Australians at War Film Archive

James Watts (Jim) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:34 **Can you give us an overview of your life?**

Well I was born at Sherwood in 1922, and actually born in the house, born in the first house that my Dad owned. It was just after the war. He was a First World War man and my mother was a First World War Pom – Pommy –

01:00 and they married and the first child, Beverly, the elder sister, she was born in Beverley in England, hence the name. And the second one, Dad and Mum were staying with his parents, and that second sister was born in hospital but in the meantime, or at that time the house was being built at Sherwood, I was born there. Mum was a Pom, they normally go

01:30 for the midwife, or 'midwiff' if you like. So I was born there, the house is still there. Do you know Lone Pine? The Koala Sanctuary Lone Pine, it's directly opposite there, the big cream house just opposite there. It's still a lovely house.

An old Queenslander?

Yes, it's, well a bit big for Queenslanders perhaps, but that style.

02:00 Yes definitely.

And then you had two more sisters?

Two more sisters younger than me, they were both born in that same house. And, well it was a quiet childhood. The Depression didn't affect us to an extent. My Dad had a reasonable job, and although he dropped pay during the Depression we still had shoes and clothes and plenty to eat. Although perhaps Mum went short occasionally, she tended to favour everyone else

02:30 and be the last on the list. But in that time we always had a house cow, we always had riding horses. So we weren't doing too badly. And then I attended the Sherwood State School. And then the Brisbane Grammar School, and that was the end of my education until after the war. When I did engineering at the tech. So that sort of covered it. After the grammar school, I had a job with the city council

03:00 electricity department. I was an internal office boy actually. And I had so little to do that I used to work out stupid things like the number of doors they had to open in a year. I had to put that together, and the equivalent to one door, something like 50 miles wide and then I worked out the number of steps I had to go up and down over a year. And it

03:30 worked out to higher than Everest. All these silly things, I loved maths of course I did those silly things.

So were you a bit bored working for the council?

Yes, I wasn't, it was no great effort, it was a case of changing around from one part of the council to another, back again and bringing up mail and things like that. And in between if I, I suppose I helped the mail boys with their letters. But that's about all, it's all internal stuff.

04:00 And I was about the third in that group to join the air force. I wanted to join the air force since I was quite young, since the war started really. I was keen to have a, and then I had nephritis when I was about 18. I was in bed for a few months, mainly on barley water. But Mum, being an ex nurse she could nurse me at home, so that was no problem,

04:30 and then I had to get cleared with the specialist on the Terrace before I could join up. So although I was 18 in June I actually couldn't join up until December, when I had the clearance. And then, actually do you want me to speak about the war itself?

Yes please.

Well then, as I said, I joined up in December and to get onto a special list

05:00 that was taken when other people missed out on their monthly call up. I had to do about 10 little books, you sat for a little exam on that, and then you are put on that special list. Well that way I was called up on the 25th of April 1941 and went straight to Somers. Do you know Somers? It's south of Melbourne, near Frankston, it's another place fairly close.

05:30 And a nice place in itself but bitterly cold. And even though it was in April it was bitterly cold down there. And in the morning we did our first two months, just ground training there, no flying. In the mornings we had just overalls and boots and run down and have a cold shower. And it

06:00 was terrible and then run back, and it was freezing cold, which is silly, but Melbourne is like that, the area is like that. Anyway I'd done no flying at all, it was just purely ground instruction. And then we finished that course, that two months course and we went to the Exhibition grounds at Melbourne where they had the embarkation grounds or transit unit if you like.

06:30 We were there for a couple of months and then sent up to Sydney by train. It took about 3 days to get there actually. And we went on board the, we went directly onboard the Queen Elizabeth. And we sailed from Australia on the 1st of September on the Queen Elizabeth and went down to Jervis Bay and joined the Queen Mary there, so we went across the Bight to Fremantle, picked up a couple of blokes there and went onto

07:00 Trincomalee, which you may not know but that is in Ceylon or Sri Lanka. And then onto Port Taufiq, which is in Egypt, and from then we were stuck in the desert for quite a while. And nobody knew we were expected there, we were completely unexpected, all of us. And they put us in this camp out in the desert and because nobody knew anything about us we adopted as our song, The Legion of the Lost.

07:30 Anyway finally we went down to Durban on the Mauritania and then we had about a month in Durban which was very, very nice. And we went up to Bulawayo in Rhodesia, or Zimbabwe now. And that was very pleasant. Rhodesia at that stage was a colony of course, and most of the people were English. Almost, yeah, most of them,

08:00 a few Scots and Irish but most of them were English, and they were very, very good to us. The climate there was very much like Queensland, very, very similar. Vegetation and everything else was similar there. And after being there for awhile we went out to the first place where I had a flight for the first time, a place called Guinea Fowl, near Gwelo. And I had never flown before

08:30 but I got in this Tiger Moth with this old fellow who had been in the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War and he said, "Right are you strapped in?" And I said, "Yes I am." But of course with the Tiger Moth you've got a pin that goes though holes and the those holes are about 3 or 4 inches apart so you can't, its either too tight or too loose, you can't get it right. I happen to have it too loose. Anyway

09:00 we took off with him behind me of course, that's where the instructor normally is. And climbing up I thought yeah, that looks alright, what I've seen on film and that sort of thing, that looks perfectly alright. And we climbed up to a 1000 feet and he said, "Are you strapped in?" And I said, "Yes," and he turned back towards the aerodrome, turned the Tiger Moth upside down, dived down to a bit 50 feet and went across the aerodrome upside down all the way. And then climbed up again and turned it the right way up. And with my loose straps I seemed to be hanging half way to the

09:30 ground, with toes and fingers, everything. It was shocking, it was a thrilling ride admittedly. When he turned back again and he said, "You know, gets an old fella like me going, doing that." But he was a brilliant, in that very, very old film, Dawn Patrol, a long, long time ago he did a lot of these stunt flying, flying upside down through hangars, and things like that.

10:00 He was a brilliant pilot and it was fairly easy to learn from him. It was good. Well that was the Tiger Moth and I passed through with that. Oh incidentally, I did get hit on the hand by a prop. We used to swing them, the Tiger Moths, swing them like that, and then when your ready you say, "Switch it on," this part of course, is sucking the petrol in.

10:30 It's just a conventional carburettor and then when they are ready you have that hand and then you pull it away. And of course you pull it away very smartly when you are going to do it, but this bloke that I was starting for, he had the switches back to front and when I should be sucking in, going like this the switches were on, and of course it fired and the prop up there came down and just got my hand there. And it looked terrible. At the moment I thought

11:00 I had lost my fingers because blood right across the knuckles and I went to the flight commander and I said I got hit by the prop in the hand, and I had my hand like that. And he practically fainted. He thought I had lost my fingers too. But they came to faint scars there, but that's all. Anyway we went on from there to Harvards which is very much like our Wirraway, you remember the Wirraways?

Yes.

11:30 That was good, good flying, no great hardship. I passed that okay without any trouble. And that is when you get your wings. And of course the first thing you do is sew the wings on like that. Then we went up to Victoria Falls, it's traditional, to the hotel up there and you live for a couple of days on chicken and champagne. Absolute traditional, it's marvellous.

12:00 The we came back from there and we were put on trains fairly quickly down to Cape Town. Then we left Cape Town for England and our group was spilt up into quite a few groups because a lot of the planes, the ships were being sunk at that stage. The submarine pack had come from the Mediterranean to below the bulge of Africa, you know, below Sierra Leone. And hey were waiting for all those that were coming from

12:30 Cape Town and our blokes, I said, were split up into different ships and of the 13 ships that left that week, we were the only one that got to Freetown, of those 13. And we stayed there, in harbour there, for a fortnight with destroyers and frigates and small boats bringing in survivors from all the other ships. And then of course we were crowded out of our berths, our cabins to

13:00 make way for these people. And we were down in hammocks, and being over-smart young people we resented that. But that's the way it was. Well then we landed at Glasgow and went by train and started our further training, OTS, operational training [school], but then there was the advanced training before that. That was on Masters, that was a British plane, and the Masters

13:30 you could put down certain amount of flap and that gave a similar situation to the Spitfire. The landing and taking off, so eventually you did go solo in a Spitfire. And it's the most fearful thing to sit in that huge nose in front of you, you can't see ahead of you, you can only see out the side. And then when you open up the throttle, there is no

14:00 dual in a Spitfire of course, so you've had no experience with Spitfires. And you open up the throttle and you get hit in the back by the seat as it charges forward. Then it roars up there and by the time you have pulled up the wheels and done a bit of fiddling you re miles and miles away from the aerodrome. They were wonderful planes, and even the little ones, the early ones, were fast compared to the Masters we had been flying.

14:30 And we had quite a bit of time with the Spitfires. You had to do aerobatics, and with the other planes too you had to do aerobatics, formation flying, dog fights, mock dog fights. And eventually the part went to a squadron. I went to 616 which was quite a famous squadron. They were the first ones to have jets, jet fighters amongst other things. And they

15:00 had a very good record. And there I was, unfortunately the only bad Spitfires is the Spitfire 6. They are supposed to be high altitude jobs and they've got a, instead of having a cowling that bulges around you, they are straight. It's a removable cowling, it doesn't slide back it slips off. And to get into the plane you clambered in and then you pull this hood over you and the fitters from the outside, because they weren't a good fit, they bashed it into place.

15:30 And then you had levers that you pulled to lock at the front and levers you pulled to lock at the back. So you are actually locked in. And if you had to bail out, well then of course you had wires that you pulled that, supposedly released all those lugs and it flew off and you got out. But the problem with those was you couldn't see out the side

16:00 to directly ahead. See with the bulging one you could put your head that far and you can see along the nose. But these you couldn't, you had to look quite a distance away. And that made landing and take off just that much more difficult. And when you are on the ground, admittedly with other Spitfires too, you zigzagged so you could see where you were going, otherwise you'd just run into something. But they were the only bad Spitfires, the Spitfire 6.

Would they

16:30 **have been difficult to get out of in case of parachute?**

No, not really, the same as the others. If you couldn't release that hood, the idea was you squatted on the seat, wound the trim that adjusts the position of the stick, you wound it right forward, held the stick back, and when you were ready you crouched on there and let the stick go. That threw the nose down, and theoretically,

17:00 you smashed through the hood. And if you weren't knocked out you pulled the ripcord. It was a hairy thing to do. Normally bailing out when you had to it was just a case of rolling the plane on its side. And then you drop out, fairly smoothly.

Why did they make the cowlings straight on the 6's?

Well they had to be sealed, high altitude jobs, they were supposed to be up around the 40,000 feet. And they were sealed there,

17:30 and also we had tubes which had hot air going through them from the engine, and they had to be plugged in too, so you had this hot air around you. And they were very comfortable at 40,000 feet. But most of our work was 30,000, 20,000 where they were far too hot and a lot of our scrambles were only a few thousand feet. And it was stinking hot in those. And in winter time you'd walk out of the plane in the snow, get in the darn thing,

18:00 and by the time you'd get back you'd just be in a massive sweat and then you'd get out in the cold snow again. So of course a lot of the blokes had sniffles, colds, and flu, all that trouble. But that ended my time on 616. There were a few little things of interest there. We escorted the King once coming back

from Canada once, we escorted him to London.

18:30 And at that time, Malta was being besieged and the little Eagle, which was a small aircraft carrier, couldn't get close to Malta. So it had to go as far as it could and the planes took off from there and landed at Malta. Well the Spitfire flaps only go up or down, there is no intermediate. And so to take off from

19:00 this little aircraft carrier you needed a certain amount of flap. So the flaps were put down, the wedges were put in and then the flaps would come up. But of course the flaps couldn't come right up so they were about 20 degrees, that way you could get off there. Well we had to, they had marked on our aerodrome which was just like a gigantic bowling green, huge green, they had marked out the flight deck of the Eagle and we used to have to practice take offs, not landings

19:30 because you couldn't land back on the plane. If you took off to Malta and your long range tank didn't work, you had to bail out and hope someone would pick you up, because you couldn't go back. It's just one of those silly things. But we went out, after that time with 616 Squadron, we went through Egypt again, and the holding camp there. And then to North Africa,

20:00 and we went by ship and we all had our own parachutes in those days. And some bright soul had packed all the parachutes in the bilges. And they all got soaking wet, stiff with salt water, which we didn't know until one of the poor blokes in North Africa bailed out, and his parachute didn't open. He was just killed. And then after that we all had to take our parachutes down and we had to pull the ripcord

20:30 to show that they would have opened. And of course, none of them did, they were encrusted with salt. So we were lucky that there was only one who missed out. In, I was in North Africa at Satif for quite a while, just flying, flying Spitfires and Hurricanes, mainly just practise. And then I went with a couple of others to Italy

21:00 and joined the 93 Squadron which was covering the Anzio landing and we flew up and down the beach head at Anzio, while the Stukas and things were coming in. They were bombing and things like that. And there is a story of Anzio which I like to tell, it's nothing to do with me personally, well not really. But when the troops landed at Anzio, a

21:30 British major in a jeep rode to the outskirts of Rome, and he came back and said there is no resistance, there is no heavy armament or anything else. And the American general wouldn't believe him and he dug in. Dug in with trenches at Anzio and gave the Germans a full week to bring all the heavy armament between him and Rome. He was hopeless and it affected me mildly because at Anzio itself, at the beachhead,

22:00 they had a very narrow strip, metal strip laid down by the Americans and we used to do dawn and dusk patrols from there. And so we had to stay overnight. So we were actually in the trenches with the troops, being shelled, which wasn't a good experience.

Had he not given them a week, they wouldn't have had the opportunity to move all their gear in?

Exactly,

22:30 they had all the time in the world to bring all the heavy armament down from the north, which they did, so it was quite a battle to get to Rome. Whereas they could have marched straight to it. Yeah, the British bloke, it wasn't a major it was a general. If it would have been a general it might have been a different story, but he didn't take any notice of the major which was stupidity. I mean a man doesn't go all the way to Rome and back in a jeep and make up

23:00 a story. Well I finished my time with the squadron, with 93 Squadron. Then I got as far, oh once again back to Egypt to the holding camp, and then to India, and I spent a couple of months in India waiting for a ship to go back home to here. And that was an interesting time, I had nothing to do there. And so I'd go in with the provisions truck in the morning, just wander around Bombay. And it was a dreadful place, it stank to high heaven and the

23:30 betel juice all over the wall, you know, they chew the betel juice with red spit all over the walls. There were bundles of clothes containing bodies, and dying people all over the street. It was a fearful place. And of course, you had these darn shoe-shine boys, always want to shine you shoes. And they'd get this muck which could have been anything, and they'd put it on your shoes, so you had to get them cleaned, things like that.

24:00 It was a dreadful place, but an experience. Then I came home to, oh through Fremantle again and then around and landed in Melbourne. And then final leave, oh sorry, leave was given and then I got back home to Brisbane here. And that was about 4 years after I left. And there is one photo there of me, it was a newspaper photo of me being

24:30 greeted by Mum. She was a little titch and I was reasonably tall in those days. I was fairly close to 6 feet, so. You could see that afterwards, it's quite a nice picture, the others are fairly ordinary.

That wasn't the end for you though because you went back?

No, that was the end for me. I went back to Wagga Wagga where I was supposed to be, well I was flying Wirraways. And they were dreadful they used to put oil all over the place. You had to,

25:00 coming in to land, to see where you were going, you had to put your arm in its glove, carefully around, to clean the windscreen because it was smeared with oil. They weren't nice planes. And I was fed up after flying Spitfires to come back there and you know, I was ready to get out. So I got in touch with my sister who was an officer

25:30 in headquarters in Melbourne, that's Beverley, she was an officer. And she arranged my discharge. So I came back up here to Sherwood and then I was discharged from Sherwood.

It pays to know people doesn't it?

Particularly when it's your sister, yeah. Very true.

So after you were discharged what did you do?

I went back to the council for a while and that was the most tedious thing. We were on ledgers and I was in the electricity department. And I'd take the meter readers book,

26:00 you transfer that to the ledger and work out the cost. Then you'd swap that with someone else and you'd take his and you'd check theirs. And that went on day after day after day, it was tedious. Fortunately the assistant accountant, a bloke called Mags, he was very good, he understood how we felt. We were reckless and the two of us, ex pilots, and he said to us, "Anytime you feel like it

26:30 hop up and walk around town a bit." Which we did. We'd go away for an hour or so and then come back. And then I did a rehab course in drafting. As a matter of fact I met my wife there at the drafting course. And she went to the council and I went to Evans Deakin, and I was mixed up with the ships to a big extent. We were building quite a lot of big ships in those days and I did quite a lot of work

27:00 on the ships.

Where were the ships being built?

In Brisbane, in the ship yard. At Kangaroo Point, just over the bridge really, the big shipyards, used to be there. It's all filled in now of course. Oh units, terraced houses, everything else. But it was very pleasant, Evans Deakin were, they were a tough firm but they were very fair. We used to work 44 hours

27:30 in a five day week. Which meant we started at 18 minutes to 8 and left at 5 o'clock, and we had something like 30 minutes for lunch. But we were content. It was bad in winter time because it meant you were leaving in the dark to get to work. But it wasn't too bad and about 40 years ago, time does fly doesn't it, I joined the State Works Department as an engineer and I spent

28:00 most of the time – I was very happy actually with that job. I'd go out to sites, look at the place, mainly bridges and roads and sports fields at the different schools. I'd go up and check on the site, get a survey of the site, then I'd go back and draw it up, and then I'd go out and supervise it, which was marvellous, it was terrific. I mean you saw the job right from nothing

28:30 all the way, which was great. And finally, when I turned 60, in '82, I gave it away. Which was a pity in a way because my wife kept on working and it just didn't work out. But I didn't go into it in any extent, I went down to Melbourne. I used to go down to Melbourne every year, just for a few days for an annual meeting of the Rhodesian Association. And apart from that, the only place I have been since then has been

29:00 Norfolk Island. I went to Norfolk Island for a fortnight, which is a week too many. A week is plenty at Norfolk Island, you can see it all in a week. You know, that extra week is a waste of time. And apart from that, it's just been here. I've been here for 50 years and I'm a fairly recent widower actually, my wife died in September. So it is fairly recent, so.

You have a daughter?

29:30 Yes, she is up at Dayborough, and she is married too. I've got a grand daughter and a grand son. But why that kitchen table, this is off the record really, why that kitchen table is such a mess, my wife died without a will and I knew what she wanted done. I had a lot of trouble getting her, see she wanted to leave her money to her daughter and the two grandkids. Well I had a lot of trouble getting the money from the Commonwealth Bank,

30:00 from her two accounts, so that I could write out cheques to my daughter and the grandkids. A lot of trouble there. But a little bit of superannuation, I had a lot of trouble getting – that's brought up. When my wife died in the nursing home, I had to put down $550 deposit and the first month, she was only there for about a fortnight, so a huge cheque came back. But it was addressed to the estate of my wife, the estate of Billie Watts,

30:30 which was utterly useless. There was nowhere for me to put it in, so finally I persuaded them to take that back and send me one in my name.

What was your wife's name?

Billie, Billie. Odd name, but probably, when she was born in 1924, a Billie Burke was probably a popular actress in those days.

31:00 And of course her father, she was the eldest, and her father wanted a boy, so that might have been some influence on it. But they had, my wife was an extremely active women, she'd be far more interesting to talk to than I am, honestly. She was very tied up in politics, the Labour Party, and she was very tied up with FIDO, the Fraser Island Defence [Organisation], she basically stopped the sand mining on Fraser Island and also the timber getting on

31:30 Fraser Island. And her father did, oh she was conceived on, and her elder brother, were conceived on Fraser Island. Her father was a surveyor and he surveyed most of that island. And one of the lakes is named after him, Lake Allom. And after Billie died, I wanted her ashes scattered near the lake. And Peter Beattie [Queensland Premier]

32:00 came up with the idea that there should be a monument there to Billie, so they built an observation platform above the lake and put this big placard there, mainly of Billie and a little bit of her father. And it was marvellous. They had a big dedication service there.

That must have been nice.

It was fantastic, as I said, she would have been far more interesting to listen to than me. She was always one for the underdog. She

32:30 fought for women's rights, feminism, aboriginal rights, land rights, peace movement. She used to go on those protest marches and get pushed around by police, and she is only a little titch of a woman. She was very, very good. Every time Senator Georges was arrested she'd be behind him with the bail money, always. She was a fantastic woman. She was very, very stubborn, very, very strong in her beliefs and

33:00 we had terrific arguments. And I said to my – fairly recently, "I can't understand, I'm such a quiet easy going person." And she said, "No you are not, you are just as stubborn as she was." So we had to have rows fairly obviously.

Keeps the spark alive?

33:30 Yes, oh yes.

You said you stopped working at 60 and your wife kept working and it didn't work out, why was that?

Well I had the idea, see as a veteran you can retire at 60, and provided your superannuation is sensibly invested you can get the pension; the war pension which is the same as the age pension. Well, of course the thing was, Billie was still working

34:00 and there was still too much combined income through that. So actually through bad investments, bad advice, and stupidity, all my superannuation just frittered away over the years, and I became a pensioner myself in, about 6 years ago, 1984, I did. It was lucky I did because it was just before the cancer operation. So it worked out fairly well. I got a gold card [senior citizens privileges card], so

34:30 I get all my dental work free and doctor's works free, podiatry free. I get someone to come in and clean the house floors and bathroom and the toilet, once a fortnight for an hour and a half. As I said, she doesn't do the dusting so the dusting is horrible. I am no good at that, housekeeper.

Can I bring you back to your childhood?

35:00 **Did your entire family stay in that house in Sherwood until the youngest daughter left?**

Pretty well, my Dad died when he was 82, so everyone, all adults. And I got married in '46, so I moved out straight away of course.

35:30 My elder sister Bev, she got married fairly late in life, she was about 40 I think. So she was there for a long time looking after Dad because Mum died fairly early, she died when she was about 62. And my second eldest sister, who wasn't my favourite sister by any means, she got married about 3 months before I did. So there was only my sister Bev and Dulcie, the second youngest, and Pat the youngest, there for a while and then

36:00 the second youngest got married. She went out and then the youngest got married, she went out. So all the, and then my second eldest, as I said, not my most popular sister, her husband was one of these people who just couldn't do the right thing. He, they started out with a lot of money left by

36:30 his parents and they went into a garage and he sort of fouled that up. He was too independent. He'd make people wait at the pump while he finished what he was doing at his desk, things like that. He had the wrong style and they finally got into just financial straits, they had to come back and live in the house, into the old house, with my Dad. And then eventually he sold it to them,

37:00 which was terrible. Sold it to them for about four and a half thousand dollars. Yeah, shocking.

Had he paid it off?

Yes, many years ago. No, it was terrible, and then of course, when they sold it, they got hundreds of thousands for it, which was a bit sad. 'Cause my Dad he ended up on a pension,

37:30 not terribly well off and depended on, for his holidays, I used to take him on holidays and then he'd spend quite a bit of time with my older sister, Bev. She did quite a lot, occasionally with my younger sister, but never with the intermediate one.

Did he stay in the house until they sold it?

Yeah, he stayed in the house until he died actually. But they already

38:00 had, it was already their house. He sold it to them on the condition he stayed there. And they sold it and they bought a place down Redland Bay. They did reasonably well out of it. My sister is still in one of those houses and she is reasonably well off. Yeah she's got no problems. I'm the only poor one in the family.

38:30 **It's all relative how happy you are.**

Exactly.

When you were growing up in Sherwood, was it rural then?

Very much, very much so. We used to walk across a gully and walk fairly close to a mile to the state school, that was quite common. Except for my second youngest, she used to always ride a horse,

39:00 would leave the horse with the smithy, the blacksmith, she preferred riding the horse to school. But the rest of us just walked. Occasionally pop would drive us, but generally speaking it was walking back and forward. Yes it was very, very rural in those days. There was a dairy farm next to us, which of course is now million dollar plots and houses on there. I had

39:30 a couple of those allotments, which I sold, of course I sold before my retirement, prices weren't so great.

Things have changed now?

And then I bought a very nice block of land at Yeronga, just opposite Wanganui Gardens just up on that hill there. And my father was a senior land valuer at the council. He gave the people who owned the Wanganui Gardens that piece of land, just to be a part, which is why I wanted to be there. And of course

40:00 as soon as they, I knew they were going to build on this Wanganui Gardens, I sold the place.

Tape 2

00:31 **You said having four sisters wasn't the best thing for you?**

No,

01:00 very, very true. With the horses, see every now and again, see we had about 2 acres which was right down to the Brisbane River, near Lone Pine. And every now and then those paddocks had to be raked because the horses normally won't eat where they've left their droppings. The same with the cows. So that all had to be raked up. So you started and raked, raked, towards the river and then you had a great heap of manure,

01:30 which is very good fertiliser. We had vegetable gardens fairly obviously, which were very good, and odd jobs like that. And of course if my sisters were going to a dance, we went to the village dance, if they were short of a partner of course guess who it was, me. So it's not all marvellous being the only boy, it works both ways.

02:00 **Being the only boy did you get a lot of chores?**

Oh reasonably so, yes. It used to work out, our house had a fairly narrow piece down the side because it was a very wide house, and a short front and a very long back. And my sisters, two elder sisters, they would share those three small sides between them and I would have to do

02:30 the whole of the back. So it was a bit unfair. But generally speaking I got on well with my sisters. Had no fights, well siblings always fight anyway, can't avoid that. I was probably closest to the one just below me, four years younger than me. We used to do all sorts of stupid things, like we'd make the old fashioned gun powder which was charcoal salt peter and

03:00 sulphur, that's all mixed up. And we used to make that and we'd have it in a large Marmite jar. And we'd be taking little bits out on a spoon and lighting it and it would flare of course, no explosion, but it would flare furiously. We were under the house doing this and my sister got over zealous and she put it back, put her spoon back before it had gone out properly. So the whole things went up. We lost

03:30 eyebrows and that's about all and nearly burnt the house down. A lot of little things like that. And in our childhood, we had the horses and two of my sisters, no three of my sisters were extremely good riders, and they used to take part in gymkhanas and that sort of thing. Brookfield was a very common one. And we'd very often, not very often but occasionally we'd used to get the old German wagons and they'd be filled

04:00 with hay and then we'd go for a hay ride right out to Brookfield, or something like that, not just the family of course, a whole mob. It was very attractive. Yes, I'd say my growing up was a very happy one really. Mum was very, very tolerant. And Pop, when he should have been, he had too good of a sense of humour, when he should have been going cross with us

04:30 and giving us a whack, he'd burst in with a silly grin, you know, he just couldn't do it.

Can you give us an example?

No, not particularly, he had... We were supposed to be quiet, which we never were, with 5 kids at the table. And two adults, and Pop had a stick there which probably had been bougainvillea because it had spikes all over it, and that was Mr Thorn Stick. If we weren't

05:00 quiet we would get that, of course it was never used. But the threat was enough. A lot of these little things. Dad, as I said, he was a captain in the First World War, in artillery and mortars which is a very unpleasant branch of it because you can see where the shells are coming from, with a mortar you can see them coming out and going over the top. And so they'd fire off a few shells and then dismantle it and go like hell out of there,

05:30 and at one stage he did get shot, a near miss. They were all trying to get into the shell holes to hide and my Dad, he was 6 feet 3 and a quarter, he had to have that quarter, he insisted on that quarter. He was 6 feet 3 and a quarter. And he couldn't fit into this shell hole, so one foot was out, so he got badly smashed up. And he was invalided back to England, and my Mum was a nurse in hospital there and according to Pop she saved his foot. She was a very dedicated

06:00 person and so they married. And they had, as I said, my older sister was born in Beverly and then she came out to Australia when she was about 3 months old.

Did your Dad share any of his war stories with you when you were growing up?

Not really, he suffered, he had suffered gas during the war,

06:30 and he did suffer abdominal pains and biliousness, quite a bit, in after life. He did get a tiny pension, it probably was for that. I don't know, it was a very small pension and it didn't help him very much, he didn't have much to leave. When his will was sorted out it was divided between the 5 children and there was something like 500 each so he only had about 25,000 to leave.

07:00 But he was good bloke. He was a beautiful dresser, and admittedly he did spend money on clothes. He used to go to Pikes, which were the place at that stage. Always very well dressed, he used to go to the races a lot, he had an interest in a few racehorses. So in those days when he was working he

07:30 was doing pretty well. And once the Depression was really over, his salary went back up to where it was and over the years it increased. So by the time he retired, or until he retired he was well off. But unfortunately the small amount he got after he retired he put into council bonds and they paid practically nothing. He was just one of those people were dedicated to the council. I've got a bit of that

08:00 in me too unfortunately. I tend to stick with what I've got. I like sticking in this house for instance. And staying with the same shop even though there are better ones around. I tend to stick to the old people and hate the little shops going bad. I really think, you know, someone is probably put their life saving into the effort of that shop and now it's gone. I always feel sorry for them.

Do you think that has anything to do with your growing up?

08:30 Probably, probably because my Dad was always one of those people who was helping people out. And he was friends with everyone. In those days there was horse and cart, he used to go around picking up the manure on the street. And he knew all those people very well, and at one stage he had his own car and he had a petrol allowance from the council,

09:00 and in the days when the petrol was pumped up they normally lift up the hose to get the last out. Well if they knew Pop was coming within the next few days they didn't lift up that hose they put that extra into a drum which they gave to Pop. They put it into his car, you know. He was liked by everyone. He was very approachable; he was a charming man; he was very suave, tall, good looking, old fellow, even when he was old, still very

09:30 up, not round shouldered like I me, very upright. Of course being army I suppose you get a better stature and being crouched in a cockpit of a plane doesn't help. Because in a combat plane you are in there extremely tightly. You can't afford to have yourself move around at all. But that's getting off the mark a little bit.

That's all right.

10:00 **Did his generosity extend to people in the neighbourhood who were having a hard time with the Depression?**

Yes, in the same way that I tend to do. If it was the, well we had more milk than we wanted for instance. And we'd always give that away to the needy people who really couldn't afford it, not necessarily to the neighbours, but the people in the neighbourhood

10:30 who could use it and couldn't afford it. There was a lot of poverty in those days when I was growing up. It was a strange thing. I think I said this with the phone interview too. They didn't have enough to eat, they didn't have the right clothes, but they always had enough to go to the pictures. Every Saturday, and admittedly that is only sixpence, but the poorer one, fairly obviously of course,

11:00 they had a lot of kids, and with all those kids going, that was quite a bit out of the salary, or whatever they had. And of course the relief gangs were going then on the roads, and there was so many people out of work that you had doctors, lawyers, all sorts of people were actually digging on the roads. And

11:30 that's when the roads in Brisbane started to improve, with the relief gangs started during the Depression

Can you tell me more about the relief gangs?

They were run by the council, and they were people out of work and they got a little bit of money for being in these gangs. And they did a terrific amount of work, and of course it was pretty tough on these academics particularly,

12:00 and a lot of white collar workers too were out of a job. Yes it was grim, but as I said, we were extremely lucky that we were fairly well off. Then of course, after the Depression we were very well off.

So you were responsible for supplying milk to your family and neighbourhood through your house cow?

Yes, oh yes, well we, with the cows you normally put them in calf every year or every two years,

12:30 so there was nearly always a cow and a calf, and it was a good calf, a female calf. We kept it so that quite commonly there would be two cows. And they got some food, some hay and [UNCLEAR] and things like that, mostly that the paddocks were big enough for them. And with two jerseys of course, beautiful milk and far too much of it. So there was plenty to give away.

13:00 We could have done the old Cleopatra thing and bathed in asp's milk except it would have been cow's.

Being surrounded by so many people did you have any other boys to play with?

Not really. I had one particular mate who ended up being my best man and a few other more casual ones. But only, the one real mate

13:30 who lived fairly close to us, we used to go to school together and go and sit down and smoke, smoke horse manure in rolled up paper. How we did it I don't know.

How old were you when you were doing that?

Oh probably about 10. Utterly ridiculous, crazy thing to do

What other kinds of things would you get up to?

14:00 Well we always had shanghais of course, and when I was about 12 I had a BSA [Birmingham Small Arms] air rifle, a very powerful air rifle. And I used to shoot the doves, that's the Indian doves, and Mum would cook them for me. And as they say with those, you cook them with a stone and as soon as the stone is soft you throw the birds away and eat the stone. They are very tough and the only part worth eating is the breast

14:30 of the doves. Occasionally I would go out west to Roma, we had a sheep station out there before the war, we had about 6000 sheep out there. And I would go out there occasionally and do a lot of riding of course, you know, boundary riding and also quite a bit of duck shooting. Which was interesting. I probably wouldn't do it now, but it didn't worry you in those days, you know, the attitude towards hunting and shooting and killing

15:00 has changed so much. I used to shoot the kangaroos because they were a menace. I never shot any emus but I probably would have done if need be. Bu the last kangaroo I shot, it was a female, and it was an extremely long shot with a .22, a high powered .22 admittedly, so it was a very long shot,

15:30 so I went for the hips to disable her. I didn't know it was a her at that stage, and then when I got up to there, it was nearly a mile away, she was sort of lying there and had a joey, well he jumped out of its pouch and he hopped off with the rest of them. And she was lying there fairly calmly with those beautiful brown eyes they've got and I shot her. Couldn't do anything else but shoot her, but I've never shot another kangaroo, another

16:00 animal since then as a matter of fact. It was dreadful experience, when you shoot them with a head

shot, a long head shot and when you get up they are dead, it's a different story, but this one put me right off. I never shot another one, that was grim. But out Roma way where our station was, that was quite pleasant. It was very good. We had, we used to get the butter in those unglazed terracotta things.

16:30 Butter was kept in those to keep it cool. And we had the old Coolgardie safes, you probably know of those, and we had those for keeping stuff cold. And of course we had the sheep and we would kill a sheep every now and again. Oh, the kangaroos by the way, the ones we shot, the hind quarters we'd give to the dogs. And they only got that about once a week

17:00 Seemed to be enough for them, they were happy.

That's all they'd live on for a week?

Yeah, that's all they'd have, a hind quarter of a kangaroo. They were kelpies, didn't have any border collies, oh there was one border collie earlier, but generally speaking just kelpies, the black and the ginger ones.

17:30 **Did you know much about World War I?**

A fair amount. We knew how much people dying, as much as anything, from septicaemia as anything else. The anaesthetics were practically unknown in those days even though you had Madame Curie and people like that, and Pasteur, pasteurising of course, but generally speaking it was very poor. And in those

18:00 days you knew it was a doctor because of the blood on his apron. It was a badge of office that you left your blood on your clothes. No such thing as having clean clothes and things like that, as a doctor in those days. And in the trenches there were so many rotting corpses that blood poisoning was just rife. And probably more died from blood poisoning than actually wounds, you know,

18:30 from the wounds, but from the wounds gone bad. And the mud and slush that they lived in was incredible, you know. They were wet for days and days, slept in their clothes and it must have been dreadful things, we had no experience, no similar experience in the Second World War. What little time I had in the trenches at Anzio, well that was enough for me, you get sort of claustrophobic. And feel that you are

19:00 sort of hemmed in, you can't put your head up or anything like that, naturally. And to be in that instance where they had to have duckboards, they had to have duckboards just to walk along the trenches and you just, like you are stepping on a corpse in those days, in First World War days. No, it must have been dreadful. And of course the, even from our war, on Anzac day I used to go from the RSL [Returned and Services League] I belonged to, I used to

19:30 go up to Goodna, it was the main mental institution up there and the, our people who were allowed out, we'd come and we'd have a meal with them. And the number of troppo, poor blokes who were up there from my war, was absolutely incredible. It amazed me that so many of the air force blokes ended up that way. I suppose some had

20:00 been taken prisoners of war and some bombers who'd done too many trips would have been… With the fighter pilot there were instances where they became coward, where they would turn away from the enemy and deliberately go in the wrong direction and things like that. But these poor blokes they had lost all track of time, and I am talking about many years, when they were only 40 or so. And they'd be talking

20:30 as if the war was still on. And they'd be talking about you know, George the 6th and so and so, and how is old Churchill getting on and that. And how's Roosevelt, people had been dead for donkeys years. And they were still living in the past and they just never came… And you couldn't do anything with them, you just said, oh their fine, you couldn't say, oh don't be so damn stupid. You couldn't upset the poor cows. But

21:00 it was very sad. I did that for quite a few years and yarned to them, they loved talking because someone new to get their stories to, and as I said, they were all living in the past. And they were the ones that were allowed out, a lot that were in security weren't allowed to come in for that meal. So it was a pretty bad business.

21:30 **It would have been a shock to see so many.**

Oh dreadful, it was amazing. And of course the people from the Vietnam War, that's even worse, they got whole sections out at Greenslopes, the psychiatric section just devoted to them. They had such a dreadful time. The poor blokes they were sort of defending their country doing what they asked to do and then they come home and they are reviled.

22:00 For what? It was a dreadful war that one

And some of them were conscripted to go?

Exactly, exactly, yes. And they weren't all volunteers by all means, they were, as you say, drafted. Can I just check my dog?

22:30 **When you worked at the council, were you happy to do that or was there something else you had in mind?**

No, it wasn't too bad. I was studying accounting at the time,

23:00 and I got as far as the intermediate in accounting. I wasn't terribly excited about it, but when I came back after the war the idea of accounting, I just couldn't stand it at all. That's why I did the drafting course at the tech. The accounting, when I look back on it was the most boring thing. It really is, it's sort of dead. You are only dealing with figures, not with people.

23:30 **Lucky the war came along.**

Ha-ha.

Did you know much about Hitler before the war started?

Yes, oh yes. From about '37, while I was still at school, I knew the problem of building up with him.

How were you getting the news?

Radio I suppose, certainly wasn't any TV.

24:00 We used to have the old radio and listen, sit around and listen to that, yeah, we got a bit of that news from there. They had a Doctor Goddard who was always, he was mainly, the 'yellow peril' [fear of migrants from Asia], he was always shouting about. But we got a bit of contemporary news through the radio, it wasn't too bad.

Was it a big activity at home to listen to the radio?

Yeah, fairly, yes. We

24:30 played a lot of cards, we all learnt all these card games, the whole lot. Bridge, 500, solo, poker of course, and patience. All had that. And in winter time we used to sit around the kitchen stove. We had the wood stove in those days

25:00 of course, and we'd always sit around that. And when we were young, Mum used to tell stories. We learnt all about the Greek gods and goddesses, all their tales and all the conventional, Grimm's fairy tales. Learnt all those. And a lot of little songs. I still remember the words but I am not going to sing them for you.

Not even one?

No, not even one, no.

25:30 **Did those stories fill your imagination?**

Oh undoubtedly, undoubtedly, well they coloured our life quite a bit, yes. I wasn't particularly happy at school, not so bad at the grammar school but at the state school.

Why was that?

I was a quiet little bloke and I didn't mix in. I used to play some of the games they had,

26:00 chig and bedlam, I used to play that, and I was good at marbles, that was one thing I did excel at.

What was bedlam?

Ah you had a circle and you had someone keeping that and you've got to, if you were captured you were put in there and to be released one of your team had got to go past there and put at least one foot inside that circle without getting caught. If he does that then you are free.

26:30 Very interesting game and then, of course, we had a lot of that red rover which, I don't know if you know that one.

I used to play that when I was a kid.

Yeah, fair enough, "Red rover, red rover, come over." There was one of those like red rover that used to have a bit of a sing song. "My spurs are bright and shine like gold, and shall not be sold," something like that.

27:00 **When did the song come into the game?**

I'm not too sure but it did, but the two sides they sang the separate parts, "My spurs are bright and shine like gold, and in this world they shan't be sold," and then there is a response to that, then it goes on. Quite an interesting little effort. But I have forgotten the rest of it, that's the only part I remember.

Sounds like it could be an old World War I song?

27:30 Yes it's possible. Well it always intrigued me that Ring A Ring A Rosie, which came from the black plague, dreadful business. And once it's described to you, you don't like that game any more.

When did you find out?

Not till I was an adult. We used to play at little children's parties, we used to play that, "Ring a ring a rosie, pocket full of posies," and as

28:00 an adult you find out it's got to do, you know, crash down to the ground with this and going red in the face.

Some of those nursery rhymes can be quite sinister?

Oh, they are, some of them are dreadful. And lots and lots of killing and boiling in water and cooking in ovens.

28:30 **Can you remember the outbreak of war?**

No I don't. I remember hearing the speeches but I probably heard those years later. I probably didn't hear them at the time. I can't – to some extent I was probably thrilled.

In what way?

Now I might be able to go and fly,

29:00 I probably was thrilled to some extent. And my Mum and Dad they were, being First World War, they made no – see in those days, you weren't 21 you had to get your parents permission to join up, and they never stopped it, they wouldn't have. Even though it probably hurt them when myself and my older sister went.

I have to back track.

29:30 **Where did your passion for flying come from?**

It probably started with kite flying. I still like flying kites at this age, and I used to make my own kites, I used to have kites given to me. And some of the kites were beautiful, and about 30 years ago I built a box kite for the children. Not so much for the children, for me as well to have

30:00 an excuse to fly it. And I had it I pinched. All the string I could find around the place, and bought quite a bit of it and I had it up in the sky so that it, just see it as a speck and I let one of these kids hold it and he let it go. And I jumped in the car with the kid and we drove all over Brisbane, but we never got it. It was still way up in the sky going further and further away, it was very sad.

30:30 But I had a cousin who made me a kite, but it was tailless. It was quite interesting, it was shaped both ways, curved up and it didn't need a tail. It was a clever kite, and that same one, that when he joined up the, joined the army medical corps he was older than I was, he gave me a plane that was nearly finished. It was one with a petrol

31:00 engine, and I finished the kite off but that plane, I could never get that motor to go. One of those single thing it was, and you had to prime the darn thing and turn it over and hopefully it would start roaring. But it never did and then I in turn gave it to another cousin, so I never did fly it.

Where there programs or heroes that you [UNCLEAR] with?

31:30 Well yes, well they weren't actually war time heroes, they were a family called Cameron. They lived at Sherwood and most interesting when they got married, he was Church of England and she was Catholic, and they made a contract that all the boys would be Church of England and all the girls would be brought up as Catholic. She had 5 boys

32:00 so they all became Church of England. But they were wonderful people, they flew beautifully. I had a broken leg, a broken thigh when I was about 12. And I was out in, in those days you were in plaster from there up to your arm pits, right over you ribs and everything else with a thigh. And so I couldn't sit up. I'd just sit up as far as that would let me, and I used to be on the veranda of the old house, and one

32:30 of these, who was probably the best stunt flyer in Australia, this Cameron, he would come over in the Tiger Moth and he used to roll the wheels on the sloping roof. Fly over and roll the wheels, fantastic judgement.

On your roof?

Yes, just above my head, and then in the park which was next door to us, he would do aerobatics very low just for me to see.

33:00 So of course that, marvellous people, terrific. The three of them were killed in the Second World War, only 2 survived. And it was a tragedy, they were a wonderful family. Brilliant family.

But you never got to go up with any of them?

Oh no, no. No, as I said, I didn't fly at all until I was in Rhodesia, the first time I was off the ground.

33:30 And nowadays I fly very seldom. I'm not comfortable in it, it's not quite the fact that I am not flying it, but it's, no maybe it is something like that. I'm never quite at ease with somebody else driving, particularly if they are driving fast. If I'm not driving myself. And probably it's the same if I'm not up in the cockpit doing the flying,

34:00 I just sort of, I wonder if he is doing the right thing. And every change of pace, every slight movement I feel it and when he was coming into land I'd know when he'd be dropping the flaps and when he'd be dropping the wheels and when the wheels were about to touch, I'd always know. So I didn't really enjoy it. The first commercial flight I went in, or the second commercial flight, was

34:30 up to Townsville and it was in a [Boeing] 727, and we were up in the, myself and a, we were going up to Townsville for a job, we were right behind the pilot in the front of the first class seats. And Brian said to me, "Those wings seem a long way back, don't they?" And I looked back and the wings looked like a tail plane they were so far back.

35:00 I was used to seeing wings here and these were way, way back there. I thought, oh dear, it gave me shock. Anyway that particular trip, there was a cyclone just off the coast and so we went inland a bit but we still got quite a lot of bumping, and we were strapped in till we got up to about 30,000 feet, and then the drinks cart came around, and being stupid,

35:30 I said I'll have a can of beer, and of course when she opened it, it just went everywhere. It had been shaken so much on the way up there. I spent about 5 minutes trying to dry me off. My mate had enough sense to get a scotch, but I did the wrong thing.

Do you remember much talk at home about the war and joining up?

36:00 No, only the two of us joined up from the 5 children. Bev and myself, my next sister she was going to, and my elder sister is still annoyed to this day, she was definitely going to join up with my elder sister, and at the last minute she screwed out of it and my elder sister still takes a dim view of that. Because they all, the whole group of them went to learn Morse which was one thing they had to do,

36:30 and they were all going to me, there was the McClellan's, there was me and Jean, Joan Wilson, there was Peggy the second eldest and there was Bev. They'd all done this course and out of all those Bev was the only one that actually joined up. Joan Wilson, her father wouldn't let her go, she was young. May Wilson did join up later, admittedly. Jean Wilson never did.

37:00 So it was a big disappointment to my elder sister, she had done this with all her friends and then she was the only one that actually joined.

Where did you learn Morse before you signed up?

The post office was using the Morse a lot then and they had instructors, they had voluntary instructors, at night time of course after work, go along to that and you could learn the Morse. The Morse teacher I had was

37:30 a lazy cow. He used to run a tape through, a tape with the dashes and dots on it, the holes like, you know, a pianola? You know that has the rolls of music, it was the same as that only it was 'dits' and 'dahs', and he used to just roll those through, or start them and then he'd go wandering off somewhere and then come back, so

38:00 he wasn't earning his keep.

Were there other part time courses you could learn prior to enlistment?

Not a great deal. Once you joined up, as I did in December, you get a little badge to say that you have been enrolled and they did have fitness camps,

38:30 and we used to go down the coast normally and we were crazy. We used to swim out beyond the waves, you know, at Surfers Paradise, and we would stay out there for 2 or 3 hours completely out of our depth, just throwing tennis balls and things like that. And never thought of a shark in those days. As for getting cramps, of course never thought of that either. But they were very pleasant and very good exercise too of course.

39:00 **And these were to support the war effort prior to enlistment?**

Yes that's right, it was part of the training in effect, yes.

Tape 3

00:31 **You were telling us about Silvie Green's Gym?**

That's right, Silvie Green, he had a gymnasium, he used to train boxers, and weight lifters, people like that, and I had to go there for about 3 months. I learnt all sort of, you know, trick skipping. You occasionally see boxers doing it, you know, with one foot and then the other foot and then for dancing

with it. I learnt all those silly little tricks.

01:00 And of course boxing itself, I did quite a bit of that, and the weight lifting, but I wasn't supposed to be doing that, purely interest on my part. I wondered how bad it is and so forth. I tried 150 pound and I found it fairly easy.

Did you beef up?

Not to an extent, I probably was about 9 stone, that would be about all when I finally, yeah, you have to work that out now.

01:30 Yeah, I was about 9 stone then, now of course I'm too heavy. I'm over 12 stone now, which is too much for me. I'd like to be about 11 and a quarter.

Can you tell us about what nephritis was?

Nephritis, well you know, it is a kidney disease.

No I don't.

Well it's a kidney disease and it's very often fatal. I was a little bit lucky,

02:00 as I said, I was in bed for oh, 4 or 5 months with it. And mainly lots of lots of barley water. I used to have jugs and jugs of barley water every day, sweetened with lemon. Lemon barley water so it was quite a pleasant drink, and I never really got sick of it. But the other meals, not a great deal, it was mainly the barley water. Of course the barley gave you nourishment and the water was for continually cleaning out the kidneys,

02:30 and finally our local doctor, he reckoned I was clear and I'd go up to the Terrace [Raymond Terrace, Brisbane], and they'd say no. So I'd be back in bed for a while and the local doctor would test me again and say you definitely are clear, you were last time too. And I'd go back up the Terrace whether they were doing it deliberately to make a bit of money I don't know. But I had to go up there about 2 or 3 times before I got the all clear.

Why would they make money out of turning you back?

03:00 Because I'd have to go up again. See every time I had to go to the Terrace for testing, for clearance, that would cost money. And if I had to go back again, say in another month or 2 months time, it would cost more money. They get more money and so on, so I often wondered if it was that. Because the local doctor he was a very good man, a very efficient man, he swore before that first time in fact.

03:30 Naturally he made sure I was clear before he sent me up the first time. He was very annoyed with them. He said, you know it happened two or three times. You've been perfectly clear the whole time.

So much for the war effort.

Oh no, this is before the war. This is before the war.

That's right, that was for –

No sorry, it was during the war admittedly but it was before I joined up.

That's what I meant, they needed young men but they were turning you back.

04:00 That's right, yes, true. But once I got the all clear I was up there like a shot of course, or down to Creek Street, that was the recruiting centre at that stage.

Did you join up with any mates?

No, no on my own. And I kept in touch for a short time after the war with a few that were fairly close. My number was 405561. I can still remember that, you can never forget that of course.

04:30 And 405560, I used to be in touch with him for a few years after the war. Of course these things fade away. Lives change, except for one or two, I don't keep in touch with any of them.

You enlisted at Creek Street. Did you have to have another medical?

No, I never missed the, that was before, I wasn't being sent by the

05:00 air force up to the Terrace, this was before.

So you had to have a medical with the air force?

Yes, they knew nothing of my history and the local doctor said for goodness sake if you talk about it at all, call it suspected nephritis, not nephritis, suspected nephritis. So as I said, after I loaded myself

05:30 with too much water then the air force sent me up to the Terrace and they gave me the all clear. So I was in from then on. Then walking out with that little badge on, proud as a peacock, walking in, going home, fantastic. I was thrilled to be joining. And I was always proud of my Mum and Dad of course, in their efforts in the First World War.

How did they feel about you joining up?

06:00 They didn't show it, they were pleased for me, they didn't show it but it must have hurt them quite a bit. Because during the war itself there was talk of bringing me home again because Mum was very, very sick and was convinced that I'd died. And they were talking about bringing me home but she got over that. And of course, very happy to see me when I finally got back. But when I got back to civilian life

06:30 after the war and what the war meant, the petty arguments and the discussions about what they were going to cook for tea, and what sort of washing powder they'd use, everything was so petty after the war. One experience I had in England, this was on 616 Squadron, two of us, we took the bicycles, yellow bicycles

07:00 that belonged to the station, we took those and we drove into Bournemouth, no Salisbury I'm sorry, roughly between Bournemouth and Salisbury this time, and they had lamps on them, very, very faint lamps because it's all blacked out, and we left these two outside the pub. And when we came out the lamps were gone. If we'd known better we would have taken the lamps off and taken them with us. So we were driving back, cycling back home and trying to dodge the

07:30 main roads and suddenly out of nowhere two hefty policemen grabbed us, bot h of us. And they wanted to know why we were riding without lights. So we ended up having to appear at the petty sessions and my friend Tangle, he was flying that day so I was there on my own. And my case was only heard in the afternoon. And it was the

08:00 middle of war with bombings all around the place, and there arguments about dog barking, there was arguments about the position of a side fence, and you think, goodness, in the middle of this great war. And all these little things that were so normal inside there. But anyway, the court stenographer was a young girl, about 16 or so, she kept smiling at me

08:30 in my uniform of course. So when they had a recess for lunch, so I took her out to lunch, and I kept in touch with her for a few months after that.

So it wasn't all bad.

No, it wasn't all bad, no, no.

I think that is the same thing that happens when you lose somebody close to you, that everything becomes petty as well.

Oh yes, oh definitely.

You just don't want to hear it.

No. I've still got the paper I got

09:00 from the summons. It says something about 'proceeding on a country road with insufficient means of illumination'. Not without a lamp, 'insufficient means of illumination'. Dear oh dear. Pedantic language.

So you joined up. How long was it before they sent you to Somers?

Well

09:30 I had to do, they gave us 20 books that you are supposed to study and they covered meteorology, navigation, administration, airmanship, aircraft recognition; a stack of subjects, geometry and trigonometry, they were in it as well. And if you did 10 of those books and then sat for a test on those you could be put on a special list. So if anyone missed their monthly call up you'd

10:00 take their place. And that's why, though I joined up in December I actually went into camp in April, which is 4 months. That was good in those days, that was good. Because they had lots of volunteers for air crew, of course, everyone wants to be air crew. A lot of them never did become air crew. And then when we had our uniform we had a white flash in our cap.

10:30 You can see it in some of those photos, that's before we'd flown but we were selected for air crew. And of course, at dances and things like that, we were always very popular. So the ground staff people used to put rumours around about us that indicated they had some social disease, for which I can't blame them because we always got the pick of the girls. And it's

11:00 just one of those things.

You got the girls because you get to fly the planes?

Oh, just because and yes, I suppose, and the uniform, just the uniform.

And what did the ground crew wear?

Oh, the ground crew would wear almost the same but they were mainly elder people, they were older people and shorter people and generally speaking, not as well educated, which is not a big thing in itself but it was. And of course

11:30 we were just proud little peacocks in those days.

When did they decide they would train you to be a pilot? Was it at Brisbane?

Oh yes.

So initially when you first joined up they decided that?

Yes, you went through special tests, you went through a lot of psychological tests and of course, blindness, not so much blindness but colour blindness test, you had to go through all those and quite a few reflex actions, and those things

12:00 all taken into account. The pilot or rather the air crew, they had to have the best physical condition of all, the air crew. All the air force, I should say. But of eye sight, the gunners had to have the best. Gunners had to have the best eye sight, and the navigators the next, and the pilot the least. But still meant he had to have extremely good eyesight.

12:30 Rather naturally.

Does that rule still apply for pilots now?

I'd say so, almost certainly.

What did you know about the Empire Air Training Scheme?

Not a great deal until I actually joined up. Since then I've learnt a lot about it, of the clever things that worked, dreamt up by quite a few people, so some people were –

13:00 say England for instance, were too crowded, they didn't have the facilities to train enough people so they brought Canada into it and they brought Rhodesia into it, mainly, and some in Australia of course and some in New Zealand. And it was a toss up if you went to Canada or Rhodesia, just like a [UNCLEAR] of cards.

They didn't do the same amount of heavy training in Australia for the EAT [Empire Air Training] Scheme did they?

No, they had the facilities and they worked out where it was convenient to do it.

13:30 And an interesting thing, when we went to Rhodesia they assumed we would all be Sergeants and officers, we weren't, we were just LACs, leading aircraftmen, that is. And so we had to be made acting sergeants, acting officers because those were the quarters that were available for us. Which was very nice for us because we were basically in the officers' mess or the sergeants' mess. And not in the airmen's mess which was very

14:00 convenient for us. Suited us very well, we get better food, better conditions.

When you signed up you were 18?

That's right.

At that time it would have been 1940?

1940 and I was still 18 when I joined up. But by that same June of that year of 1941, I was 19.

14:30 **What was going on in Europe at that time? Was the battle of Britain in 1940?**

No, it was in 1940, yeah,

You were aware of all this then?

Oh yes, very much so, yes. In actual fact we were originally taken down at short notice to Melbourne to be trained as air gunners. Because they, the Wellingtons, which were the main bombers in those days, they were losing a terrific number of rear gunners.

15:00 Naturally because that's where the fighters come in, and the rear gunners copped it. So we were going to do a 4 week course and then go to be rear gunners. It just so happened that my eyesight was pilot only. My eyesight wasn't good enough for a gunner, so I was very lucky. So that was one time when I could have missed out on being a pilot. If my eyes had been better!

15:30 **You could be at the bottom of the sea as well?**

Oh, very much so, yes.

So you went to Somers. Were you excited about going on a plane?

No, it was just a lot of hard work. We did a lot of drilling and a lot of lessons. There was a terrific amount of lessons, and got exams on it too, of course.

16:00 The PT [physical training] was good because we were young, naturally and we were fit anyway, so PT

had no horrors for us, it was quite good. And route marches, we had a few of those, that was no big deal. The lessons, I never did like school really so I wasn't particularly excited about the lessons, but you had to do it.

What were the subjects that you were good at?

Anything to do with maths

16:30 or physics, I was fine. Meteorology that wasn't too bad and, of course, the trig, trigonometry and the logarithms they were no trouble, and conventional geometry, that was no worries. Aircraft recognition, that wasn't too bad, navigation that was a bit fiddly. Hygiene, well that's a boring subject, it really was. Administration, that was tedious, you know, learning all the

17:00 administration rules and regulations, that was tedious.

When you learn to sail a yacht you learn the rules of the water. What is the appropriate word for that in the air?

Oh probably just

17:30 airmanship.

Airmanship?

Yes.

And how were you at that?

Reasonably so, there was quite a, they were sensible rules that was the whole thing. they were sensible rules, and a lot of obvious things that you made sure you did take charts even it was only a small trip, you made sure you had the charts. They had a lot of slogans during the war and big posters, PO [pilot officer] Prune, he was, he always had trouble, and

18:00 it was little things like, PO Prune says, "We don't need a map for that little bit." And, "Oh no, don't check it we've got plenty of petrol." Things like that.

She'll be right?

Yeah, she'll be right, don't worry it will go away. No those clouds won't fold up, no.

So was it at Somers that you did the first Tiger Moth?

18:30 No, no.

That was Rhodesia?

Yes, only the ground training in Australia.

You must have been champing at the bit to actually?

Oh absolutely, yes. See, when we left Australia, well of course after we had done that we were hanging around Melbourne for quite awhile and then we went to Sydney and then we had the trip to Port Taufiq and then

19:00 we were stuck in the desert there for quite a while. And I managed to get yellow jaundice while I was there, hepatitis these days. And I went to a British Army hospital and it was the most dreadful, it was out in the desert and it was stinking hot in tents and the nurses couldn't have cared less, the nurses were only interested in the doctors. And the doctors were only interested in the nurses; they couldn't have cared less for patients.

19:30 With the, you had to be put off fatty food of course with the yellow jaundice, they called it then, nephritis, not nephritis, hepatitis I should say. And they put me back onto a heavy diet too soon and nearly killed me. Yeah, that was terrible.

How did you get hepatitis?

Goodness only knows, but it went through us. See I had hepatitis there and quite a few others got it,

20:00 don't ask me why. And when we were in Rhodesia I got mumps and quite a few of the others got mumps. So, fortunately the mumps stayed away from the vital parts, it can be bad in adults.

So you went over on the Queen Elizabeth. Just before you embarked you said you were hanging around Melbourne.

20:30 **What was the city like in war time?**

It wasn't particularly quiet, there was no black out or anything like hat . There were a lot of troops around naturally, but you still had plenty of, a good time, plenty of food, cafes and that sort of thing. Basically it was normal. They didn't have all the buildings they have got there now naturally, but it was very, very normal.

Were you interested in girls at that time?

21:00 What a silly thought. Of course, of course.

Did you have a girlfriend?

Oh yes, I had girlfriends wherever I was. Oh that is not a boast, it's just one of those things that happened that's all.

Well a lot of young fellows weren't interested in girls, they were much more interested in machinery.

True. I was very interested in that too, I liked cars,

21:30 but I still liked girls.

So where would you go for a night out? Would you go dancing?

Dancing I think mostly, yes, in fact yeah, I suppose that was about all. Unless it was daytime drive outs in the country and everything. There was still petrol, you could get petrol. I had relations of a kind in Melbourne and I used to stay with them quite a bit.

22:00 **What about a girlfriend in Melbourne. Did you have one before you left for overseas?**

I had two actually, these relations were not blood relations. I used to take out the daughter of the house quite a bit, and also her cousin. Both very nice girls

Not at the same time?

No, no well the younger one, she didn't know I had been taking the other one out for years. And she was utterly, I met her since the war, she was utterly furious that I was going out with

22:30 this cousin of hers. One of those strange things. And I hadn't particularly made any secret of it, just the way it was.

Did any of them write to you when you went overseas?

Oh yes, they both wrote to me and very nice letters. Because you didn't get much from home. And a lot of mail was lost, of course. And of course, practically all my mail home was lost,

23:00 that's because I was just a lousy letter writer. So I'd claim most of my letters had gone down. Nasty character.

When you went on the Queen Elizabeth, what was the set up there?

Set up, there were about 7,000 troops onboard, and just about a handful of the air force. They were, the troops were mostly reinforcements for the 6th and 7th Divi

23:30 in Egypt, in North Africa, I should say. And the food onboard the Queen Elizabeth was the most atrocious I had ever come across in my life. We had rotten fish, the same rotten fish, day after day after day. And with so many troops on board we had to be fed in shifts. And one of the army shifts they just refused to leave, they wouldn't eat the food and they refused to leave. And they had everyone from the, of course, of the ship, the captain of the ship, and everyone coming down to

24:00 try and get them to move and they all got pelted with this rotten fish by the army. You might, if you like, call it a mutiny, but finally it was decided that we wouldn't have any more of the fish. And then they moved. And there was nothing done about it. Because that rotten fish, the Cunard line who had the Queen Elizabeth and the Mary, they were getting 5 shillings a day for our messing, all those messing and that was a lot

24:30 of money then, and we were getting this rubbish. And I know a friend of mine, his uncle donated cases and cases of apples to them, they were selling them to us. And they had been donated to be distributed. So the line didn't come out very liked at all. It was shocking food.

25:00 **What happened after the rotten fish episode?**

Oh, we got reasonable food after that, still nothing marvellous but reasonable.

How did you get on with the army blokes onboard?

I got on with them reasonably well. You had to be a little bit cautious of them because they were pretty rough, they were practically skin heads, and they were pretty rough types. And they'd be quite happy to pick a fight. So you had to be reasonably careful.

25:30 But I used to play two up with them and I did reasonably well, I must say. I won about 50 pounds in the trip from the army blokes. They were quite good. But one of the most marvellous things we used to do was, it was blacked out naturally but once you were away from the ports everything was duty free. And we used to get those huge cans, like a huge

26:00 Dixie and we used to get that full of beer and it worked out about, oh only about 3 pence a gallon. An incredibly small amount for beer. And we'd take that huge thing out onto the deck in the dark and we'd all have enamel mugs and we'd dip into it and drink from it. When it was empty we'd get another one, it was marvellous. And on the open deck in a calm sea and a moonlight night it was really beautiful,

26:30 it was lovely, most attractive.

Very nice?

It was very pleasant, the only thing was I lost a camera and I'm pretty sure it was one of the stewards that pinched it but you couldn't accuse them because the cabins weren't locked and anyone could have gone in. And I had it under my pillow, where it should have been safe but, no, I suppose it's the first place to look for anything isn't it. Under a pillow. But it was a beautiful camera, a lovely little thing, and I was very upset

27:00 to lose it.

Was there any kind of rivalry between the air force and the army?

Not enough of us to make any rivalry.

You'd hold your tongue then?

Yes.

What about arriving in Suez, what were your first impressions?

A little bit nervous of the natives there. They were very rough a tumble, and most of them were against the war

27:30 of course. Even the King, he was against the war too, he had his private plane and he had his private yacht and there was always a fighter sitting next to his private plane, and always a small warship beside his yacht. So he couldn't go anywhere. No, the Brits completely controlled Egypt, there was no doubt about that. We used to get into trouble sometimes

28:00 with the mobs, they used to come at us with knives and sticks and that sort of thing. That was when I was back the second time and they'd had a bit of problems, a bit of bombing and that sort of thing and they'd come charging down the street with, screaming, yelling, knives and sticks. But we always had revolvers and we used to fire it over their heads and stop them.

28:30 **I wonder why they were so panicked?**

Well, they blamed all the bombing and everything on us, because they were against the Brits, they weren't as, basically, they are now, to some extent. And they didn't want the war because they didn't want the bombing.

Did you experience any seasickness coming over?

No, no I'd been sailing all my life. We always had, at home at Sherwood, we always had a launch,

29:00 we went right down to the launch there. As a matter of fact I used to go on the launch before I could even swim. It's a funny thing, I'm digressing to some extent, when my elder sister was 6, the second one would have been 5 and I would have been 3, we were allowed to swim in the river and my 6 year old had to be in charge of us. The 6 year old having to look after the other two.

29:30 And where we had the launch moored we had one mooring post there and one mooring post on the jetty back there, and Dad had a rope from this mooring post on the jetty, and another rope to the other mooring post and then back to the jetty, and a 3 year old, I used to hand myself all the way around it, and back to the jetty. And the river in those days as it is now, was still muddy. And if I'd have dropped off, whether that

30:00 6 year old would have been able to get me or not, I don't know. She was a good swimmer even then, but thank goodness I never let go.

Isn't that funny the responsibility given to a child then?

To a 6 year old, yes, yes. And she accepted it. She expected it.

How long did it take you to get over the Egypt from Australia?

About 3 weeks, 3 weeks

30:30 with the two Queens together. Going across the Bight we went through a terrific storm, going across the Bight and we were supposedly escorted by a cruiser and the cruiser was disappearing from sight, oh it seemed to be minutes at a time and then it would come above the water again, you know. And it was so rough that those huge Queens, over 80,000 tonners, and from the waterline of the bow of the

31:00 Queen Elizabeth, probably the Mary too, I suppose was 82 feet. And she was actually dipping her nose,

she was dropping 82 feet and up again. It was incredible. Walking the length of the ship, down the centre line one moment you are as light as a feather, next thing you are as heavy as lead. Now when she is dropping you have got practically no weight and when she is coming up, of course you feel that you have lead in your feet.

31:30 But no, I was never seasick there. But that was a fantastic storm.

Did you think that would be the end of you then?

Oh no, I knew the Queens would take it alright. I was a bit concerned for the cruiser though, it would disappear completely under waves, just vanish from sight. And of course it could only take that about 10 minutes I suppose, in that real storm, and then it had to turn back.

32:00 **You disembarked in Egypt and were taken to the Mauritania?**

No we were taken, no, the Mauritania was the one we were taken from Egypt back to Durban.

So yo u did disembark at Egypt?

Oh my word, and we were stuck in the, as I said before, we were stuck in the desert for quite a while and nobody knew we were coming and we adopted our Legion of the Lost, our song, as I said before.

And that is when you got yellow jaundice?

32:30 Yes

And you were there for a couple of months?

Yeah, about a month I suppose.

What were you supposed to do there?

Nothing, we were just en route to Rhodesia, we weren't supposed to do anything there and we did nothing there. We had roll call and that was about all. But it was dreadful, we were out in the desert and we

33:00 were in tents and the sand bags were about the tents, you sort of stepped out, and, sorry about the dog.

So you did go on the Mauritania to Durban and you were there for about a month?

And it took us about 3 days to get up to Rhodesia, got to Bulawayo and once again we were put into camp. Once again they waited. We weren't

33:30 there too long and then we went to the airfields to start our actual flying.

Some pilots trained in Canada in the snow, and there you were in Rhodesia.

We were lucky there because the climate there was very much like here in Queensland so it was no problem, and most pleasant people. In South Africa you got a bit of a mixture.

34:00 You got a lot of the old Boers there, the Afrikaans and some not so friendly. But in Rhodesia it was a colony so it was really part of England and they were all well spoken English people really.

How did that work as far as the apartheid situation?

They had nothing to do with it. It was

34:30 a colony, there was no apartheid there at all, in Rhodesia. Actually you didn't have those severe rules. You see, people have spoken about Rhodesia in the same breath as South Africa, as far as Apartheid is concerned, but it was nothing like that at all. The – in Rhodesia, the natives were allowed to ride on trains, trams,

35:00 whatever. They were allowed to walk around the street unmolested. They could live in the towns if they wished to, normally they didn't. Most of their jobs were menial, admittedly, but they seemed to be very happy with it. Anyone who caused trouble, which is understandable, were the mission trained ones. They had a better education than the ones straight from the bush naturally, and they probably aspired to better things. Whereas those who came from the bush, if they got their 6 pence a week, if they were looking after say 6 of us, you know, polishing our shoes

35:30 and cleaning up the tents and things like that, they were very happy. They liked it.

So it was more the educated people from the missions?

They were the trouble makers.

They would like to have jobs that the white man had?

Yes, oh yes. Definitely they were the discontent. Whereas the ones straight from the bush, as I said, they were very happy.

36:00 **Can you tell me what Rhodesia looked like? What were the roads like?**

There weren't a great deal of main roads, only in the towns themselves. Mostly there was still jungle and in the jungle the roads were just like two car tracks. And if there was nothing coming the other way you would drive on them both, naturally. If there was something coming the other way you had to take two of your wheels off into the rough stuff beside that track and the other one did the

36:30 the same the other way, and you passed that way. So they were just like continuos car tracks. And it was jungle too, pretty thick jungle too. From Guinea Fowl, which was that first station I was at, we used to go into Gwelo which was probably about, oh, might have been 14 miles or so. And if you missed the last bus home, they had to walk back or stay in town. And I, a few times I started to walk back, but of course a few times you got

37:00 into trouble, if you weren't back by midnight. I started to walk back, but you could hear the leopards padding with you, just the other side of the grass there, on the side of the road, you could hear them padding with you. You could pick up a stone hoping you could defend yourself with that. And you'd go on walking, and the hair would be up on the back of your neck, and you'd go on and on, and as soon as you were about a few hundred yards beyond the last lights of the town,

37:30 you'd think, oh no, I can't turn around and go back in and stay the night. God it was scary, really scary. And the leopards were taking a lot of the native women. What happened was the baboons were, they're a big trouble, or they were a huge trouble in Rhodesia, both North and South Rhodesia. And they had these huge safaris killing the baboons and it turned out the baboons

38:00 were the main food for the leopards. So when the leopards didn't have the baboons they would turn on the native women. And normally when they were going down the streams to get water. That's when they normally attack.

I wonder why they would get the women?

Well the men normally were armed to start with, and normally they wouldn't go down there. The women would be doing the work, the men wouldn't be doing the work. Silly thought,

38:30 fancy men having to work, even bring water up from the –

That's right, she should have the baby on her back.

Exactly, perfectly correct

Taking care of the house.

Naturally, and don't forget he crops.

Planting everything.

And making it into flour, you got to do all that.

Because it's the same –

Just a normal thing.

It's the same analogy as the lion that sits around all day except occasionally roars.

Exactly and the female

39:00 does all the hunting, yeah, very true.

Don't get me started.

Tape 4

00:33 **Can you give us a picture of the Empire Air Training Scheme in Rhodesia?**

Well it was very, very good. They sort of split up into divisions of the different countries, Australia, England to some extent, Canada, Rhodesia, Canada probably too, the most, because they had the space and

01:00 it was big, whereas Rhodesia probably took the least because it was a very small country and very sparsely populated, as I said, it was mostly jungle. There were a total of about 600 of us went there during the war and 400 roughly got their wings, or wings whichever it was. And the others of course missed out and they re-mustered to something else.

How many were there when you arrived?

Well they never stayed there,

01:30 they kept moving on. So there wouldn't be more than about 90 as far as we were concerned. Probably about 90 there, and of course, as soon as we came they moved on so we went on. Out group was split up between bombers and single engines or multi engine and single engine, and I was lucky, as I said, I wanted a single engine which I got.

Was that something you had any control over?

02:00 Not really. You are asked your choice but if you know the air force at all you know that means nothing. Nothing at all. My sister, she had a home here of course in Brisbane, and her friend had a home in Melbourne and they wanted to be close to home, so of course you know what happened, my sister went to Melbourne and the other came up to Brisbane. It's the way it always works. So giving a preference does mean a heck to a lot.

02:30 That's the way it works.

So once you got single engine, did you know you were headed for Spitfires?

Oh yes, that was the obvious thing. It could have been Mustangs, but the most obvious thing was Spitfires. They had had the Kittyhawks and things like that in the desert, but we weren't going there. We were most certainly, or I thought we were going to England. As it

03:00 happened some of our blokes did go back to the Middle East. But I went to England so I was very happy there.

So what did they get you to do? What were they instructing you in?

Well you had a lot of physical activity, that's as much as anything to teach you discipline because when you are flying in formation or something like that you have got to react

03:30 directly with the command. You know, if they say you've got to break left, you've got to break left, you don't say, why, what's there? Otherwise you are not there. So you have got to learn very quick responses and basically blind responses. You are not allowed to think for yourself in that split second, if he says break left, you break left. And that's it. Then you think what's it all about. And

04:00 the physical, the PT as such, the physical exercise and the games, they all had that idea in mind to discipline and work as a team and not so much solo. That possibly applied more to the bombers than the fighters, but even to the fighters it still, you still were in squadrons even though you didn't fly as squadrons, sometimes there was twos.

04:30 **Did they mix up the air crew and ground crew in that training?**

No, the air crew were always entirely separate. The ground crew had their own instructors and everything else. No they didn't mix. Once you were on a squadron if you didn't mix with them you were very silly because they were looking after your plane. Each plane had allocated to it a fitter rigging, and a fitter engines. And one looked

05:00 after the aircraft itself and one looked after the mechanical side. And if you didn't keep in well with them you were very silly. Because they could be very casual about your plane and not worry too much. But if you took an interest in your plane and told them anything that might be wrong or may be improved, they'd jump to. But if you just got out of your plane and just walked straight over and ignored the ground crew who were always waiting for you to come back

05:30 you got nowhere with them. So you had to learn to mix with them. And it wasn't hard anyway, they were really nice people, dedicated people, it was terrific, yeah.

Did any pilots get into strife by not treating their ground crew very well?

Not strictly, but they'd have trouble with their plane and the plane would not be cleaned as well. You see, to try and get a little bit out of Spitfires we used to even polish them, polish them like polishing a car,

06:00 just to get a few extra miles per hour. And if you had enough interest in your plane like that they'd help you like a shot. Otherwise if you didn't make an effort with the plane, well why should they? And so that's the way it was. And as a matter of interest, the planes I flew when I had my own plane was always a B, tied up with Beverley Yorkshire of course, and also I had a beaver painted on the nose of it

06:30 because that is the symbol of Beverley in Yorkshire. So that was just one of those tiddly things.

To remind you of big sister back home?

Yeah, that's a thought, yeah. True.

Can you tell us about going solo for the first flight?

07:00 Well of course going solo, that was in the Tiger Moths naturally, and it was a colossal thrill and you were very, very nervous about it, terribly nervous. You felt you could do it, but, and of course the instructor was nervous too. He was waiting on the tarmac and your first solo was just circuit and bump, you didn't go across country you just went, you got off just did one circle and came back down. And if you didn't

bounce too

07:30 hard you were fine and everyone relaxed. And you were away and then you do your cross country and navigational exercise and everything else. And towards the end of the course you do the night flying which was not good. Not good at all. Because there was very little, you had primitive instruments in the Tiger Moth, as I said, the place is sparsely populated, there is very few lights, there is mainly jungle underneath you and if you had to go to this point and then

08:00 go to this point and that point, it wasn't hard to get lost. One of our poor silly blokes did get lost and he bailed out and he had a parachute, we didn't have our own parachutes in those days of course, and they were always too big for you. When you walked out of the plane put them on, they were smacking the back of your knees that's how long they were. And this character he bailed out and he couldn't reach the ripcord with his right hand - you are taught to reach with your right hand to pull it of course.

08:30 And when they picked him up in the morning he had scraped the skin off his ribs trying to get to that ripcord. He was dead naturally, but if he had the presence of mind to pull the strap up which has the ripcord on it with his left hand, then he could have got it. But of course, you know, panic,he went. We had a few people killed in accidents.

09:00 **What kind?**

One of the things you did, not so much with the Tiger Moths but with the Harvards, you did air to ground firing. You had a target sort of set up at an angle and you came down and you fired on it then you pulled out. Well one or two of them in the course were mesmerised by the target and they don't pull out, they just go straight into it. They get mesmerised as they are going down to the target and just keep on going, bang. It's like

09:30 that Frenchman who was trying to do the gliding, you know, they have these wings on and they are trying to glide, and of course you are actually dropping at fair speed although it looks as if you are not, but if the camera man is with you naturally it looks as if you are doing it at a level place but in actual fact you are dropping all the time. And he left it too long. He apparently got to the belief that he was actually flying and he went in. And he was

10:00 a very experienced man and he just got that idea at the wrong moment that he could fly onto the ground, boom. So these things do happen, and there is no accounting for it. We had bombing practice too with the Harvards. I never had to drop a bomb in earnest but we had a smoke bomb and we used to drop those onto target. And you did it by,

10:30 theoretically you did it by counting. When you lost sight of the target underneath, it meant it was still a long way forward of you, then you counted say up to 12 and then you pressed the button. And I could never do that. I always do it by feel. It would disappear and then I'd say, hmm, and then boom, do it by feel or instinct if you like and I was always closer than anyone else. It was just one

11:00 of those silly things that worked. Just by feel.

It would vary greatly depending on height you were?

Oh yes, all that had to be taken into account. And then of course we did air to air firing. You'll have one plane with a drogue behind it. You know what a drogue looks like? Of course you do. And he was coming, you'd be above him and coming the opposite way, do sort of a diving turn onto it

11:30 but you had to break off fairly quickly because if you went astern of it you were likely to shoot him down. And I used to annoy them occasionally. I'd stop firing but I'd follow it around and they'd have red and all this flash, flash, flash, you know formed to get the heck out of it. Just one of those silly things you do.

You were just doing it to stir them up a bit?

Hmm, that's right, give them a bit of excitement for the day.

What were

12:00 **more common, accidents in Harvards or Tiger Moths?**

Oh the Harvard, the Harvard is more likely to be fatal.

In what way?

Because it's a heavier plane, the Tiger is very, very light and even if it spins in you've got a fair chance of getting out of it. If, particularly if it's a flat spin, but the Harvard is a very heavy plane. And we were 5,000 feet above sea level where we were flying, at ground level so they were inclined to come down pretty heavily.

12:30 And because of that rarefied air, or fairly rarefied air the Harvard's inclined to do round loops, you come into land you think you are alright and then suddenly she'd swing seriously round, normally dig in one wing, break the [UNCLEAR] leg on that side and end up as a mess. And you normally got out of that but sometimes they didn't.

What would cause that?

Well they stalled at a higher speed and you'd, as far as you were concerned you were right for landing

13:00 and everything should have been alright but then, just at the last minute there might be a puff of wind going the wrong way that just cuts down your airspeed. You see if you've got wind coming from behind you suddenly, then your airspeed is gone completely. And they'd drop the wing. See a Tiger Moth, if it stalls it drops straight, if a Spitfire stalls it drops straight,

13:30 if a Harvard stalls it drops a wing straight away. It does flop straight it always drops a wing. And it's normally the right one and around she goes, bang. A messy business.

Any other complications?

No, they were a nice plane in themselves but

14:00 they were vicious we had to learn, and recover from spins with them. And the idea was because we were at 5,000 feet ground level to start with if you weren't out of the spin at 4,000 you bailed out because they could quite easily lose 4,000 feet while you are trying to bring them out of a spin. Whereas a Tiger Moth, you could spin them say 1,000 feet and still recover.

14:30 These things happen. And a Spitfire, if it's trimmed properly you let go of the stick and it will pull itself out anyway. It would drop its nose and pick up speed and as long as you looked after the stick it would be right. But if you let it drop its nose, pick up speed, it will probably stall again, and drop its nose, do that. But, as I said, the Spitfire, no real problems, a lovely plane, a beautifully designed plane.

15:00 **In terms of the journey of your training, what was the rationale behind going from Tiger Moths to the Harvard? What were you learning more about as a pilot?**

Only to handle a faster plane that's all - faster landing, faster take off, faster spins, faster loops.

15:30 Just speed more than anything and, as I said, she was a vicious plane too, as far as dropping wings and things like that were concerned. But that's about all that was, just that difference. Getting used to a monoplane as opposed to the biplane.

How did you get on with the Brits?

Marvellously, marvellously.

16:00 The British trainee pilots good as gold, they were the same as us. We did, oddly enough, have the odd Canadian, and occasionally a South African one. Ian Smith, he was in the news of course when they finally got their independence in Rhodesia. Ian Smith, well he was the president or whatever you like, he was the one who stood up to Britain and said, no we are not going to let go. He

16:30 was one of the trainees in Rhodesia. He trained there and became a Spitfire pilot. A nice bloke in himself. Misguided perhaps, but that was the times. The same as those misguided people in Algeria. They didn't want to change and then they rebelled against their own people.

What would you get up to for fun?

17:00 That's hard to say. We drank too much, we smoked too much. We used to go to the odd dance and parties and things like that. But some went hunting - there was always hunting on of course, some did that. I never did. But apart from that, mainly visiting, visiting the homes and farms. They

17:30 were all very nice people.

Where they billeting out people? Or just welcoming?

Just welcoming anyone, yeah. It was, there was only one girl on the aerodrome at Bulawayo, Elizabeth King, she was a nice girl. But she was hopeless on the fire truck.

18:00 If there was a prang on the field, she drove around the perimeter before she went out to get it. I mean a fire truck, you fly straight across the field, to hell with anything, to get there, but no, she never did. As I said, she was a nice girl but she was no good in that fire truck.

What was the scope of her duties?

She was in uniform.

18:30 And well that would be, she was obviously a transport driver of fire engine, probably did the conventional driving for the suppliers and things like that, but she did do her turn on the fire truck and, as I said, she was, just no good. That's just one of those things.

Did the fellows pursue local girls in Rhodesia?

Yes, they did to a big extent

19:00 yes. I met quite a few. I used to take this girl, Elizabeth King out quite a bit. And yeah, we all got to

know quite few. Oh, we went to the races occasionally, they had races there and we went there occasionally too. And you think it was peace time, the girls used to really dress up with those big shady hats and beautiful dresses. They really dressed up to the nines just to go to

19:30 the races. Yes, it was very pleasant, very pleasant times when we went, all the, oh when we were flying too. But the thing with the air force and flying and things like that, the flying is marvellous and if you could be flying all the time it would be terrific. It's the times in between that's bad. When you are in a transfer, transport section waiting to go somewhere else and you are there for weeks, that's tedious. When you are

20:00 going from ship, say from England to North Africa, that's tedious. And when you are waiting in North Africa to go across to Italy, that's tedious. All those things, when you are not actually flying, it's tedious. So that a lot of people kept on flying after the war, I never wanted to. I loved the flying but I hated the spaces in between, just boring and frustrating. The same as we were on leave in London,

20:30 and it was being bombed, you wanted to be up there, you didn't want to be down on the ground. Wanted to be up there even if it was night. Yep.

Do you remember how long it took you to go solo on a Tiger Moth?

No, I couldn't tell you quite honestly, probably not so long in the Tiger Moth, probably only 3 hours 3 or 4 hours I suppose. But probably longer in the Harvards because they were fiddly.

21:00 Everyone took longer with the Harvards than the Tigers. The Tigers were reasonably safe, you could get killed in them but it was rare, they were very safe.

How did the instructors set up training in the Harvards?

Oh the Harvards were dual, they were a dual plane so you went up dual for a long time with an instructor, and of course you had to learn the cockpit drill

21:30 before you even fly in them, before you started.

What was the cockpit drill in the Harvard?

Well you'd have to get in the plane, see that your straps were tight, see that the switches were in the right places, and before you switched on, see if you had petrol, see if you had this, see if you had that, just a case of going right through. Checking the compass, see if it's working okay, check it's not being affected by anything

22:00 close to it. All those little things, you had to do those before you actually started up. And with the Harvards you had one little, one trick, we used to have to land in a small field, further away, it was a landing field, a fairly small one and you had to start the Harvard up by hand. They had

22:30 a gyroscopic wheel and a handle, you know, like the old milk separating machines, where you go slowly and it starts, screams louder and louder and louder because you were turning a huge flywheel, well it was the same as that, you could hardly turn it to start and you kept on an on and on until it's actually screaming. Then you had to pull that handle out, jump in the cockpit and turn it on, and hope it caught. It was

23:00 a tricky business but reasonably safe.

And you'd do that yourself? You didn't have a ground crew to help?

You did that yourself. In case you were forced down somewhere or another and there was no one to help you, learn that, it was an interesting exercise, quite good.

23:30 **When you went over to England on the Nehellit [?], were you excited about going to England?**

To England, absolutely, yes. See in those days we considered ourselves almost part of England, not like today, they weren't a foreign country then.

24:00 They were home, they were the old place, the old home, we were always happy to, everyone had terrific respect for England and we were very glad to go over there to give them a hand. I still have a lot of respect for the people. The Brits I had to deal with, and there were lost and lots of them of course, over the years, marvellous people and their morale was terrific. You might say they are too stupid to know when they are beaten, but

24:30 no, they were terrific. And among the aircrew I never saw any lack of morale fibre at all. They were all proud and keen and there's no, oh we are going to lose, or anything like that they were always optimistic, which is excellent. That's why even the Battle of Britain, those blokes practically killing themselves, they knew they'd get through, they knew that

25:00 Britain would win. They just knew it and all these reports from Germany, propaganda reports, that had no affect on them, we used to listen to them just to hear the music. They used to copy records from America and there'd be the propaganda and then they'd play some music. And the propaganda meant nothing to us, not one little bit.

What sort of things would they say?

25:30 Oh, you are going to lose, in the case of the Americans particularly they'd say, oh yes, your wives are going out with your best friend and so and so, anything to ruin morale. And of course for the Australians they say, oh yes the Americans have got all your women now. You've got nothing to go home to et cetera, all these things. And as I said, it made no difference to the aircrew at all.

26:00 **Did you see much of the devastation of the Blitz?**

Oh yes, a lot of them. A lot of it in London too, in fact in London I had seen the King and Queen and the two youngsters in London, you know, walking around some of the devastated sites, yeah. Yeah, when our present Queen she would have been about 16 then I suppose, and Margaret would have been younger of course,

26:30 and the King and Queen, they were nice people. I liked the old Queen Mother, she was a lovely person, oh everyone did for that matter.

Can you give us a picture of what London was like in those days?

London was still quite good, they still had Lion's cafes [community organisation] about every second corner and you could get a bit of a meal there. It wasn't too bad. Talking about meals, this is a bit silly,

27:00 on the squadrons we had what they called air force suppers and breakfasts. If you were on the dawn patrol and the dusk patrol before the dusk and then the dawn then they gave you, after you come off dawn patrol, oh, dusk patrol rather, they give you a special supper. It had eggs and steak and things like that in it. And of course there would always be a few people try and sneak in on it. The communications officers and people

27:30 like that, "Oh, we have to do something." They'd never get in, it was aircrew only, they'd never get any eggs, any steak. We enjoyed that, it almost made it worthwhile.

What was the food like in Rhodesia?

28:00 The tucker was good in Rhodesia; in the air force in Australia it was lousy finally. When we first went into camp it was good because the air force were doing its own catering. But then the army took over the catering for all the services and then we were getting bully beef and stuff like that and powdered egg. In a place that was full of good meat and full of eggs

28:30 and we were getting this powdered stuff, it was weird, and dried fruit.

What did you think of bully beef?

It was alright if you left it alone, but in the Middle East we had it for morning, lunch and dinner. We had it for 3 meals, that's all we had and dates as extra at tea time. And if they left it alone and it was reasonably cool

29:00 it wasn't bad but as soon as they tried to mince it up and make it into meatballs or put batter around it, it was awful. If they left it alone it was great, that was all. Our food in the Middle East, that was pretty poor. Dates were alright, you weren't allowed to buy any dates or anything like that yourself. They all had to come from the mess, because unless they were carefully scrutinised they

29:30 could be bad and we wouldn't know. Same if you fell into what are known as the Sweet Water Canals in Egypt. You had to be very thoroughly disinfected afterwards. Because they used to drink from the, this is the natives, the Arab, they used to drink from the Sweet Water Canals, they used to bathe in them, they use them as a toilet and very often they threw dead bodies in them.

30:00 **As in the dead?**

Yeah, oh they were dreadful. And as I said, if you fell in one of those you were out and you were in big trouble if you weren't cleaned off straight away. You could get a dreadful disease called Bilharzia.

What would that do to you?

I'm not too sure, but you were sick for about 4 years, it took about 4 years to cure you from it

30:30 it was very bad thing. Thank goodness I never had that. I had the mumps and the yellow jaundice, which is a silly name because jaundice means yellow anyway.

Yellow, yellow?

Yeah that's right.

Coming over on the Nehellit [?] were you aboard when she was torpedoed?

That's right, she was torpedoed, but before, see all the ships where we were we were always the

31:00 bunny who was the gun crew, they normally have a 6 inch gun on the back and they probably have a 3 inch and on the midships they probably have a couple of Oerlikons or something like that, anti aircraft

and our blokes happen to be on the stern, that night, on the stern guns, and they saw the 4 torpedoes that were fired, two missed, two hit but only the nose went off

31:30 only the trigger went off, or the detonator if you like, the main charge didn't. So we just got dents in the hull. And what happened was, Captain Brown who was the, he stopped the ship threw all his books overboard, which is standard practice, if you are going to be sunk. And then we went, all the abandon ship went, we all got in the lifeboats and waiting there to be lowered by the crew.

32:00 The crew did that, fairly primitive ones in those days, just the few turns around the halyards and then sort of let it go. And the only casualty was a baker's assistant, he was lowering one of the boats and he didn't put it around the bollard actually, and he tried to hold the boat up with his own weight and he went over the side of the boat. And that was unfortunately just about the time that captain, that Captain Brown decided we weren't sinking

32:30 and we started off again. So we left him behind in the sea. Couldn't do anything about it, the subs were all around us and we just couldn't stay there. So he just got left behind.

So you were still under the threat of attack?

Oh yes, very definitely, we were lucky. We were in the middle of the pack apparently but whether they used up all the torps [torpedoes], I don't know, but we got away with it. And as I said, we got as far as Freetown and we waited a fortnight while the others

33:00 came in. Some of our people ended up in Dakar in North Africa which was then Vichy French and they were there until the allies took that over and became part of occupied territory. Then they were released and they joined us in England.

How did they get caught?

They were torpedoed and they were probably picked up by the French boats. They ended up in Dakar which was Vichy French in those days,

33:30 which was anti British of course and pro German. Until the Brits, I think it was, released the country and they just stayed there as prisoners of war. And then they joined us later in England. But one bloke broke his leg, he was a bit unlucky. He got it caught between a life boat and the side of the ship, probably when it swung in. But we were

34:00 fairly lucky. I think we only lost that one bloke overboard. And the other ships they lost people but not any of our aircrew as it happened, they were lucky.

That's extremely lucky.

Yeah, absolutely. They believed they were sabotaged in the factories, you know the forced labour factories. They think the forced labour people from France or wherever they were had sabotaged them. It was lucky for us. They had divers down in

34:30 Freetown of course, to examine them and they were just dents, nothing else.

Of course that was below water so you didn't know what was going on?

No.

Did you feel anything of the hit?

You mean apart from falling out of bed, falling out of the top bunk and falling on the floor?

Yes.

No, nothing. It was the funniest thing. We got up and, of course, we used to sleep with our life jacket as a pillow which is a no-no,

35:00 but we did, you weren't supposed to use them as a pillow.

Why is that?

I don't know. They were a kapok one but you weren't supposed to use them. We had those there, our little bag of necessities beside us and we were fully dressed except for our shoes. And when the abandon ship went we wanted to get up on deck. And I think there were 6 of us in the cabin and one of the blokes couldn't find his shoes. Oh did we curse him, we wouldn't leave without him, but boy we cursed him.

35:30 "Why don't you look after your bloody stuff? Where are your bloody shoes? Put them on, bugger the laces, come on, we are going now." Oh he got abused, as it turned out there was no sinking with us. It worked out fairly well.

The first you heard about it was you crashing to the floor?

Yes, yes telling me, woomph, and

36:00 you are very conscience as it is when you wake up, it was about 9 o'clock at night. When you wake up you are just conscious of what woke you, you suddenly realised there was a big bang that woke you. Yeah fantastic experience.

So is news travelling through the ship at that moment? Or are you working on your own volition?

No, the abandon ship went off, we heard the engines stop and then we were expecting it, and then the

36:30 abandon ship went on. And then of course, we all went up on deck. And we had of course, when we left Cape Town, the life boats were always out in war time, as soon as you leave port, they are ready to drop. And we had life boat drill every morning. You know, they'd give a whistle and you'd go up and have to get in your right place, with that boat and some belonged to that boat and some belonged to that boat. You couldn't just

37:00 rush to one boat or something like that, you were allocated to the boats. And we were there and, as I said,, we were actually in the boat. And when we started off again, we got out of the boat. Which was very pleasant, much nicer not having to go into the water in the lifeboats. It was good.

It must have been an anxious moment having joined the air force and suddenly thinking you were going down in the ocean?

37:30 Oh drive you mad, absolutely, it's true those thoughts will go through your mind. It's the same as in Rhodesia, this poor bloke bailed out at night. I wanted to do a parachute jump. I thought it would be fun to do it, but they wouldn't let you. They weren't worried about you but they had spent 20,000 dollars on your training they weren't going to waste that.

38:00 So that's the way it was.

So as a pilot you weren't actually trained in parachuting?

Oh no, no, definitely not. You had the parachute that was part of your seat in fighter planes, had the parachute, had the parachute and then you had your dinghy and you had a pad on top of that. You had the 3 things there. You also had an escape knife. I was talking about escape boots before well you had an escape knife which is a vicious thing.

What is that?

38:30 Like a stiletto really, a vicious thing. And then you always had a little knife somewhere here because the dinghy, it was, if you released the lever it blew itself up, you didn't have to pump it up naturally, you know, carbon dioxide cylinder. Well just occasionally those went off accidentally in the air. As soon as that happened

39:00 the dinghy tried to push out this way and of course it pushed the stick right forward. So you went into a screaming dive, and unless you could release that pressure very quickly you were gone for. So you had a little knife so you could slash the dinghy if it ever blew up. It was one of those things you had.

As if you don't have enough to worry about.

Yeah, yeah you had all these little things. And the escape boots I was talking about those before. They were

39:30 donated by different towns and communities, things like that, and they were like an ordinary boot. They were felt lined, they were quite good, but they had a row of stitching down there which could easily be broken off, and then they became ordinary shoes. So they were escape boots so you get rid of that part and you are walking around in ordinary clothes which are a darn sight better.

It turns you into an instant civvy?

40:00 Yeah, we had a lot of little aids. We had buttons on our tunic, put one on top of the other and it swings around and the top one is a compass. You had to have those. You had magnetised little things that were on a string, which did the same thing. Swung around, all these little gadgets, and as I said before, we had the little fishing line,

40:30 and you had morphine.

You told me about the fishing line off camera.

Oh yes, well in the escape kit you had lots of little things including the two morphine things to keep you going, and you also had tablets to keep you awake, if you had to travel for a couple of days, day and night without any sleep. You had those to keep you awake and you had this fishing line which already had an artificial lure on it. And you had that. You also had a device which was like a concertina

41:00 that was the drag behind the dinghy, theoretically filtered the salt water. And in theory at least, you got some reasonably fresh water from that. You also had a little sail, a little mast and a sail, and you had cover that you could pull up this way and pull up that way in

41:30 rough weather. So it was quite good. You had oars too, you had two oars.

Where would they be?

They were all in this little kit that you were sitting on.

Unbelievable.

Yes, it was beautifully designed.

The oars would they fold out?

Yes, they were concertinaed, that's right. Yeah it was quite incredible what you had there.

Sounds like an uncomfortable chair.

Oh very definitely, yes it was.

Tape 5

00:31 **You were saying you came into Glasgow?**

Yes that's right, by train down to London

So Glasgow was your first port of call in the UK?

Yes

Did you stay overnight?

No, just straight on a train and straight down the south of England, in the dark of course, naturally.

And where did you come out the next day?

Oh down at London

01:00 and then we went south west of London to Ibsley a little place, Ringwood, they are two little villages. And the airfield was very close to Ringwood.

Did you spend any time in London?

No, not then, I did later on occasionally but not a great deal. I used to spend any leave I had at the time, I used to go up to Yorkshire to be with my Mum's relatives. They were very good, they were marvellous they used to,

01:30 they used to keep their rations. They had salvage rations there and there was always something for me, and I always seemed to arrive at about 3 o'clock in the morning, and I'd go to this old house I was speaking about before, that had the marks on the walls where the cannon balls had hit. That's how old it is. And I'd knock and a window upstairs would open, "Who is it?" And I'd say, "It's only me," and they'd know exactly who it was as soon as I said that, the whole of them,

02:00 all of them. They'd troop down, and they'd always find something for me to eat, might be just green peas, you know, with a bit of butter, cooked with a bit of butter. I still like that. Always something, they would always scrounge an egg or something for me in the morning. They were marvellous people.

When did you see them for the first time?

Yes, the first time, the first time I'd been to England.

And that was when you were stationed at Ringwood?

Yes, that's right,

02:30 616 Squadron and every time I had a long enough leave to go, I used to go up there.

At that time in the UK you hadn't yet been in a Spitfire had you?

Oh no, definitely not.

So was it at Ringwood where you got that training?

No that was squadron, there were a couple of steps in between that I have left out. Including the operation, I was speaking about that before, the operational training unit where we converted from the Masters to the Spitfires. Masters

03:00 were a training plane just as the Harvard was in Rhodesia. But the Masters was a little bit more sophisticated and with the adjustment of the flaps they could make it very much like a Spitfire taking off and landing. Same sort of attitude.

So it was a progressive learning curve you went up to Tiger Moths from Harvards?

Oh yes, to the Masters then the Spitfire.

So you were there with 616 Squadron at Ringwood,

03:30 **is that when you became mates with people or got to know the squadron better?**

The squadrons were a mixture. See, 616 was a very old squadron and the old squadrons, most of the originals are university graduates and people like that and they are inclined to be a bit snobbish. If they are permanent air force. And, of course they had the big advantage, they would have their wives there, have

04:00 their cars there and be able to live off the base in houses and things like that, which we couldn't do. But generally speaking they were pleasant but the senior officer always kept a distance a bit. So they weren't as casual as Australians are.

Was there any kind of thoughts on Australians being colonials?

Oh it came up occasionally, but in half jest. It was never very serious. Not enough

04:30 to take offence at. Just one of those casual things. And, of course, the Australians as usual, they'd prove themselves, you know, good fighters, so they weren't worried about it. They'd get a bit upset about our lack of, our casualness, about saluting and things like that. We were far more easy going than they were, they were very strict. And of course the, some of the English ground crew, not the engineering crew, not the ones that we had, but the administration people, the clerks and things like that,

05:00 they resent that because we were sergeants, officers, within a year say, in the air force, and some of them had been in for 20 years and they were corporals and they had a terrific resentment, at times, not all of them, but a lot of them did have. And, of course, at the station dances of course, they didn't get a look in with the pilots.

05:30 With girls, the girls from the local town or village would be invited, and of course they all went for the pilots. They were the glamour boys and the poor old ground crew who had organised the dances, they were the sort of wall flowers. Which was a bit sad. But we didn't mind.

How did the girls tell if you were a pilot? Did you wear something?

Well we always had our wings.

And if you wore wings that meant you were a pilot?

Yes,

06:00 you can't wear the wings if you weren't a pilot.

I misunderstood, I thought if you wore wings you were aircrew.

That applies now but it didn't then. If you wore wings in those days you were a pilot. If you were an observer you had half a wing with an 'O' on it. If you were a bomber you had half a wing with a 'B' on it. but the only ones in those days that had the full wings were the actual pilots.

06:30 So if you had the full wing you were a pilot. That doesn't apply anymore. They've got through that stage and they all have wings if they are aircrew.

That is very glamorous then.

Of course.

So what were the English lasses like?

They were very charming people, they were very, very nice. Probably a little more casual with attitudes and things like that. Mainly because it's, during the war it's a restricted place or

07:00 not restricted but it's different, it's not like normal conventional peace time. And it's a case of 'live life and lie because tomorrow we die' sort of thing, even with the civilians because they had the V1s and the V2s [flying bombs] coming over and they never knew when. I had to take shelter with one of my cousins up in Yorkshire on the dales there, and one of these daylight raiders came over, machine gunning. And we

07:30 had to duck our head in a hurry to get out of the way. So it was a touchy life and of course as Spitfire pilots your operational life was very, very short, your expectancy of life was short. Not so much your operational life but your expectancy of life was very short. And a lot of them were lost on their first flight, that was quite common. It was a funny thing

08:00 that if you got through your first ops [operations] you'd probably get through the lot. It wasn't something you could teach to anyone else, the newcomers probably tend to lag, wouldn't keep up as well as they could and you did your best to sort of coddle them along. But if they were number 2 to a flight and they were a long way apart, they would know to change height or direction when their flank is getting close, whereas

08:30 we would change direction when it's starting to get a bit close, we change direction or we change height. So the burst were either above or below. Whereas the newcomers they didn't have that and you couldn't really teach them, it was a case of you had to learn it yourself or you are gone. And as I said, the newcomers nearly always got it. Which was sad.

What kind of exercises did you do at Ringwood?

09:00 The aerodrome itself was called Ibsley, it was just near Ringwood, Ringwood was the village.

Ibsley is where the aerodrome was and where you were stationed?

Yes.

So Ringwood was where you would go to the pub?

Exactly, pretty little village. And it was interesting too, that aerodrome itself it was like a huge bowling green. It was so big that one time we took a whole wing

09:30 of Spitfires off at once and that is 36 planes, all taking off at once. That's how big that field was, it was incredible. And, of course, with the scramble you'd just jump in your plane and you just go off in what ever direction was the quickest. You don't go taxiing out and go this way and that way, you just take off, you just open the throttle and you were gone.

Can you tell us what were

10:00 **your overall order there considering that you actually hadn't flown a Spitfire yet?**

No I had flown a Spitfire then, Ibsley was the squadron. You see I flew the Spitfires, I went from Masters to my solo on Spitfires and did solos in Spitfires at the operational training unit. So I went to Ibsley, I had flown Spitfires.

What was your confidence levels like there at Ibsley?

10:30 Pretty good, yes I was quite happy with all the flying actually. I liked the flying, as I said before, it's the in between that becomes boring. If you could keep on flying it would be marvellous.

Can you tell us about the scrambles?

Well that, scrambles, that's when there is bandits, enemy planes, are sighted on their radar screen and that would come through from

11:00 the intelligence office. And that comes down the dispersal, when we are either in the planes themselves, if there is going to be a risky one, and they think it could be a scramble any time, we were in the planes just waiting. Or we are sitting in the dispersal. Just ready to run to our planes. And on the squadron your parachute, you know I was talking about he parachute and the dinghy and all the bits a pieces, that's already in the plane and your straps and everything are back

11:30 and you jump in the plane and you sit down there and your aircraft fitter, he clips everything on for you, so you just sit there. And he jumps down and gives you a wave and you start it up, and as soon as you are happy with the plane he pulls the chocks away from the wheels and you are off. And that takes about as long as it took me to tell you. It's very, very quick, it takes no time at all, you actually run, if you are not actually in the plane already you run to it, you don't walk to it

12:00 you run and you jump in and you are not interested in ranks or anything then. The first one to get going takes off first and so on and so forth. If it's going to be a high scramble or something you probably form up. But the main thing is you do a sweep up towards where you are supposed to go. And then the leader he'll comb off and he normally will come ahead of you and then you follow him. And he's got,

12:30 we all have contact by radio, but he'll be the one who'll be doing the directing and everything else. And you just put your gun on, from safe you put them onto fire, cameras switched on and away you go, and see what happens.

So the ground crew are ready to scramble like you are?

They are ready to help you into the plane, they are standing by, that's right. But they don't get the supper, they don't get the aircrew supper.

13:00 **When you come back?**

They are always pleased to see you back, they get attached to you and the plane. It's their plane and you are their pilot and they are always pleased to see you back, unless you are obnoxious of course, then it's a different story. As I said, they are not so keen to look after the plane as well as someone who takes an interest.

Can you tell us when you go up in the air,

13:30 **what are you looking for?**

You are given a direction and normally a height, and it could be reconnaissance planes up extremely

high, it might be 40 or 50,000 feet, and any chance of intercepting we'd almost certainly have to go across the Channel to gain height and try to get him as he is going back to the continent. If it's low level then we go practically at ground level, and try once again to beat them

14:00 into the channel and catch them on their way back. If there is time, you attack them head on, but generally speaking, it's too late because the radar can't pick up anything very close to the ground. There's a period of silence which we used to use a lot, we used to go across to the channel to the continent quite a bit and you always kept below that level. It was only when you

14:30 hit the coast that you went up like a house on fire to get height. So you wouldn't get shot down by the anti aircraft. So the higher you go the lesser the aircraft you can get, down low everything would fire at you, when you are up really high then of course they'd have to use the big guns.

Was that your main concern, the ack ack [anti aircraft] gun?

Yes, in the time I was there it was, it wasn't so much the German fighters. The German fighters were getting

15:00 to a stage where they were awed by the Spitfires. That's generally speaking, there were exceptions, but generally speaking there were, and places like Italy, which is later on admittedly, if there were quite a few German planes, if they saw a Spitfire they'd usually go the other way. If they saw a Kittyhawk or a thunderbolt or something like that, they'd attack. Normally they were shy of the Spitties because the Spitties were good.

15:30 No doubt about that.

What did you think of the Messerschmitts?

The Messerschmitt, the 109 is a beautiful plane, and at different times it was probably equal to the Spitfire or even a little bit better. See the Spitfires were improving all the time. You had ones and twos, I actually trained on ones and twos, and you had fives and sixes you had a 5 C which had cannons instead of machine guns, then you have the eights then you have the nines, which is the latest, I flew in Italy.

16:00 Then after that you had the fourteens and others. So it was a case of up and down, up and down. Some times you felt the 109 was better, sometimes not, the Focke Wolf 190 was another one which was good but we never considered it a true rival. It was the 109 which was the true rival for the Spittie.

What was your favourite Spitfire to fly?

Well the nine, the last one, naturally, it had a bigger engine, more speed

16:30 and it had the cannons. It had four cannons and four machineguns. So it was good.

And in the nine it was just you as well?

Always in a Spitfire, nothing else, you were on your own. Which is what I liked, the more staid people became bomber pilots, which is good, more responsible people, which makes sense, because they had to consider their whole crew

17:00 you didn't, you'd [UNCLEAR] your mate or your own and it was your own neck you were risking with it, no one else's, which I liked.

What made this fearless?

Well you are not fearless, you are not fearless. You are terrified the whole time, you just keep on going that's all. Well I say you are,

17:30 not terrified, but you do have, not so moments of doubt but everyone and then you realise, this could be my last trip, I could be buying it this time, which is of course being killed. You know that term?

No, I've heard many terms for death since I have been doing this, going west, but I haven't heard buying it.

Oh yeah, if you are buying it, you've had it.

18:00 **Can you give us an example of a typical operation?**

Ah, well there is one which was a bad one in which we lost quite a few of the squadron, it was attacking mine sweepers. We were escorting low level bombers, torpedo bombers

18:30 but we had to soften up these mine sweepers by doing an attack on those with our cannons and machine guns and they are the flak ships, flak, that is anti aircraft of course, they were the flak ships of the fleet. So we went through a hail of flak and we lost, I think 5, 5 of the 12 in that trip. That was a bad one. But felt sorry for the poor old torpedo bombers because

19:00 they lost quite a few and they had to come in straight and level, they couldn't take evasive action whereas we could. Once we'd done our quick run we could go zooming out of it but they had to drop their torpedo and clamber away as best they could so. That was a very bad trip and every trip to Brest,

we used to escort bombers to Brest quite a bit, and at one stage – they had the submarine docks there, they had

19:30 the naval dockyards there, it was huge place and it was absolutely, you went through a complete wall of flak, just solid flak and sometimes we were a little bit lucky, sometimes whole squadrons are lost, a whole squadron of fighters are lost on those trips, they were savage. There was no time when we didn't lose some of the squadron.

20:00 So, but of course, you knew it wasn't going to be you. We had a lot of, they asked me on that phone interview, we had a lot of little superstitions. As a fighter pilot particularly you are a rubber neck. You've got to look all around and your neck can get chafed against your collar because you normally have the collars which are pretty coarse fabric and so

20:30 if you could persuade someone to give it to you, you had a scarf inside your collar wrapped around your neck. You also had a silk stocking on your head, underneath your helmet to give you a bit of protection, from bumping it, the leather was coarse. And the joins underneath were coarse and a stocking or something of that nature was good. We used to, we all smoked in those days.

21:00 We used to smoke half a cigarette and put it out so we'd be back to smoke the other half. Another superstition, then I also wore a little kangaroo on a boomerang which my father had carried all through the First World War. I used to wear that as well so you had all these little superstitions, everyone has them.

Did you miss the Australians to have a beer with? Did you have any Aussie mates there?

21:30 Oh a few, and but oh no, we came across the odd one or two, but as I said, the Pommy pilots they were good. Their beer isn't marvellous as you probably know, but we drank enough of it to be happy.

Is that what you do when you came back from an operation? Go to the pub?

Ah well no, it wouldn't be the pub it would be the mess. It would be on the station you'd go to the sergeants' mess or the

22:00 officers' mess and have a few drinks there. Some of them had special things, they had mugs that belonged to the different pilots and if one pilot didn't make it they'd turn his mug upside down and they all drank to him. Little things like that. And if you didn't have that at least you'd talk about the poor bugger who bought it. And a bit of a yarn about that, which softens it up a bit.

Was that a daily occurrence?

22:30 It can be, yes. During the Battle of Britain naturally it was, it was not just one, three, four, five, a dozen, in one day. But possibly not daily but certainly two or three a week, always. And when I say two or three a week, one of those might be 7 or 8 people in one time. Because on the station you had 3 squadrons and if you lost a few out of this,

23:00 at one stage, one of the squadrons I was with, they lost all their people, the whole lot, they lost the whole squadron in one go.

What was that squadron? Do you remember?

No, I couldn't tell you now, it was on the same base as us there but I couldn't tell you what it is. And as I was talking about escorting the King, well that time it wasn't supposed to be our job

23:30 and the one who were supposed to do it, they didn't have enough planes. So it fell to 616 and we weren't even on readiness, we knew nothing about it. Of course we'd had beers and had been late up and had hangovers and all sorts of things. So we clambered in our planes, we didn't have enough planes either, we only had 10, it should have 12. But if you had a bit of a hangover or something you turned the oxygen on so about 10,000 feet,

24:00 took a few decent breaths of that. Then you felt better. It made a difference.

That's a good point.

Yes, but of course you don't do that too much because oxygen in excess is poison.

It's interesting that oxygen keeps us alive and yet too much of it can kill us.

Yes that's right, yes. Very true.

24:30 **You were at Ibsley for a couple of months?**

Probably about 6 or 7 months, and then I went to North Africa. Only as a matter of interest, I was in Algiers when an ammunition ship blew up in the harbour. Algiers, I don't know if you know at all but it's sort of in a basin and hills covered with the houses and hotels etcetera, sort of rise out from there. And this

25:00 ship was on fire and the New Zealand frigate or it might have been a destroyer, I'm not sure now, I think it was frigate, was tied to it and acting as a tub and was towing it out to sea. And it blew up and the

whole thing was just a complete mess. Bodies and barrels and rubbish were floating ashore for days. And both the little war ship and the ammunition ship were just skeletons on the harbour.

25:30 I was in Italy at one other place too where an ammunition ship blew up, which was on fire, probably sabotage. But this time they had enough sense, it was being towed out on a very, very long line, and when it blew up the thing towing it didn't get hurt at all, which was a much more sensible way to have done it. That poor little New Zealand ship should never have been doing it that way, it was stupid. With the chance of the

26:00 whole thing blowing up. Yeah, it's a bit unfortunate, it's sad when they are all gone but it was someone's stupidity, it really was.

Tell us about going to Yorkshire for the first item and meeting your mother's family. Did they know you were coming up?

No, no, no.

You just rocked up and said hi I'm from Australia.

Yeah, I'm your cousin, I'm your cousin Jim. Yes, Mum's sisters, oh main sister, there were three sisters

26:30 that were alive then and a brother, I never met him, he was further up, he was at one of the ports. But I met the three sisters and two female cousins of mine and one male cousin, who was also air force as a matter of fact, he was a pilot too.

Did he live?

I'm not too sure whether Malcolm, yes he did, he did. But he died fairly soon after the war and I'm not sure why,

27:00 but he died fairly soon. But he got through the war okay. Yes.

Did you meet any girls over there? Any particular girls?

There was one that I should have married, but she was an Irish Roman Catholic, she had a fantastic singing voice. She was a concert singer herself

27:30 and she was in the service, she was in the ATS [armament training station] and that's the army section of it. And she was a lovely girl and we used to go out quite a lot. But she was Roman Catholic and of course, I was Church of England, and in those days it was just, you didn't mix at all, it was a no-no. So though I regret it I didn't do anything about it, but I probably should have married her, Pat Reber [?], lovely girl, beautiful singing voice.

28:00 Every time I hear that old song, I've Got Spurs That Jingle Jangle Jingle, it goes right back to that one she used to sing to me.

Do you know what happened to her?

No I don't unfortunately. She was from Belfast so she could have been mixed up in the troubles. No, I never did.

When you say you should have married her…

In those days it was very strong the feeling that Church of Englands didn't marry Catholics, it was just

28:30 a no-no. That's the way, I was brought up that way. As I said, it didn't always happen because I was talking about those Cameron blokes, that were all, yeah. And the usual thing was if you married a Catholic then all the children had to be Catholic, in that case it didn't work out and they all ended up Church of England, as it happened, being boys. Yeah, three of them were killed, two, the one that used to do the acrobatics in front of my place

29:00 showed me one of the wheels on the roof, he was brilliant pilot. He finally went over to England, joined a squadron and someone landed on top of him before he was into operations, and killed him. As they were coming into land, some one landed on top of him, and killed him. Another one was shot down over Germany, and the third was killed in training, down at Archerfield as a matter of fact.

29:30 Took off in a dust storm and he didn't know the instruments well enough and he went into a deck, that's three of the sons gone like that. The other two who were both in the army, they survived. But it was a terrible blow for the old lady. She died soon after, I think she just died of grief at losing them.

It's funny how some families seem to have a higher dose of tragedy than others.

30:00 Yeah there are odd things like that. Now my wife's uncle Lionel, he had a son that he called Walter, after his brother who was killed in the First World War, and Walter the son was killed in this war, in our war. So you know, it seemed to be the wrong thing to call the kid Walter after he'd been killed.

Like a bad omen?

Yes, just one of those funny things.

30:30 **I understand that you didn't have a batman.**

I wasn't an officer; only officers have batmen.

What are batmen?

He's a personal servant, he's almost like a valet. He puts out all the clothes for the officer, he sort of cleans up the place, cleans the shoes and helps him with the uniform and things like that. Polish up the buttons. Of course the British, they've got the brass buttons, everything is brass and they all have to be polished

31:00 whereas we had the black ones, so it didn't worry us. That's a batman, he's like a personal valet really.

Too bad you didn't have one.

Only the officers had them, and I was only a warrant officer, which is just below.

When you were learning to fly a Spitfire, who adjudicates you? Who makes sure that you do everything right?

31:30 Well, when you first go on the squadron you go up normally with the best pilot. He's in his plane and you've got to follow him. Now he'll go hedge hopping, he'll stall turn and he'll spin the thing, he'll go into weird high speed turns, he'll do rolls, he'll do loops and you are supposed to sit on his tail. And if you can sit on his tail for most of the time, you are good. But it's usually probably about half way through the routine

32:00 you spin off, or something like that, and that's not bad. But of course, if you make mistakes early on then they don't want you.

How did you go?

Reasonably well, I followed him most of the time, but I did eventually spin off but that was very close to the end of it. He tried everything to get rid of me and he hadn't been able to, but at last he did. Which pleased him but he was very happy with my performance so I became a member of the squadron.

32:30 **So it's almost like you had to tailgate him the whole time.**

Yes, absolutely, absolutely, yes. And you had to have incredible reflexes to follow because he gave you no signals, he'd just flip it over on its back or dive or climb, and you'd have not much warning except if you were smart enough you saw the tail runs or the rudder move, but generally speaking

33:00 you just had to watch the plane and just try to cover it. Be only that much behind.

I wonder if there are many accidents from doing that?

Occasionally, not in a case like that, a test to see if you are good enough for the squadron, that doesn't happen in there, but occasionally. Now if you've got a squadron or even three planes that are going to turn fairly sharply like that, what happens

33:30 is that this one goes over the top and this one goes underneath. Because when they come around there like that they will be in the right position again, with this one going underneath over to there and the one over the top comes to there, it's just a very simple manoeuvre but if this one goes over the top or if this one goes underneath then of course they prang and they are gone. That does happen occasionally to fighter but more often with bombers. Quite a few accidents

34:00 happened that way. And of course some accidents just happen through stupidity. We used to do unlawful low flying when we were training because it's the most thrilling thing to have, it's thrilling to be going 200 plus miles just skimming over the trees, it's incredible, really beautiful. And go down a little valley and just lift your wing up and move over a tree and go down again, oh, it's

34:30 a marvellous thing. The low flying I think is the most thrilling thing in flying. If you are up high you get no sensation of speed.

Must be like a bird.

Oh, it's fantastic it really is. And occasionally in England, particularly, they get these layers of cloud which is almost like a snowfield on top, it's very, very smooth, and you can get the same feeling there, you roar just there. There is always a slight chance of a plane coming through and hitting you

35:00 but very, very rare. But you'll be, you get so intense on this, following this and getting the thrill out of there that if there is a break in the cloud and there is a hole there you get a sudden shock, you get a shock that you are going to fall into it and fall down. You get so mixed up with going over this snow field, or what looks like a snowfield, then suddenly there is a hole.

I know what you mean you explained that very well.

It's beautiful because you get that ah, as you come to this hole in the cloud. Yeah.

35:30 **You haven't flown like that for over 60 years?**

No, that's right, oh, it was marvellous. And unquestionably, the low flying was fantastic.

Can you tell us what you knew about the Japanese coming into the war when you were in England?

We heard when they did come in of course, naturally, which was not terribly long after I was in my training and a few of our chaps

36:00 did come back to Australia, they couldn't stand it, they were probably more of the wash outs, which is a term you do know. They were some of the washouts. A washout is some one who doesn't make it through the course, he gets washed out. Doesn't mean he is literally washed out as those poor gunners were, but he's failed. That's a washout, a wipe out of course is a finish. Yeah, but that is not a washout.

36:30 **I have heard a few blokes telling us about hosing the rear gunner.**

Yeah, normally the rear gunner, they were dreadful.

So you heard about the Japanese coming into the war? Did you have any concern for your loved ones back in Australia?

37:00 No, not really, not really but some of them did, as I said, and they made a fuss and they were allowed to go back home without completing their course. They probably did finish the course or do another course when they got back to Australia, in fact some I know did. And they did become pilots but they were out here. But I didn't have any real worries about them. But I know, I suppose I don't know why, I really couldn't tell you why I didn't,

37:30 but I didn't.

You were young and doing the low flying.

And full of optimism and sort of faith, yeah. True enough.

What was it like being Australian but working for the Royal Air Force?

38:00 Well, it just happened that way that I trained in Rhodesia of course, with mainly English or mainly British, some, occasionally, a New Zealander, or one New Zealander, I'm digressing again. In Italy we used to, we were in tents with snow on top, about 2 inches of snow, and of course the ditches to and from

38:30 our camp were full of snow. And this Kiwi, he was a whinger, he was a morbid drunk and a whinger and we'd had quite a lot of grog as usual. And then we went back and he was going to stay on for a while. And they found him curled up in the snow in this ditch about 2 o'clock the next morning, perfectly alright, perfectly alright. And what do they say, the lord looks after drunks.

39:00 Yeah perfectly alright, oh we got tired of him, he whinged about everything and it's just no good. No good for anyone.

No, it would have been hard enough being in a war, never mind having your nose rubbed in it.

Yeah, I mean you try to be cheerful and you sort of think well I'm [UNCLEAR] and then have some one say, "Oh but – " and you think begets that all right.

What happened to him?

39:30 I think he got through it, I'm not too sure. I did lose track of him. I didn't hear of him buying it at all, or being wiped out.

And he wasn't a washout because he made it to Italy?

That's true, that's true, yes, yes.

Tape 6

00:32 **You were talking about the range of Spitfires; can you give us a pilot's point of view of the different Spitfires that you flew?**

Well the one I went first off on was Spitfire1, the very first one

01:00 and it didn't have the hydraulic undercarriage. You had to select the undercarriage and then pump it up. What happened was after Spitfire 1 took off, once it levelled out you knew it was a Spitfire 1 because it did this, because you had your joystick in one hand and you had this lever in the other pumping up the undercarriage and before you knew it [UNCLEAR] your hands were doing this. So the plane went like that all

01:30 the way across the sky. Another thing is that the early ones only had machine guns and the later ones got cannons, some got two cannons, some got four cannons. And they were fairly big, they were 20 mm Oerlikans, if I can remember rightly. But they were powerful and you had a range of them you had a high explosive armour piercing everything else. And you had tracers as well so you get some idea of where your shots

02:00 were going. Apart from that, the main thing would be, the 6, I spoke about that before, it was a dreadful plane, mainly because of that, and because it was so incredibly hot. You know, if you were at low level you were perspiring like a hot summer's day here. And it was the middle of winter where we were. The 5s, the ordinary 5s just had machine guns, the 5 C, that had cannon and then of course the 8, that was a high altitude job, it had the

02:30 pointed wings, not the smoothly rounded ones like the ordinary Spitfires. They had the long tapering ones. If you want I can show you what the different ones look like.

And what did that actually do to the flying?

That was supposed to give them more lift in the rarefied air because once you are up to about 40,000 feet the plane just flopped around as if it was on a pin cushion or a soft waterbed

03:00 if you like. It just flopped around and didn't answer the controls very well, because you didn't have the thick air going over it. And of course you had to bring in your super charger, normally at about 20,000 feet to get enough compressed air in to keep the motor going at a decent speed. If you didn't have the super charger in you'd just be idling. Choof choof Choof. And of course, the other big difference

03:30 was the improvement in the motor. Got bigger and more powerful as it went along. And the props, they started out with two bladed wooden props, then they got three bladers, then they got four bladers, and they went from wood to metal.

And the advantage of the four blades over the two was speed?

Yeah, just strength improvement and smoother of course, same as a 6 or 8 cylinder car is

04:00 smoother than a 4 or a 2. The more blade you had.

Any other improvements?

No, that was the obvious except that the early ones had a fixed pitch propeller.

Can you explain that?

The pitch allows the blades to turn relative to the air. So in fine pitch they haven't got

04:30 much bite on the air, but they've got, faster they can go a lot faster. And the more pitch you put on the stronger it is going through the air. You see, it's hard to explain, but see, if it's like that, that's the plane here, if you turn it more like that it's taking a bigger bite of the air. Well you had that control from there. And your revs

05:00 were controlled by the pitch. Your torque which is the strength of the engine what's going into it, was the throttle. The throttle didn't touch the revs. You could have low revs or high revs, or low throttle or high throttle and the revs stayed the same, you just had more power in the blade that's all. And that was a big improvement.

And that was the Spit 1s that were fixed?

Oh they were fixed, yeah. That's right.

So how much of a difference would it make varying the pitch?

It made a big

05:30 difference, particularly with take off and landing. You always took off and landed in fine pitch, because you had a bigger response then. If you can imagine, if it's coursed to the wind, if you suddenly open the throttle you are far more likely to get a check or a stall than if it's smoothly turning. So if you misjudged a landing or something and had to go around it, then you could boot the throttle and she'd pick up straight away.

06:00 So it was a huge advantage, it really was.

I didn't know about pitch. Did you notice much difference in the pilots of Spitfires and bomber pilots?

Yes, as I said before, the bombers were generally steadier types, steadier types. They, the Spitfire

06:30 pilots or most of them, they were ratbags. With no exceptions really, they were all a little bit silly in the head I think. They were, oh devil may care perhaps, and as I said, the bomber pilots are more responsible, steadier types.

And how did this ratbag character manifest itself when they weren't flying?

07:00 Well once again, stupid things, racing cars, getting hold of racing cars and charging around the streets in them, little things like that. There was always something silly. And of course, when you were in the air if you had a chance of getting away with low flying you did it. And if you were going over the Channel then you had a chance of low flying over the waves. If it's a calm sea you

07:30 cannot tell your height over the water, it's quite incredible. I've been up there where I can sort of, I can't see anything down there except the waves or the sea, a long way down. The next thing there are gulls eyes blinking. That's how close I am to the gulls so I am practically on the water, and you can't tell that for about 100 feet. That caused a lot of crashes in the Channel because you can't judge it, to within 50 feet would be

08:00 the best you could go. If the sea is rough, fair enough, occasionally people came back with fish in their radiators but of course, was from hitting gulls who were carrying fish. That did happen. It's happened on our squadron, it happened a few times.

Nothing left of the gulls but the fish were there.

Yeah, the fish. And it makes a good story. That's how low it was, they got a fish in the radiator.

08:30 **Given that you got to low fly over different terrain did you have a preference?**

Over land was the more exciting because you had to be on the edge of your seat. Particularly if you are screaming across France for instance,

09:00 and you've got the pylons with the high tension wires, they're up here and you've got to make it in that much space of time, decide whether you are going to go underneath the wires or over, you've got to make it in a hell of a hurry, because you are going, well probably 300 miles an hour. And you haven't got much time, it's over or under or praying. So all those things gave you a thrill and if you went through a town you had to sort of lift over a chimney or a church

09:30 or something like that then that was an extra thrill. As I said, the low flying was the acme of it all.

Was there always a preference to go under the wire if you could get away with it?

Well you normally, well I always went under wire because the higher you get the more chance of being shot at by ground crew. Whereas under the wire and very low down, I've gone over gun emplacements and they've just, just be gaping haven't had time to get to the gun or anything else,

10:00 thank goodness. Oh yes, you saw that quite a bit. But yeah, the escorting, the bomber that was, you had to do it of course, but it was dreary work, you had to pull your speed back to match the bombers which was almost always slower than you were

10:30 and you have to stay up there and watch for them. And that was tedious.

This was at Anzio?

No, this was at England as well. Oh yes, most of our jobs in England were escorting light bombers, light and medium bombers. Mainly Mitchells, Bostons and Marauders. And sometimes the poor old Whirlwinds, they occasionally carried torpedos. Yeah, but mainly the light bombers.

11:00 **But of course your other duty in escorting is to defend them.**

Oh, of course, that's why you are there, yeah. You were going to be the buffers against any fighters that were going to come down at them. But of course escorting, particularly if you were a close escort, you cop all the flak as well as the bombers, not just the bombers. And there again, talk of instances, you remember I was fairly close to a Mitchell bomber when it was directly hit before it had dropped its bombs,

11:30 and it just blew up into pieces in the air, Just little bits of wing and things floating down, that was a shock.

What did you see of that?

I saw, I was quite conscious of the Mitchell quite close to me sitting there, the next thing there is this woomph and then the bits and pieces. Now and then the sky, for a second, and then just flopping down fearful. He might have had a chance if he had dropped his bombs but everything went up in one go, bombs the lot.

12:00 **Did you cop any shrapnel?**

No, no, no I was far enough away for that. It was a nasty sight, it left a bad impression.

How much damage could the Spitfire take, in terms of ack ack?

They were pretty good. There was a friend of mine,

12:30 he had about 8 feet taken off one wing. Your people down at Victoria almost certainly, he is a good friend of mine, most certainly have interviewed him, in fact I think he told me that they had. But just

before D Day he was patrolling there and a recce plane, German recce plane had come over and taken photos and they could not afford to let him land with those photos. So they had to chase him right to Paris. And they shot him

13:00 down just as he was coming into land. But Des himself going through the rest of the low level flak, he got shot in the shoulder and in the head, and lost about 8 foot off one wing. And one eye was shot out and the other eye just closed in sympathy. He called up to his mates and said he'd had it, and his mate said, "Like hell you have." And his mate came charging through the flak along side him and talked him all the way back to England, completely blind, Des was completely blind.

13:30 And he talked him all the way back to England and talked him into landing. Which was fantastic and the crash crews and everything were out and they didn't' realise that the wing that was missing, or the half wing that was missing, was away from where they were waiting and they didn't know there was anything wrong. They were waiting for this cripple plane to come in and this one came in and did a nice landing and taxied to a stop. And it was Des with, you know, shot in the shoulder and in the head, one eye shot right out, and the

14:00 other blind in sympathy. He did a marvellous job. He's ended up now with a glass eye. Even after he ended up with a glass eye there he finally got back to training pilots, you know, flying. He was flying and training pilots, in jets which was fantastic, fantastic bloke, really good.

That's an incredible story.

Oh, marvellous bloke, that's one of those funny people, not big bloke but

14:30 very resourceful very strong in himself. Up in Egypt at the transit camp we had to go to the mess kitchen itself and we were supposed to wash our plates after our meal. And there was a 44 gallon drum of cold water with probably about 3 inches of slime and fat on top of it,

15:00 and that's where we were supposed to wash up our plates. And inside they were all Arab helpers in the kitchen itself and it was an absolute pigsty. And Des rounded up a few of us and we chucked them out and we tipped everything out of all the pots in that kitchen. We got some more Arabs and more, apart from the ones that were there and we got them scrubbing everything out. And we were just LACs, leading air crew at that stage,

15:30 and the catering officer came storming over and wanted to have a go at Des. Des told him to piss off, and he went. That was Des, but oh, it needed it, it was an absolute pigsty. And of course they didn't care, because at that stage it was the airmen's mess and they weren't worried about that.

Can you

16:00 **give us an impression of what it's like going through ack ack? What it would feel like?**

Well it's very funny. When I first came cross it, probably one of my first flights across France, they were throwing up what they called 'flaming onions' which is like a ball of fire that comes up and I was admiring it. I was thinking gee that's good, that's good, that's fantastic. And it comes

16:30 up very slowly at first and it speeds up or it appears to speed up as it gets close to you, and of course it just goes whoosh past. And I was thinking gee that was close wasn't it, my word, good shooting that. Then I suddenly think, they are shooting at me, and you change direction, you change height, you go mad for a few seconds. And after that you become fairly fatalistic about it. You know, you can't do a hell of a lot if it's that

17:00 one for you, it's there, and you can't do a damn thing about it. And you become fatalistic and philosophical I suppose, think oh well, if that's it, that's it. You do your best, you change direction, you change heights, you might even change speed, but apart from that you can't do anything. And if they are good on the ground and you are unlucky, well you cop it. And of course, a direct hit on the body of a Spitfire just wouldn't survive, not a chance.

17:30 **Obviously you could get away with a bit of ack ack.**

Yes, oh yes. Some of the planes came back and looked like a sieve, you know, holes right along the fuselage and the wings. Yeah, they were strong planes.

In terms of engagement with enemy aircraft. What kind of

18:00 **tactics would you use to deal with enemy aircraft?**

Well, there are some fairly obvious things, you want to gain height on him if you can. And if you can get between him and the sun it's good. If you can come out of the sun well then he doesn't see you terribly well. A lot of things like that. You have go to be able to turn very slowly and if you happen to be over the Channel or over France, you've got to

18:30 watch your petrol because you can't stay there too long. The Spitfires have got a very short range. And if you can't tangle it, say in a dogfight over in France for 10 minutes is probably the most you can stay there and then you've got to, if you can get back. You just can't keep going. So tactics, you just try to get the advantage of height if you can.

19:00 Apart from that if you can get the sun, get in between the sun, beaut, otherwise there is nothing you can do. Just hope you've got superior speed and better turning.

Was there anything in terms of approaches or tactics that the enemy would do that was predictable?

Oh, they'd do the same thing, they'd always – one of the big slogans was 'Beware of the Hun in the Sun',

19:30 because if they could get in the sun, naturally, that's the place to come from. You are far less likely to see them if they are coming directly at you from the sun. And apart from that they had, the German's planes had one big advantage over those early Spitfires, the earlier Spitfires had an ordinary carbie and if you pushed the nose forward the float came up and blocked off the petrol and the engine

20:00 will stutter. Whereas they had a powered, full [UNCLEAR] if you like and they could put their nose down and dive, we couldn't. You had to, if you wanted to go down in a hurry you had to turn over like that, go down that way so that you still had the centrifugal force the right way on the float in the carbie, and that was a slight disadvantage. But, of course, you got used to it and you got very quick

20:30 at flipping it over on its side and down.

All those scenes in war movies are starting to make sense.

Yeah, well the Spittie [Spitfire], those early ones, you cannot push it straight forward, you just, won't necessarily stop the motor but you'll splutter. I wouldn't be able to tell you any of that without my hands would I, I was just...

21:00 We had, trying to think of what he was, he was European, he may have been Dutch, but he'd shot down a plane and he was terribly excited and he was trying to explain to the intelligence officer over the phone what had happened and he was trying to explain, and he said, "Oh just a sec," and he's doing this in front of the phone.

21:30 Ridiculous, but that's life.

He must have been very excited.

Absolutely, oh yes.

Were there any times during operations where it got a bit hairy and you thought you might not make it back?

Possibly the one time I was in Italy. Up a fair way there, about 30,000 the motor cut out

22:00 and I had to glide all the way back to just north of Naples at [UNCLEAR] and I wasn't too sure I was going to make that. A couple of planes turned toward me. I thought they were going to have a go at me, and I sort of showed my wings and they let it go. Whether they were friendly planes or not, I don't know, but as I said, particularly in Italy the German planes weren't terribly excited about mixing with the Spitties

22:30 and I had to come back with no motor all the way. And I was lucky, I got back and landed.

So showing your wings let them know who you were.

As soon as they saw that shape of the wings they knew it was a Spitfire, there wasn't another plane like it. It had to be a Spitfire that was it.

So friend or foe it made the difference.

Did the trick, that's right. Very true.

23:00 **No engagements with enemy that were particularly hairy?**

Not really, not really. We had one bad business where we lost a couple of blokes but we did get quite a few of the planes. I didn't myself but a few of them did. There was a daylight raid on Bournemouth, it was a pretty bad one, and we were the closest squadron so we were scrambled and by the time we got over

23:30 Bournemouth the gunners on the roof had woken up and so they shot at us of course. They were too late to shoot at the Germans and then they saw these planes come roaring over between the rooftops, because they assumed they were more raiders, so they shot at us. Of course they didn't hit us fortunately. And it was the same old story, as I said before, go like hell to try and get between them and the French coast. Well we got a couple and at Tempest

24:00 they'd come in there and they were very fast, they were ugly planes but they were very fast. And they got a couple too, so it wasn't too bad. But I never got any personal, I got shared planes but that's all, nothing else my own. Not that I mind.

You were talking earlier about shooting your last animal.

24:30 **Was there ever any consideration about?**

No, really it was a case of you or him sort of thing, and we had the big advantage of we were not close to the people. See we were not, I didn't personally, but our squadron at times, they machine gunned

25:00 buses, these good time girls that Hitler used to put around. You know, they are prostitutes and they used to go around in buses to help the morale, not the morals, but the morale of the troops. And they were a target. One thing I did take part in a few times, we had what was about a weekly trip across to Cherbourg where there was a brewery.

25:30 We used to shoot up the brewery so the Germans wouldn't get their beer. And we thought that was fair enough, if we could stop them from having their beer, that was fair enough. Little tricks like that, and the shooting up trains, well you did it, it had to be done, and there may have been innocents on the trains, you didn't know. You normally went for the engine if you could, but that was it.

26:00 **Was it something that you tried not to think about?**

Yes, you didn't, you didn't, you sort of kept it out of your thoughts. It was never discussed in the mess or things like that, you know, when you are having a few yarns afterwards, those things were never brought up. It was probably at the back of everyone's mind of course, but no. But I am very glad I wasn't infantry and things like that you know, hand to hand combat and

26:30 killing people like that. No I don't think, well I would have done it, undoubtedly, so many did. But I wouldn't have liked it; it would have stayed with me. So, at least when we were even strafing those mine sweepers we were close enough, we were close but far enough away, we didn't know how many we had killed or anything like that. And, of course, once again, they were firing everything they could

27:00 at us naturally, the enemy, so difficult. I wouldn't have shot up a trawler or anything like that; plain fishing boat, but a war ship is a different story.

Particularly one that is firing at you.

Yes, very much so, true.

27:30 **What about other squadron members who didn't come back, did that have an effect on morale at times?**

No, not really, it probably, if anything it strengthened it. You sort of, you wanted to get back at them because they had killed your mates, that sort of thing and it probably strengthened the morale. As I said, I was always with the RAF although I was in Australian uniform.

28:00 Their morale was good. There was only an extreme rarity that you got someone who was turning away from a battle, who was sort of screwing. And if you didn't know his history you couldn't condemn him. He may have had two lousy tours and he should have been just retired from the war. You just don't know so you can't condemn any of those poor souls.

28:30 **Was that something that you saw happen or just stories that you heard?**

Oh friends, friends of mine that it happened to, the commanding officer of them and things like that. Excuse me.

We were just talking about lost mates. Back at base

29:00 **would you do anything like last drinks?**

Very often last drinks, yes, very often that and you would always wait around until long after they should have been back. If you didn't know if they had been shot down, you'd wait around the dispersal point until long after they should have been back. Hoping they'd come back or hoping you'd hear.

29:30 Yeah, it was distressing ourself, but we had to go with it. It was happening all the time and there was, it wasn't a rarity.

What would be said at last drinks?

Oh, it would be in the mess, in the sergeants' mess in our case, and in the officers' mess

30:00 with officers naturally. And oh, just be a case of "Here's to poor old so and so, have a drink." Occasionally they'd smash the glasses, old German style of things, of hurling them into the fire place. Other times you'd just probably drift off into groups who were closest to him as a friend, and you might talk a little bit about him. But it was one of those things you had to get it over with

30:30 that night, you couldn't let it carry on for days and days. You knew he was gone and that was it. You only, in the back of your mind you are happy it wasn't you, but that's at the back of your mind, you don't consciously feel it.

Naturally.

Oh, yes you couldn't avoid it.

31:00 **Was mateship an important part of your air service?**

Yes it was. It was essential actually. In many ways you had to be able to trust your mates so you had to be reasonable friends with all of them. And if you could fly with your mates, beaut. Because you knew exactly their style, what they were likely to do in a particular situation. And it's the same old thing, as I said, there was normally the new pilots who got shot down, the older knew what everyone else was going to do,

31:30 and the young ones, or the new ones just didn't have that knowledge, it was a bit difficult.

As you became one of the experienced pilots was there a sense of anxiousness on behalf of new pilots coming in?

32:00 Oh yes, you do. Look at them and you'd think, gee whiz, I wonder what his training was like? I wonder what he is going to be like? And you did wonder, and you did worry about them naturally. As I said, you did what you could for them. If they were lagging behind, of course there was always a trap, like a herd of animals the one that lags behind gets taken, and you'd

32:30 pull back a little bit if you could. Or you'd get on the radio and tell him to get his finger out and get up with the rest. You'd do what you could, you couldn't always do the right thing.

Was religion something that played a part in your war?

33:00 Not to any extent. You always had services, it was quite voluntary, you went or you didn't go. I never went. I'm Church of England, well I still think of myself as Church of England not Anglican Church of Australia, but I'm not a very strong one. Most of the Catholics did go to mass. So they did,

33:30 but it was no big deal and no one was forced to, you didn't get punishment if you didn't go to the church services, it was just up to yourself. We occasionally were, when a pilot was killed and his body recovered in England then we'd very often act as pall bearers for him, and that was a dreadful job with the family there.

34:00 And very often the poor bloke had been burnt as they very often are with a crash. And you could smell it through the coffin, and you were carrying this coffin on your shoulders and in your nervousness you are inclined to smile, with a nervous smile, you know, you just can't do it. It s a nasty job. Particularly if it was someone you knew and you could smell the body's been burnt.

34:30 Yes not pretty.

Not at all.

When we were talking about you couldn't judge the distance above the water, I had to take off late one time because I couldn't get the motor started, and I was going like hell across the water trying to catch up with the squadron. I could see it ahead of me. I was going like hell

35:00 and I heard this voice say, "For Christ sake get up." And I look down and there is a bloody plane underneath me, a bomber was underneath me, and I thought I was right down on the water. So I very smartly pulled up away from him. Just one of those silly things, you see, you can't judge it. And I'd, he'd obviously come up behind me.

35:30 "For Christ sake get up." They must have been terrified with the thing just drifting down onto them.

Is there a space within low flying where you are getting more resistance?

More turbulence or anything like that? Not noticeably.

36:00 If you are very, very close to the ground you probably would, but that would be within 4 to 5 feet of the ground. Unless you've got gusty wind blowing or something like that then you might get something at 50 feet. And of course you always get these updrafts over hot services, over roads and things like that, you get the thermals. Well of course the gliders use the thermals all the time to keep up. And with the, not so much with the Spitfire, but with the Tiger Moth for instance who are light and slow planes,

36:30 they get affected very badly by the thermal current. Where a Spittie tends just to zoom straight through it and you don't really notice it.

Can you give us an impression of the range of ops you were doing in North Africa?

Not so much North Africa. In North Africa I was at Satif, we were flying Spitfires

37:00 and the odd Hurricane which we all flew, just for the heck of it. I'll tell you a little bit about that, digressing again, of course. I'd never flown a hurricane before and I took off in this thing and in Egypt, North Africa, there are more Arabs on top of the train than there are inside the train, they are just massed on the roof. And the idea was you dived down and just skimmed the roof to make them jump off

37:30 not simple little things, humanitarian of course. And I did this with the hurricane that I had never flown before and it had, does what's known as mushing, it mushes in. A Spitfire with its broad wings comes very cleanly out of a dive and climbs up. The Hurricane comes out like that and keeps going down like that. And I damn near went through the train, oh, I don't know how I cleared that roof. But that was a big

38:00 fault with the Hurricane, it was heavy plane with a fairly narrow wing and she actually mushed in.

So did you touch the top of it?

Oh no, no, I was lucky, but I must have been awfully close. I know I cleared the roof with all the human cargo. Another silly trick we had, you known the bum boats with the big sail on the Nile, you've seen those bum boats with that huge triangular sail,

38:30 we used to tip them over. We used to dive down and just pull up at the last minute and the blast was enough to blow them over. We did that for a while until they started complaining in Cairo, they were getting short of food. Because these bum boats were bringing all the fresh food in, so we had to stop that. As I said, the fighter pilots

39:00 were a ratbag lot.

It's good to hear some of these stories.

Yeah.

Tape 7

00:31 – two hours not a lot and by the time you got across the Channel and back and mixed it you couldn't stay very long in any engagement.

Were there any accidents because of lack of petrol in the Spitfire?

Oh lots, lots. Yes, lots of people mixed it too long and never got back to England. A lot were picked up in the sea admittedly but pretty common thing. Whereas the Mustangs had a good range and it

01:00 could stay out a hell of long time. It was good, it was a British design. It was built in Canada and America, but it was a British design. It was a good plane, not as good as the Spitfire of course, but a good plane.

Do you have any models of Spitfires?

I've got some that I haven't made up which I'm going to get my grandson to make up for me, little ones, I've got about 2 or 3 of those. And I've got that tea towel in the

01:30 bedroom. I shouldn't, oh I might bring it out, I don't want you to see my bedroom, it's a mess.

You can show me later. You said you were patrolling from Satif?

No Satif was where we were doing that fiddling around before we went to Italy and we were patrolling from a little place called Nettuno, for what it is worth.

North of Naples?

02:00 North of Naples that is correct.

And you were patrolling into Rome?

We were escorting into Rome, yes, to the railway yards mainly. And also we were covering the Anzio beachhead itself. We were going back and forward just to stop, mainly the dive bombers.

Anzio was where that debacle happened between that British major?

Major and the American general, that's right. And where I spent

02:30 a little time in the trenches, very short time. We had one thing, with the dusk and the dawn there we had to be sitting in the plane. We were sort of strapped in the planes ready to take off at a moments notice because we didn't have much notice there. So we are beside this little metal strip and a Kittyhawk came in. They haven't, most of their stuff is electrical not hydraulic, and he couldn't release

03:00 his bomb and he couldn't get one of his [UNCLEAR] legs down, he couldn't get one wheel down. And he came skating past us, he landed, and he skated past us on one wheel and a bomb. Sparks flying all over the place from the metal and we are strapped in the planes, watching it go past. It didn't go up, as it happens; it was a scary few minutes.

Did you ever think that there was a person looking after you?

Well yes, I suppose you always do that at times,

03:30 yes. Theoretically it shouldn't have unless it burnt through the casing itself, it shouldn't have gone off, because they are normally not armed until they are dropped. That pulls the pin out and as you are dropping the pin comes out and then the bomb is alive from then on.

The dam busters were crews. Did you know about that happening over there in England?

Oh yes, yes.

04:00 We had good intelligence, we had intelligence reports came through all the time to us and we knew what was going on all over the place. We knew all those things, the thousand bomber raids, all those things.

How did you find the Americans there?

Bloody, ah we were not impressed,

04:30 and it wasn't altogether their fault, they were badly trained. Their aircraft recognition was extremely poor. The airmanship wasn't marvellous. Their RT [radio telephone], they were always chattering on the RT when you are supposed to keep silent unless you got something to say. And they were talking about what they were going to do when they went out that night and what they were going to have for tea, they were chattering on the radio. And one

05:00 thing I do know of what they did, they were flying Mitchells to bomb in northern Italy and they bombed a field that had Mitchells on it. One of their own fields with the same planes that they were flying, they bombed it. And apart from anything else they killed a British pilot who was flying one of these little sea plane types that had picked up quite a number of Americans out of the sea.

05:30 And they managed, in that bomb raid, to kill him. Oh it's sad. But the main thing was their aircraft recognition was poor. As I said, it wasn't all their fault, they were badly trained, that's all there was to it.

That's fascinating because some Vietnam vets have said not wanting to call in American aircraft because they would be killed.

That's right, that's correct. In Italy if there was any close engagement where they were being held up,

06:00 where the Americans were being held up, they always wanted the RAF to come in. They never, for a close engagement, they never had the Americans ever. They always asked for the RAF, specifically for anything close. Yes they weren't impressed with their own people.

Can you tell us about the time you had in the trenches?

It was no big deal it was only a couple of nights I was in

06:30 there and the shells were coming over but we were under sort of reasonable cover, we didn't worry too much about it. But, of course when we were on the aerodrome, strapped in, those shells were landing on the aerodrome anyway. So it was not much difference. You just hoped that they missed you, which they obviously have.

Was there many casualties there?

Not a great deal. Most of it was through

07:00 false, bad judgment with the pilots. It was a very, very tight little strip, very, very narrow and if you made a misjudgement you'd just go over the edge and just go into the sea. Little things like that; you had to be fussy taking off and landing. Otherwise it wasn't too bad. We had one bloke had to bail out because he got a leak in the Glycol, that's the cooling for the motor of course, and

07:30 if that goes she will blow up, so he had to bail out but he was picked up by the Americans and he was okay.

You talked about one of the latest Spitfires having cannons?

That's right not even the latest, the 5s had cannons as well. A fairly early one.

Was that what you mainly used?

Ah

08:00 with the 9s and the later ones, yes, yes. You probably use the machine guns as well as the cannons, you probably use them for sighters perhaps, because they had tracers as well, which mean you had some fair idea, but the cannon was the real stopping power. As I said, they were 20 mm which is pretty big, not far off an inch about the size of that connection down there. And they were big and about that long too. They were good.

08:30 Some were explosive, some as I said, were armour piercing. Some were tracer so you had a fair range.

And you knew obviously how much you had of each ammunition?

Oh yes, it was measured in seconds, that's all. So you had to have very short bursts, you couldn't press your finger on the button and just go boom, boom, boom, and keep on going, you had to make it short

09:00 and make it work.

And what about the cannons?

Well, particularly the cannons, the machine guns lasted a bit longer, they weren't too bad. But in a strafing thing like the [UNCLEAR] I was talking about before you used up as much as you could going across, you didn't try to save any that way. Because it was the one job and then you were back, back home. So it's difficult.

09:30 **You mentioned the stokers.**

Stukas, yes, dive bombers.

What was that like?

Well they are very difficult they have only got one point where they are vulnerable. They come down in an incredible dive and they pull out so hard that the pilot actually blacks out, he blacks out completely. And the plane pulls itself out

10:00 and just after he pulls out that's the vulnerable point when you could get them. If you just happen to be in the right place.

Did you get any?

No, no, no we didn't come across any. The only thing that irritated me was, once again, the Americans the Thunderbolts would normally do the high patrol. They, if I can use a vulgar expression, they were like a flying shithouse, they're dreadful planes, but they do the high, and they'd come

10:30 hurtling around and come charging at us in the Spitfires, doing close patrol with their guns blazing. And we'd turn around and, of course, we could turn inside them without any trouble at all. See [UNCLEAR] oh here they come again, we just turned around then we'd sit on their tail while they furiously waggled their wings and then they'd go back up again. But once again they didn't recognise the Spitfires, and they knew we were there, they were hopeless.

So you were taking the low road, and they were taking the high road.

11:00 That's right and they'd come diving down on us, dear oh dear. It's the same when you, sometimes when you went to escort the American bombers you've got a particular place to meet them, and you get greeted by cannon fire from them and you are there to protect them. Their recognition, aircraft, that was probably the worst feature, it was extremely poor. That and chattering on the RT.

That's just undisciplined, isn't it?

11:30 Absolutely, they were badly trained, that was it.

I wonder why they were so badly trained?

I think they wanted to get a lot of them over there in a hurry and I think they put too much emphasis on pomp and circumstance. All had very smart uniforms, far nicer uniforms than ours, better cloth and everything else. All their equipment was better. And they went for the parade and things like that.

12:00 All pomp, or too much pomp if you like.

Some people I have interviewed have said that across the board a couple of the wars that we have done, that if Australians had the equipment, you'd wonder what would happen.

Yes, yes, well old

12:30 Churchill even said at one stage, to the Americans, "Give us the equipment we'll finish the job." He was a marvellous war time leader, he was terrific. He did a lot for – the morale of the English people was good. You'll read in books that it wasn't but I had a lot to do with civilians as well as forces and basically speaking, they were a proud people, they weren't going to be beaten, no way in the world.

13:00 And they talk about the morale at the very lowest point and things like that, I never saw it.

What about the bombing of London? Did you see much of that?

Yes, I saw a lot of – I was bombed in London a few times, but I saw a lot of the, in fact I went to see some of my Dad's relations. He had some down there and when I went to see their house, their house was gone. They were alright as it happened, but the house was just blank with a water tank on it,

13:30 and I found them, they were alright as it happened.

Where were they?

They were in the air raid shelter when the house was bombed. They had air raid shelters. Sometimes it was in the house itself, under the stairs or something like that. Sometimes it was dug underneath the house and other times it was out in the yard, which was better of course, generally speaking, as long as it was concrete, it was pretty good.

Did your mother's family in Yorkshire have an air raid shelter as well?

14:00 Not that I know of, no, I don't think so. Hull and places like that were strafed and bombed, naturally Hull would be. But apart from the one time that I had to take shelter with my cousin, I don't think Beverly copped it to any extent. But they had 400 years or so ago.

14:30 With the cannon.

I wonder if that house is still standing?

It's still standing now, yes. One of my cousins writes fairly regularly to my elder sister, and she writes back of, and yes, the elder cousin in England, she'd be about 89 now, still living in that house on her own, in this huge house.

15:00 Still keeping her garden, still keeping birds, so she is doing very well.

Tell us about the flying over Italy. You mentioned flying low over trees was beautiful, when you were flying over Italy did it look very different?

Not all that much, no not a great deal. England was a

15:30 greener and a nicer place. Italy was, at that stage was pretty drab. And you had a lot of big installations and things like that around the place. But no, and certainly not, there didn't seem to be so many. See in England, it's remarkable, people are always amazed at the wide open spaces which are everywhere in England, fantastic. And I

16:00 didn't see that so much in Italy.

How do you measure flying in Spitfires, by flying hours?

Yes, that's correct. Yes 200 hours is a normal.

How many hours did you do?

I couldn't tell you quite honestly.

16:30 Probably 400, 450, 500, something like that altogether. That's with England and in Italy. But 200 is a normal tour, whereas the bombers to do the ops… But you see a Spitfires' ops, some of them could only be 20 minutes. If it's a scramble and the scramble is cancelled it's still an operation, but it's only taken a few minutes, so you are off again.

17:00 **I want to hear about what happened in Sorrento. Was war declared over?**

No, the war wasn't over but my war was. I'd finished my flying.

The war in Europe?

Just about, it was on it last legs or starting to go on its last legs. Italy had packed it in. And they were our friends again, but they still hadn't beaten Hitler.

17:30 But I'd finished my flying and all I was doing was coming back home. So when I was at Naples at the depot I wasn't worried about being absent without leave. Which they call AWOL [absent without leave] now which was 'AWL' in our war, because 'without' is only one word. Now it's AWOL. Why isn't it just AWL?

18:00 'Without' is a single word, not two words. Anyway, I did mine, as I said, I knew the corporal who was keeping the records and calling the roll and he marked me present there every day.

Tell us about this mate that you knew. Was he a roll call supervisor?

He was a corporal, he was just a corporal of the admin corporals and his duty was to call the roll each morning to see that we,

18:30 at the embarkation unit, was still there. And he used to mark me down every week and I call up to Sorrento and tell him I was still there, and ask him if anything had come through. And it had so I went down to Sorrento and I stayed for a couple of weeks at the officers' hotel. It was a rest area as well, R and R [rest and recuperation], as you'd call it these days. And there was an officers',

19:00 grounds crew officers', there was a aircrew officers', there was an aircrew sergeants', ground crew sergeants' and then there was airmen's, different hotels. So over the, you are only allowed to stay at each one for two weeks. So one turn I became an officer, a ground officer aircrew, a sergeant type aircrew, a sergeant type ground crew, and so on, so I went through all the hotels.

19:30 I did that a couple of times. And I spread that over about 2 and a half, 3 months I suppose, so long, getting the boat home. And I used to have breakfast, breakfast at the hotel, and then go down to the beach and I would stay there swimming and going in canoes and swimming up and down the coast there. And didn't have any lunch, went home and had a reasonable dinner, then went to the warrant shop and

20:00 had a few beers before I went back to the hotel and went for the night. And I spent most of the time with this Italian girl, Isabella, and we used to swim. You know of the blue grotto on the Isle of Capri, you don't know the, oh dear you haven't lived. The blue grotto on the Isle of Capri, it's world famous, fantastic grotto that you get rowed into and normally,

20:30 if it's calm, you get rowed in fairly easily, if it's rough you can only go in at really low tide. Where there are a lot of grottos right up and down the coast and this girl seemed to know them all. And the entrances were more often than not were actually underwater, you had to dive down and swim through a tunnel, then you came up into a little area where there was a beach.

How beautiful.

They were, they were lovely, as you can imagine, without that outside light, you were white, you were greenish white, you were the

21:00 most peculiar colour in them. But I used to spend the days swimming with her or sunbathing on the beach or out in the little canoes. Yes, she was a good friend, that's what she was, a friend, nothing else.

How did you meet her?

Oh, she was s daughter of one of the families that owned the hotels.

Did she know about you fibbing at all the hotels?

21:30 Oh no, no, heavens no. No, nobody knew anything about that, at that stage. There was another girl and she was a countess. I used to take her out occasionally. She was, very, very strict family, she had. Oh, you don't want to hear this.

Yes I do.

She had a very strict family and at one stage she was locked up for a week for seeing me, and we used to

22:00 get up to all sorts of dodges to meet. She used to play, she used to teach piano in the next village, so she'd get on the tram and I would get on the tram at another stop. We'd get off at different stops and then we'd meet in the woods and go for a walk in the woods. And then she'd go down to swim and usually her brothers were with her, very seldom allowed on her own, we'd arrange to swim around to a certain point and I'd be there sort of thing.

22:30 We used to meet quite a lot, she was a nice girl, she was a sweet girl. A nice gentle soul.

That sounds very romantic. I wonder what happened to her?

I don't know. I don't know, being a countess was no big deal. With the counts in Italy it goes on the female side and the male side, it goes both ways, normally with the counts it's the male side only and they carry it through there. And the wife may be a countess but that doesn't carry on to her daughter, or things like that, but in Italy it does. So being a countess isn't a big

23:00 thing. But this other girl Isabella, she said I should be learning Italian from the countess. According to Isabella she spoke perfectly, she spoke perfect Italian, far more than Isabella herself did. Isabella was a nice girl, but not the same type as the countess, very different people.

23:30 **How did you meet the countess?**

I don't really know now. It must have been through Isabella I'd say or, of course, I keep digressing. I keep thinking of these other things.

No, tell me.

I was just thinking at these hotels they used to put on little dances and the Italian girls would come, but of course they all had to bring their mothers and sometimes their grandmothers. And then when

24:00 the cakes came around, they'd stuff all the cakes down their dresses, in their handbags, they were probably short of sweet stuff I suppose, but the old mothers would make pigs of themselves. They'd eat as much as they could and then what they couldn't eat they got stuffed into their handbags or down their dresses. It was fantastic, it was an open slather, everyone knew it went on so it didn't worry, they were very pleasant dances. But

24:30 finally I did get caught and I was marched back to the camp at Naples and marched in with hat off before the CO [commanding officer] and I was charged with eating meals without paying for 3 days or something, and that was the charge. And the CO said, who was a pilot, in those days anyone above the rank of squadron leader had to have wings, he was a pilot, and he said,

25:00 “Why isn’t this man being charged with being absent without leave?” AWL, and the warrant officer who brought me in said, “Oh that is to be brought up later.” And CO said, “It’s too late for that now.” I was charged the equivalent of 12 and 6 pence for the meals I had eaten without paying and confined to the camp for a week, that was it. And then I was back to Sorrento.

25:30 It was incredible, and I stayed there again until it was set, ready to go. But this time I had to be a little bit more circumspect and I had to pay my own way. You know, pay boarding at private families.

I’m curious, you said your war was over, does that mean you had done enough?

Yeah, see I’d been overseas 3 years or so and they reckoned it was time I got home.

26:00 They reckoned that it was time for me to go.

So what were you waiting for? Were you waiting to be told you’d be going on the next ship?

No, I was waiting for the next ship. At Naples, as soon as a ship was going Australia’s way I’d be on it, the first one, but as I said, it wasn’t for months by the time one came up. And then it was the damned old ship that dropped us at Bombay.

26:30 And I was at Bombay for quite some time.

So this is the ship you got embarked at Naples. How did you say goodbye to these two lovely Italian girls?

Well with an awful lot of tears on their part. They really carried on.

Have you ever returned to Sorrento?

No, no, I wish in many ways that I had. It would have been pleasant to see them again, but I never have.

27:00 I’ve got their address and that sort of thing, but I will never write to them anyway, no way. As I said, I am a very bad letter writer.

Did you get in trouble for that from your Mum when you got home?

Oh no, no. Oh she didn’t know anything about that.

Not the Italian girls, but the fact that you didn’t write?

Oh yes, well that’s why I used the excuse that I had written a lot more than

27:30 I actually had. And my mail had gone down with sunken ships.

Well done.

Yes, I was 21 when I was overseas, in England actually, and they sent a parcel of stuff, a wristwatch and all sorts of things, it never arrived. It was sent I know, but it never arrived, but that might not have been the ships, it might have been someone pinched it on the way, but we just don’t know.

So you didn’t get any closer to these Italian girls than a kiss and a cuddle?

28:00 That’s about it, that’s right, just friends, yep. That’s me. I was very pure little boy.

Sounds like it.

I was.

So tell us about going over on the ship to Bombay.

Well there was nothing special about the ship there. But when we got to Bombay we were stationed a little bit outside Bombay and, as I said, I got

28:30 aboard, I had nothing to do. And I used to go in every morning with the supply truck and just wander around Bombay. And, as I said, it was a dreadful, at that stage, a real mess. People dead and dying on the streets.

From starvation?

Yes, yes, most of it was just straight starvation, they were just a bag of bones.

29:00 Yes, it was grim. We had a cleaner here who was, when we had a full time cleaner, she was Eurasian and she came from Bombay and she said, it is not much better now. She reckoned it was still bad and she had been there fairly recently. So it must be a pretty bad spot.

Can you tell us, could you go to any of the sacred religious places in Bombay?

29:30 No I didn't, and I should have gone to the Taj Mahal of course but I never did. That wasn’t all that far away, Agra, I could have gone to that. The same in Italy, of course Rome had fallen and I could have gone to Rome. A lot of our blokes did and kissed the Pope’s feet. But I never went, it was just one of

those things,

30:00 just couldn't be bothered.

Well you also had two pretty Italian girls.

Very true, very true, yes, yes. I had them to worry about.

What about the Indian women in Bombay?

No, I got to know some of the British people there, but that's all. Not the Indians themselves. They were…

30:30 See they varied so much, as you knew, some of these Eurasian girls are really beautiful and some of the Indian girls for that matter. But no, I didn't get involved with them at all. And then we actually came home on an American liberty ship. Oh, it was the foulest journey, the food was good but it's the way they were fed. American, two meals a day and the breakfast you got eggs, bacon and flapjacks and

31:00 maple syrup over the whole bloody lot, on the one plate.

They still eat breakfast like that.

I know, I couldn't get used to it. I didn't mind the two meals a day, that was okay, but we were right below deck so there were no portholes or anything like that in the Liberty ship. And the toilets had overflown and they were just slopping up and down the corridors. And we were in

31:30 hammocks just above it, it was most unpleasant journey.

Were you sick?

No, fortunately, but I came back home to Australia needing a haircut very badly, because I wouldn't let he barbers on board cut my hair. I didn't like the look of them, they were Indian or Lascars, but I just couldn't bear them handling my head.

32:00 **Did you say Lascar?**

No, Lascars.

Lascars?

Yeah, Lascars, they were Indians.

I've heard of the Indian drink laskas.

Oh yes.

A lascar, I wonder if it was those people that invented it.

Maybe it is. The Lascars, they were on most of the European ships as stewards, fireman, and everything like that.

Were you glad it was over for you?

32:30 Yes I was. I got to the stage where, you see, as I said before, it's the time between flying that drive you mad. If you can keep on flying all the time it would be marvellous. But you are away for so long and then you had to do this little refresher course before you got back onto it and then it went on and on and on, it became tedious. And that's why I said I was glad to get out.

33:00 Get in touch with my sister and say, help Bev, get me out.

Do you remember how much you were getting paid?

No, I haven't the faintest idea. It was extremely poor compared with the Americans, but it was extremely good compared with the RAF. So it wasn't too bad. But no, I can't even put a figure on it, I can't even guess.

33:30 Can't even guess it. I was always seemed comparatively poor but I never had to send home for more money or anything like that. I always seemed to manage. And as far as ironing and washing are concerned there was always some kind soul who would do that for you if you asked them nicely.

And you paid them?

No, no, no,

34:00 some of the WAAFs, the women, if you were friendly enough with them they were quite happy to do your ironing and washing for you. Which was nice.

The WAAF in England you are talking about?

Hmm.

Did you get to know any of them on a personal basis?

Of course, we were on the squadrons with them, of course I did. As well as the ATS, the air force, the army.

34:30 **Your wife was in?**

She was in the WAAF, she was a wireless operator in the WAAF.

You met her when you came back to Australia?

I met her when we were both doing the rehabilitation course at the college.

And that was after the war?

Oh yes. That was in ’45, ’46.

35:00 I became engaged on the 14th of August 1946 which was Exhibition Wednesday and I got married on the 16th of December. In December because Evans Deacon at that stage, they used to sack everyone over Christmas. You took your holidays all at the same time, the whole firm closed down. And the idea was that they didn’t have to pay statutory holidays.

35:30 So everyone is sacked at Christmas and re-employed in January so that was the period that you used to either go on holidays or get a job or get married. I used it to get married. And that’s getting onto 57 years, it’s a long time.

It is a long time.

Yep.

And when was your daughter born?

She was born in ’52,

36:00 in November ’52. It was rather strange. You saw that picture with her father, with her grandfather rather, Billie’s father. Billie’s father died very suddenly of a heart attack when he was only 52 himself. And the shock of his death, that allowed Billie to become pregnant. She apparently had been short of thyroid and the shock of her father’s death made it enough for her to become pregnant. So that’s when she had Jenny.

36:30 So in a macabre sense you might say that his death allowed Billie to, Jenny to be born, but that’s one of those things.

That is a strange twist of fate isn’t it?

I have a friend who has a thyroid problem in America and she can’t have a baby.

Yes, the doctor had never told us what the trouble was which was

37:00 most annoying, he never told us that. And I didn’t know if I was at fault or whether it was Billie, so we just tried for donkey’s years, unfortunately it just didn’t do any good. And then she had a very bad confinement and birth, took about 36 hours, nearly lost them both. And that was the end of it, she didn’t want any more children, and I thought oh well, fair enough.

37:30 It’s her choice so that was it. I would have loved to have had about 5 kids actually. But it wasn’t to be.

What were your thoughts on coming back to Australia after this wonderful romantic time of flying Spitfires, being in Sorrento? What were your thoughts coming home?

38:00 **Did that bring a lot of anxiety to you?**

Not really, not really. I’d left a girl behind here of course, that had written to me nicely all though the war. But I didn’t want to marry her. I felt I didn’t want to marry. I felt I had been only home a fairly short time. Very nice girl, she was a young friend of my sister’s really, that’s how I started going with her. And when I came home I started going out with her again of course but

38:30 I didn't want to marry her and it became sort of an ultimatum, you know, you marry me or I’ll marry an American. And she married an American. Just one of those things if I wasn’t going to marry her she would take up with this American who was keen to marry her. So then, oh fair enough, so off she went.

You were also pretty young when you came back.

I was about 23,

39:00 if I remember rightly. That picture you saw of my meeting, the caption under that was something like ‘the youngest of the returning veterans’ or so. And I was the youngest of the group that came back up here. We had the march through the city, that’s about all, march through the city, people clapping and waving. But I didn't want to, I was glad to be home.

Tape 8

00:31 **Can you compare the bases you were on in terms of camaraderie, considering the number of expats [expatriates] there at Rhodesia?**

Yes, yeah, that's right Rhodesia was

01:00 very, very good, very, very friendly, far more so than anyone else, which was marvellous there. England, they were very pleasant, very nice, no doubt about that, it was quite good. Italy, well you had your own friends and you made friends with some of them. But of course, Naples in those days was a dreadful, an incredible percentage of the people had syphilis, an incredible number, a huge number, out of

01:30 all proportions. And you mightn't believe this, but engaged couples, the boys were pimping for the girls to raise money to get married. And it was common, common in Naples, it was absolutely incredible. It was a dreadful place, it was good to be out of it. Sorrento was a very different story entirely, even though it was in the same bay, it was very, very different.

02:00 **That's incredible to hear, compared to these days you hear how protective the virginity of brides are.**

Yeah.

The virgin brides.

Yeah that's right. Of course those virgin brides, if you want to be vulgar and go through enough, there was the stitching up of course, and there was the killing of the foul to sprinkle on the sheets to show the blood. To show that she had been a virgin. There are all those little tricks, there are lots

02:30 of little tricks.

Incredible isn't it?

Oh it is. There was one little thing I didn't speak of. In England, when the snow was very heavy we couldn't fly because the Spitfires have got very small wheels and any thick snow you can't take off and that's the end of it.

03:00 But we had to keep the runways clear for the bombers, any bombers, we were in the south of England of course, any bombers that were damaged that couldn't make their own field. So we had to shovel, so we used to shovel night and day, from the CO down, everyone had to shovel, the whole lot from the CO down, to keep these runways clear for any bombers that couldn't make it back to their own base. But what I was going to say, that

03:30 in one stage there when we couldn't fly, I did a small course, blind approach, a 'bat's' course as they call it, blind approach in landing, where you could actually land in full fog or cloud if you wish. And I went up to Oxford to do that and I was billeted in the old permanent Air Force House there, really beautiful there and you had the WAAF

04:00 waiting on you all the time. You had morning tea brought to you in bed, you had breakfast, you had the beds made for you everything tidied up, and they were quite happy to linger and chatter to you too. It was very pleasant.

The royal treatment.

Absolutely it was lovely, it was only a week, but it was really marvellous. A wonderful time.

How advanced were the instruments? How could you land in a fog?

04:30 The Spitfire didn't have it, it was only if you went onto another plane that you might be able to use it. Spitfires couldn't use it at all. You had to have special instruments. If you have the time I'll tell you how it works, it's a fascinating thing. They've got over the centre of the aerodrome, is the cone of silence, directly above a radio station there is a cone of silence. And if you flew over that you knew you were over the centre of the aerodrome.

05:00 Now they had directional signals coming out from there. And signals on one side went 'dah, dah, dah, dah', long and the other side they went 'dit, dit, dit'. If you went on the centre they were continuous, the 'dits' and the 'dahs' went 'beeeep', it was just one note. So you could time the distance from when you first got the 'dits' here for instance till you left the 'dahs' there. Now that width would tell you where you were

05:30 in relation to the aerodrome. And it would tell you if you were going towards it or away from it. And then a certain distance out from the aerodrome they had a outer marker beacon which gave a deep note, 'bip, bip, bip' and as soon as you came over that you had to be at a certain height and speed, and then you add a fixed rate of decent towards this inner marker beep, which had a high 'bip, bip, bip',

06:00 which you could pick up quite clearly. And from then on you should be close enough to the airport to pick up some images, you know, shadowy bits and pieces and you had a marker on the runway that

showed reds and greens, if you were in the green you were on the right path, if you in the red you had to get up. If you were in the, I think it was the amber, I can't remember the other colour, you were too high and you had to come down

06:30 until you hit the green. So it was beautifully done, lovely done. And I managed to never have a chance to use it. We used it, of course, flying Oxfords, but with an instructor, we never did that solo on our own, we always had an instructor in the plane.

Where were you flying Oxfords?

Only there, only there and only dual. We weren't doing the actual flying, but we had an instructor with us, but we had a hood over our head so we

07:00 couldn't see out. We were truly blind flying. And there was no rest for those instructors because the worse the weather was the better for them, it was perfect weather for training. So they had no rest.

It's an extraordinary system.

Yes, as I said, being in a permanent base, the food and the conditions were absolutely beautiful, fantastic. It was like a lovely holiday.

07:30 **Where was that base?**

That was at Oxford. It was really marvellous. I really enjoyed that.

Generally speaking how did the Brits take to the Australians?

Once they got to know them, pretty well, but without being too much immodest, the air crew were not like the army. We were basically better spoken and

08:00 better educated. And I suppose we were more easily accepted by the families there. Some of the army blokes were pretty uncouth as you can imagine, and of course, a lot of the sailors were. But we charming people were always nice.

That's good to hear.

Of course!

Just ratbags.

08:30 **What do you think was the worst experience of your time in the service?**

Yeah, if it weren't for operations I'd say the food on the Queen Elizabeth, of course, but in operations I really don't know. The trips to Brest, as I said, we lost so many they were probably the worst. You had a very distinct consciousness that you might not be coming back from that one. But that was

09:00 always a bad trip.

How did you overcome those feelings in the moment of having to do it?

It's probably the same old thing, you are terrified of showing fear, or frightened of being afraid, or frightened to show that you were afraid. You had your reservations. You didn't particularly want to go on a trip but some one had to do it. You didn't like it, but you did

09:30 your job and if you got back, beaut, if you didn't, who can tell.

Do you think everybody knows that everybody else is as scared as everybody else?

I think they would, because there's no doubt about it, everyone, if they've got a brain in their head are going to be frightened. You can't avoid it unless

10:00 you are completely a nut. And you've got to be worse than just a ratbag not to feel it. Yeah.

Did Australia change very much while you were away?

Well in an odd way it had, because you see, when I left America wasn't in the war

10:30 and there were no Americans here. But when I came back the place was riddled with Americans, when I came back to Australia, and that was a huge change, because you know, the quiet sleepy old towns, when I went away, and then it's just writhing alive with these Americans everywhere. And it certainly came to life.

Was that a bit of an abysmal shock for you considering your experience with Americans?

11:00 Yes, I didn't particularly like it. I would have been happy if they weren't here, certainly. I never became friends with any of them. I'd meet them occasionally and how do you do, and goodbye. I never became friends with them at all. Some of them, well certainly some of them would be nice people, but they are not Australians.

11:30 **How about social mores given that women had been working in jobs they hadn't worked in before?**

Yes, yes, true. But it sorted out the girls to a big extent, you know, some of those who were quite happy to go with the American sailors and things like that you know. They weren't particularly nice girls, well that's the feeling we had. And to some extent I think it

12:00 sorted out the girls.

Cleaned up the streets.

Yeah, definitely, same as every time an American war ship comes in, they come out the woodwork, all over the place.

Not received very well by the local fellows.

No, no definitely not.

Do you remember the actual finish of the war? Getting the news?

Yes, yes.

12:30 I was down in Melbourne at the time. And yeah, it was fantastic, terrific.

What did you do?

I don't know, nothing particularly spectacular. I think we went out in the street and yelling and running up and down and a few little things like that. But otherwise, not a great deal. I was at Williamstown which is a suburb which is a fair way out of the centre of Melbourne so it was comparatively quiet. But

13:00 everyone was thrilled, it was a marvellous thing. But of course, we had expected it, it wasn't unexpected when the Japanese gave in. It was on the cards anyway.

So you had been getting that news while you were overseas?

Yes, oh yes. As I said, our intelligence reports were extremely good. We got them straight from the very top right down to the, the ground staff didn't get them, it was only

13:30 the aircrew that got them. The intelligence officer got them, then it was only the aircrew that got them from the CO down, but the ground crew didn't get them.

Why was that?

Because some of the parts in the intelligence reports were sensitive and they were almost most secret.

So why would they get handed out to aircrew?

Oh well,

14:00 they were supposed to be trustworthy. Mostly they would have been of course, because you had got to be a little bit patriotic at least to be in the aircrew, and if you are trained as air crew then you have a bit of discretion. So you are not going to blab your mouth at the nearest corner, and that didn't necessarily apply to the ground crew, who came from all walks of life, and some new and some very old ones. So

14:30 it was different with them.

Most Australian service men hook up with their mates after the war, that would have been very different with you?

Yes that's

15:00 quite true it was extremely difficult. The army particularly, when they went as Queensland regiments or Brisbane regiments, things like that, yeah they were able to keep in touch, which I never could. The same on Anzac Day. When I used to march on Anzac Day I had to join the odd bods because there was no group that I actually belonged to. You see the Catalina crew for instance, that's Australia and all the others, nearly all Australia

15:30 and there is nothing, the European, there were a lot of us over there, admittedly but they didn't have any special organisations so you just had the odd bods, we used to drift around. I used to normally go with the my eldest sister's husband, he was [UNCLEAR] but he was Australian and he was mixed up with the Catalinas so he normally marched with the Catalina mob and I'd go with him. Because, as I said, we had

16:00 nothing of our own. And as you say, most of those that I flew with, that have come back, are down in Victoria. And so I really can't keep in touch with them. Until I had this operation years ago, I used to drive down for their annual dinner. They have got and still have got an Australian Rhodesian Association which is for all those who trained in Rhodesia and I still

16:30 belong to that, but the last 6 years I haven't had the chance of getting down there. I just had to give up that driving back and forth.

How long after you returned did it take for those associations to come into being?

That particular one, the Jacko, Ray Jackson who started it, oddly enough he was one of the washouts, not the wipe outs, the washout. He failed the pilot's course so he came back to

17:00 Australia. He was a failure there in Rhodesia, and he did become a pilot here or an observer. I don't think he was a pilot. He did serve quite honourably in the war. And he was the one who started it up then which surprised me. You'd think he would have been a little bit against Rhodesia because they failed him. But no, he obviously had that love for Rhodesia and the people who trained him.

17:30 Of course, and he started it, poor bloke he died a few years ago of cancer. He was a very good Catholic and he didn't worry too much about dying. He reckoned he had a good life. And he had this cancer it must have been lung cancer I think, I know it was something to do with his chest, anyway. And he said

18:00 it's bad enough having this but he said I've got bloody gout as well, and he was most annoyed that he had gout. No doubt they could have left that out as far as he was concerned. But a very nice bloke and a very helpful fellow. Oh I liked so many of them. Of course we are all dying off, well naturally we are all 80ish. So it's not so surprising that there is not too many of us left. And every time I get those newsletters from that friend of mine down there

18:30 who had the half a plane, he's running it at the moment. There are always a few more have gone that we trained with. So it's a bit of a sad time in many ways.

Did you smoke and drink before you went in the RAF?

No, I could basically say I didn't smoke or drink. At Christmas time, we were allowed half a glass of sherry and that was it.

19:00 And cigarettes, after I was old enough to smoke myself, I'd buy a packet of ten and after a fortnight I'd throw half of those away because they'd been sitting in my pocket and they were all smashed and broken. So it wasn't until I joined the air force that I drank and I suppose these days they would call it peer pressure, but everyone drank and everyone smoked in those days so you just join them.

19:30 **You continued after the war?**

Yeah, I didn't give it up till '84, no sorry '54, I gave it up in '54, which is a fair while ago now.

That's not bad.

Oh, I had a special reason at that stage, that was the year my Mum died and I gave it up on her birthday, that's all. And I thought, well I'm not going to damn well smoke any more. So that was it. Just one of those little things.

20:00 **How did you find it settling into civilian life?**

Terrible, terrible as I said, everything seemed so petty, there were no wide visions or anything like that or there didn't seem to be, everything seemed so little. As I was saying, at that petty sessions in England we are in the

20:30 middle of a war and they are arguing about the position of a fence or a dog barking, or the custody of a child. Well the custody of a child is a bit different I suppose. But I used to, one of my sisters was home then and we used to play a lot of three handed bridge, we all learnt all the card games growing up, as I said, but I used to get bored to tears, I really did, I had nothing to do.

21:00 And the job on those ledgers was so boring, I was glad to do the rehab course in drafting, it was just a break and then once I got to Evans Deakin that was good, it was excellent working on those ships. A lot of work, marvellous.

Was it doing something that you enjoyed that helped you settle down in the end?

Yes, definitely, yes. As a matter of interest, the drawing, you've seen ordinary drawing boards, well these drawing boards were about

21:30 20 feet long but they were only a table wide. You used to T square up this way from the edge of the table and then you had these long things with these huge plans. You had straight edges, clamp it down by a weight there, and clamp it down by a weight there, and then draw your incline there. And in those days we were using ordinary pens, no ruling pens or the fine point pens, just ordinary pens, which made our

22:00 lettering very good because you got your thick and fine strokes, that made it very different. You had to watch for blots, they were terrible. If you weren't careful, for the straight edge, and you had too much ink on the pen of course it would just go underneath and you pull it out and you get a great blot that you had to clean out. No, but generally speaking, it was good job and I enjoyed that. And when I finally got to the State Works Department I spent half my time driving around in my car looking at sites

22:30 and then drawing up and then supervising. That was marvellous, that was terrific. In fact I don't know

why – well I do know why I retired, because they got these experts in, and these experts have always got to change something. Instead of, I was part of a small group who put out more than any other big group in that section, and then they were going to make a pool, all the draftsmen would be in a pool, all the engineers

23:00 would be in another pool and you wouldn't know what draftsman you were going to have working with you. And I though that is hopeless, when you got used to people and you are a very good little team working marvellously and then just muck it up for the sake of these experts. So finally I was happy to get out of it. I thought I've had a good time, it's time to go.

Sounds like an action of bureaucracy.

Oh, it was.

23:30 It was dreadful thing. That's the whole point, if you call in efficiency experts they've got to change something, if they didn't change something they'd be out of a job, and of course it's not necessarily the right thing to change.

Do you know if it became more efficient?

No, I didn't. I heard that for those people who were left it fell backwards, it went backwards, it wasn't the right thing.

24:00 **It's hard to imagine it would have.**

Hmm.

Tell us about meeting Billie.

Well I met Billie, as I said, at the course and I liked her and we started going out and then she lived at Ascot and I lived at Sherwood. That was a long way to go both ways and so on the, on that Exhibition day I said, look it's far too much for me to

24:30 keep coming over here to see you, we'll have to get married. So that was it, we got married.

What was it about Billie that inspired you to make such a proposal?

I don't know, I don't know really. There must have been something about her that I liked, she was a most attractive person. And she got old of course, naturally,

25:00 they all do, but she was extremely bright, extremely intelligent, very clever person. And I suppose I admired that to some extent. No, I liked her.

You were sympathetic to all the things she was fighting for?

No, no, anything but. I'm a dyed in the wool Liberal to start with. And I actually

25:30 did belong to the local Liberal sub branch, and of course Billie belonged to the Labor sub branches. And at one stage we were giving out pamphlets for opposite sides at the one booth, up at a little church. And someone had a crack at her about why you should have to vote. And I had to jump to her defence and abuse this bloke. I thought fair enough, she's handing it out, you didn't have to come and vote.

26:00 If you didn't want to vote, you could pay the bloody fine, I told him so. And I just wouldn't have anyone having a crack at her like that, even if we were on both sides, on opposite sides. But it got to the stage where she got so intensely mixed up with the Labor party that I thought "Oh well, give the Liberal – " I wasn't a dedicated Liberal to that extent, I was probably a Liberal because my parents were

26:30 as much as anything. So I gave that away. I was still a Liberal but I took no more active part and of course she went mad with the Labor party.

That must have caused a few good discussions.

No, not really. I helped her to some extent. When she was having trouble getting all the paperwork done I helped her with that, and folding and putting into envelopes, helped her with that. And one time when she was

27:00 getting fairly old, she was going to do a letter drop. And I said no way in the world, so I did it for her. I didn't mind doing that because she did take on too much all the time. As I said, she was mixed up in the peace movement, all those protest marches in the Bjelke-Petersen [Premier of Queensland] days. I know she never ended up in jail, she was always there with Al Georges, bailing him out.

27:30 **Just a couple more questions. The tradition of Anzac Day and marches, do you still march?**

I used to, I haven't for years. My sister always marches.

28:00 **As a retuned serviceman what does the Anzac tradition mean to you these days?**

I think it is still a terrific thing. I think it's marvellous and it obviously is very popular with the people too. They are getting big crowds there. And that day is good. It's used, to a big extent, as Remembrance

Day even more so than November, the old Armistice Day. And

28:30 certainly when I went and used to march and then went onto lunches and different places. Our particular group, we went to Stones Corner where it was very, very nice, they put on a free meal for us and a free beer. And it was very, very nice. You sort of relived some of those things and mourned some of those lost mates and I think it was very good for all of us. I think it did us all good.

29:00 And even if I don't watch I still watch it on TV and even the 11th of November if I'm around I always stop what I am doing at 11 o'clock for a couple of minutes. I always think it's good. I like it, old hat and traditional perhaps, but I still like it.

If a grandson of yours or someone else came up to you and said I want to go to war, what would you say?

29:30 If you want to join the air force I'd be very happy to let him. I think he would do very well. And he is not so much a little fellow now, he is about 23 and I wouldn't say no, at the moment it would be good.

30:00 As for going to a place where we shouldn't really be involved, I don't know about that. I wouldn't be too happy about that. In the old thing of the old mother country threat, of course I'd be all in favour. Or if Australia was threatened fair enough. But no, apart from that, Iran, Iraq a few places like that, no, no I wouldn't want him

30:30 going there. Which I suppose is a bit selective, but that's the way it is.

Thank you very, very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS