would have been a hard job.

That was something I'd never done before and I don't think I ever did it again, but it was a very, very it was a very sombre job. We just went into the billets different billets that they were in. They were in Nissen huts actually. At Kelston it was Nissen huts and we went in each hut where the crews had been and this is a job we had to do.

The people who were doing the weather that night

Yeah, the met people.

Must have felt

Oh

Terrible.

Terrible but it all really did

27:00 and truly went wrong but I mean they were getting no forecasts from on the continent. They had to do all the forecastin' from where they were and I mean they didn't have the facilities in those days they've got now for I mean you can plot weather at the other side of the world now and probably be right with it to a couple of degrees, but then it just unfortunately it all the sky cleared, the cloud cover they should have had and of course the Germans seized on it. They literally they couldn't go wrong.

How did you get oh I

27:30 **imagine the information came back with the surviving crews.**

Yeah. Yeah. I don't know whether I worked that night or not. I don't think I was on crews. I don't think, no because I went I don't think I took crews before I went to the bomb dump. I know I went to a bomb dump to pick some detonators up or something and that was on the way back when I realised how bright the night was. I think they had, well they had left. They had left. I don't think I worked with crews that night and the following mornin' I don't think I was on crews then. Although

28:00 I did go on the air field for something. It could a been something different but I saw the empty dispersals. Word had got 'round when I went for breakfast that they'd had a bad night but it wasn't until I went on the air field that I saw how bad it had been. You know and how the large number of aircraft had been lost.

Did any of those were any of the men shot down to survive? Did anyone come out of that?

I don't know. I don't really know. Maybe. The odds of survival were very, very remote

28:30 unless they did manage to get out of the aircraft very, very, very, very quickly but I mean maybe the ones that probably could possibly have got out quickly was the bomb aimer. He was right. The escape was underneath him. The gunners and all that an easy chance to get out and the rest of the crew, oh maybe a navigator might have got out a bit or the flight engineer or

So it wasn't common that someone could parachute to safety

No.

Out of those planes?

It did happen but

29:00 if the aircraft was on its well some sort of minor damage and the pilot thought he wasn't going to be able to control it, then he'd give the crews order to abandon aircraft and of course unfortunately the pilot was nearly always the last one to leave and very often by the time he did get a chance to leave it was probably too late. I think most of them that got out, their parachutes worked alright. That was something else that was very important, was the parachute packers. It was mainly done by WAAFs

29:30 and in a massive hangar where they'd parachute packing and I never heard any complaints. In fact I even heard of one or two air men that had bailed out elsewhere congratulating you know calling on the packers and telling them that they'd saved their life, the parachutes. Then

You must have had a lot of admiration for the people that

Oh marvellous. You see, the pilot he is he couldn't fly with a parachute strapped to his chest. Well that's where they used to clip them on. They didn't

30:00 sit with them on. They had them close at hand where they could get hold of them and he had a sort of a seat parachute. So he had escape hatch over the top of his head but I mean by the time the rest of the crew had got out, even at about twenty, twenty five thousand feet that aircraft would have fell pretty quickly and by the time the pilot got the chance to get out the aircraft would be pretty low down near the ground, but some of them did survive. We did hear of one or two coming down in

30:30 occupied territory in Belgium, other countries, and they did survive but just how many off the squadron I never really found out and when D Day started and there was more raids over France then I think more of 'em seemed to survive you know what I mean. You know in French territory the resistance helped them and things like that. In some cases they even smuggled them back to England and of course this was at their own peril. If the

31:00 resistance were caught they were shot and ah quite a lot of them were shot through helpin' allied air men to escape. Not just in France, but in Belgium and one or two other countries too. Holland and you know Norway.

A lot of acts of bravery.

A lot of acts of bravery by civilian people and see every member of the community might not have been anti-Nazi. There were sympathisers with the Germans wherever they were and if they got wind of what these

31:30 people were doing they would betray them for favours with the Germans and of course these people were they were shot.

When you first, you mentioned the first Australian that you met.

Yeah, David Shannon. Yeah.

And

Yeah.

You came to meet other Australians after that on the air fields?

Yes. Not quite, well not on a name basis. Incidentally, speaking of David Shannon, he was born at Holgate, David Shannon.

Oh.

Yes.

32:00 I think he's still got relatives up there now and he married an English girl, a journalist, and David settled in London after World War II and he died about I think it was probably about two or three years ago. So he…

And you settled here?

I settled here, yes. Yes. That's right. Mm.

And what had you what did you know of Australia in those days? Did you know?

Well I, I think I mentioned this before, I think I learnt more from people who I picked up and gave lifts to you know, Australian air men,

32:30 than I never learned at school because I think all I ever really remember about Australia at school was there sheep everywhere and every girl in the town was called ‘Sheila’.

Well you couldn't go wrong then could you?

You couldn't go wrong. We never learnt very much more about it. You know we thought there was a kangaroo bounding 'round every corner and all that business but I spoke to quite a few. I'd give them a lift if they were going on leave to Manchester or somewhere like that and you'd be they probably didn't have a travel warrant and if they were in uniform we or if we were allowed to we'd pick 'em up

33:00 and give 'em a lift and they'd tell me about what part of Australia they came from. Some were from WA. Some were from the outback and

What impression did you have of the Australians?

They were good. They were good. I took one or two of them home with me actually. Mum found them a bit of a drink of tea and something like that. We couldn't offer 'em much because we were on rations you know and saw them on their way. I dropped them off to wherever they were going to. They'd been on leave for forty eights hours or things like that.

Well I bet everyone was interested in meeting them?

Oh yeah it happened you know probably there. They weren't there long because I could only just

33:30 barely call in. I couldn't overdo it you know because it was a service vehicle and petrol but I managed to do it once or twice without getting caught. So yes and sometimes comin' back if we'd been out to Nottingham or somewhere like that I sat next to some member of air crew and you know they had the Australian uniform on, the flash, and I'd just say "What part of Australia are you from" and got talking and different parts and that.

Did you find them much different from the Americans?

Oh yes.

34:00 Oh they were a lot quieter than the Americans.

Quieter?

Yeah. The Americans are more brash, if that's the word, but they were very friendly you know and the Americans they'd do anything to for you but the Australian lads they just, you just quietly went about the job. I never had, mind you they could play up. They really did play up on more than one occasion.

Is that right?

My golly yeah. At Binbrook they had a party on the pier at Cleethorpes and I don't know what it's to celebrate. It was

34:30 probably towards the end of '44. I September '44 there and I was on duty I never got an invitation mind you and things got out of hand on the pier and they upset the mayor of Cleethorpes so much that he said, "No more parties."

What were they doing?

I don't know what they were celebrating but whatever they celebrated they did quite a bit of damage and he wasn't happy about it because really, the relationship with the people in the towns 'round about these bases was quite good with the air men

35:00 but I think on this particular night the fellas let their hair down a bit. I don't know what it'd be towards the end of the year, because there's not really much on about autumn in Australia but whatever it was anyway they the guys they had a ball.

And you didn't get invited?

No I must a been on duty or something. Probably.

You weren't too happy about that?

No.

And do you remember

35:30 **when the end of the war came in Europe?**

Yeah.

Where were you at that stage?

When the war finished in Europe I was in India.

You were in India?

Yes. On VE [Victory in Europe] night on the base that I was at, Meiktila, my fellow ambulance member, a fellow called Fred Savage, he came from London. I think we were about the only two sober people on the base and the job we were given was goin' 'round the place collecting the bodies and bringing them back to camp. They were all sloshed out in the village.

Another party you didn't get

36:00 **an invitation to?**

No, another party. Yes, yes. So there you are, and then the same on VE on VJ [Victory over Japan] night, which was in August. That was a bit more of a quiet affair I think, VJ night than VE night, but VJ night of course we were getting ready to leave to go elsewhere to being moved on from Meiktila, from India. Meiktila was about eighty miles from the Burma/Assan border. So we were pretty well up right up in the top north east corner of India, Burma.

36:30 **Did it feel I imagine, and quite rightly so, that the British people just were so happy when the Germans were defeated?**

Yeah.

Did they really have much care or knowledge about the rest of the war that was going on with the Japanese?

That's a good point really. I mean the war against the Japanese was many thousands of miles away in virtually in Burma and the Pacific and you didn't probably didn't get the same feedback on that one that you did

37:00 on the war in Europe. I mean that was probably pretty well covered, especially with the Americans being the, not that the Americans weren't involved in Burma because they were. We had a few Americans with us at Meiktila but they were mainly transport young men. I don't know how much feedback was given to the people in Britain about the war in against the Japanese. I know that when I was being posted overseas I wrote a letter home and I couldn't give anything away. I just said I would

37:30 probably be going overseas and Dad wrote me a letter back and he said, "Make sure you get on deck and get plenty of fresh air." Well I didn't get plenty of fresh air because I was flying. So that was a bit of a joke that. Family joke. So he thought I'd be on a troop ship. So yeah VJ night was, I think on VJ night were we in Calcutta? We moved out of Meiktila and then we were on our way heading over this direction.

38:00 So I can't remember too much about VJ night. It was a relief. It was a relief.

Everyone would have had enough.

Yeah. I don't know how true the story is, but I'm in touch with one of our pilots that was with the transport command and they were bringing back some Gurkhas. You've heard of the Gurkha troops? In this aircraft, in one of the aircraft, and they had a

38:30 captured Japanese officer on the aircraft, high ranking officer, that they were bringing back for interrogation and somehow or other he slipped his manacles or whatever was on his wrist and he had some inflammable material on him and he's tried to start a fire in the aircraft. You know absolutely suicidal. So from what I was told the Gurkha troops got hold of him and flung him out of the aircraft. He wouldn't

39:00 do that again.

No.

Yeah and they would do it, the Gurkhas, they wouldn't bat an eyelid about doing it because they weren't afraid of anyone and they still aren't to this day.

No, they sound like quite a fearsome fighting machine.

Yeah they're wonderful people. I came across a few of them

Did you?

But not a lot but what I saw of them I had a lot of respect for 'em.

During your service?

Yeah. In India, yes. Oh yes there was Gurkhas there.

And they were British loyalists?

Very loyal. Very, very loyal and I think to this day they still are and I don't think they were always

39:30 as well treated by the British government as they should be. I don't think they're overpaid for one thing but they still serve as life suits them. Mm. I think they were the ones the Japanese feared the most, the Gurkhas. If the Gurkhas were in the area they the Japanese knew they were in trouble.

So they'd be the guys to be standing next to, the Gurkhas?

Oh yeah. Very

If you were in trouble.

Oh yeah. Yes and of course they were bred in the hills areas and jungle areas. They could move silently where

40:00 maybe somebody like me'd make a terrible noise when he was movin' around but they were they were very good at it. They knew what they were doing.

How were you received in India at that time? Being a British person? Because there was the beginnings of

Yes.

Of the uprising.

Uprising, yeah. Well I didn't find it too much in India but when I got to Indonesia I did. It was a different story in Indonesia but I don't know whether you want any information on that or not.

Well we do

Yeah.

But we'll leave it here

Yeah.

40:30 **'Cause the tape's finished.**

Yes. Alright.

Tape 6

00:37 **Eric...**

Yeah.

To go back a little again.

Yeah.

You you've recounted in detail that awful night when so many planes were lost...

Yeah.

And then the next major event that happened was about came about three months after that is that right, when D Day started?

Um

01:00 yes. March, that's right, March '44. That's right. D Day started, yes. That's right. During yes, yes it was.

And can you tell me about all of that period?

Yes. D Day? Yes. We didn't know what was actually happening. There'd been a lot of talk about the invasion you know D Day eventually coming but the crews were alerted for early morning raids with fairly large bomb loads, which would suggest

01:30 that the tanks wouldn't be very far away and on D Day itself, along with a lot of other squadrons, before the bomb loads were put on the aircraft just before the actual invasion started what they did was, they got as many Lancasters as they could and the aircraft were flying in like a box pattern over the English Channel. Um

02:00 they had to go x number of miles on a set course that way then that way that way, more or less like a square, and this was all done to confuse the German radar, the German warning systems. So we had the Lancasters on hand and probably other aircraft from other squadrons and they flew in this tight formation. They had to be exact height. No slip ups, because one slip up it would have put the Germans on

02:30 guard that something was going on and this system worked because when the invasion actually started the troops started lying landing in the spot that the Germans didn't think they that would have done. They thought they would have landed further down the coast I think, somewhere probably down towards Dunkirk, somewhere like that. So this is what the aircraft were doing.

So the aircraft are going in a box formation?

Yeah, like a box formation. That's right.

But they're moving across the Channel.

Yeah, that's right. Yes.

Could the radar not have just picked up their

03:00 **dir general direction anyway?**

Well it probably picked up but it probably wouldn't it probably wouldn't guess then that they might a thought there was exercises or something like that.

And they wouldn't have known how many aircraft

Oh no that was involved in it but from what I heard it did work you know. It did confuse the enemy and the ra because they had some very complex systems, the Germany you know. They were really on the ball with their you know the listening systems and this was what, squadron I was with was doing it along with a lot of other squadrons

03:30 too. In fact 460 did it too. They did this you know prior to the actual invasion started. Then once the troops started landing and they started moving inland then of course the aircraft started getting bombs on and that but the biggest problem then they came that the troops had started to advance a lot faster than what they expected. Very often a raid was cancelled because of fear of dropping the bombs on our own men and the American men. This happened quite a few

04:00 times due to this. So a raid that should have been on was at the last minute was probably even aborted and on one particular day the operations were on in the morning, it was probably about a month after D Day, and they were cancelled. The crews were still to stand by and the operations were on again in the afternoon. So they bombed the aircraft up again. You can imagine the work involved for the armourers you know and the other people, personnel.

04:30 **They wouldn't have stopped.**

No, they wouldn't have stopped and then again they were cancelled. So this second time it was virtually a stand down. So the crews were given permission to leave the air field. They could go into Louth. That was always the nearest place to this one I was at, Kelston, it was only a few miles away. So of course once they got into Louth they started to make merry, as they always could do and I was still on duty at the air field in transport and word came through again

05:00 for ops to go on again and of course by now a lot of the crews had left the base and we were given instructions to go into Louth to round up as many of these guys as we could and get them back to the camp. Well you can imagine how willing they were, you know.

They would have had a few pints by then.

Exactly and I don't know how the other drivers went on and they sent people with us you know to get we got some of them back to the camp but anyway the ops were cancelled in the end. So it was a bit like a movie you know, throwing bodies in the back of the

05:30 and then get 'em away. The police were down there organising it, service police, and I don't think Louth ever got over that you know. It was complete mayhem, 'cause I mean there's scores of air men you know 'cause it was a big bomber station and they were havin' a ball. They were let loose and whoopee. So that was a one off thing but that actually did happen and of course as the troops moved further into Germany, the invasion forces, they began to get things a bit more organised and targets more ahead of the troops were eventually being attacked to give them

06:00 more access across France and

How long did this carry on for from D Day? This operation?

This operation? Well the box formation was only for a day or two before or it may have even been twenty four hours.

And what were you during that time?

What, when that box formation was on?

Well the you said the armourers were working hard. I mean you must have been

Oh the, oh yeah when they yeah well that was after that after the start of the invasion. Once the troops started moving forward

06:30 and then they started getting the aircraft ready for targets, well alls they could do was sometimes the bomb load was changed. So the bombs had to come off to the off the aircraft

Is that what you were doing at that time?

Ah I could have been involved in that, yes. Of course I wasn't an armourer, I was an MT driver. I was just behind the trolleys moving the bombs backwards and forwards to the bomb dump. It's a big place, a bomb dump. I mean there's a lot of traffic in and out of it you know because what we were twenty to thirty aircraft on the squadron and they all had to be bombed up and

Any accidents?

One

07:00 or two in other places unfortunately. The most deadliest of bombs were the delayed action bombs because had like a time fuse and if they didn't go off at this particular time well of course the bombs would go off and if ever an aircraft returned with engine trouble or anything like that, these delayed action bombs were taken off the aircraft straight away and we had a very remote part of the air field where they were taken to and they were detonated. We'd hear a series of 'bang, bang, bang'

07:30 and we knew that these delayed, they weren't generally very big bombs. They were generally about two hundred and fifty pound, five hundred pound bombs. They were generally about five hundred pound I think, the delayed action bombs, but they were very, very tricky because when they landed on factories and places like that they didn't know whether to touch them or leave them alone, the German bomb disposal people you know. So there was probably a lot of people killed with them.

You obviously got to know quite a lot about bombs. Were you able to and tell the difference between the allied bombs and the German

08:00 **bombs? As in were they manufacturing a different kind of bomb over there that they...**

We never saw any of the bombs that they manufactured of course. The bombs they were the ones that were we sort of got the if you got used to working with a thing it's like anything else, you get to know it and you can name it. I knew the smaller ones would probably be the two hundred and fifty pound ones. Slightly bigger was five hundred pound. Thousand pound bombs were bigger still. You could pretty well

08:30 identify them and then they ones that we call the ‘cookies’, they were the four thousand pound bomb. They were like a big long cylinder, round cylinder bomb, and they were very easy to identify and then there was one that was a, I think it was an eight thousand pound. I don't think we I came across many of them and then there was one that was twelve thousand pound but they had aircraft specially constructed to carry them. They were called what they call the grand slam and they used these on the V1 sites and the V2s. They were a special bomb, but I don't they had

09:00 special squadrons designed to carry them.

V1 and V2 sites did you say?

Yeah, that's right. Yes the flying bombs and rockets. V1 was the flying bomb. V2 was the rockets.

Where were all these bombs manufactured?

Well I know different parts of Britain. There was a very big one between in Lancashire between Chawley and Preston. A place called Euxton, E-U-X-T-O-N, and that was a very, very big place. I don't know where the other bombs were manufactured

09:30 because where we were on the air fields it was just a dump to put the bombs in to store them and of course they were covered with grass over the top. It was all camouflaged so that they couldn't be seen from the air and you see another thing too that a lot of people don't realise, before World War II started the Germans were visiting Britain. They visited a lot of the pre-war air fields. They were they weren't dumb. They got to know where places were. I mean no doubt a lot of these place were stored just

10:00 as I suppose in some case one or two of our people were over in Germany on store places and it's not long since there was a documentary on television by an Australian that I've forgotten his name but he was about one of the last people to leave Berlin and he came out with quite a bit of a lot of information for the air force about German air fields you know.

Well imagine if the places manufacturing the bombs had been...

Hit, yeah.

Discovered or hit?

Yeah I don't can't remember

10:30 any ammunition place being hit. I know from time to time they did have accidents in these places, in the armament factories, and of course there were manned by women and men. A lot of the people that worked in the armament factories were definitely women.

What was your mum doing through the war?

Oh she was just on domestic duties, on a home duties. She wasn't fit for anything else.

Oh she still was...

No, no.

Unhealthy with her legs?

Yeah with her legs, yes. She had varicose ulcers and

11:00 they never really got better. It's something that she developed after birth and we couldn't afford a lot of medical treatment in those days. She was just given ointment and cream for treating them and...

Well I suppose the best of the medical supplies would have gone to the service people?

Yeah that's right, yes. Yes, that's right. So yes, they were very painful for her at times. She had a pretty rough time with her legs.

So you got through

11:30 **D Day?**

Yeah.

And then you joined the transport command in...

Yeah.

1945?

Correct. Yeah about posted there about January, February '45.

And what was that what were they responsible for?

Well flying supplies into Burma, out of Burma, from India and flying troops in, flying them out and bringing back casualties from Burma. Men that had been prisoners-of-war

12:00 under the Germans because by now they were starting to liberate them. The war wasn't quite finished but it was only about three to six months away from finishing. So the places that had been recaptured by the allies where there was any prisoners-of-war they were flown out straight away for treatment. Surprisingly enough, just before Christmas 1945 I finished up with the repat [repatriation hospital] when I was here and the court the ward that I was in was full of the men that had been flown out of Burma. Australian servicemen

12:30 and there was nobody there that I knew, but I think I was the only British bloke in the ward with them. Had a bit of a bit of a virus for about three days so they put me in hospital, but I'll always remember these Australian servicemen because some of them looked like skeletons. You couldn't believe that they were human beings.

And where were these so you're where were you amongst all this?

Sorry?

You weren't on the planes? You were driving still?

Yes still driving, still driving the ambulance.

13:00 **So when the...**

Yeah.

Prisoners-of-war were being brought back...

Yeah.

On the planes...

On the aircraft, yes, we met them.

You met them?

Yeah. That's right. Yes. We used to meet the aircraft and we'd take them to take them to a big general hospital just outside, army general hospital outside Meiktila.

Which do you know which one that was, the

I'm not sure whether it was the 14 it might have been the 14th AGH [Army General Hospital], but I'm not sure, so I will stand corrected on that but it was

AGH?

Yeah, yeah. Army General Hospital. Now the practice out

13:30 there with the ambulances or any vehicles, the heat, it was so hot that the hoods of the ambulances and the other vehicles were made of canvas. So what we used to do was we used to fold the canvas back to allow a breeze to come in and a lot of the drivers in other vehicles they'd drop the windscreen down at the front. You could release it and let it lie on the bonnet you see so you got fresh air in,

14:00 but the flies used to annoy me you know because you'd get them smacking in your face all the time. So I always used to leave the windscreen part up you know and the orderly alongside me and I saw this convoy coming towards me in the distance and when it got nearer it was a convoy of army engineers, Indian Army engineers, and they were going to make a new air field, a new run way, and about half way along this convoy these roads weren't surfaced or anything, they were corrugated roads, and these

14:30 strips of mesh for these air fields one of them must have slipped or something and the strap broke and the next thing somethin' hit the front of the ambulance with an almighty 'bang' and the windscreen shattered and the support for the windscreen just crumpled you know on this great this steel sheet clattered to the road. Of course the engines kept goin' you know this their way of driving was not everybody else's. So the orderly and I picked this steel mesh up and took it back with us

15:00 to the air to the base to show 'em you know that we hadn't been in an accident or anything and they looked at it and they said, "Well you're a very lucky man. If you haven't have had that windscreen up you would have been decapitated." It would have chopped my head off. So the support that I'd left up, it hit the support, bounced off the support, clattered on the bonnet and clattered on the road you know.

You should have gone many times by now.

Yeah I should have, so on that occasion I was definitely lucky. Yeah you were lucky because you would a had a headless husband you see.

15:30 So sometimes 'cause I was always called a bit of a stick in mud. I was called ‘goody two shoes’ because I wouldn't stick me nose out you know. I didn't drink you know or one thing and another. I didn't smoke and all that. So on this occasion it

It all paid off didn't it?

It all paid off, right. So that was that anyway.

So at this stage you were in Meiktila

Yeah, Meiktila. Yeah

And that's where you're receiving the POWs [Prisoners of War]. Do…

Yeah.

I know you've mentioned this before,

Yeah.

But what camps were they being picked up from?

16:00 They were being picked up from camps near Meiktila, that's down in Burma. M-E-I-K-T-I-L

I honestly can't think of the name of the under camps of other camps that were down there.

Changi I think you mentioned.

Well Changi was Singapore. That was a long way away from us.

Oh that was the other…

No that's alright. No it's okay. There were other camps. There was several down further down into Burma, down near Rangoon. I don't know just how far our squadron aircraft was flying down there but they were flying well 'round pretty well 'round the clock.

16:30 You know bringing these as fast as the liberation was going on as the Germans, ah sorry, as the Japanese were pushed further down. So they were able to release more men

And you'd never seen a sight like it?

Oh my God no. No. You can't believe that any man could be so inhumanely treated, not even in prisons, to what these they had survived from what four years or more this business of war. Well many of them never did

17:00 do. I don't know whether you ever saw the film The Bridge on the River Kwai. I mean that was a good rendition of what those fellas had to put up with. The bestiality and the cruelty by the Japanese was…

And the starvation.

And the starvation. They had virtually nothing to live off and

Were they able to speak? I mean you would have been one of the first people in pretty well that…

Yes. They seemed to be just in the aircraft the ones that I came across they were quiet and glad to be away. They all wanted smokes. They all wanted to have a cigarette

17:30 and they didn't mention seem to mention much about food and of course when they got 'em in the hospitals for recuperating they had to watch how they did feed them you know 'cause their stomachs would only take so much. I mean living on a diet of berries and whatever they could find and although from what one or two told me, I don't think the Japanese guards and men were treated all that much better you know. They weren't given all that much. It was just their cruelty that they did it with

18:00 them.

And were they what nationalities were these men?

What the, the servicemen?

The POWs?

Mainly a lot of Australian and British servicemen. A lot of POWs yeah from Australia.

And British?

And British. Yes. Oh yes. Well it depended which camp they were in and where they'd been captured. All these men, all these servicemen were probably taken prisoner in Singapore or in the islands off the coast there. You know 'round Java, Sumatra. They were all a lot of servicemen on those islands and they were all

18:30 shipped over to camps on the mainland the to that the Japanese had.

Did it, it must, I'm not suggesting that the enormity of the war hadn't hit you before...

Yeah. Yeah.

Because you'd already been through quite a lot...

Yeah.

But it must have hit you once again...

Oh.

When you had to see those people?

Yeah. No I mean when an aircraft landed at the field at Meiktila and they were coming in and out regular, there was a regular stream of

19:00 flights. I mean it was always a very, very quiet area and incidentally there was quite a lot of nurses travelling with them, Australian Army nurses.

Who were also being rescued?

Yes. No with, they went to attend to the servicemen. They flew with the crews, army nurses, Australian Army nurses and British Air, Army nurses. They flew with them to tend to them whilst they were on the flights.

They were very brave women weren't they?

Oh they were brilliant they were and very caring and of course I think maybe some of them

19:30 probably didn't even make it when they got back you know they because they were pretty long flights. I mean they're not a very fast aircraft but that was the best they could do to get them out. They could never have got them out by road or on foot. They wouldn't have lasted. There wasn't much in the way of roads or trails anywhere in Burma. So the easy way of evacuation definitely was by air, by aircraft.

So they were coming back to Burma by aircraft and then were they sailing back to Australia or England?

No. They were flown they were oh well the

20:00 they were flown they were flown from the internment camps that they were in they were flown to the nearest place such as Meiktila. Meiktila was probably about the nearest to Burma and it was a big air field and then they were sent into army hospitals, as I say, for convalescence for a long time before they were fit enough to be sent back to either to Australia or England.

Did you ever have a sense of hatred for the enemy? Did you have that in your heart or?

I did. I did.

20:30 I had it. I had it for the Japanese.

Because of what you saw?

Because of what I saw, yes. How could one man be so bestial and so cruel? I mean there's many had had their heads chopped off just because they didn't just bow low enough to a Japanese officer. Things like that. I mean they'd no they'd no they'd decency didn't occur with them and their men had to carry the orders out from the officers or else they would have got the same treatment themselves.

Have you been able to get rid of that feeling?

21:00 Oh now there's you've brought up a very good point here because the coach room I worked with for awhile, transit, where you got a contract with the Japanese government. They were doing filmin' believe it or not and my boss told me, he said that, "We've got to look after these people because they're well they're bringing a lot of business in", which was fair enough. They were. I said so I said to him, "Well" I said, "I'll be respectful to them Murray.

21:30 I'll shake hands, but I'll never bow to them" and I never will do. I've nothing against the Japanese children. They had nothing to do with it, the people that came after, but some of the, you know some of the higher people that were involved in it all. No, I haven't forgotten.

And did he respect your feelings about that?

Yes he did. He did. Well he accepted it, whether he respected it or not.

It must be quite confronting for a lot of people who went through that period.

Yeah.

Because

22:00 **now Australia has a large Asian population.**

Oh yes. Yes. Very true. Very large Asian population.

And it must be almost, well it must make life very difficult for some people.

Yeah.

Who hadn't been able to let go.

No, no. Oh no, no.

Some things are too hard to forgive aren't they?

Well as I mean you're not dealing, you weren't dealing with cattle, you were dealing with human being. They were literally dealing with a fellow

22:30 man weren't they? I mean they're no different to the Japanese. They had two arms and two legs and a body and they were on this they were on this earth together. Prior to World War II I mean I'd never really heard anything much about Japanese and had no aggression to any of them or anything like that but World War II changed it all.

What did you know about the Jewish concentration camps at the end of the European war? Did...

Well...

Had you heard anything?

Not, we

23:00 did hear bits about there being concentrations there ah camps there during the war. Yes we did hear that. That was mentioned on radio from time to time by people that had escaped and of course they were no better. They were no better at all.

No. So you assist in getting the POWs back to the hospital?

Yeah, that's right.

And then you find out that

23:30 **you're going to Australia, is that right? To take part...**

In the, that's right in the see the war was still on then and we were going to be part of a task force bein' organised in Australia for the invasion of Japan because at this time the atom bombs had not been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. So we were told that we would be supports part of an air support for the British fleet, which would be along with the Australian fleet and the American fleet

24:00 in the invasion of Japan and casualties for the actual invasion were estimated between two hundred and thirty and three hundred thousand expected casualties.

Australian and British?

Yes. Yes. These were the figures that we were given. It was it came out later too. So you can imagine the

concern about all this but when by the time we got here to Australia the bombs had been

24:30 dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima so

Is that you found out about the bombs when you got to Australia?

No we found out the bombs just before we came here.

Oh I see.

It was about August, about August 1945, and we left India about September '45. Just after. I think we were in Calcutta when they dropped the bombs.

What did you think about that when you heard about it?

Well I mean it was a relief. I mean World War II was virtually over and

25:00 well it was a great sense of relief that we weren't going to be involved in it you know but there was still supplies and stuff to be fed up through the Pacific to the navy and other branches. So we still were due to come over here to fly the supplies out. I don't know whether I mentioned to you about how they got the aircraft over here to yeah. Well from India

25:30 they couldn't fly the aircraft through Singapore because the war was still on. This was when early on in '45. So the powers that be they said, "What we'll do, we'll fly the aircraft down to Ceylon. Take all the necessary fittings out of the aircraft and put extra fuel tanks in." I think it was about five overload tanks and they put new engines in the aircraft and just the

26:00 essential ground crew were going to go with them, that was the fitters, mechanics and electricians, and so they all got down to about Colombo. Put the tanks in. Refuelled and they set off for the Cocos Islands.

Were you involved in this?

No, because I come by sea. I was a transport driver. So we left Calcutta on a troop ship and we eventually came 'round into Port Adelaide. Now this troop ship that we were on was called The Sante

26:30 **'Health' [in French].**

Yeah, health, you're spot on, and they'd been built at the end of World War I in a German ship yard in Bremen and the Germans sold it to the French government, they renamed it Sante. When World War II started the Germans captured it off the French government and gave it to the Vichy French. Then when World War II the British Navy took it off the Vichy French

27:00 and gave it back to the French.

Long history this boat.

And do you know that ship went through World War II without a mark on it. It did convoys all over the place. Never once, not even a scratch.

Must a had the right name.

It had the right name, Sante, and coming out of coming out of Calcutta we got the tail end of a monsoon in the Bay of Bengal and Eric, not being number one sailor, soon found the nearest part of the rail he could find because by now the

27:30 ship was just about doing everything bar loop the loop and I had one comedian to the side of me singing, "Give me land, lots of land, don't fence me in." So I felt pretty close to strangling him. It was that bad that some of the crew were even hanging over the sides of ships with us, and these were Alaska seamen and they were used to it, but after that it was smooth sailing. It was a beautiful sail all the way 'round. We sailed through in across the Indian Ocean. We slept on deck all the way.

Well that would have been beautiful.

It was so crowded it was so crowded my mate and I slept under slept under the

28:00 stars all night.

And the ship was full of British troops and

And servicemen coming back on repatriation. There was six hundred and eighty personnel including about two hundred-odd Australian servicemen that were coming back for repatriation. So it was chockablock, full.

Did you in that time when you were receiving the POWs and also on the ship coming back to Australia,

Yeah.

Were there any Australian nurses that had been...

There were some, but I never really in

28:30 conversation with them

POWs?

No. There were. There were nurses on. There were nurses on. They had their own more or less part of the ship, their own quarters and the facilities for doin' any clothing, washing, daubing as we used to call it, was so bad that most people used to hang their washing over the side of the ship with a line and let it thrash about in the sea and then pull it in. That was their washing machine and about a couple of weeks out of Fremantle we ran short

29:00 of water. So everybody finished up washing in sea water, which isn't very nice for showering in but right drink of water had to be anyway when we got to Fremantle we were given a lovely reception.

Yeah I've heard a bit about could you tell me about the reception that you got in Fremantle?

Oh yeah we were there for about twenty four, forty eight hours and townspeople went to town on us you know and Poms [British] a lot of Poms on the ship and Australian servicemen. So places were thrown open to the blokes and

Must have been a very emotional...

Oh

29:30 it was lovely you know.

Coming home?

Fremantle yes, and that's the only time I've ever been in Fremantle. I was only there about forty eight hours.

So this is your first impression of Australia.

The first impression of Australia, yes, and funnily enough one of the first people I spoke to was a transport bloke. He worked for the equivalent of the transport there and he said, "I come from Preston." You know he'd been out there for donkey's years. So I told him I'd been came from and he said, "Oh" he said, "Yeah I know Bolton." So he was the very first one I met in

30:00 W.A. and then of course we followed the came 'round through the Bight [Great Australian Bight]. Nothing happened, quite a smooth ship. Smooth sailing, no sea sickness through the Bight, not even a ripple, and the same with the Bay of Biscay and yet within sight of London in the Indian Ocean and you know but that's the way it happened.

And then you came into Port Adelaide on...?

Yes, on

On that ship?

On the Darby. Yes.

And did you disembark at that stage or?

Yes we did. There was a train waiting for us and we all were taken to

30:30 Parafield and then

So what were your impressions your first impressions of Australia? This place that you'd heard of from all the Australian pilots and crew?

Well I'll tell you this much. We went into Adelaide for the first time. It was like walking into utopia. Everything was so clean and orderly. Even though they'd had rationin' here it was nothin' like what we'd had in Britain. There was fruit everywhere. You could buy fruit that we couldn't find.

31:00 Lots of things that we hadn't seen for ages and I mean now remember the war had been on for four nearly five years then by '45 and a lot of the servicemen you know they'd gone without a lot of things, and the reception from the Australian people, they were marvellous. There was a great big ‘cheer up hut’ that they called at the station run by voluntary services and you could go in there, get a meal very cheap. There was even accommodation there and there was invitations galore from Australian families to go out,

31:30 spend the weekend with them. Spend time with them.

Must a been like...

Oh it was marvellous.

Well the end of a nightmare and the beginning of...

Yeah. It was.

A dream.

It was. It was so clean and Adelaide you know I mean I don't know why they call it a large country town because it's not a large country town it's a city in my eyes, even though it's not the biggest of cities, but no, it was it was nice. I liked Adelaide and I probably had it in me mind then that maybe one day I would come back, but

So you were taken out to Parafield?

32:00 Yes. We used to get the train up to Parafield and always used to catch the train going back at night, back to base about midnight. We never used to call out Dry Creek. We used to call a nasty name to it because it smelled such a lot. We used to stand at the back of the train call it 'S*** Creek' but no, then I met a family at that lived at Largs North, a family called Crittens and he was originally from a Lower Stoft in England and

32:30 he jumped ship in Melbourne in the 1920's. He met an Australian girl, Peg. They married. They came to live in Adelaide. He got a job at a customs and the block of land that they got at Largs North just off the esplanade I don't know whether he told me it was twenty five pound or fifty pound they paid for that block of land. Anyway they befriended us. They were wonderful people. They died of course a few years ago.

That block of land would be worth a bit more now.

Yeah, worth a fortune now that's for sure and one of the family

33:00 that two of the family that got to know, one was a family called Rhodes. She's actually married now. Her name's Rodd. Her parents were very good to me. They lived above the police station at Port Adelaide and they befriended me and my mate and we used to go there for a meal with them and

And what did you think of Australian culture or Australian social life?

Well they were a bit more relaxed. More free and easy. I mean they were had they had been at war as well but there was no signs of buildings being

33:30 you know sort of barricades up and all that business. It was hard to realise but you know I mean Australia was twelve thousand miles away, I understand that, but I liked it. I quite and I did hope probably that one day we might get back and I kept saying to Sylvia when I got married, "Will you emigrate?" and she kept sayin', "Oh twelve thousand miles is a long way", which it was, which it is because I don't think Sylvia had even been down to London, which was two hundred miles from where we lived. So you know it was a big move for anyone to make, especially a woman,

34:00 and I have a lot of respect for women that followed their men to come out here to a place so far away, but she stuck it out. She's been good and we've never been back. We've been here ever since and it's getting on for forty years now.

Well you obviously don't feel any great desire to go back.

No. No. I don't think Sylvia would really. We've had our moments. We've had our ups and downs, but other than maybe go for a holiday, but there's we've always said, there's other places that we haven't seen.

34:30 We've seen a bit of Victoria. Seen a bit of New South Wales. We've even had a holiday in Queensland. So we've not done too bad really and people have passed on that we knew in England. Families have grown up. Sadly Sylvia's lost one or two members of the family. I've lost a brother and of course our parents have all gone. So

Your children might find it interesting...

Yeah.

To go back there?

Oh well yeah. They've heard different things, but our son was in the navy in England. He did his training there, but he was quite he seemed to be quite content to get back here to

35:00 Australia. So and that just about, oh I did, I went onto another place too after I finished up. I finished up in Sumatra.

You finished up in Sumatra, but we can... can we just go back a bit?

Yeah, you can. I'm sorry.

That's alright. You don't have to be sorry.

Yeah. That's the last part of it anyway.

It's a lot to tell.

Yeah.

You were saying that you went out to Parafield.

Yeah. Yeah.

So what did they have you doing there?

Ah on the ambulance again.

Lot of variety in your job.

Yeah, lot of variety in my

35:30 in my I'd nothing much else to do to tell you the truth, and the MO was a man called Doc Ormerod. He was a Scot. I he'd been with us of course in India and up the main north road there was no poles or anything like that. It was just riding stables. All of them up the main north road and he was very fond of horse riding. So I used to take him to one of the horse stables for horse riding and he used to fix me up with soft drinks and all that. Then bring him back to Parafield. That was more or less the time of it.

What did you have to do there though?

Not much.

36:00 Not much.

Just maintenance of vehicles?

Just maintenance. Just marking time that's all. There was very little we could do. The aircraft were flying supplies up to, even then they were still flying up into the Pacific through Cloncurry through Queensland and up through the islands, flying supplies up, and then eventually even that finished and then about Christmas 1945 we were told the squadron would be disbanded and those due for repatriation would be sent back to

36:30 the U.K. and those that still had time to do, people like myself, would be sent elsewhere and this happened. I was sent to Sydney. The squadron was disbanded at Camden and

What did you think of Sydney?

Well we were on a cushy number there. We got from the camp that we were at, which was a place called Narellan, about forty miles out of Sydney my mate and I instead of being on the ambulance this time, we got the job as a postman. So we just collected the mail in the morning, got transport,

37:00 went to Sydney for day. Got rid of the mail about lunch time and the rest of the day to ourselves and transport to get back. So we had a ball for about three or four weeks. It wasn't for long.

So how old were you at this stage?

Ah '45, I'd be twenty two.

So you're twenty two?

Twenty, yeah.

And you're foot loose and fancy free in Sydney?

Yeah. Oh yeah.

And so what did you get up to?

Not really a great deal. I did a bit of visiting different national parks and didn't get into any love life or anything like that.

37:30 There was still plenty of facilities there for soldiers, for servicemen, some good clubs and I saw the start of the first boat race. Saw that start off in '45. That was very interesting, Boxing Day. That was good and then January I was I was moving. No about the end of January we were posted out of Australia. The squadron just disbanded.

And where did you go after Sydney?

Went back to Singapore. Went to Singapore.

And what kind of

38:00 **state was Singapore in?**

That was just getting over being occupied. Just beginning to come back. Oddly enough probably the most lavish place in Singapore was the Raffles Hotel, that was actually a service club then, which we could go into and get a good meal, and I wasn't there very long before I was sent to Sumatra.

Sumatra.

That's another part.

And

38:30 **in did you have duties in Singapore or were you just biding time?**

No, just in transit. Wasn't doing anything until just in a big massive transit camp. It's a place called I think it were called Siloso. Yeah, I think it was either Tingha or Siloso. There was two camps. It was a bit more

And you hadn't been to Singapore before had you?

No. No. No.

And what I mean obviously it's post-war but...

Mm.

What was your impressions of the place?

It was very busy. Singapore itself was very packed. A lot of movement.

39:00 A lot of people about. Very, very busy.

A lot of bomb damage?

I didn't see I didn't see much in the way of bomb damage in Singapore, no. I know that Singapore Harbour had a few damaged ships lying around and that I think, if I remember rightly.

And some cars.

Oh yeah. Oh a lot of that. Yeah. Yeah. We'd heard about of course the fall of Singapore in '42, which was three years before, and I didn't see any Japanese

39:30 actually, whilst I was in Singapore.

Probably wouldn't be the best place for them to be at that time.

No. Coulda been, I think they'd already possibly been dealt with by then. Especially the higher ups you know. The ones that were guilty of atrocities had one or two generals had been shot, dealt with.

We'll leave it there Eric.

Yeah, that's alright.

Tape 7

00:39 **So Eric,**

Yeah.

Just going back in time a little bit...

Yeah.

Um, you formed under Wing Commander Burton

Yes that's right.

And told that you were flying out to the Far East.

That's quite right, yes. That's quite right.

To Burma.

Yeah.

And what were you allowed to take with you?

01:00 Ah well as we were flying, we were allowed one kit bag full of our own under clothing and stuff like that. That's all we could take. Anything else you had to send back home.

Had did your parents know where you were going?

Um no, no. They didn't know where we were going. They guessed there was somethin' about it, but they still thought I was gonna go by sea you know and that we were getting rid of a lot of equipment. They didn't know I was flying because I

01:30 couldn't mention that.

How much contact had you been able to have with them throughout your war time

experiences in England? Had you been able to go home a lot?

I got you had a leave or two but not a let. Leaves were generally about seven or fourteen days.

And what kind of reaction were you getting from your family? Do you remember...

Oh dear.

The kinds of things that they'd say to you?

They were always glad to see me but of course they were battling just the same as a lot of other people on you know rations, low food

02:00 stuff. The only thing that I could help a bit with was when I was with the Americans I could take Dad some cigarettes home and take Mum some chocolate home and I think I took one or two cigars home if I remember rightly. Basic stuff like that but that was all.

Were they worried about you?

Oh yes I think they were worried but they didn't not in their nature or anything like that well they didn't show it a lot because they knew that and they knew there was a lot of things I couldn't discuss with them you know. I never discussed

02:30 anything with them that I shouldn't do. So yeah they were worried. They were concerned, naturally enough. Being the eldest son too, although I did have other brothers anyway.

And what were they doing?

Well they were younger than me. The brother younger than me, Ronnie, was working in a foundry ah no sorry a manufacturing firm, steel foundry. Sort of steel foundry. I think they were on war work and the youngest brother was still at technical school.

And what were your parents

03:00 **doing?**

Well Dad was still working on the trams of course as a tram conductor.

Was that a reserved occupation?

Yeah well he was too old for military service anyway. Dad was too old then and I think Dad would be about mid-forties then. So he was too old for call up and of course Mum wasn't workin'.

So they were living off what he earned and what...

Yes, that's right. Off yeah and they were still supporting the other children.

03:30 Yeah.

So they were doing it quite tough?

Well, they were managing. Everything was very, very restricted. I mean I was never able to take anything home like food stuff or anything like that anyway because there was nothing I could take outta the camp. Outta the bases I should say.

Do you think you were eating better on base than they were back at home?

I think we were. Yes, I think we were. On more than one occasion, although we probably grumbled about it, but no we were we got through alright.

04:00 **Could we just go through the places that you flew to on the way to Meiktila?**

Yes.

I I'd just like to talk about those places briefly.

Yeah that's quite alright. Day one we left Taunton Merryfield, that's Somerset. We flew down to Cornwall, to a place called Saint Morgan. It's still an air field and we had to get clearance there for goin' overseas.

04:30 So we refuelled the aircraft at Saint Morgan and then we headed across the Channel and then started heading south through France, I think keeping pretty close to the coast most of the way, down to Marseilles. Well to a place called Istres, that's I-S-T-R-I-S. It's about forty kilometres from, thirty forty kilometres from Marseilles. Big air field. Been a big Luftwaffe air field and that was the first stop.

05:00 **And how long were you there for?**

Only overnight.

Only overnight? What did you observe of the ex-Luftwaffe air field?

Oh the buildings were pretty well knocked about. They'd been bombed by the allies and the hangars were damaged and of course the German personnel was all gone. The Luftwaffe personnel had long gone and it had it'd been pretty badly knocked about. I believe it's still in use now as a matter of fact. It's been done up again of course, the air field.

05:30 **Were there any Nazi swastikas up anywhere or any...**

Oh they were on the walls and everything, yes. They were there. Swastikas and writing in German and about you know something about you pick up a bit of about allies and under allies and all that business. I can't speak German, but you could see that what they'd you can gather about what they'd wrote on the walls about what had happened. About what they'd done.

So these were individual people graffitiing or

06:00 **was this sort of...**

Oh I don't...

Official?

I don't know who they were that would have done it. They were probably maybe German service personnel, Luftwaffe personnel. They were on the base. I don't know what type of air field it had been under the Germans. Whether it had been a fighter air field or a bomber or what.

Is it right to say that in England the spreading out and satelliting of so many of the air fields was to limit the amount of damage that one bomb run could do?

Yes. Yes. Yes I think it was a good idea.

06:30 See why Lincolnshire had so many air fields, it's probably the flattest county in England, in Great Britain, in fact. It was ideal for air fields because most of Lincolnshire's virtually as flat as a pancake. There are parts of Lincolnshire that they refer to as the Lincolnshire Wolds, W-O-L-D-S, but they weren't really wolds in the sense that you know them like you get in the Yorkshire Dales and places like that. So on the all it was an ideal place for anything like that. There were a few hills but not many. There's no mountains or anything like that.

07:00 **And Marseilles, this air base you said was quite a substantial one?**

It was a big one, yes.

Did you were you aware at the time did anyone discuss there being lots of other air bases? Was this a tactic that was employed by the Germans as well?

Well it could have been. I never heard anything more about the actual air fields. All's we knew was that it we could see it had been a Luftwaffe air field and we got we touched down at probably about tea time, after the flight from Saint Morgan because we didn't leave Cornwall 'til probably pretty

07:30 well late in the morning and at Istres it was we got a meal organised and bit of a kitchen, emergency kitchen, organised for us and we had a meal and I think more than anything else just to stretch our legs we walked into the village, which wasn't far from the air field, and we wandered around a bit. There didn't seem to be much damage around the village and the people were pretty quiet. The French people didn't say very much but and then from

08:00 there we went back to the air field and of course we were off very early again the following morning. Most of the flights were pretty early morning.

So the French weren't particularly happy to see you?

No they weren't we weren't greeted with open arms or anything like that happening. No, there was none of that happening at all but there's no any signs of any ah any bitterness you know or any anger or anything like that. We didn't see all that many really in the village. It was only a very, very small village.

Was there anything else on the base that was sort of souvenired

08:30 **by people? Was there any left uniform or any of that kind of thing?**

Oh I don't know. If anything had a been taken it would have been taken long ago. Although this was what, this was January no February '45. So if they'd been gone I don't think they'd been gone very, very long from there. So whether the village people had raided the place and taken off what they could do. They probably would do. You couldn't blame them for it but apart from the four

09:00 girls that spoke to us, I think they were the only people that we spoke to in the village. I think we saw one or two men knocking around, older men, but didn't see any signs of any young people or anything like that. It was only a very, very small village.

So this is an air base not unlike the kind of work that you were doing? Its flights are leaving there and presumably they're coming to bomb or be fighters?

Yeah.

In the end?

From their side, yes. Oh yes I don't doubt what it had been involved a lot in the war,

09:30 you know what I mean. Excuse me a minute.

Sure.

I did get the impression it possibly was a fighter field because the murals of aircraft on the walls were probably of they were actually of allied planes that had been shot down over you know over that area. Claims that they'd made.

Did it was it at all eerie being in that place or were you not?

Oh it seemed strange, yes, because we'd

10:00 within twenty four hours we've come out of Britain you know to foreign soil, which it virtually was. It was still under Nazi rule still and German rule, but there was that strangeness about it all, but I think we were a bit surprised to be where we were you know. As I said, when you're flyin' over flyin' down from Saint Morgan down to Istres you looked below because we were only above about three or four thousand feet up and you couldn't see hardly any signs of life and

10:30 everything looked so peaceful below. There was no signs of any damage or anything like that in that part of France. It all looked sort of rural and quiet and peaceful. You couldn't believe there was a war on. You know that we were flying over enemy territory, which it still was for a few months longer and

So you were there for twenty four hours and then...

About yeah less than that actually. Ah about twelve hours, twenty, eighteen hours at the most.

And did you eat there?

Yes, we had a meal on the base. Yes we had a meal

11:00 there. I can't remember what it was. It was some sort of a temporary meal got together for us and we just sort of fixed ourselves up with sleeping where we could do. We found some old beds and bunks and that you know. We just it was all very, very makeshift because we were you know we were just travelling through.

So these are Luftwaffe bunks?

Yeah their bunks and stuff that they'd used. Beds and all that and they were just ordinary they're nothing special about them. We just got to get our head down. We were happy to be lyin' on it to

11:30 get a rest ‘cause it had been a pretty busy day sort of thing, prior to leaving.

So once you'd slept, what next?

Well early morning and we were away again, heading into heading over into Tripolitania, which is part of Libya now I think more or less and in the late afternoon we arrived at this place called Castle Benito. I don't know what it's known as now,

12:00 it's another name for it now, but it was had been occupied by the Italian air force. The same thing happened again. There was all the murals on the wall. This place had been very, very badly bombed during the landing in Tobruk and the harbour was a lot of ships ah and again it was the same thing there. We just made do for a night and we didn't go into the town or anything at all and we were off again early the following morning.

So you saw ships in the sea when you...

In the harbour. When we were comin' in to land

12:30 we saw the ships.

Do you know whose they were?

A lot of them were probably allied ships that had been bombed during the 'cause about 1941, '42 Rommel [Erwin Rommel, German Field Marshal] broke through and he came very, very close to getting into Tobruk. That was the siege actually. It was under siege for a long time, Tobruk, and I think the German army shelled the harbour a lot and of course they probably hit quite a lot of ships. There was quite a number of ships partly submerged in the

13:00 harbour and we could see you know there'd been a big battle there but quite a lot of damage had been done to the shipping.

That's a part of the war that's certainly part of Australian almost folk lore now.

Tobruk, yeah.

The ‘Rats of Tobruk’.

Yeah, Rats of Tobruk that's right, yes.

Did you hear about that at the time?

No. No I didn't. I knew there'd been heavy fighting. I can't remember the Rats of Tobruk coming out 'til later. This the that phrase.

So it wasn't commonly

13:30 No. No. No. What we saw the area around there was virtually a lot of it was desert. It didn't look very hospitable to be stationed in you know and we were under canvas there actually at, no Castle Benito we went under canvas. The next place we were at we were under canvas and again it was all desert. Actually we were at a place just outside Lod about outside Tel Aviv in Israel. It was a place called El Adam.

14:00 That was all desert there as well and from there of course we did have a bit of a, we had a bit of a break. I think we might have had twenty four hours there and we went into Tel Aviv to have a look around.

And what was Tel Aviv like?

Beautiful. Well modern. Very, very very, posh place, but like the Riviera and well mixed people there. Jewish people and Arab people. There wasn't really

14:30 any signs of any fighting then. It was very, very nice. Lovely place.

It looked untouched by the war?

Oh untouched, yeah definitely. No signs of any bombing or anything. No, there was no signs of any damage in Tel Aviv.

And did were there cafes or...

Yeah, a lot of cafes there. We had drinks there. Ice cream and we could get stuff like that. Whatever there was and whilst we were there of course we went to get back to the air field I don't know how we worked that in, but

15:00 we went through Jaffa and we that's where we picked up all the oranges. 'Cause the air field wasn't far from Jaffa and we picked them up. We got some boxes and took 'em with us.

How many boxes of oranges were you taking?

Oh I think we took about six to each aircraft and full of oranges, stored them in the aircraft, and we had a ball. As I say we ate oranges all the way through to India. We must have been the fittest people to arrive in India.

Vitamin C enriched.

Oh yes. Yeah.

No scurvy for you.

Oh no. No. They were good and they were beautiful oranges. I mean Jaffa oranges in England you pay,

15:30 used to pay quite a lot for them then. I don't know what they're like now but they're beautiful oranges and the people in Tel Aviv we didn't have much contact with them really. Just the shop keepers. I know at the air port at El Adam was a very busy one. Same with the one at Lod and then of course from then on we went on to I think next one was Ibania in Iraq and that was

16:00 also that was on the edge of the desert. It was then. I don't know what's it like now of course, Baghdad's all built up now, but that wasn't a very nice place. We were under canvas there. Just over night and then the next day we were off down the Persian Gulf to a place called Bahrain and that is really an island in the Persian Gulf and you when you're coming in to land you came in over the sea and when you're taking off you went over the sea and

No mistakes.

No mistakes, that's right, and a lot of the population there was Arab

16:30 and mate and I we eventually found sleeping accommodation for ourselves and it was in a large cupboard in a little part of the air field and we put our sleeping bags in this cupboard and we off went to sleep in the cupboard and about in the early hours of the morning we heard this bell clanging away and we made enquiries and we found out that they used to ring this bell to warn the sheikhs to look after their women because they were being raided with sheikhs from the other islands. Used

17:00 to raid one or two of those islands to pick up the women you know and that was a warning bell with the warning bell that they used to these guys were on the move. It was a funny place Bahrain. Anyway we were only there overnight and off we went again.

Why were you hopping so much? Is it the amount of fuel a plane could fly?

Yeah it's just the load limit. DC3. They went about probably about eight hours flying without refuelling. Not much longer and remember it was only about a hundred and fifty, hundred and seventy

17:30 miles an hour, which isn't very fast, but they were a good, good plane. Went up two or three times with the crew. Had a chat with them. They called us up the front. Sat with them for awhile. Changed with them. Moved around. It was good. It was quite good and as I say, mostly crews were fellas that had done tours on bomber command. Coastal command and probably one or two on fighter command and they wanted to carry on flying. So they volunteered for transport command and they were still flying and there was even one or two

18:00 Australian air men that were on their way back home. They were flying home the easy way and they were gonna be demobbed in Australia, which was good for 'em.

So,

Sorry.

Then, sorry, from Bah...

Bahrain.

Bahrain on...

Yeah. Onto Karachi. Actually it was Karachi and then Raipur. We landed in Karachi then flew on to Raipur. I think Raipur was more central India. That was very, very hot and dry.

How

18:30 **long were you in Raipur?**

About three weeks.

So you must have got an impression of the place?

Yes. Not a very good one either. Very desolate and very open. There were some American missionaries working there amongst the native population. They're very, very poor people and as I say, it was very, very hot. The CO had to get hold of some clothing for us pretty quick because I mean you're standin' in a temperature about that degree you workin' on the aircraft. I mean

19:00 the fellas were stripped to the waist and it was no good.

What were you doing during these three weeks?

I wasn't doing any driving or anything. I was just more or less filling time in. There was not much to do in the way of duties. There was very little happening. Just a bit of work on the aircraft, that was all. I can't remember doing any duties there at all. I know I went to church once or twice and it was run by American missionaries. It was a big large tent that they had the service in. I remember going to church there.

Did many of the men go to church?

19:30 Yeah. Quite a few, yeah. Different denominations. Mm.

And what kind of impression did you build up of the local population?

Um they seemed very poor people. Very, very poor. I know I remember one thing very clearly about the there was a lot of large birds. They weren't vultures, they were a type of hawk and the proper name for them was shite hawks. Not kite hawks. That's what they call them

20:00 and when you walked from the mess tent, from the kitchen cook kitchen to the mess tent, to eat your food if you didn't put your hands over your plates they'd come down and swoop the food off the plates these hawks and they were good at it too. There's more than one person got caught out. There was just fluttering of wings over your plate and off it went. They knew you know when fellas were feeding and other than that there wasn't much else happened really at Raipur.

Was there any prostitution or drinking

20:30 **or those kind of things going on?**

I don't think so. I don't think anybody went anywhere near any village if there was any villages nearby. We just stayed on the base and everybody knew we were only there temporary. So it was just a case of waiting for the time to move. You know the right time.

And you'd known all along that you were going to end up at Meiktila?

Yes. Oh yes. We were told we were going to Meiktila. The flight from Raipur to Meiktila was a pretty long one. As I said before, it was a bit of a hairy business getting off

21:00 the ground, which we eventually managed, and Meiktila was a different again because we were up in

north eastern India. We'd been in central India before and this was Meiktila was all jungle. It was a different set up altogether there. Lot of jungle all around. Just the villages cleared and the air field cleared from the jungle.

Can you tell me about the air field?

Yes. Not far out of town, out of Meiktila. Meiktila was quite a large town actually. It was quite a big town in, I don't know what it's called now. I think

21:30 it's still on the map now as Meiktila and there was quite a number of Americans there and they were flying transport so they over the hump as it was called, into China. Flying supplies to Chinese, the Americans. Big Liberator aircraft and ah we had, as I say, we had our squadron there on the air field. It was very about from where we were staying it'd be about four or five miles from the camp where we were camped and

22:00 it was quite a fair way out and it was in use pretty well all the time, the air field.

So you were staying quite a way away from the

Yeah where yeah where the our accommodation where our billets were. We weren't on the air field. The air field was virtually just a flying field. It was just a flying field cut out of the jungle with control facilities and that would be about all. You had the ambulance there and all that on the air field but with our ambulances I was on at the time I was based back in the camp but the air field was very, very much basic, you know what

22:30 I mean. Temporary sort of a thing. There'd never been an air field there before. It'd just been cut out for the for the war effort. For the you know for the allies to use.

Were the buildings made specifically for the war effort? Were these Nissan huts?

Oh they weren't. They were mainly bamboo huts mainly.

Is that what you stayed in?

Yeah. Bamboo huts, yes. Yeah they were good. They were quite cool. Yes they were alright.

23:00 There was a spell where the fellas started keepin' pets and the pets they started keepin' was monkeys. There's monkeys everywhere and things and jewellery started going missing and things started getting a bit nasty in the hut I was in, in some of the other huts too. It turned out these monkeys were stealing the stuff and hiding them in the rafters. So the CO put a banned on keepin' pets. No more monkeys to be kept as pets. They were only little monkeys you know. They were very friendly little things

23:30 actually but they were very mischievous.

Did you have one?

No. No, I didn't keep one. No. Used to walk 'round with them on a rope. Even the native children even kept mongooses as pets. They didn't have pet dogs or pet cats, they had mongooses. Little rope around its neck and of course the mongooses were there was a lot of snakes around there. There was snakes all over the place, although I didn't see many, but the native children had, they had the mongoose for a pet.

24:00 **Why do you think they didn't build your bamboo huts closer to the air field?**

Ah I don't really whether it was because most of the supplies and everything was in Meiktila itself. You see Meiktila was we were only about two miles out of the town and then you were probably about another three miles further on towards the air field.

So you were between Meiktila and the air field?

Yeah. Yes. Yes. Between ah no, Meiktila was between us and the air field. We were just on the outskirts of the town, of Meiktila.

Mhm.

Yeah.

So you had your bamboo huts and...

Yes.

24:30 **And sort of how many people were staying in this area?**

Well the whole squadron was based in bamboo huts around on the base. To a hut I should think there would be about probably about ten or twelve in a hut. They weren't all that big but they were good enough for, I don't know who'd been in them before. I've got a feeling the army might have used them before we did because they were already there when we moved into them.

Was there a mess hut?

Yeah.

25:00 Well we there was a big mess hut for the men but we had a lot of our meals on the sick quarters. We had our own cook, so we had our own we had our you know, we were more or less billeted in the sick quarters.

Who who's we? All the drivers and...

Yeah, the orderlies and myself. Two drivers actually. There was another man and myself. We more or less lived there. There was one time when we had a break and I actually I was in the I was in the

25:30 I was in the hut for awhile. No, wait a minute. Sorry, I'm wrong there. The sick quarters was near that's right, the sick quarters was near to the huts. That's right. I beg your pardon. We weren't sleeping in sick quarters. We were sleeping close to sick quarters and we each had a native that used to come in and clean for us, native boy, and the one we had would only be about twelve or thirteen. We christened him Abdul and he used to come in and tidy up for us. Used to give him a couple of rupees or anything like that

26:00 and he used to take it home to his parents and in the mornings what we used to do, we used to take the used to take the orderlies for used to pick 'em up, their mess was away from us, used to go to the mess take them to the mess for their meal, that's right, they had their early morning breakfast and then we brought them

26:30 yeah we brought them back to take 'em down to the air field and one morning for some reason or other comin' back to the air field, not to the air field, to where their accommodation was, to their camp, and the roads were very, very narrow. I mean it was virtually jungle on each side of the road way and my headlights picked up some movement in the bushes on the right and

27:00 as I started to turn towards the drive way to where the camp was, there's a bloke shot out of this these bushes with a very ugly lookin' knife in his hand and of course I was only goin' very, very slow with the ambulance. So I sort of put me foot down and the ambulance slithered about and I could hear all this shouting and carrying on at the back, "What are ya playin' at?" and when I got back into the camp I told them what had happened and of course everybody said to take more water with us and all the rest of it you see. So Abdul was late

27:30 comin' in that morning and he was generally in pretty early to clean up after us and one of the fellas questioned him about why he was late and it appeared there'd been a wedding in the village the night before and they very often wanted a dowry, which involved giving cattle, and the groom and the bride's family had had an argument over what this dowry should have been. Of course they were drinking the wine or whatever it was that they drank and

28:00 things got quite nasty and I think he killed somebody in the family and of course this fella shot off with a knife that you know that I eventually saw in the bushes. So when the story was explained by the Abdul with the with the orderly, I got more of a better response you know.

They didn't think you were barmy [crazy] anymore.

They didn't think I was barmy. What was I playin' at and I don't know whether they caught the guy or not. I don't know whether it happened or not and a few other things happened there, because when they found out there was a sick quarters there,

28:30 if there was any accident they'd bring people to the sick quarters for treatment. 'Cause the hospital was a long, long way away.

Locals as well?

Local oh yeah. Local civilians, yeah, and they had a habit of climbin' up in a tree to pick nuts, beetle nuts and all that sort of stuff, and invariably the one of them would fall out of a tree and they'd bring him into the hospital for treatment and of course two or three didn't survive. They fell and cracked their skulls, things like that happened, and the doctor did what he could for them, the MO, and then we just

29:00 took them to the local police station and local police station were very non-committal. They just sorta said, "Put them there on the verandah" and that was it you know. There were no relatives there and that's

Did you ever assist with any of those?

Ah I went to pick one up that fell out of a tree, an elderly man. The orderly and I went and we took him back to sick quarters but he was already dead. He had fractured his skull and he was a pretty oldish man I think, if I

29:30 remember rightly, and he was the one that we took to the police station, ah took his body to the police station, and also we had a drowning there. Some of the guys had built rafts out of oil drums and there was a lot of ponds around there, pretty deep ponds. They were full of all sorts of vermin and stuff and these guys were rafting on these ponds on these pontoon things that they made out of oil drums and of course the thing capsized and this bloke was thrown in the water, this air

30:00 man, and by the time we got him out he was dead. He'd drowned and that made me make up my mind to learn to swim. I thought you know, "It's so near the shore and if he would have just swum a few

strokes he would a been alright." So when we eventually got to Calcutta I sort a learned to paddle around a bit and swim a bit. I thought one day I might need it. So, yeah there was wasn't a lot of things happened like that, but there were there were accidents happening like that. A massive population. Very big population

30:30 all 'round that part of England, of India. Very, very poor people too.

And what about the Americans? Were they in the same

No. They were in a camp of their own, the Americans.

And their did they use the same air field?

Yeah. Oh yes. They used the same air field. Yeah so they put on a bit of entertainment for us. They had their own cinema, outdoor cinema, and we were invited to go. They put films on for us from Hollywood, new films, and there was a few American servicewomen there too.

Must have been a novelty.

31:00 Yes, oh yes. They were probably in big demand but we never got anywhere near them. There was no British servicemen, women, there at all but the American women were there. Wasn't a lot but it was a fairly used base by the Americans.

And what was being done out of Meiktila at that time?

Well, as I say, they the Americans had the big four engine Liberators [B-24 bombers]. They were flying supplies into China to help the Chinese to fight the Japanese because they flew over a range of mountains that were called

31:30 the hump. That was a range of mountains separate India and China. Hima, part of the Himalayas probably, and the Americans flew over there with these supplies and our own aircraft was just flying down into Burma to bring the fellas out and take supplies in. So it was a pretty busy air field, Meiktila, and from Meiktila we lost one aircraft, which was crashed in a thunderstorm, monsoon storm. We lost one aircraft from Meiktila. That was the only one we lost to my knowledge.

32:00 **And you were helping some of the POWs that were coming out of Burma?**

Yeah, that's right. Yes, meeting them with the ambulance, yeah. Taking them to the general hospital in Meiktila. It was a big army general hospital there. I'm not sure whether it was the 14th AGH or not, but it was a big hospital anyway. It was on the outskirts of Meiktila.

Did you or any of the orderlies ever actually go on the planes to meet...

No. We stayed with the ambulance because they had men there that was doin' the

32:30 lifting off of the stretchers and it was also supervised by the nurses.

So there were nurses on board the planes?

Yeah. More often than not yes there was. I think

Male or female?

Two. Two ah no male and female actually but there was female nurses with them comin' out of Burma.

And they were English?

Yes. Yes they were. Yes they were English Army nurses. There might have been one or two Australian, but the ones I saw I think were English mostly.

So they'd go in and pick up

33:00 **the men and bring them back?**

Yeah, they'd fly down. They'd fly down with the aircraft when it left Meiktila to go down to into Burma. This place called Meiktila was a big base in Burma. That's where the men were loaded from and then they'd fly back with them.

Was there anybody else that they were bringing back or was it purely POWs?

Oh probably a few servicemen due for repatriation had been wounded and things like that in fighting, but a lot of them were POWs.

Why

33:30 **had you not been released from service at this point?**

Well when you went in the services you were given a number and the older men, say men in their thirties, thirty five, which you know was old for service age, they were amongst the low numbers. You know ten, twelve, fourteen, but my demob number was forty four 'cause I was only eighteen when I went in you see. So I had quite a long time to wait before I was due for

34:00 repatriation.

So there's a point at which everyone who's got a number eighteen is...

Yeah, whatever.

Is...

Yeah depended how long and some had probably been in service since about 1940, '39 so of course they would be out quicker but from time to time different groups numbers came up. I mean twenties came along and then thirties.

And they were never out of order? You wouldn't get a thirty one getting let off?

No.

And then...

Oh no

Twenty two?

No, it was taken in strict rotation. Yeah. Yeah.

Okay.

34:30 Yeah.

We'll move forward in time 'cause I think we've covered quite well in...

Yeah.

In between those, but...

Yeah, that's right.

Can you tell me about Sumatra?

Yeah. Can you just give me one minute please.

Sure.

I won't be a sec. Excuse me. Can I just take this off just for a minute.

Yeah we'll just stop the camera.

I wouldn't do that to you dear.

Could you tell me about Sumatra?

Yes. I was only in Singapore for a

35:00 few weeks. In transit. Not very long. Maybe two or three weeks and then I was told I was being posted to Medan in Sumatra and about this time of course the war had finished and the Indonesians were trying to get rid of all the Dutch people because they felt in some cases they had a lot of oppression under the Dutch, and if you looked Dutch and you were white,

35:30 you weren't very popular. So for the first time in my service career I had to carry arms. There was a curfew on. We had to go about in pairs most a the time and I had a what we call a Sten gun, like a small machine gun. Whilst I was there these natives, Indonesians, raided the camp

36:00 and they killed several of the air force regiment men on the air field. They were guarding the air field. I finished up driving the commanding officer. In fact I drove for three commanding officers on the base. The first one I drove for he was very, very, very nasty with his orderly and myself. He used to treat us like dirt. I mean he was knockin' about with a couple of Dutch

36:30 girls and I'd go out, take him out, and he had a Japanese staff car actually that we'd taken over that had been captured from them and I'd take him out to wherever he was staying with these Dutch people, and you'd be sat out there in the sun and if there's no shade that was no ‘big deal’. He never sent any cold drinks out to you, anything like that. Anyway he eventually got repatriated back to the U.K. and another commanding officer came along

37:00 and this one was a lot better than the first one. He was more fatherly you know, more caring and wherever I went with him he was very good and then eventually he was sent back to the U.K. for repatriation and the third one that came along was an Irishman called Kilmartin. He was a former Battle of Britain pilot and he was a gem. He was wonderful. He treated us like human beings and

37:30 wherever we went, if he was doing any courtin', he looked after us you know. He looked after his batman [officer’s servant] and myself and shortly after I was with Wing Commander Kilmartin my demob came through. I was gonna be sent back to the U.K. and that was the end of my service career

about September 1946.

So the night that you were raided?

Yeah.

Was this quite soon after you'd arrived?

Yeah.

38:00 Not long. Not long.

Why were the Indonesians raiding the army camp?

To get weapons.

To fight the Dutch.

Yeah, that's right, and because we were in the way. Not all the Indonesian people. Don't misunderstand me. There were you know there were a segment of Indonesians that were hell bent on independence. That's what they were after. That was the beginning of it all. 'Course for many years they'd been part of the Dutch East Indies and now they were getting

38:30 free of oppression. I'm not saying all the Dutch people were bad with them. They probably weren't, but I know some of them had been pretty hard on them and of course when the Japanese came along in a way they thought they got a saviour in the Japanese, but the Japanese were no more kinder to them than they were to anybody else. Actually whilst I was at Medan I came across, I think she was a Eurasian girl. I think she was part Japanese. I think she were

39:00 Eurasian and I'm trying to think of her name. I can't think of her name. Elizabeth, she was called Elizabeth, and when the Japanese invaded Sumatra she must a been about thirteen, twelve or thirteen, and they were looking for women for the brothels and she was a very bonny girl actually and her family, there's a big leper colony on the island, and her family hid

39:30 Elizabeth in the leper colony because the Japanese wouldn't go anywhere near it. They really didn't like lepers. Well they let 'em alone. So this leper colony was more or less run by nuns of some order. I don't know what order it was, but they looked after Elizabeth and kept her safe until the war had until the Japanese had gone. So

And she didn't ever contract leprosy?

No. No she didn',t but there already were lepers in there

40:00 and Elizabeth survived it. Yeah. A bonny girl, too. Lovely girl.

So how did you know her?

Um used to get two or three of the girls used to come around to the camp. You know they were looking for food and things like that from the servicemen and two or three of the blokes got talking. One of the girls spoke a bit of English and this was the story they got from them about her being in the leper colony.

40:30 **We'll just stop there thank you. We're just gonna change tapes.**

Tape 8

00:40 Strange things. Strange hobbies.

Very strange hobbies.

Yeah.

So you were, given your number had come up and you were...

Forty four. Yeah that come up. Yeah. So I was sailed back to Singapore and this time with the navy

01:00 of all people in what they call Landing Craft Troops, an LCT. It was like a ship with no windows in it of course. Like a barge, big London barge. It was only about two or three days sail from Medan, Sumatra to back to Singapore and when we got Singapore Harbour it was chockablock with shipping so we had all our gear with our everything

Why was it chockablock?

Well there was a lot of ship coming in. Movement, discharging, going in Singapore Harbour you know. Stuff was starting to come in again. Supplies

01:30 and stuff. So we couldn't get in to the side of the wharf so what they did, they anchored this LCT in the middle of the harbour and then they brought a smaller boat alongside of us called a lighter and we had to come off the side of the LCT with these rope ladders and down the rope ladders into this lighter. You try going down a rope ladder with about forty or sixty pound of equipment on your back plus kit bag in one hand you know. There was a few near spills but eventually we made it down

02:00 the side of this LCT into this lighter and then of course they took us to shore and then from there I was about two weeks in transit and then I was told there was a ship coming in. It was called The Athlone Castle.

Had Singapore changed much since you'd last seen it?

Not a lot, no. I didn't see much of it. I was only there about two weeks and then down to the docks at Singapore. This time the ship was in the dock, thank god, and sailed back to the U.K.

02:30 I had a penchant to be gone. Took us about three to four weeks to get back I think and we got by train from Southhampton to Thornton, near Blackpool. There was a big demob centre there and that's where I got demobilised.

And how long did that take?

Oh only about a week to get cleared of everything. That would be about October 1945. Ah '46 I'm sorry.

03:00 '46, I made my way back to Bolton, which wasn't far away, and I were already wrote to the transport people in Bolton asking them if I transferred job abroad from Australia. So I went down. My father was still working as a tram no it was a bus a bus conductor then. Yeah, no wait a minute. No the trams were still runnin'. There was still a few

03:30 trams running. I think he was still tram conducting and I asked for bus driving and they said, "No you've got to be twenty five." I was only twenty three then. So they said, "If you're still interested go on the back. Learn conducting. When you're old enough we'll put you in the driving school for bus driving." So I said, "Alright." So I started conducting and then one morning I sat in the depots like spare man,

04:00 stand by, and the depot inspector called to me. He said, "You'd better get outside quick. There's a tram outside. The conductor hasn't turned up. The driver's not very happy about it" and I went outside and I saw this tram outside the depot and you talk about your tram being full. You never seen anything like it in all your life. It was packed and it was a double decker tram too. So the driver got of the platform and as soon as I saw him I think my heart sank because it was a fellow known as "Shiny Straps."

04:30 To look at him you knew he'd been in the army. His uniform was immaculate. His boots were polished. His shoes were polished and he had the moustache and what he had to say about the female sex wasn't very, very nice indeed. So he said, "The sooner you get on the tram and we get away get moving the better." He said, "Now there's" there was an intersection in Bolton that was called Preston's Corner and this was where two main roads crossed. So he said, "When we get to Preston's Corner don't forget

05:00 to the back of the tram. Hold on to the trolley rope so the trolley doesn't come off the wires." So of course Eric set off. Trying to collect the fares inside the tram and I'd forgotten all about this trolley rope and we just entered this intersection. There was a flash and a bang and the tram just shuddered to a stop and everybody pitched forward. You know you can imagine the mass the sea the mass of people. Everybody surged towards the front of the car, to the front of the tram, and next minute you heard the

05:30 door open right at the top of the tram and this voice said, "You silly you ****" well you can imagine what he said you know, and I was lookin' for a hole in the tram to fall through. Anyway went to the back of the tram and there the trolley rope was swinging all over the place you know. Doing a rope dance or snake dance and eventually I got hold of the trolley rope and got it back on the wires. I looked to me right. There was traffic everywhere. I looked to me left. There was traffic everywhere and when I looked behind me there was a convoy of trams that were

06:00 that would have put the Atlantic convoy to shame. They were all queuin' up behind me. Anyway we carried on with this run up to this terminus and I was still collecting fares when we got to the terminus. I think most people on that tram had a good free ride. Anyway when I got back to the depot the inspector said, "I've got some news for you. They've dropped the driving age for bus driving to twenty three so you can go in the driving school tomorrow." That was the only time I ever worked on a tram. Thank god.

Doesn't sound like it was

06:30 **your calling.**

It wasn't my calling, no. Not a tram like that.

Had...

Especially with, sorry.

Had you been able to bring anything back from overseas to your family? Any mementos or photographs or?

I can't remember actually.

Snakes?

No I didn't bring any snakes back. I can't remember very much really what I brought back. Photographs. Oh yes well done Sylvia. In Sumatra I was given a sword from a Japanese officer. When they surrendered these swords were taken off them

07:00 and then what was he called? Lieutenant he was, a Lieutenant Yamamoto I think and I had this Japanese sword in the house in Bolton. Now when we learned we were going to come to Australia, of course things like this were forbidden. So our son was at school nearby where we lived in Bolton. So and also my brother was teaching there, one of my brothers, so we gave the sword to him to put in the museum. I probably would have got quite

07:30 a bit for it out here but yeah that was a souvenir and I can't remember much else. Presents or anything like that.

So back to the U.K. and you became a bus driver and how did you meet...

Sylvia?

Your lovely wife?

Aha. Well just before I was bus driving, learning to bus drive, I was conducting. Yeah that's right. It was on the bus where I spoke to you wasn't it? Yeah that's right. Yeah I was

08:00 still conducting. I was still going through the driving school and this young lady came belting along one night. Opened my arms and anyway she sat in the seat on the corner of the, it was a bus wasn't it? Right, yeah the bus, and we got talking. I think she'd been babysitting and I told her, you know, been in the air force and all the rest of it. So I said to her, "Can I take you to the pictures? Would you like to go to the pictures one night?"

08:30 and she said, "Yes" and I think I was Sunday off that week and of course there's no Sunday cinemas then in Bolton, but there were in Berry, about six miles away. So we went to the pictures in Berry and from there it all went carried on and eventually proposed to her and about twelve months later we were married, weren't we?

So why did you end up coming to Australia and why did...

Oh right yeah.

Sylvia come, agree to come...

Well…

To Australia?

I don't think I ever really settled down.

09:00 The climate got to me. The weather. Winter of 1963 was probably one of the worst they've ever had in Britain. Sylvia's father died. He was only sixty. He never got to see retirement. That more than anything else I think. Driving in bad conditions you know, fog and all that, and I love the sunshine you know and

09:30 Adelaide was still very much in my memory. So I asked Sylvie from time to time what she thought about emigrating and she you know I mean to say it's a long, long way to go. Eventually in the end she agreed. So we made enquiries through Australia House. It was actually a society run in Manchester called the FETAS Peter Society and it was called Future Emigrants to Australia Society. So we used to go to meetings there

10:00 in Manchester and they used to give us information about what was going on in Australia about job positions and of course about this time there was quite a lot of people emigrating. It was about 19 just during 1960. So Sylvia's sister also agreed to go with us if we were going to go. They were originally going to go to New Zealand and they changed their minds, said they'd come to Australia with us. So we put the papers in and eventually we

10:30 the word came through that we'd qualified to be accepted as migrants and our son would be about sixteen, Brian, and our daughter was four. It was a big move for them and it was a big wrench leaving family, especially for Sylvia because there was only her mother on her own but they were more or less in favour of us leaving to make a life in Australia and we flew out. We flew out

11:00 with an air line called ‘British Eagl’e. They were part of the Cunard chain of shipping and they'd gone into the air line business. So they flew us to Melbourne in this aircraft. It's called The Bristol Britannia. Eventually the air line did go bankrupt, but they flew us out anyway to Melbourne, to Essendon as it was then. There was no airport at Tullamarine. From there

11:30 we stayed overnight with some friends from Bolton and then the next night we caught the train to Adelaide. We caught The Overland [train]. The people that we'd met when I was here one of 'em had arranged temporary accommodation for us at Woodville at a lady's house. More or less in a sleep out area and didn't work out too well, especially for the two children. So eventually we got a flat at

Glandore.

12:00 We made enquiries about housing and of course we got the story that Sylvia said, about them wanting us to sleep at Elizabeth, live at Elizabeth, and we said, "No." I knew there was other parts of Adelaide which were nicer and eventually we got in with a building firm. They built houses at Mitchell Park and we moved from this flat at Glandore, which wasn't very nice. There'd been somebody in, Asian people or somebody. There was cockroaches and all sorts in it

12:30 and we got out of there as fast as we could do and we moved into this house and this house that we moved into at Mitchell Park and my aunt come from come through from the U.K. and I think we had the equivalent of about thirty shillings between us. Sylvia went grape picking for Hamiltons winery on Oaklands Road. Her sister went with her to get some extra money. I got a job bus driving with a local bus company on South Road and from there we started to get

13:00 established but it was a long haul for a long, long time to get stuff together. When they got a bit of money together through the grape picking a bit of furniture they got from Mecar Used 'til eventually we got our house something like in Mitchell Park and as I said to you before, we actually had viscous soil down there and at one stage there was quite a bit of trouble with flooding too and

13:30 we felt we wanted a change. This place come a came along but the people that had this place had a pool at the back, which we didn't really want. It was above ground pool that had been sunk in-ground. So we had the pool for awhile and it was quite popular with the children but there was never anybody there when there was any maintenance wanted doing, looking after, the old story, so the pool was eventually drained out and we had it filled in and we've been here ever since. We've never ever been back to England

14:00 and we have seen a bit of Australia.

Did you regret having moved here?

No. No I was happier here than Mitchell Park actually.

No in Australia I mean.

Oh Australia? Sorry. No. I love England. I'm not against England. I'll always have a soft spot for England because I did quite a bit of coach driving in England too before we came out here. I left the transport company and went driving with a coach firm. I did a bit of tour work, which I enjoyed, but it's

14:30 not much of a life for married people. I mean you're away from home for a week. It wasn't really fair on Sylvia, so I miss the Dales [Yorkshire Dales] and miss family. I mean Sylvia's sisters were great to get on with. I always got on very well with them. She had three other sisters in England. She missed them I'm sure just as much as I missed my mother and father but eventually mother and father did agree to come out here. My sister was already out here nursing.

15:00 She'd been nursing in Tasmania and she got moved to Reed Park. She was nursing there and eventually later on my younger brother came out. He with his wife and he went teaching at Karratha and then at Katherine, no Katherine and then Karratha, and then when he retired from Katherine he went to live in Bundaberg and the brother that was left in England he died from cancer at about the same time that Sylvia's sister died from cancer in the 1980s. March

15:30 1980s. Actually March is a bad month for deaths in our family. There's one or two other people died in March.

What is it you told Sylvia about Adelaide that appealed, other than the climate?

Um I think I told her a bit about the life style you know. I showed her what few photographs had of Adelaide and I told her it was it was a comfortable place to be in. I mean remember we weren't here all that many weeks,

16:00 but what I'd seen of Adelaide I felt we'd be alright, settle in, and oddly enough, this society that we went to in Manchester it was surprising the number of people that were applying to come to Adelaide, British people. A lot of them got jobs with GMH and other firms up there but I think you know she I think she had time to get, if Sylvia would have said "I'm not going" I wouldn't have come. There's

16:30 no way I would have come. I would have stayed with her in England, whatever I missed, but she agreed to come and I mean another thing too, she'd never been anywhere else. She'd never been away out of Bolton. I think we only had one apart from our honeymoon, about three days in Morecombe. Apart from a holiday in south of England, in Cornwall, that's the only time we you'd ever been anywhere and the only time we

17:00 came through London was coming out here and that was only just in transit to Heathrow Airport. So really she'd never even seen all that much of England and as time got more settled our son married. He had children. Our daughter married and she had children. The family got stronger and larger and we still kept in touch with family in England. We always have done and we still write now to the survivors and

17:30 we've always talked about if ever we had any money that what we might do, but I think I mentioned to

you early on I think we both agree that if ever we had a decent sum of money we'd have a holiday in New Zealand rather than go back to the U.K. because my sister goes back about every two years and she always comes back with the same story, that everything's changed a lot to when we were there. That you wouldn't recognise parts of Bolton. There's a very big um population of

18:00 people from other parts of India and other parts of the world and some parts of Bolton have improved a lot and other parts have gone for the worse. So we've had ups and downs here. It's not been easy and especially on one wage because Sylvia's had more or less a heart problem. She's not been able to do a lot of heavy physical work. The heart problem actually started after we more or less got out here, although I think she was born with a bit of a defective heart, but she wasn't picked up when we had our medicals

18:30 and recently she had a pretty bad fall in the medical centre on the South Road so she badly damaged badly not one of her legs and it's given her heart a bit of a shake up too and pulled a muscle pretty badly. So but she's getting over it now. She's feeling a lot better now, but I don't think we'd ever move anywhere else now. If ever we move anywhere now it'll be a retirement place.

19:00 I think we're both of the same mind. We'll stay here as long as we can do.

Do you ever march on Anzac Day?

Yes. Never missed it for many years and in the 1970s and '80s as, and I've probably mentioned before, my father marched with the British Imperials. They were the ones that were in World War I. 'Course quite a lot of them had emigrated out here with their sons you know families and our son

19:30 marched with the Royal Australian Navy. He did twelve years in the Royal Australian Navy and I marched with the Royal Air Force. So three members of the family marched with three different services and I was the one that always got the stirring done because the air force was always at the back and every time the march finished they're always there waiting for me.

The bluebells.

Yeah the bluebells. Gee we got a lot of rubbish about that. "Why where've you been? Where have you been?" and, "Look who you've been behind.” The cream and all that. I got the lot thrown at me. I still get stirred with that by our son

20:00 now with the navy but it was all in good fun and today on Anzac Day I go down, I still have lunches once a month in the city, at the Union Hotel with friends that I've met through bomber command. Through 460 Squadron and after the march sometimes we go to the air force club at North Adelaide in Kurmor Street at I've also

20:30 met someone else that was here on 238 squadron but he married a local girl. He lives at Joc Roslyn Park. So he also comes to these dinners with me and they go to the Buckingham Arms with me after the march 'cause I generally go with them but the only trouble is, it makes a long day for me because I go down to the service down here at Port Elonga, the dawn service, and I go down to the march and then of course the lad

21:00 from Roslyn Park he doesn't go to early morning service, he goes to the service at Sansa at Kintour Avenue there so I'm there and then of course they go for a meal. So by the time I get back home after the meal it's getting towards tea time so it's been a very, very long day, for Sylvia as well as for me, so Peter's wife keeps on at me about, "Isn't Sylvia coming by? Don't you bring her to the lunch", but she's not a big lunch eater Sylvia.

21:30 She enjoys a meal at night, but I think if we went to the lunch together at Buckingham Arms she would probably leave half of it anyway, but he's a good mate and one of my mates. I've a lot of mates, but he's a good friend and his wife's a lovely woman so I generally just go and have a meal with them and then head back here as soon as I can, so that's about it for the march.

Now is there anything else you'd like to say for the record?

22:00 No. I'd just like to thank you, both of you, for the way you've done the interview. Your patience and your help and hope it's been of some use to you.

It's been a pleasure.

Oh thank you.

A pleasure to meet you too.

Yeah thank you.

And your lovely wife.

Oh yes. Thank you. Well thanks for coming and thanks for everything you done.

Pleasure.

And if ever you want any references you know where to come.

INTERVIEW ENDS