

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Keith Stevens (Steve) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 13th January 2004**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1397>

### Tape 1

00:39 **Can I get you to give us a brief overview, starting from where you were born to after the war?**

I was born in Hampton Park on the 21st of February 1919. I went to school at Hallam. There were only six pupils in the whole school. There were only three families in Hampton Park when I was born there.

01:00 Then I transferred to Hampton Park School. They built a school at Hampton Park, which was used as a school, a hall, a church, everything. Various churches we went to each Sunday, each denomination had a meeting there different Sundays. Then when I finished that my brother was at high school and technical school. My father was a builder. He got badly gassed

01:30 in the First World War and his health collapsed, and there was no money for me to go to any more schools, so in the middle of the Depression, 1933, I must have been about 13 I think, I got a job. I walked the streets of Melbourne to find a job and I found a job in a factory, worked there for four years. That didn't faze me in any way. I then did a motor mechanics course and became an A Grade motor mechanic. I then had my own business before the war. I then went into

02:00 partnership with a chap in Sydney and he ran off with all the money, and disappeared with the chief commissioner of police's daughter, and went to New Zealand. Then I was in the army and called up as the war started in '39 in the militia, and I thought running around with a rifle wasn't much fun, I'd join the air force. I raced in to join the air force, couldn't join because I wasn't 21. My parents wouldn't sign at 18, between 18 and 21. So I then waited until I turned

02:30 21 on the 21st of February 1940 and raced in to join the air force. I joined aircrew, an early number 408723. You can always pick aircrew numbers by the first two numbers; the year you join up. Then I went to Sydney, trained at Bradfield Park, scrubbed as a pilot because of eyesight but that day they scrubbed 12 of us because there were too many pilots. Everyone wanted to be a pilot and I wanted to be

03:00 a navigator. They said "No" and I became a wireless op air gunner, off to Canada, trained at Guelph, from Guelph into England, 57 Squadron, the Dam Busters for a while, and then did three tours on 57 till I was shot down. I came back eventually and married Neet over there. I came back and worked for a company selling typewriters, and ribbons, and carbons. I won

03:30 their competition Australia-wide, that didn't appeal to me either. An old chap who was a Bugatti agent for cars in Melbourne, Jack Raybold's Sporting Cars, I had done work for him before the war and he asked me to come and work for him. I worked my way up until I became the director and general manager of it. Then he died and his relations wanted to sell the company naturally, which they did. I then went on my own eventually and ran my own repair business.

04:00 I was in used car selling for a while but that didn't appeal to me. It was all right selling sporting cars because we had a guarantee and we always looked after people but the used car trade became very rough, which didn't appeal to me, so I started my own workshop until I retired. Then I was a councillor with Oakleigh council. I was on the committee of the VACC [Victorian Automotive Chamber of Commerce], the board and management of the VACC, a member of the Society of Automotive Engineers of Australasia,

04:30 in Legacy and then when they were building this village when it first started with five villas, I came and looked at that, and came here, and I've been here 16 years.

**Excellent! That's a fantastic overview. That's probably one of the best ones I've heard for a while. Fantastic! Well let's start from**

05:00 **your pre-war years, can you tell us about your parents?**

My father was in the First World War. He was a very early number, 3931 I think. He joined up. He didn't go to Gallipoli. He got to Egypt and they withdrew them from Gallipoli, and then he went and fought in France. Strangely enough he fought on the Somme, exactly where I was shot down.

05:30 He got badly gassed, ended up in England in hospital, eventually sent home here and he was told he wouldn't live for more than six months if he lived in the city, so they bought a property at Hampton Park, 12 acres, which was a vacant place in those days, and made roads. The road was only made as far as Oakleigh. The rest of the way was only gravel and we grew up there.

**Did he talk much about his experience?**

No, not much.

**What did**

06:00 **he say if he did talk about it?**

Mainly about the mud and the slush. I think he was in the 22nd Battalion but then he transferred to the second pioneers. He was a very good carpenter and they used him in the pioneers. He said the mud and the slush, fought alongside the black watch. That's where I got my name.

**How did the war**

06:30 **affect your father?**

He got very ill with the lung problems and then became secretary. He was one of the early secretaries, not the foundation secretary but one of the early secretaries of TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension] Association for eight years. He was also the founder; I think he was the founding secretary of the federal TPI. He and Joe Haig, they used to go to Canberra quite a lot. He was still doing that when I came back from the war but then

07:00 he got very ill, ulcer problems in his lungs and he died at about 62. He was only 62 when he died.

**Did you have any other relatives who were in the war?**

Yes I had an uncle who was in the air force in the First World War, a pretty wild fella. He was a mechanic I think in the air force.

**Did he have any impact on you?**

No, we didn't see him for years. The families didn't get on for a long time but my brother and I started playing golf.

07:30 My brother became a scratch golfer [no handicap]. He was a good golfer. I was on 14s; the best I could do and we met him playing golf one day. We took him home for lunch. My mother wasn't happy with that idea but she eventually came round. Yes, I helped him a lot as he got older but I don't think he had much...no he didn't. I think when I first met him I would have been 18 or 19. He made motorcars. He had a business in High

08:00 Street, Armidale or not quite Armidale, on the corner of Orrong Road, not Orrong Road, one of the roads there. He built three-wheeled motorcars. He was quite a character. Then that went broke. His partner ran off with the money, so he then worked at Mika Insulation.

**What about your mother's side?**

My mother's father was a Scotsman.

08:30 They came out here in 1842. My great great grandfather was one of the founders of Newmarket Racing Stables. He trained Mormon, who was second in the first two Melbourne Cups. It was favourite each time but Archer beat him each time. I've never been interested in horse racing but that was the history of it. My grandfather died, I think he was 88. My mother lived to 92. We didn't come in

09:00 here. We looked at this when it was first built but we didn't come in here because she wouldn't move. We stayed and looked after her until she died.

**What is your religious background?**

Well, I'm an agnostic now! [laughs] I started off as Church of England. All the Sunday schools we went to, the Presbyterian, the Methodist, the Church of England but on the fourth Sunday at the school they had a Roman Catholic, so we got a day off.

09:30 Then the Catholics went and built a big church in Dandenong, so we were unhappy with that because we had to go on a fourth one then! Religion changed completely in the air force.

**For you?**

Mmm. I just lost it. I can't see how people can go to church and carry on with all this rot, and still go around doing what they did,

10:00 especially the Germans.

**Yes. That's quite a common thing for many soldiers.**

Is it?

**Yes. It seems to be. It's not surprising actually.**

You see it in France too. It's quite different in France. They've got beautiful churches they've built and they never go to church.

**I do want to touch on that issue a bit later. Religion is clearly important.**

10:30 **Can you tell us about your upbringing in Hallam?**

Hampton Park?

**Yes.**

It was good. It was a good way to be brought up, good country life. My brother and I used to trap rabbits, and sell them for sixpence a pair I think. We'd sell the skins to Kennons' Tannery people and at Wattle bark we had a big property. 12 acres we had at Wattle bark and they used that, Kennons used that for tanning. The rest of the time we just lived in the country,

11:00 played cricket for Hampton Park. My brother and I both played cricket. He was a good bowler. I was wicket keeper for a while and then played baseball with Dandenong Aids. I was the catcher. I had a couple of broken fingers thanks to my brother. He was a very good pitcher.

**I didn't know baseball was played in Australia?**

Oh yes! We played it in Dandenong quite a lot. Then we ended up with turf wickets in Dandenong. We had the first turf wickets outside Melbourne. We had some funny cricket teams,

11:30 Bangholme and all these odd little country teams, Keysborough and all these places. We generally killed a couple of snakes while we were playing cricket. There were always snakes. My brother was very good at sport but he ended up being too good at golf and the 19th hole fixed him, too much bending of the elbow!

**How did the Depression affect your life?**

In the country, my mother was very good

12:00 and so was my father really. We grew a lot of vegetables and so forth, and we fed a lot of people that came there, some were doctors that couldn't get a job, lost their homes, lost everything. They'd come and cut firewood for us, and my mother would feed them.

**Doctors?**

Two doctors.

**That's surprising.**

Isn't it? Some of them were just business people who'd gone broke. Some of them were just people who had nothing, never started with anything. She

12:30 fed them and looked after them. Sometimes they'd sleep in the shed. We had a big shed at the back, my father being a builder early on. He built a school. Before his health really collapsed he built a school, he built a couple of places in Cranbourne. He built a butcher's shop for Hubert Opperman's father. Hubert Opperman was a famous bike rider and he built baby health centres, and the jail

13:00 in Cranbourne. Then his health collapsed and that was it. It was good even though the Depression was difficult for us because food wasn't plentiful. He didn't get a pension from the Repatriation Department. He didn't get a pension from them until he was very ill and the doctor eventually got him that, got him TPI but in the meantime I think we lived on about 30

13:30 shillings a week, something like that, and grew vegetables.

**So basically the farm life managed to sustain you?**

Sustained, yes.

**Otherwise you would have found it very difficult?**

When I left school there were no jobs about in the Depression, so I got a job working for a dairy farmer, Kirkham and I got the sack. He used to pay me ten shillings a week and my keep, and he hadn't

14:00 paid me for three weeks, and I wanted it, and he said I'll only spend it, and I had a bucket of milk, and I tipped it over him, so I got the sack. He was a friend of my father's. When I went home my father said, "You're home early." I said, "I've resigned." So that was my first job.

**How old were you when you entered the workforce?**

13.

**That's pretty young isn't it? But that's obviously not unusual for that time.**

It wasn't unusual for that time, no. Most people couldn't afford school. My brother

14:30 was still at school. My mother could afford to keep him at school but not me. She didn't think I was clever enough! [laughs] I proved her wrong.

**What were your interests as a child?**

Motorcars. I always had an interest in motorcars. I think that may have come from having met my uncle once or twice when I was very young and I think that may have stuck in my mind. My father loved motorcars. He used to buy all these odd Scrips booths [?]

15:00 and various motorcars you've never heard of. I suppose it grew from that.

**Can you tell us how you managed to professionalise your interest in cars?**

When I wanted a job I had to come to town to live with my aunt and I walked the streets of Melbourne to get a job. There were no jobs about. Everyone had a sign up, "No Vacancies" and I walked into one in Fitzroy. They had a sign up, "No

15:30 Vacancies". I went in and the chap said, "What the hell are you doing in here?" I said, "I came here for a job sir." He said, "Can't you read?" I said, "Yes, I can read." "Can't you read the sign out there?" I said, "Yes but if I read every sign and took notice of it, I'll never get a job will I?" He said, "Righto! You can start work Monday." So I did. It was in a factory and I worked there for four years. I learned a lot of life working in a factory, amongst the girls and the blokes there. That was a rough, tough business for a kid from the country.

**Whereabouts did you work?**

16:00 Fitzroy. It was a rough, tough area and a rough, tough bunch of people in the factory. It was a good way to learn life.

**How old were you then?**

13 when I started there but I told them I was 14. You had to be 14. I worked there for about three years or something. Then I wanted to go in the motor trade, so I resigned and the managing director of the company came over, and tried to talk me into staying. I said, "No. I've had that." It was a corset factory.

16:30 I was fed up. They had me designing corsets! That wasn't my forte and I then went in the motor trade. I went out on the Monday. I left on Friday and got three jobs on the Monday.

**With corsets you could have competed with the American soldiers!**

So then I got a job in the motor trade and got an apprenticeship, did my mechanics, and then became an A grade mechanic. I stuck

17:00 to that until the war started. I had my own workshop in South Melbourne. Cess Warren was a racing driver. He and I used to race cars together. He had a Bugatti and Frazer Nash, and a Victor, which you wouldn't see. There's one here now owned...it's a car I took off the ship for him. His mother had plenty of money and bought it for him. It was about 8000 pounds I think, which was a lot of money in those days. It's now valued

17:30 at 400 000 dollars, owned by one of the car people. Shannon's Auctions own it. It's the only one in Australia. They were very interesting cars, Bugattis and the cars I got mixed up with.

**How did you come to own your own business? This was before the war wasn't it?**

The chap who owned the place where I did my apprenticeship, he gave up and he sold out to Cess Warren. Cess only wanted to sell petrol at the front,

18:00 so I rented the workshop from him. I knew a lot of the customers and I just ran my own business there. I was only about 19 then I think. I don't think I had completely finished my apprenticeship but you only went in those days of a night time. You never got a day off for an apprenticeship. You had to go twice a week of a night time. You never got time off from work. I did turning and fitting, and engineering as well.

**What sort of income was this generating?**

18:30 I can't remember now. I suppose I just broke even. I made enough to live on and pay my board at home. I had an old indian motorbike. Then I bought a 1914 Wolseley car for ten shillings. I wish I owned it now. It would be worth a fortune! My brother got rid of that when I was shot down. That was about that and then the war came.

**How did you get involved in**

19:00 **the militia?**

I just joined the 58th Battalion.

**When was this?**

That was in 1938.

**Why did you choose to join the militia?**

I could see there was a war coming. It stuck out a mile and I thought I had to be in something. I'd get called up in something eventually, so I thought I'd join up. I had a high rank there, a lance corporal!

19:30 **So you were in the infantry?**

In the infantry. We went up to Trawool. When the war started they took us to Trawool, gave us old uniforms from the First World War. We couldn't get the creases out of them. They'd been in wool bales and boots from the First World War. We spent three or four months up there in Trawool at odd times and then...well 1939, mainly they called us up at the end of '39. It must have been October '39 they

20:00 called us up.

**What was the training like in the militia?**

It was all right. It was hard work, plenty of route marching and we had a bit of trouble one day. They were checking machine guns and they thought they'd put a dummy bullet in it but they'd put a live one in it. It went straight through one of the fella's heads.

**Someone got killed?**

Sitting in front of it. Someone had put a live round in amongst the dummies.

20:30 But it was very interesting. It was mainly route marching and fighting bushfires. We fought the bushfires up in Mount Dandenong in '39, all around Trawool and Goulburn, got lost a few times. We only fought bushfires with a bag and when that got burnt then we had the branch of a tree. It was very difficult, tough, tough life but it was good for us. It kept you fit.

21:00 **What did you know about war in general before you joined up and before the Second World War started?**

I'd read a lot of books on the air force, Biggles [Major James Bigglesworth, famous pilot stories] I think. There were a lot of books on Biggles or something and I'd read a lot on that. I suppose that's where the interest in the air force came. It was a better way to fight a war than down in the mud.

**Did you know much about the First World**

21:30 **War outside your father's own experience?**

Not a lot, no. I did meet quite a lot of TPI people. Caulfield Repat [Repatriation] Hospital in those days, which is Melbourne Hospital now, I used to go there with my father. He used to go and visit them. Some of the fellas had been there ever since the First World War, gassed with their face half burnt off.

**Can you remember seeing all these things?**

**How did that affect you?**

22:00 Well I think I said in my book it affected me...when the Second World War started I thought I'd better do what they did.

**How old were you at this stage?**

Then I would have been 17 or 18 when I used to go with my father there, I think a bit earlier, possibly 13 or 14.

22:30 They came to live in town eventually and I'd be about 15 when I first went with him. He was very friendly with an undertaker there called Bathurst and Decker, an undertaker that was right near the Caulfield Hospital. I think he was tied up with the TPI too and I ended up buying some shares in that, a good company! I made quite a bit of money, became a director of it at one time.

23:00 They wanted to take me on as a conductor of funerals but Neet decided if I took that on she'd go back to Glasgow, back to Scotland, not much of a job I don't think. Anyway, I think that's what got me interested in the war, seeing all that. I used to go quite often to the office with my father, to the TPI of a night to help him. I used to do all the envelopes for him in those days. They couldn't afford a

23:30 secretary, so I used to do all the envelopes when he posted the bills out.

**Did you get to know any of these veterans?**

Mmm.

**Can you tell us about these people?**

Some of them were gassed. Some of them were minus a leg, minus an arm. Most of those belonged to a different branch but then they became TPIs. There were different types of pensions paid. They were

24:00 paid to legless people or blind people and they had different associations but TPI were just the people who had a total and permanent incapacitated pension. A lot of them, they played cards mainly of a day. They had various offices in town, one in Swanston Street, one in La Trobe, one up in Kelvin House up in Exhibition Street. They were still there when my father resigned as secretary. I

24:30 got to know a few of them going in there.

**What would the veterans say to you?**

They very rarely talked about it. Now and again they'd talk about it, not very often. They were more interested in trying to win their solo card game.

**I'm interested to know about their actual injuries. You were saying that some people had burnt faces?**

They got gassed with Mustard Gas. Some of them had no nose. They had it built over with plaster to make a

25:00 nose for them. They were in Caulfield. Some of them had never been out of their beds. Some of them were minus legs, stomach problems, goodness knows what. They were just never out of bed. They were just in bed from the end of the war.

**That clearly must have had a massive affect on you?**

Mmm.

**Did it make you think about war?**

25:30 Well, it made me think about it when I was in the army. I thought when the war was starting to get stirred up in Europe, I thought, "Well this is not going to be good fighting down in the mud. I'll join the air force." I thought it was a much cleaner way to fight a war. Whether it was cleaner or not, who knows?

**I suppose now would you say the same thing?**

Yes I think so.

26:00 If you were interested enough to see what Communism and Socialism could be, National Socialism, Nazism, call it what you like, to see what could happen when you get a dictator, whether it's left wing or right wing, it doesn't matter a damn, I don't think there's much difference between Nazism and Communism. They were both completely controlled by power

26:30 hungry dictators and I just saw that the world...I just thought that the world couldn't be much of a place. When you looked at it the world would be a terrible place.

27:00 I had a brother who was a Communist. He belonged to the Communist Party and that I couldn't understand, how anyone could belong to that. Unbelievable. Communism could never work. It's proved it. It has collapsed all over the world. When you get power hungry people like that you can't live under that. There's no freedom.

27:30 You'd see that in your own country where they're fighting against one another for years and years. Where's the answer to it?

**There's an answer but they haven't found it unfortunately.**

I think everyone is trying to. I think that's what forced me, really made my mind up. I couldn't see Communism and I couldn't see Nazism.

**28:00 How many siblings did you have? Just a brother?**

Just a brother. One brother.

**Can you tell us about your brother?**

He was a good sportsman, a clever bloke, worked in the government. He had a very good job in the commonwealth government. I think he worked in the public works department of the commonwealth government. He had a good job, got married, divorced, married again, had a couple daughters we still see, two nieces, one

28:30 in Queensland and one here in Melbourne, married to a leading anaesthetist. When he was younger he was a good bloke but I think he got in with the wrong peer group. I suppose you could put it that way and they got interested in Communism. I think it was an "in" thing. In the late '20s and early '30s Communism was an "in" thing. To be pink was a big thing. To me,

29:00 I couldn't see it. Then eventually...he never went to the war. He got himself a job down in an aircraft factory near Fisherman's Bend. We didn't contact. He never wrote to me when I was at the war. His wife did. She is still alive. She's 90 now. Gwen we keep in contact with a bit. She used to send me parcels and write to me but my brother never wrote to

29:30 me all the time I was at the war.

**Were you close to him before the war?**

Yes. As a kid we has good fun together but when he started in Communism, no. We played a lot of golf together but on one condition, if he started talking about politics I'd walk off.

**That sounds like me and my father!**

30:00 **Whenever we get onto politics, we don't get along!**

It was a pity because he was quite a clever bloke but he drank himself into problems. Golf did that to him. We used to play at Royal Melbourne, all the golf courses and I went along with him. He got invited because he was such a good golfer and the 19th hole was always the trouble at the golf course. Isn't it? Whether the 19th hole was

30:30 the cause of it or whether he drank a lot, I don't know. My father never drank. My father was a teetotaler [didn't drink alcohol] and my mother might have one glass of wine a year I suppose, at Christmas. I didn't drink much until I joined the air force.

31:00 **There were a fair amount of veterans from the First World War who were converted to Communism.**

Yes.

**Did you know anything about that?**

No, I didn't but I've read books on it now.

**What were your father's political views? Did they have any impact on your brother?**

My father's political views were like mine. They were Liberal or conservative if you want to put it that way. Liberal, not conservative. I'm not conservative. I'm middle of the road. I can see both sides.

31:30 I don't think there is much difference between the political parties here now. It's only the Labor Party that don't know how to handle money, that's for sure! I've seen that even when I was a councillor.

**Were you politically inclined in any way when you were young?**

No. I was later on, yes.

**After the war?**

Yes.

**Or during the war?**

After the war. I was a councillor in Oakleigh, an Independent

32:00 and that was a very labor council, which was the wrong thing in councils I think. Politics is too strong in councils now. They are there to help the public and the people, the ratepayers not to carry on a political fight. We had awful fights in Oakleigh, writs and arguments, a stupid lot of rot.

**What about just general political understanding?**

After the war when I was in council, the minister for health at the time tried to get me to join

32:30 and go into State Parliament. There was an easy seat to be won in the Upper House but I'd had enough trouble in the council with a bloke threatening me. They broke the taillights on my car and threatened to burn my house down, and goodness knows what. Neet and I decided that going into politics wasn't a good idea but I'd have been a Liberal if I'd have gone in. Why I didn't go in, I said I didn't always agree with what the Liberal Party do.

33:00 I used to get in trouble in council because I never stuck to what the Liberals wanted if I saw something good from the other side. I said, "If I go into politics and I don't agree with you, you'll kick me out, so what's the good of going into it?"

**Before the war were you in any way political?**

No, only anti-Communist because my brother joined it.

**So how did your brother get involved exactly?**

I don't know.

33:30 Through his brother in-law I think.

**Was his brother in-law a Communist?**

Mmm.

**Did your brother go to university?**

No. He went to high school, technical school and then some other college somewhere but he never went to university, neither did the other fella. The other bloke owned butcheries.

**Coming into the start of the Second World War, your brother would have obviously**

34:00 **had different views on the war?**

Completely.

**Can you tell us about these views?**

He just said when I was in the army that I was a fool to ever join the army. When I joined the air force he said, "You're completely stupid." I said, "Well I've got my opinion. You've got yours. Your lucky to sit back while us blokes go and give our lives to keep freedom for you people." Our politics were never any good after the war, Never.

34:30 The last time I saw him he was down here and he started an argument about politics, and I told him to either give it up or leave, so I never saw him after that. He was very politically left wing. He was 79 when he died I think.

**I presume that as a young man you would have been quite pro-empire?**

Yes,

35:00 strongly pro-empire.

**Tell us how that was brought into you?**

I think that came into you at school. Every day you raised the flag, you stood and sang the national anthem, which was the British national anthem. I think it was just imbibed in you at school, possibly partly from my father as well and my mother, possibly from my parents but school was very strong in those

35:30 days. We believed in the empire.

**What did your mother and father say about the empire?**

They just believed in it. My father wouldn't have gone to the First World War if he hadn't have believed in it and my mother being of Scottish descent. My father was of English decent. His father, I never saw that grandfather. He disappeared. He was a

36:00 civil engineer in New South Wales and built bridges but he ran off with a young girl Back in those days it would be a bit difficult, wouldn't it? It wouldn't matter today. No one would take any notice, so I never saw him and I never heard of him. He just disappeared.

**Did your father ever talk about the conscription debate of World War 1?**

Yes. He thought it was a completely stupid

36:30 idea. That would be Pops.

**So Billy Hughes [William Hughes, Australian Prime Minister]? He was quite a character during the '20s wasn't he?**

I think he was a bit against Billy Hughes because he changed sides but a lot of politicians have done that. Churchill [Prime Minister of England] did. A lot of politicians have done that. They can see both sides and it depends on where it's going to get them, doesn't it? Whether they want power. Churchill was a man who knew the right thing to do.

37:00 **When it came to the late '30s what did you know about Nazism?**

What I'd read. Now when I worked in the corset factory we had...they bought all Pfaff. Threw out Singer sewing machines and put in all Pfaff, German sewing machines and some of the Germans came out, and worked there.

37:30 We learned a little bit from some of them. They were very careful in what they said. Nazism was just growing then in the early '30s.

**They were pro-Nazi?**

Some of them were, some weren't.

**What would they say on both sides?**

There was only two of them that would say anything. One said, "It's a bad system. It will never work." The other one was all for Hitler.

38:00 Germany was so pushed down after the First World War. I think the Versailles Treaty had a lot to do



with that. It did really, pushed them down too far. They'd pay three million marks for a loaf of bread. It's a bit difficult.

**Did you also read the newspapers?**

Yes.

**What sort of things would they say about Nazism?**

There wasn't much said for a long time until eventually the churches kicked

38:30 up a row. Some of the churches I remember along Sydney Road, some of the churches had signs up about, "Power will lose the spirit of life" or something like that.

**Were you aware of the Spanish Civil War?**

Yes. That was where my brother and I were quite argumentative. He and his brother in-law argued about it. I said, "Well why don't you get off your backsides and go, and join them if you believe in it so much.

39:00 You're a Communist. You're against what Nazis are doing. Why don't you get off your backsides and join them, and go and fight for it? Don't spruik about it. Go and fight for it."

**Why didn't he go and fight?**

I don't think he was made like that, to go and fight. He was good at sport and he was tough playing sport but I don't think he...whether he was a full Communist or on the verge of just being a loud mouth about it, who knows.

39:30 **Did you know of people who were Communists that served in Spain?**

No.

**What would you disagree with him on regarding the Spanish Civil War?**

I thought the worst part of the Spanish Civil War was the Nazis when they came in with their bombers and just got stuck into everyone.

40:00 **So you could remember the Guernica bombing?**

I remember reading about that but that was the Nazi's way of testing out his weapons, wasn't it, his dive bombers and his weapons.

**Did you see Communism as a threat?**

Yes.

**You did?**

Yes, even when they fought on our side you could see that because any dictatorship of any description is always going to be a threat

40:30 to freedom and the British Empire was all for freedom, wasn't it?

**What about Mussolini and Franco?**

Franco did a very good job for Spain I think. He sorted them out. Even though he was right wing he sort of sorted them out. I think he did a good job for them later on. He was cunning enough not to join in with Hitler in the war, thank goodness. Mussolini? Well, he was just a loud mouth politician who was

41:00 climbing on Hitler's back really.

## Tape 2

00:37 **I'd like to take you back a bit to your childhood. Can you tell me a bit more about the kind of things you'd do for fun growing up in Hampton?**

Playing cricket, riding a pony, we had a pony named Snowy. My brother was very cunning, he used to ride Snowy first. By the time I got on him he'd had enough. He used to

01:00 pigroot and throw me off but they were the main things. I used to collect bird's eggs, which was a great thing in those days but if there was only one in the nest, we wouldn't take one egg. We always left some eggs. We collected...I don't know what happened to my bird egg collection. It must have disappeared. Mainly cricket, a bit of football, trapping rabbits,

01:30 foxes, we got money for foxes, fox skins. They were worth more than rabbits. We killed snakes. We had a lot of fun as kids, never frightened of them. I would be now but I wasn't then! I don't think there was

much...oh yes; I was caught once pinching apples in Narre Warren with a chap who was at school with me and he had

02:00 problems. He'd had some disease in his legs when he was young but he got to the stage where he could ride a bike and we were pinching apples up in Narre Warren once, and an old farmer caught us. I said, "Quick get out and hop on your bike Bert!" I had my backside facing the farmer and I got a load of saltpetre, very stingy stuff it is! I had to ride the bike home standing up on the pedals.

**You fire saltpetre from a shotgun?**

Yes.

02:30 He just had a shot, a 410 shotgun was all. They took the bullets out and they put saltpetre in there. My brother dug it all out with a needle. What else did we do? Not much else. I suppose just as kids we chopped wood. I tried to grow mushrooms. I thought that was a great thing to make money on growing mushrooms. It was a stinking job. I didn't succeed.

03:00 **Can I just clarify, Hampton Park? Is that part of Hampton, next to Brighton?**

No, Hampton Park is near Hallam. Hampton Park is the other side of the Dandenong. There is Dandenong, Hampton Park, before Cranbourne, between Cranbourne.

**So you were really out in the sticks?**

Well, it was in those days. Now it's a suburb and not a very nice suburb I gather, from what I read in the paper. In those days there were only four

03:30 families of us that lived there; the Oppermans, that was Hubert Oppermans the bike rider's parents, the Kirkhams, us and the Morans I think.

**How did you get to school?**

Walked.

**How far was it?**

It was about two mile to Hallam but Hampton Park was only about a mile. The school was further over on the back road about three quarters of a mile I'd say. I walked there and walked back, never worried about walking, and

04:00 played up I suppose on the way there, and back, got into all sorts of troubles you could find!

**It must have been tough in winter?**

Yes it was a bit cold in the winter, didn't hurt, not cosseted like they are today, which is a pity because they've got to be picked up and dropped at school.

**Did you have good shoes?**

04:30 Yes, fairly good shoes. My mother, they didn't have much money but she dressed us as best she could. She always kept us clean and I was always taken out in front of the class at school to show my fingernails because they were always clean for some reason. The teacher had some bent on that sort of thing, having clean fingernails. They were schools

05:00 with eight classes and nine at school. I had a fair bit of trouble at school. I played up a bit at school I suppose. I used to get into a bit of trouble. We learnt a trick. The inkwells were powdered ink in those days and we learned if you broke a bit of a razor blade off, and dropped it in the ink, the ink went invisible. I got caught doing that, so I had to clean all the inkwells out for a week and refill them.

**It made it invisible?**

05:30 Yes, it makes the ink clear and if you break...we used to break wattle seeds and put in. The smell was terrible but that was kid's things. We got caught smoking behind the toilet, Country Life cigarettes and I had to write an essay, 100 words on country life or 500 words on country life! That's typical kids isn't it! We made our own cricket pitch on the school

06:00 and we had Arbour Day, we used to plant trees, do the gardening for the school.

**Would you say that your parents living on the farm was a good living in terms of money and looking after the family?**

06:30 **Was it enough or were you poor, or do you think you were better than most?**

We were better than most because we were lucky there was always food there. For lots of them there wasn't food, even people that lived around us. We had a cow. We used to milk one cow and we mainly grew vegetables. Once my father's health collapsed...he ended up...he was six foot two and ended up weighing six stone.

07:00 He got very ill. He was out in McLeod I think. It was a place they put these chaps with lung problems

because of gas and my mother fed him. She used to get chicken. We grew some chickens. She made chicken broth and fed him with a teaspoon, and we'd take it in turns, and just heat it over the flame of a candle, just fed him with the teaspoon. We were never allowed to make a noise

07:30 when he was very ill. I think he was like that for about two years. He hardly got out of bed and my mother went blind at one stage, just lost her sight, and it came back about a fortnight later. It was just being too tired and working too hard looking after him.

**Were your parents**

08:00 **close?**

Yes, fairly close. As they got older they grew apart a bit because Pop got very interested in his TPI secretary and he joined Freemasonry, and got very tied up in Freemasonry. I joined that later on when he got me into that later on but I didn't get very involved in it. I just joined it. I think it is a very good thing if it is run properly, like most things in life. So is religion if it is run properly but who runs it properly?

08:30 **Good in theory?**

Mmm.

**Were you yourself close to your father?**

He wasn't a man you could get very close to, not really. He was very friendly with old Kirkham, the chap I worked for and got the sack for tipping the milk over him. He was a good

09:00 mixer with people but he was a good father in a way, but he didn't interfere, didn't help a lot really. I think he was too ill to be interested. My mother did most of the work bringing us up. She was a very strict lady, a very difficult lady as she got older, a good mother but very difficult. She had a very set

09:30 thing about my brother. See he was born in 1914 as my father went to the war, so he was only a babe in arms when my father went to the war and she had him for four years while he was at the war, and he became her favourite. I appeared in 1919. I always believed I was adopted until I joined the air force.

**Why did you think you were adopted?**

I don't know.

10:00 I felt out of the family a bit. He was always spoilt. My mother did everything for my brother and I always felt that I was just there, that was all. When I joined the air force I knew I wasn't because I got a birth certificate! He was very spoilt and I think that is partly why he got into so much trouble drinking, and carrying on. I think mother spoilt him completely, ruined him but that

10:30 can be a mother with a first child and with looking after him for four years.

**It's funny how things turn out. Did your father step in with discipline at all?**

All Pop had to do was glare at you. If you saw him glare at you at the table, you'd know you were in trouble.

11:00 **So he was a strong presence?**

Strong presence but didn't interfere much in your upbringing. When I finished the state school and the last year at state school I got peritonitis, and I was in hospital for quite a while. To do the merit certificate I topped the class with the merit certificate, even though I was away for three months and they wouldn't give me my

11:30 merit certificate because I hadn't been at school for the full period of time, even though I topped the class. I kicked up a row and demanded to see the...this was when I first started to stand on my own feet...demanded to see the inspector. My father came with me then. I must give him top marks for that. We went and saw the inspector, and I argued with him. I said, "How can I be the top of the class, I got 90 odd percent and I can't get the certificate? These blokes that got 60 percent got...?"

12:00 "But you weren't there long enough." I said, "I didn't need to be there long enough did I? I could do it without that." I eventually got my merit!

**The squeaky wheel gets the grease!**

Yes!

**Can you tell me about the kind of education that you got? What did you learn about Australia's place in the world?**

12:30 **How did you see yourself as an Australian?**

I always thought I was British, really in those days. I still believe that in a way. I'm possibly not a real...I was born here with my parents but I'm not a real one-eyed Aussie.

13:00 **Did you see Australia as a subset of the empire?**

No. I saw it as part of the empire but a long way away from the empire, a long way away. We were so far away in those days. Now we've got aircraft but in those days it took months to get there on a ship and who could afford it? So we were just a funny little country miles away from anywhere.

13:30 **Where were your parents born?**

My mother was born here and my father was born in Leichhardt in New South Wales. My mother was born in West Melbourne.

**So they weren't particularly British?**

No. Well she was very British because of her father being Scot I think. Pop was...I don't know where it came into my father because he didn't know

14:00 his father that well. I think his father left when he was quite young. He was brought up here in Melbourne, in Clayton and somewhere on a...his mother couldn't control or handle the three of them, and I think he was brought up by a farmer for a start until they got a bit older. Then they went back to the mother.

14:30 **Did you think the empire was a good thing?**

Yes.

**A bastion of freedom?**

Of course.

**Do you remember Empire Day?**

Yep. It was a big day!

**What sorts of things did you do?**

At school we had a big day on Empire Day. We used to get half a day off.

15:00 **What was the mixture of the other kids at school? Were there any other different races at all?**

No. They were all Anglo Saxons I suppose, all the same.

**And similar backgrounds to yourself, from farms?**

Some were from farms and someone ran

15:30 the store. Evans who was a minister for the Labor Party, his parents were born up there. They were up there. Senator Evans, Gareth Evans, I went to school with his uncles and his father. They ran the store I think. No, someone else ran the store. I've forgotten what they did. One of them worked

16:00 in a big engineering place in Springvale making locomotives.

**Did you have many friends at school?**

I mixed with a lot of them. I used to fight with a few of them naturally, like all kids!

**But growing up on a farm did you manage to mix with them outside of school?**

Yes. We played cricket and mixed together. Most of

16:30 them, they were all killed during the war. The ones I was friendly with, none of them were left at the end of the war.

**We spoke a bit about religion before. Were your parents religious at all?**

Yes. My mother was Church of England and my father was. They were both brought up...my mother was educated at a Catholic convent strangely enough, even

17:00 though she was Church of England and my father was educated at a christian brothers college, and yet they were both Church of England because it was the best education. To get the best education it was a Catholic education in those days, possibly still is. I don't know.

**Were they particularly devout?**

No.

**Observant?**

No. I don't think Pop ever

17:30 went to church.

**Was there a mixture of different religions at the school?**

Yes, quite a good mixture.

**Was there any friction between Catholics and Protestants?**

Yes friction between the Catholics and the Presbyterians or Protestants, the old mixture that was there, which has died out now I think but it was very strong in those days.

18:00 **How was it strong?**

It was always, "You're a Catholic so and so" and "You're a press button [Presbyterian] so and so." I think it grew in the kids and possibly came from the families.

**A press button?**

A press button Presbyterian! That was the nickname they used.

**I haven't heard that one.**

Haven't you?

**I've heard of proddy dogs [Protestants].**

18:30 **Did you ever see any friction between the adults?**

No, not really. I don't think I noticed it, possibly didn't notice it, a few arguments when they used to have dances because someone played the piano wrong but I don't know whether religion came into that!

**What sort of food did you have?**

Food? Well, a lot of vegetables and fruit,

19:00 which we'd grown and could get around there. Meat, we used to get only a delivery once a week from Dandenong. Milk we got from Kirkhams, walk up and get the milk. Bread, I think mother used to make most of the bread. No refrigerators in those days. We had a cool safe down in the floor. What did they call them? Coolgardie safes.

19:30 **Did you eat rabbits?**

Yes a lot of rabbits.

**How did you catch them?**

Mainly trapping or snares. We used a lot of snares. Trapping was a problem. We used to get a few foxes but the foxes would bite their leg off, leave it behind in the trap. You had to get them quickly once you caught them. Snares were good to catch them.

20:00 **You didn't use guns at all?**

No.

**Ferrets?**

Yes we tried ferrets. They drove you mad. They'd go down the hole and you couldn't get them out! I didn't like ferrets much.

**How much did you get for the rabbit pelts?**

We used to get sixpence a pair for the rabbits skinned and then we sent the skins to Kennons. I don't know what they paid us. I can't remember but it was lucky if they paid for the rail journey sending them down

20:30 by train.

**Did you eat all the rabbits you caught or did you sell them?**

We sold a lot of them. We used to run a stall down on the Cranbourne Road, my brother and I, and sell vegetables and rabbits. Imagine it today, no refrigeration because that was an unmade road then. It was only gravel.

**The health inspector would be right on to you!**

Yes he'd be rather upset with me!

21:00 **You'd probably get a 5000 dollar fine and three years in jail!**

And we're still alive! It's amazing isn't it?

**Now I'm interested in the factory you worked at in Fitzroy.**

A corset factory.

**Yes whereabouts was it in Fitzroy?**

It was in Victoria Street, Fitzroy, a small street that runs off Brunswick Street

21:30 and Nicholson Street. There used to be a big dairy on the corner. It was called La Mode Corsets.

**Can you tell us a bit about working there? You said it was a good experience.**

When I started there my first job was sweeping the floor and messenger boy normally. Then the printer was an alcoholic. He used to get me to get grog [alcohol] for him when I was out doing that.

22:00 There was an engineer who used to look after the sewing machines and he knew I was interested in that, so I got interested in fixing sewing machines. I liked that. That was good fun. Then the manager and the managing director said, "You've got more brains to waste your time with stupid eyelet machines." They then started doing material...that sort of self-knit sort of material, dying it. I helped to set that up and they had their own knitting

22:30 machines, these circular knitting machines with millions of needles in it. I helped to set all those up. Then he took me off that and got me designing corsets. That was the end of my effort there. I thought, "No I'll leave that. I've had that."

**What was the atmosphere like in the factory?**

Pretty tough amongst the girls. They were pretty tough.

**Did they give you a hard time?**

Yes, a country boy! They gave me an awful tease

23:00 but I learnt a lot. I learned to stand up for myself, good experience really.

**Did they play any tricks on you?**

Yes, they got up to all sorts of tricks.

**What sorts of things?**

I think we'll forget those!

**Why?**

They were a bit wild.

**For the historical record I'd like to hear them!**

No! They were fairly wild girls.

23:30 Some of them were very nice but some of them were really...some of the blokes were...they were fairly tough.

**Did you know much about girls before then?**

No. I didn't have a clue! We used to get 12 and six a week, I got there. A big wage 12 and six a week, 48 hours a week.

24:00 **Was it a steep learning curve finding out about women?**

Yes.

**You're being very coy!**

I didn't get mixed up with them if you want to know that! No I didn't. I didn't get that intimate with them if you want to know that answer. I remember the printer saying, "Don't get mixed

24:30 up with those. You'll get a dose." I thought, "What on earth is a dose?" I soon found out. A country kid, I didn't know anything about that but he told me. He was quite a character the printer.

**You may not have got involved with them but you've got stories about them. I can tell! The factory being**

25:00 **in Fitzroy and you were living in Hampton...?**

No, then I lived in Coburg. When I came down from Hampton Park in the Dandenong I lived with an aunt in Coburg.

**Why so far away? Was it because that was the only place you could get work?**

You couldn't get any work in the country near Hampton Park. There was no work up there and it was too far to travel all the way down there, so I lived with an aunt for

25:30 about six or nine months. Then my parents, my grandfather owned another house in Coburg, so we moved in there. They rebuilt that and we moved in there.

**The whole family?**

The whole family.

**How did your parents feel about you working in Fitzroy?**

My mother didn't care as long as I was paying for myself.

**At 13?**

Mmm.

26:00 **I just wonder because Fitzroy was such a rough place.**

A fairly tough area.

**She had no qualms about you going down there?**

I don't think she knew what it was like, possibly didn't know. I think it was a rough area to work in but you could look after yourself in that area. Brunswick Street was a very rough street and up further were all the brothels, up in the top end, Gertrude Street, known as

26:30 "The Narrows". It was a very tough area. Now it's a very upmarket area but around Gertrude Street and Little Fitzroy Street were all brothels. Blamey [Sir Thomas Blamey] chased them out of town. They were all up there. It was a fairly rough area.

**What was The Narrows?**

The Narrows was called Little Brunswick Street and all the little streets. Every street had a little street named after it and it was called The Narrows. They were little narrow streets.

27:00 They all ran off Gertrude Street. Now it's an upmarket area.

**Mmm I live there.**

Do you? Whereabouts?

**In one of the narrows!**

Good heavens! That's interesting isn't it?

**I don't know if it is exactly upmarket. It is still a pretty rough area in a lot of ways but it's expensive.**

Is it? Just near Gertrude Street?

**Yes, just off Smith Street and Charles Street.**

Oh yeah.

27:30 **But yes, not quite as rough as it was then. Did you know much about the gangs or pushers around the area?**

We heard about them but didn't get mixed up with them, didn't know much about them. The only one we heard about was Squizzy Taylor when we lived in Hampton Park. His relation or his girlfriend owned the Hallam Pub and he used to come up there a lot. As kids we heard about this and thought this was terrific.

28:00 There was some crowd in Fitzroy, The Caps. They had caps with a razor blade in the [points to brim]. We'd heard about them but we never met them.

**Not the Grey Caps?**

I think it could have been the Grey Caps.

**There was a gang called the Grey Caps. I wasn't sure if they were in Fitzroy or not.**

They used to fight a lot with the ones from Port Melbourne I think.

28:30 **And the Crutches?**

I've heard of them but I didn't know them, no. Thank goodness!

**How long were you at the factory for?**

A bit over three years. I must have been about 16 when I left there. That's when I got a job in the motor trade and did my apprenticeship.

29:00 **You must have felt pretty fortunate to have a job during those years?**

Yes. My brother wasn't. He was still at school. My mother kept paying for him at school.

**Were you aware of other people, I mean you mentioned that when you were younger your mother had people sleeping in the shed outside. Can you tell me about**

29:30 **some of the other things you saw or were aware of, people who were doing it really tough?**

Just tramps walking along the road with their swag on a stick on their back. We used to meet quite a few of them.

**Were people generally supportive and helpful to people who were out of work?**

I don't know whether a lot of other people were but my parents were. They were always good to them up there.

**Did you see any sustenance gangs?**

No.

30:00 **You were aware of the different politics at work during the '30s. Did you see any political activity in the city?**

There was a bit of politics. I think we didn't see much of the politics until the Spanish Civil War.

30:30 That's when it brought politics up. Russia had just turned political, gone Communist and that sort of caught on with a lot of people. It was the "in" thing to join in, wasn't it?

**Did you ever see speakers or demonstrations?**

No I don't remember any.

31:00 **Now we're getting into the later part of the '30s and war is brewing. We talked a bit about the Spanish Civil War but how aware were you of what Hitler was doing and what was going on in Europe?**

Well, for some reason I must have been interested in politics. I wasn't really politically minded for one party or another.

31:30 I think my leanings were always the middle of the road and I could see that what he was doing wasn't good. It couldn't be good but you can understand, now later on in years you can understand the Germans because they were so short of food but you cannot understand how anyone could build a regime like he built.

32:00 **So you read the papers?**

Yes.

**And kept yourself abreast of the news. Were many other people that you knew avidly watching...?**

No, I don't think so. My brother did because he was left wing and that's possibly why I followed it more because I was just the opposite.

**So even at that age**

32:30 **he was quite political?**

He was very political. Where he picked it up from I don't know. He was always a bit that way but he picked it up from his brother in-law when he got married. He got married. He was going with this girl for quite a while and then he got married in about '37 or '38 I suppose.

33:00 His brother in-law was very political.

**How did you get on with his brother in-law?**

I just ticked him off!

**In what sense?**

We used to play golf and he was supposed to be weak, and wanted somebody to carry his golf clubs. I said, "If you want to play golf you can carry your own golf clubs. I'm not going to carry them for you."

33:30 When they started politics on the golf course, I'd walk off. I said, "I'm off." They had their beliefs and I had mine, and they didn't meet.

**So you were fairly aware of what Hitler was doing?**

Yes.



**And Mussolini I presume. Did you**

34:00 **know of many other people who were worried about what was going to happen?**

My father, he was. Some of his colleagues and his TPI crowd but amongst the people I mixed with, not really. I ran my own workshop in South Melbourne in the latter part and I was busy trying to make money to make a living, and pay my rent, and run the

34:30 business. Then when I went to Sydney...Rex was a bit, the chap I was supposed to be partner with, Rex Bourke, he was very political. He was like me but more right wing than I had been. He was very forceful in his talk about Hitler. I might have picked a bit up from him but he

35:00 disappeared, with the money and all! The partnership collapsed. The girl got him in more than the money I think.

**So your Dad was worried and the veterans saw a war coming?**

The veterans, they didn't want to see a war coming again. That's why they wouldn't sign for me to join the air force. Between 18 and 21 you need your parents' consent to be an

35:30 aircrew. You can join the army or anything but they wouldn't accept you in the aircrew unless you had your parents' consent. When I first tried to join they just said, "No way!" I went home and they just said, "No way." They wouldn't sign it, so when I turned 21 I joined up on my own.

**But you joined the militia didn't you?**

Mmm.

**Can you tell us about that?**

I just joined it because a few were joining the militia. I think it looked like a war was coming and

36:00 I suppose we all joined up. It was only the militia. We weren't being sent overseas or anything. It was just training.

**What sort of things did you do?**

I think it was very good training. I think they should still have it, not to train young blokes for war but to take them in and train them in national service would do them the world of good. I think it would knock a lot of the wasted youth that is wasted nowadays. I know some of them that went into national service and it made men of them. I think it would help a lot.

36:30 Some you would never help but I think it would help a lot. Politically you would never get a party to agree to that. When I belonged to the Liberal Party I was vice president of one branch and anytime I brought that up they all said, "What do you want to do? Lose the next election?" So it wouldn't matter. No party is game enough to take it on, which I think is a pity.

**It has always been a very divisive issue in Australia.**

Hasn't it! Yes, especially since

37:00 Vietnam.

**Where were you training with the militia?**

In Trawool. It was up near Seymour, near Puckapunyal. They then had the 6th Division at Puckapunyal. There were fights in the town between the militia and the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], so they made it a rule that

37:30 certain nights we could go into town when the AIF couldn't go in. I had to go in a couple of times on picket duty. You wore a bayonet on your side and we had some terrible trouble. A couple were killed. Red Maloney, a famous horrible type from Fitzroy, he killed someone. They kicked him out of the army I think.

**Did you see that?**

No. We only heard about it.

38:00 Our main thing was fighting bushfires during that period. It was late '39 and early '40. In early '39 we fought the fires up in the Dandenong's but late '39 and '40 were mainly around Trawool, all the back of Puckapunyal, and Goulburn, around those areas.

**Can you tell me about some of the fights that you did see between the**

38:30 **Chocos and...?**

When I was on picket duty it wasn't much fun. That's when they stopped it. It was too dangerous. They stopped us going into town. They'd just start outside a pub naturally, too much alcohol. It still starts fights doesn't it?

**On picket duty did you have to try and break them up?**

We tried but too many of our blokes were getting knocked about, so that's why they decided

39:00 to break it up.

**How did you find adjusting to the regimentation?**

I didn't mind it. It was quite interesting. It was something different. I did a month and then three months I think. That was about the end of it then, when I joined the air force but I quite enjoyed it.

39:30 It was good exercise for you, good training and you learned discipline, which I'd learned a fair bit of when I worked in the factory anyway but it was a different type of discipline. They got very upset, the army, when I joined the aircrew because aircrew had control over anything. Once you joined aircrew it didn't matter whether you were in the army or not, they couldn't stop you going.

**40:00 Did you get on well with the other blokes when you joined up?**

Yes, we had a lot of fun together.

**Did you find they had a similar background to yourself?**

All different backgrounds, completely different backgrounds some of them. They were a quite good bunch of blokes. I was talking to a lady here in the village the other day and she said, "Reading your book I see that you were in the 58th Battalion. My husband was in that."

40:30 She mentioned his name and I said, "I think I remember him." It goes back a long way.

## **Tape 3**

**00:36 What were you doing when the Second World War was declared?**

I was in Sydney running a company with another bloke, Rex Bourke. We had a contract of Ireland's Cake factory and a big blue metal contract looking after their trucks and cars.

01:00 We had some funny staff there. One was an epileptic and the other bloke was a very strange fellow. We lived in a flat next door to where we were working in Crown Street, Surry Hills, which is the toughest part of Sydney. Boy was it tough! It really was tough. There were some of the best fights I've ever seen there. Coming home one night I saw someone with a dustbin just straight over someone's head. We had a little Austin Meteor

01:30 we used to race around in, Rex and I. He had a girlfriend. She had a sister and I went with the sister for a bit but there was nothing in it. He was very tied up with his girlfriend. One morning I went down to open the business and he wasn't in bed. We slept in separate rooms in this flat. I thought, "That's funny. He's not in bed." I went down in the morning and I looked in, and everything was gone. He'd taken all his tools

02:00 and papers. I thought, "That's funny." Val Ireland came in, who owned the cake factory and he said, "What's happened Keith?" I said, "I don't know." I found a note on his desk. He'd gone. He'd taken the money and everything, so I had nothing. I had no money, so Val Ireland said, "We've got to get the trucks ready to deliver cakes." The Blue Metal bloke came in and I said, "Righto!" So the kid and the other mechanic, and I we got the thing working with no money.

02:30 We didn't have wages or anything, so Val Ireland then...we did that for a fortnight. We found out by then that he'd run off with the commissioner of police's daughter, gone to New Zealand. Rex had just run off. So that was the end of that and the war started just at that time. The war had just started and I realised I'd be recalled in the army, so I gave up in Sydney, and came home to Melbourne.

03:00 I think the army called us up for a month. No it must have been three months. It was '39 wasn't it? It started in '39 and I was called up for three months. Then I joined the air force. I did my time in the army and then straight into the air force.

**What was the atmosphere like in Sydney when the war was declared that day?**

It was a pretty wild night

03:30 the night it was declared. There were a lot of drunks around the town.

**Did you go out for a drink?**

No. I didn't drink much in those days. I didn't bother. Sometimes I'd go and have a counter lunch. You could get a counter lunch then for sixpence. You'd buy a beer and get a counter lunch but that was about all. I wasn't very interested. I didn't drink a lot then.

**Were you in the militia at that stage?**

I was in the militia when I went to Sydney. I got permission

04:00 on the reserve to be off it for a while but when the war started I had to come back, so it was just as well I came back because Rex disappeared with all the money. I don't know how Ireland's got on with their work from then on. That was their problem. All I ended up coming home with was my tools and no money.

**What took place when you came back to Melbourne?**

I came home and I then got in touch with the army or the army got in touch

04:30 with me. They called me up and we went up to Trawool.

**What sort of training did they give you?**

Just ordinary infantry training. I didn't like the look of the bayonet. I thought it was better to join the air force. I didn't like the running around with a bayonet. It was mainly route marching.

**What was your relationship like with the soldiers and officers in the 58th?**

All right.

05:00 We all got on well together. We had troubles I suppose, like all young blokes get into trouble over something. We slept in those bell tents, a round tent and when some bloke came in drunk one night, you all slept with your feet in the middle, and some idiot would stick his feet up next to your face, get in the wrong way. We had one bloke who used to snore, terrible snorer. Another fella and I got some shaving cream one night and put it in his mouth.

05:30 He foamed! He thought he'd gone mad! Typical jokes but they were terrible places to sleep in those round tents. It was on the ground with a ground sheet. That's all we had under you. Eventually they put some boards in but in the early days they didn't have any. The militia uniform we had to give up and put in the army uniform. You know the old First World War uniforms?

06:00 They'd been in wool bales and they were all folded but it was an interesting time.

**What did your father have to say about the war and you?**

He said, "You're not going to the war. You're only in the militia. You're not going away to fight." He was dead set on that one and that's why they wouldn't sign for me to join aircrew.

**How long were you in the militia for before**

06:30 **you got into the aircrew?**

About 12 months I suppose.

**Where did you change your mind about the air force or when you wanted to join up?**

Well I just didn't like the army. I thought I'd had enough of the army and what I'd learned from seeing the blokes who were knocked about in the Caulfield Hospital, I thought, "No I don't like that business." I thought the air force would be better.

**So tell us how you came**

07:00 **to join the air force?**

The second time when I went in to join, I went in and the young fella said to me, "Hey I've seen you before!" I said, "I came in here and you wouldn't accept me before. I was too young but I've got my birth certificate." He said, "Huh! You're in a hurry to die aren't you?" I thought, "Well he knows something that I don't know" and that was it. They just send you upstairs, put you through all the tests, spin you around in a sort of dentist chair and make you stand up

07:30 to see you didn't fall over, stand on one leg, and then the other, fired a revolver off behind you with a blank bullet to see what happened. I did have a problem then. He said, "Well your education is a problem because you left school young." So I went home and I said to my father, "I've joined aircrew but I've got a problem. I'm not educated enough." So he said, "Well

08:00 I know a girl, a daughter of a Japanese woman." An Australian soldier married a Japanese woman in the First World War. "Their daughter is a lecturer at Melbourne University. She's a very clever girl. Go and see her." So I went up and she said, "Well if you're interested I'll give you a month's trial. You won't be called up in the air force." They said I wouldn't be called up until I'd done some education. She said, "If you're interested at the end of a month,

08:30 OK." So I was. At the end of three months I had to go and sit part of matric [matriculation], which she taught me at the University High School. I passed that and you had a 21 course lesson from the air force, which was 21. You had to do one a week I think and I passed that easily, so then they accepted me. I was just called up.

- 09:00 We were given a number before that, called up and then sent off to Bradfield Park in Sydney. That was the initial training school. I was on 13 Course. Then I think they had problems with...they had too many then and they weren't moving them on quickly enough, so we had to do two months instead of one month at Bradfield Park. We did another month and then we got a week's leave, came home,
- 09:30 and went back to Bradfield Park, got on a ship, the Awatea, and off. That was all the training. I got scrubbed as a pilot. In between they sent me to Narromine I think it was and I got scrubbed as a pilot.

**So you wanted to be a pilot?**

I think 100 percent wanted to be pilots and their problem was they had too many pilots, and not enough navigators or wireless ops, gunners. Everyone couldn't be a pilot could they? They needed the rest of the

- 10:00 crews for bombers. Actually they wiped me off aircrew because of my eyesight and yet I've been to Doctor Wolf here, and he said, "That's impossible." He said, "Your eyesight now is terrific at your age. The only thing you've got trouble with is glare", which I got from searchlights burning my eyes but I can see just as clearly out there without those things on. But they had to scrub me for some reason.
- 10:30 They scrubbed 12 of us in one day. He was called the Black Knight, a bloke in a black leather outfit. He was the instructor. "Come in here. You're finished." Then they wanted me to be a navigator and I said, "No. I'll be a wireless op air gunner." So I did that, off to Canada on the Awatea, a New Zealand ship.

**What is the role of a wireless operator air gunner?**

In the early days you had to do both

- 11:00 because in the Hamdens and Wellingtons the wireless op needs to be in contact with the base, and to control the RT [radio telegraphy] in the aircraft, they were the early things and be a gunner as well in the turret. In the Hamden they had one gun sticking out the back. In the Wellington you had to be able to take over if one gunner got killed, so you had to do both. Later on in the war towards '42,
- 11:30 later on they made them signals. You wore an S for signals and the gunners wore a G, so the wireless op was just a wireless op, not a gunner. The original navigators were observers. They wore an O and there's a good nickname for that one. You can work that one out! They had to be the bomb aimer as well and they had a second pilot. Then they found that losing an aircraft, you were losing two pilots. They couldn't cope with that,
- 12:00 so the second pilot became a flight engineer and the bomb aimer became a bomb aimer. He wore a B. The navigators wore an N but my first navigator just wore an O. He was an observer and could do both. So you just ended up as a wireless op controlling the electronics part of the aircraft.

**What was your first training like at Bradfield Park?**

- 12:30 It was very strict. It was on education mainly, marching and drilling, you had to do all that, and mainly education. You had to learn gas. They were frightened of gas after the First World War. You had to wear gas masks and go through gas routines. The main exams were mainly on that and education on maths, and
- 13:00 flying, and all that sort of thing, just the theory of it.

**How did you find that?**

I passed out all right. I think I got 90 percent, somewhere near that.

**What were the officers like?**

They were all right. They were good instructors. Some of them were just civilians, some of the maths instructors but most of them were pilot officers.

- 13:30 They'd just been called up as teachers and put into those jobs I suppose. That was good training.

**Was that a memorable event for you at Bradfield Park?**

I suppose in a way it was. When you look back at it now, I suppose in those days it may have been but you look back on it now and think what a waste of time it was, but it wasn't a waste of time. It was to educate you in the ways of the

- 14:00 air force really. That's all it basically was, the initial training school.

**Did they teach you anything about what to expect from the German Air Force?**

No. It was all theory. We didn't learn much about what to expect from the German Air Force until we eventually got to England. We learned a bit in Canada but not a lot.

**What took place after Bradfield Park?**

We had a week's leave, straight back then, put on a ship, the Awatea and off.

- 14:30 We called in to New Zealand on the way and then Honolulu, and then Vancouver. Then from Vancouver by train across through the Rockies, terrific trip through Canada, to a place called Guelph, which was an agricultural college, which is now a university. The air force had taken it over to train wireless ops and cooks. They had a cooking school there and they learned cooking on us! Some of their cooks weren't too good
- 15:00 but they had training.
- Before we get to Canada, what did you know about the war? By this stage France was practically overrun.**
- That's right. France was overrun. We knew we were in trouble.
- Did you think that at any stage the war could be lost?**
- Yes.
- When you heard of Hitler in Paris what was your reaction at the time?**
- Frightening
- 15:30 that France could fall so quickly. You wouldn't believe it took four years in the First World War and they never got there, and they did it in about six weeks. Incredible!
- Did you hear anything about the German weapons?**
- Yes, mainly about their air force, what they were doing shooting people, people trying to get out, just blowing
- 16:00 them down, the aircraft. I learned that when I was in France from some of the people too.
- Are you speaking of civilian aircraft being shot down?**
- No, just shooting pedestrians on the road to get them off the road, so that they could get their tanks through. I'd read that then but it comes from the French people I was living with there in France. They just brought their
- 16:30 Messerschmitt 109s and 110s, JU 88s, and just blew people out of the way but that's war. War is not a friendly business.
- You said you'd been on a ship to New Zealand. What was the purpose of going to New Zealand?**
- It was the Awatea, a New Zealand ship and it picked up New Zealanders. We had a lot of New Zealanders
- 17:00 picked up there. Some of them were going to be pilots in Canada. Some of them were observers. We weren't all just wireless ops. The crowd of us that got on, some of them were to be pilots, some navigators, some wireless ops and we picked a lot of New Zealanders up for training as well to be trained in Canada. There weren't enough training facilities in this country in those days or in New Zealand. Canada was closer to England and they had more training facilities ready there.
- 17:30 So we picked up a lot of New Zealanders there.
- Where was your next stop after New Zealand?**
- Honolulu. We didn't stay there long, about a day I think. It was only to refuel the ship and get food for it, and then on again to Vancouver. We couldn't go to America then because America wasn't in the war.
- What was the voyage like?**
- 18:00 It was interesting. We had a few problems. We had a very tough sergeant major who was driving everyone mad, New Zealanders and all. We all got together and we used to ring him up, and tell him "Could he swim?". They all threatened to throw him overboard, so he became very...kept well out of the way. We had to run around the decks of a day to keep exercising and we had lectures to fill in time, otherwise you were bored.
- 18:30 A very rough trip in the Awatea, the food would start at one end of the table and end up down the other end. The Awatea would have rolled in dry dock I'm sure! It was a very rough ship.
- What about the weather?**
- The weather was rough. Going into New Zealand was very rough. The rest across the Pacific was quite good. Then into Vancouver, that was a beautiful city. We didn't stay there long. I think we spent
- 19:00 half a day there and then on the train to the Canadian Rockies, and through there. We had a lot of fun there. We got off at Banff. The train stopped at Banff to refuel. We got off and we had two hours or three hours. We went into town and we met a couple of Canadian Police, mounted police. The three of us had a bit of fun with them and they took us to show us the jail, and locked us up for five minutes, just for a

bit of fun. Then when we came out the train was leaving.

19:30 I said, "The train's leaving." So they hopped us in a car and drove us down to the next station, quite fun. Banff was a very pretty city, a very pretty country Canada, very friendly people, a lot of Scots people. When we got to Guelph, Guelph was a very British town. Guelph was the old original name of the British royalty before they took Windsor.

20:00 Guelph was a German name and they wanted to change it to Windsor. There were a lot of Scots people in Guelph. We were well looked after there, met some nice people there.

**Were there a lot of Germans there as well?**

I don't think there were any there. I can't remember any Germans there. They were mainly Scots. Three of us were walking along the street one night and they were all playing bowls under lights. One chap called out, "Hey you three"

20:30 in a real half-Canadian Scottish accent. "Come and play bowls!" I said, "We're too young for that." But we went in and his name was Anderson, and he made great friends of us. He and his family looked after us. When we had any leave of a weekend we could always go down and see them. They were very good to us. His wife had died quite young. He'd brought up his two daughters and son. His son was a paraplegic through playing ice hockey.

21:00 the two girls, Lillian and what was the other girl's name? They were quite good fun. Lillian and I were walking...this is quite funny...in Guelph one night looking in the town. Do you remember some of the old buildings had strange windows? You could walk in the back of the windows and I said, "Let's have a screw in there." I got a slap in the face. So when I got home

21:30 I said to Dan, "Lillian never spoke to me on the way home. I don't know what's wrong with her. I didn't do anything." He said, "What happened?" I told him and he roared his head off. He said, "Well you know what screw means in this country?" I said, "No I don't." He said, "It means sex. What does it mean in Australia?" I said, "A good wage or a look!" So Lillian and I, it was a joke between us from then on. You've got to learn the slang language of the other countries you go to, so they gave us a book on slang language.

22:00 **Did you end up apologising to her?**

Yes! She just laughed, thought it was funny from then on but they were very good to us. He was very good Dan and I eventually met his brother in England as well. Dan had come from England just after the First World War. He'd been in the First World War and he was a Free Mason, and I had joined Free Masonry then. We had a bit of fun together, went to some of the lodges. Then we did our

22:30 course in Guelph, which was about eight or nine months on the wireless. Some of the blokes went off their rocker [lost mental stability].

**What do you mean?**

Doing Morse code. You do eight hours of Morse code a day with earphones on and the thing belting into your ears for eight hours. You'd get a break every couple of hours but it was...one morning we were all on parade and one bloke came down in his pyjamas and great coat, and

23:00 abused the group captain, and goodness knows what. He was sent home. He'd gone off. Some of them just went completely. They couldn't take it. It was very difficult training and you had to learn the theory of electronics, electrics and it was a good grounding to learn it all. I passed out there. I think I was second or third on the course. Then

23:30 we had to go and do a gunnery course at Mossbank, the other side of Canada. During the gunnery course, the gunnery chap called me aside and he said, "Cut this out. You're doing too well as a gunner. You'll end up in the tail gun not the wireless op mate. You're too good a shot." I passed out there but luckily I stayed a wireless op.

**What sort of weaponry were you trained on?**

We were flying in Fairy Battles then. The original aircraft we flew in, in

24:00 Guelph, just near Guelph, were Norsemen, a funny little two-winged biplane thing and then Tiger Moths. When you got in the Norseman you had a parachute, a seat parachute on and you got in, and they screwed the wireless set in on top of you. I remember saying to the pilot, he'd been a Battle of Britain bloke, "How do I get out?" He said, "You can't. If you can unscrew the wireless quickly enough you can bail out but once you're in there,

24:30 you're in mate." So we did our training there. The first time I went up with him, I'd done my exercise I had to do on the radio and he said, "Are you finished?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Hang on!" Then he did a couple of loops. He was bored with flying blokes around I suppose after being in the Battle of Britain. Then we finished on Moths [Tiger Moths] there. You had to do all your exercises and then we flew in Fairy Battles

25:00 for the gunnery course. You then got your sparks put on your shoulder and you got your half-wing, the AG half-wing in Mossbank, and made a sergeant then.

**What would you do on leave?**

We went to Dan Anderson in Canada, mainly with him and his family. We went

25:30 into Toronto a few times, went to a couple of ice hockey matches. We had a couple of wild blokes there, Billy Cross and Johnny Keppel. They took over the bus once in Guelph and drove it into Toronto. They ended up having to go before court. They got into real problems. They were both killed later on in the air force but

26:00 they were a couple of wild ones.

**They were killed were they?**

Pretty wild blokes the two of them. Keppel, I think he was, Keppel. His father was a big tie man, clothing tie manufacturer. Billy Cross came from a family with plenty of money, so they were just a couple of wild young blokes.

**Did you ever get an opportunity to visit the United States?**

We snuck across the border before the Yanks [Americans]

26:30 came into the war. We wanted to go to America, so we were told we had to get a passport. We wrote to Ottawa, the three of us and we got our passports, got a British passport, which I still have I suppose as well as my Australian one. We got that passport and we went to America. How we got away with it I don't know. We were I uniform. We weren't supposed to be in America in uniform because the Yanks hadn't come into the war then but we got to New York.

27:00 We had a lot of fun in New York. We went to the Waldorf Astoria to have a beer but the doorman said, "Come on fellas! You can afford a beer." We were sitting having a beer and someone put a bottle of whiskey on the table, and I said, "We can't pay for that." "Don't worry. The stockbroker gentleman over there has bought it for you." He came over and talked to us, and then he took us under his wing. He took us to a nightclub one night.

27:30 Then we went to see Eddie Cantor [entertainer] in some banjo place and we weren't allowed to pay to go in. They let us in for nothing, three of us in the front row. I got a note halfway through, "Don't leave after the theatre. Come backstage." We went backstage and had champagne, and chicken sandwiches. That was good fun. Eddie Cantor and Mary Martin, some big singer. It was good fun. Then a couple of nights later,

28:00 we were only there for a few days, we were invited to the Stork Club. We went to the Stork Club and we couldn't pay to go in. They let us in for nothing and we sat at the table with Bing Crosby, Bob Hope and Cab Calloway. He was a bandleader, a famous bandleader. Bing Crosby was a dour sort of a bloke. Bob Hope was just stupid. He was a real character, a real comedian off the stage as he was on it. He was good fun.

28:30 Bing Crosby was a very dour sort. Cab Calloway was quite a character. So that was a good night. Then the stockbroker, we had to go back to Canada and he and his wife met us as we got on the train, and gave us a hamper with food, and a bottle of whisky, so that passed the time on the way back to Canada!

**You were treated very well!**

Yes, well treated.

**Why do you think he was so nice to you all?**

I don't know, just happened to see us.

29:00 I suppose we were unusual in a blue uniform and some of the people said, "You're Australian! I thought they were all black in Australia! What have you got? Kangaroos!"

**What were the impressions of Australians then in New York?**

Well, they were all amazed that we were in the country. Why we never got locked up I'll never know, in our uniforms. We weren't supposed to be but nobody took any notice of it. We just enjoyed ourselves.

29:30 New York was a wild city. We got down in Harlem one day and were told to get out. The police grabbed us, put us in their car and drove off, take us out of the Bronx there, get out of there. We were only there for I think about five or six days.

**So you had no idea Harlem was a no go area?**

No we didn't know what the Bronx was or Harlem was. From there

30:00 we ended up a Montreal and from there we ended up at Halifax, which was over on the east coast, to go to England. One night we were upstairs in the dining room having dinner a few of us and the Yanks for

some reason, they must have had a ship in there, and they had some of their SPs [Service Police]. They had baseball bats with them. Some of their blokes there were a bit full and they came in with baseball bats and started belting some of the blokes. We got

- 30:30 upset, grabbed the SPs, took their bats off them, threw them down the stairs and then pushed the SPs down the stairs, so the next day we were called on parade by the CO [Commanding Officer] at Halifax. We lined up and he said, "Will the six men who threw the Americans down the stairs and their batons, please step forward?" So the whole contingent stepped forward! We ended up at his feet. He said, "Won't the six own up?" No one said anything, so he said, "Well you're all confined
- 31:00 to barracks." So we were. Two of them, Billy Cross and Johnny Keppel, they decided to cause some problems. They got a shoebox with a dead bird in it, dug a hole in the parade ground and buried it, said that was the CO. They had a ceremony with a man's magazine, a couple of wild fellas but no repercussions. They just took it all as a joke I think. I think they were glad to put us on the ship to England. We got on a ship called
- 31:30 Sarpeedon, a Norwegian boat with a wet mess, which meant there was grog onboard, so it was a bit different to the British ships. There was no alcohol on them. I think 10 or 12 very attractive you ladies got on. They were going to England. Some of their husbands were in the Tiger Squadron, which was the American squadron that fought in the Battle of Britain and they were all going over in the FANYs [Female Auxiliary Nursing Yeomanry],
- 32:00 to join the FANYs, which was a big set up in England. Nancy Wake belonged to it.

#### **What is the FANYs?**

The FANYs. What did they call it? The Female Auxiliary Nursing Yeomanry. Now it was a blind for secret service and SOE [Special Operations Executive], and all sorts of people but all these girls joined to drive

- 32:30 ambulances in England. They were very attractive and good fun. We were playing cards one night and I was winning too much, and there was an Aussie bloke I played with and I thought, "He's good on the cards." So I said to the girls afterwards, "I wouldn't play cards with him any more. I think he's a card shark." So we didn't. He was. He was giving me good hands and then wanting part of the money. So we gave up that game but they were nice girls.
- 33:00 They were all headed off to...we then were given a job to go up top and look for submarines because aircrew had good eyesight and they said, "You can do it." There was one Lewis gun on the back of the thing. You couldn't have shot anyone with it, pouring water over the top of you. We lost half the convoy on the way to England.

#### **How big was the convoy?**

I suppose there were about 40 odd ships in it.

- 33:30 Tankers just went up of a night time from submarines and they hit them, just exploded. The only ones that went around were the corps vets. We just kept ploughing on. The corps vets went around and tried to pick up as many as they could but they didn't have much hope with a tanker when it was hit because they were all burnt. When we got near North Ireland, the north of Ireland, which was always a problem
- 34:00 because the U-Boats were all close to that part of Ireland, we left the convoy, the Sarpeedon and one other, and raced into Liverpool because we were faster than the rest of the convoy. It took us about a week or a fortnight across there. It was a fairly rough trip. It was very rough.

#### **What was the weather like?**

Terrible because they went up very north, up towards the Antarctic and

- 34:30 the Arctic, around there.

#### **When you say terrible, tell us more. What do you mean?**

Very rough, rough weather, waves beating over the ship all the time. When you were on duty on the back, on the gun, you were sodden by the time you spent a couple of hours there.

#### **How big were the waves?**

30 or 40 foot waves at times. They'd come right over the top of the ship. The Atlantic can be very rough.

- 35:00 **It would have been terrifying?**

Oh yes! It wasn't much fun.

#### **You were on a fairly big ship weren't you?**

The Sarpeedon wasn't that big, no. I've forgotten what size it was. We had about 30 of us and these girls. That was about all. There were only about 45 or something on the ship but it had cargo as well. It was mainly cargo.



35:30 **Tell us what it was like to be in a convoy that was attacked by U-Boats [untersee- boots - German submarines]?**

Frightening. Nothing you could do. They put me out one night, I was out one night and I called out. There was a flash of white in the water and pilot handling the ship or the captain said, "Shut up ya mug! That's only a wave."

36:00 I thought it was a torpedo! You had to look for something, a flash in the water. It was pretty cold up there and very rough, a good way to get seasick, a good way to get over seasickness too. It cured you. After a time you got used to it.

**Were you in the crow's nest?**

Sort of, yes, a sort of crow's nest. It was only a lookout to see if you could see anything. The U-Boats used to come up

36:30 underneath around the convoy and they'd pick on the stragglers. It was always the slowest boat in the convoy and that was the speed of the convoy. It had to drop back to the speed of the slowest boat. They lost a few on the way over.

**Did you see the boats being sunk?**

You could see them at night time.

**So it was at night time they'd attack?**

Early of a night time.

**Why not in daytime?**

I don't know. Perhaps they had radar they could pick up better.

37:00 In daytime there was always...there were a couple of corps vets and one destroyer around, one or two destroyers in the convoy, so I suppose night time was easier for them to sneak up underneath. They possibly followed you all day and then came up underneath at night. Very efficient they were. German U-Boats were very efficient in those days. Later

37:30 on they caught up to them with their own radar system. We could pick them up then.

**Were there any particular nights where you saw a few ships being sunk?**

One night I was on duty we lost three in one night. One was in the middle of the convoy, just up in front of us.

**Were you all tightly packed?**

They were fairly spread out

38:00 but the corps vets were racing around trying to keep them altogether the whole time. Some of the old ships were pretty slow.

**Must have been terrifying.**

That's when I learned what the war was about, wasn't it? The first feeling of...

38:30 across the Pacific we never worried, from here to Vancouver but across from Halifax to England, you knew you were right in the middle of the U-Boat war then. You knew enough about it to know it was... and you were lectured enough on the ship.

**Did you lose any friends in those convoys?**

No. They were mainly cargo ships and tankers, which we had no contact with. We

39:00 all got to England, the whole of us wireless ops. I think there were about 30 of us.

**You must have been relieved to get to Liverpool?**

That was being badly bombed too.

**Tell us about the first day you arrived in Liverpool.**

When we arrived in Liverpool, we arrived there in the evening and we were off ship by

39:30 morning. They didn't leave you long in the ship, off by morning and on a train to Bournemouth. All you could see were the wrecks of the buildings around you on the wharf. You didn't get much time there, off on the train and down to Bournemouth.

**So it was pretty badly bombed?**

Yes, it was badly bombed. A shipping area was where the Germans wanted to bomb.

## Tape 4

00:35 About a week in Bournemouth and then we were given leave. Harry Robinson and I trained together, similar to look at in a way, for some reason we got a holiday house, a Lady Ryder home in England. She eventually married Group Captain Cheshire, a famous war pilot. We went up to a millionaire's house in Birmingham. He'd become a millionaire. He started off

01:00 as a newsboy, sold newspapers, then he got barges and became a millionaire but wasn't accepted in Sutton Coal Fields in Birmingham because he was a commercial. That was the rule in England. He wasn't accepted in the Upper...he was a nice old fella, he and his wife. We had a week there. Then it was back and we were posted up to Medley in Herefordshire.

**That was a very unusual system.**

01:30 **The infantry never got anything quite like this. Can you explain a bit more about how this scheme works?**

The scheme only worked to try and give people a break in between their training. She ran...she only died a while ago. We still run money for the Lady Ryder Homes through the Escape Society and through the odds and ends crowd here. It was mainly an idea for people on leave for somewhere to go,

02:00 only for overseas people, not for the local people. They could go to their own homes. It was only a way to give us a break I suppose, after coming across the Atlantic.

**Why are you called the Odd Bods or the Odds and Ends?**

We were called the Odd Bods because we were the odd bods who flew in England. We were odd bods. No one wanted to know us. This is quite true. I was at Probus yesterday and a chap, who had written a book about New Guinea, he'd read my book, and he

02:30 said, "I was amazed when I read it and I noticed you had quite a shot at the back about not being recognised here." He said, "I couldn't follow that Keith." I said, "Well Lloyd..." He said, "Now wait a minute." He said, "I went and spoke to Jack Tong, who flew and he came back with the same idea." Air Vice Marshall Sulley will tell you the same thing. We weren't recognised when we came back. Two reasons; one, we fought the wrong war. I was told that by a politician. Two,

03:00 because of being in bomber command. After the war everyone hated bomber command. Now even Churchill, chiefs of staff and all, threw all the blame back on Harris. Harris became the fall guy in bomber command. Harris saved a lot of lives, a lot of infantry and a lot of lives. He could never have won the war with his bombers. He was pigheaded about that. I agree with that. He thought if he knocked Berlin completely out, he'd win the war. Well, that

03:30 didn't happen. We practically wiped it out but that didn't win it, but bomber command saved an enormous amount of lives, and tired out one and a half million Germans. So when you look at this, we came back, people were against bombing. Dresden had got bombed, so people didn't like us. I didn't bother doing anything. We started the Escape Society and got that going.

04:00 **You mentioned earlier that because you were good at what you did, possibly too good, you almost became a tail gunner. Why didn't you want to be a tail gunner?**

Well, that was a dead-end Charlie there. They died quicker than anyone.

04:30 I was more interested in wireless. I did it a couple of times, you'll find out later on but I wanted to be a wireless op. I trained for that and had done well at that.

**What are the main differences?**

A gunner was just in the turret at the back. All he did was look out for fighters and try to shoot them down. A wireless op was very important, especially later on with all the various secret equipment we had.

05:00 He was a second to the navigator. Without a wireless op the navigator...ours got lost quite a few times! I was lucky enough to find the spot for him. (UNCLEAR) and taking sights from the stars. That's all we used in the early part, astro-sight.

05:30 **What in particular appealed to you about being a wireless op air gunner?**

Well the air gunner part didn't appeal at all but the wireless did because it was something I was interested in, electricity. I suppose being a mechanic and being an automotive mechanic, an electrician as well, it tied in with what I'd done in the automotive industry. Morse code I picked up easily luckily. I could handle that easily.

06:00 **After you were staying at the Lady Ryder home, you went from there to...?**

Medley in Hereford. That was for wireless ops to do extra training in Oxfords and Andersons, which we did. Then we had to meet our navigator, funny how they crewed you up. They had so many navigators. I

think there were 20 of us who went there, maybe 25

- 06:30 and we had 25 navigators, and you just picked one off the wall. I saw Sergeant McKenzie and being partly Scots ancestry I thought, "He'll do." So I picked him. He was the only one AWL [Absent Without Leave]. He was down with Anita strangely enough, Anita and Mrs McKenzie, Mac's mother. She befriended Anita. Her mother had died years ago and her father was sunk by a German U-Boat, and she befriended 'Neet'. They'd gone to see some
- 07:00 army blokes they knew at Salisbury. Mac had gone along with them and came back a day late. So he and I were confined to barracks, and we had to catch up. We caught up on the course and passed them all. We won! We topped the course. He was a very good navigator and we were a good combination. When we'd finished that, I think that took a month. That was mainly flying in Oxfords and Andersons, Hamdens, and that sort of thing.
- 07:30 Then we were posted to Harwell, which is near the atomic energy park, the Harwell Aerodrome and we had to be crewed up into crews. We were sergeants. We walked into the sergeant's mess this day and Mac said, "Good God, there's old Hawk Eye!" I said, "Who is that?" He said, "Hawkins. I trained with him as a pilot in America." What they did before the Yanks came into the war, in England they sent the blokes to Canada in uniform, put them in civilian clothes and sent them to America.
- 08:00 The Americans trained the pilots, only pilots. Paul and Mac were both on a Pilot's Course. Mac got scrubbed off the pilot's course. He was trying to drop Coca Cola bottles on a bridge somewhere, so he got scrubbed as a pilot. He then went back to Canada and became a navigator. That's how we met up. He said to Paul, "What are you doing here?" Paul said, "Crewing up. What course are you on?" It was the same course and Mac said, "How about Steve and I? We'll go
- 08:30 with you." That was the start of the crew. From then on we found gunners and so forth, and that's how a crew was found. You weren't crewed up by any rule or law. You found your own crew. We started up then. I went to Hampstead Norris and did some more training, back to Harwell, and the squadron leader called us in one evening or one afternoon. He said, "You're flying tonight you crew." I said, "Are we?" He said, "Yeah."
- 09:00 I said, "What another one of these dome flights up over Scotland or something? Night flying?" He said, "No. You're going to Germany mate. You're doing the first 1000 bomber raid." So to get 1000 aircraft over Germany, Harris used every aircraft he could get. OTU's [Operational Training Unit], inexperienced crews, it didn't matter as long as he had 1000 aircraft. He didn't quite get it. I think he got 900 and something, and off we went to Cologne. We bombed Cologne and luckily got back out of that one. Then the next one was Essen. This was a funny one.
- 09:30 We're were coming out of the target, I was up in the astrodome and I thought, "That's a funny sight. The North Star, the pole star is on the port side. It should be on the starboard." I said to Mac, "Where the hell do you think you're going?" He said, "Why?" I said, "The pole star is on the starboard side." He said, "Don't be stupid." I said, "Get up and have a look." He did and he said, "Good God!" He said to the pilot Paul, "Where are you going Paul?" Paul looked at the compass and said, "I've put it on the wrong way around." We were 180 degrees out. We were called the
- 10:00 'Wrong Way Crew' after that but we luckily got back from Essen.

**Just going back to the crewing up, as you say it was fairly random?**

Yes, a haphazard sort of thing.

**Your first choice was...?**

Laurie McKenzie, known as Mac.

**Apart from his Scottish ancestry**

- 10:30 **was there anything else that attracted you?**

I hadn't seen him. I picked the name off a wall because he wasn't even there.

**Because it was through him that you met your wife?**

That's right!

**Can you tell us about that?**

After we went to the squadron, 57 Squadron, we went to 9 Squadron first. It was the 9 Squadron Conversion Unit. They had Manchesters and Lancasters. Lancasters had just started. They were one of the first squadrons to have them.

- 11:00 We were sent there to do more training at 9 Squadron in Waddington. We flew in Manchesters for a start, learned after we'd done a few flights in them if one motor cut they just went "Geoong". [indicates plane crashing] That's why the Manchester was scrubbed. It was the basic Lancaster with only two 24 cylinder vulture motors. Barnes, Wallace and the head of AV Rowe decided that he wanted four Merlin motors. If he could get four Merlin

- 11:30 motors in it, four 12 cylinder Merlins, it would be a better aircraft, widen the wingspan and the tail, and it became the best bomber in the war, by luck! Then we trained on Lancasters. We were then posted to 9 Squadron. We when got there the CO said, "I'm sorry fellas, you're going to 57 Squadron." He said, "They lost half their crews last night in Manchesters, so you're off there." We arrived at Methwold and 57 had gone. They were up
- 12:00 at Scampton, so we ended up at Scampton and then after we'd done a few raids, Mac said to me, "You're only going to London on leave." I used to see Mr Anderson, Dan Anderson's brother in London and that was all I did. I went to The Strand or somewhere, Australia House. He said, "Come up on leave and come and stay with us." So I stayed with his mother, his mother was divorced and his mother's parents.
- 12:30 Then Neet wasn't a friend of Mac's. She was a friend of Mac's but they weren't going together. He had another girl called Roslyn. I only met Neet...one night we went...she had a friend Anne. They wanted to go dancing and I'm not a dancer. I'm a marcher! Anne loved dancing. The first night I ever met Neet was going dancing and I was with Anne. Anita was with Mac and she said to Anne, "How is he?" She said, "I like him.
- 13:00 He's a nice fella but he can't dance!" But then Neet married me and I never learned to dance. That's how I met her, through Mac. Some certain lady when I came back from the war, the mother of one chap who was killed, said, "Where did you meet her? In a pub?" That didn't go down well at all. I don't think Neet had ever been in a pub in her life until she came out here.
- 13:30 **There must have been a lot of relationships made in similar ways at that time?**
- I think so. A lot lost. A lot of girls got engaged to fellas...the losses were tremendous in those years. Some of the blokes were lucky if they did one trip. You'd see them come and go.
- 14:00 Later on when I was signals leader I saw more of it.
- Were there a lot of women around?**
- A lot of WAAF's [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] on the station, yes. Some of them got pregnant naturally. They got engaged to blokes who got killed, all sorts of problems. I never got close to any of the WAAF's. I didn't really. Evidently the wing commander...
- 14:30 I was only a sergeant, then a flight sergeant. He called me in one day and said, "Sign this form. You're going to be an officer." I said, "I don't want to be an officer. I'd far rather stay a warrant officer." He said, "Well you'll sit in my office until you sign it." I sat there for about two hours and I thought, "Oh blow! I'll sign the thing." He'd evidently seen something in me that he wanted and I signed up, became a pilot officer, and within two months I was a flight lieutenant.
- 15:00 I jumped the rank of flying officer, so he'd seen something. I was very good in the wireless part, even if I say it myself. He knew and could see it, and I could handle men. That was important.
- 15:30 **Before we get on to your first raids, tell me about your first flying experiences while you were still in training. How did you adapt to it? Did you take to it like a duck to water?**
- Yes it didn't worry me, even flying when I was trying to be trained as a pilot. I did a couple of solos until I got scrubbed. I enjoyed it. Just as well I wasn't a pilot I suppose. I might have killed the whole seven of the crew.
- You were no good?**
- 16:00 I landed all right yes but they just wanted navigators and wireless ops, too many pilots. I would never have made a fighter pilot. I think that was a different feel, a fighter pilot. Some of the bomber pilots they got should never have been bomber pilots. They made mistakes. They'd have been better fighter pilots but that was the mistakes made. Anyone makes mistakes in wartime.
- Do you think some of them**
- 16:30 **were suited more to risk taking?**
- Suited more to risky operations, yes.
- Did you ever have a fear of flying?**
- No. It was like going for a bus trip. You were called to do an NFT [?] or go flying, you just grabbed your parachute and Mae West [Life Jacket], stuck your Mae West on, in the parachute harness and out in the aircraft, climbed in as if you were going for a bus drive, never thought about it. You saw a few
- 17:00 smashes of course. A lot of blokes were killed in training and that shook you up a bit.
- They must have thrown you about a bit to get you used to it, a few dips and rolls?**
- Not many rolls no. Over enemy territory, yes. Weaving but never complete rolls, no. That was up to the fighter pilots to play fun and games with that. The only bloke who may have done slow rolls was Mickey Martin.

- 17:30 He was a very famous bomber pilot, I think the best low level bomber pilot. They wouldn't accept him here in Australia in the air force because he had asthma, so he worked his way over to England on a ship in 1939 and joined the air force in England, and became the best low level bomber pilot of the war. He was as good as Gibson or Cheshire.
- 18:00 **Did you ever get vertigo looking down?**
- No. It never worried me much, only when I took over rear...I'll talk about that later.
- Take us through a Lancaster and your position in it. When you got into the plane what was it like?**
- When you got in the Lancaster and you couldn't stand up. I couldn't anyway, not high enough. You'd bump your head.
- 18:30 When you got up to near where I was, there was a main spar that ran right across the aircraft. You had to climb over that, many a barked shin and knee was done on that one, climbing over that and I sat just in front of the spar. The wireless section was on the port side there. The navigator was just in front of me on the same side. The pilot of course was up on the port side. The flight engineer was on the starboard side and the bomb aimer down the front. He was the bomb aimer and the front gunner. Then
- 19:00 halfway down the back up top was the mid-upper gunner. Then right at the tail was the tail gunner. He's still alive.
- The bloke in your crew?**
- He must have been very lucky.**
- I only found him through the internet. There was this chap that was trying to do the film up north and he got onto someone in England, and sent me a...
- 19:30 I think he wrote to me about it. He then said, "I think you might find someone." I got through in England and found out on the internet and found out it was the rear gunner still alive. We are the only two still alive. He hadn't finished...no that's later. I'll tell you that later.
- 20:00 **You had a turret or a dome?**
- A turret. A turret for both the gunners and an astrodome above me. The astrodome was just a dome with a cover over it so that no light would show if you had lights on. If you wanted to go out to the astrodome you had to turn off all the lights inside, so that it wouldn't show outside. Often I used to get up there and watch for fighters, and have my
- 20:30 earphones on if there were any messages coming in, while we were over the target area.
- Did you enjoy being up there?**
- Well, I don't know enjoy it. You sort of signed up to do something and you do it. I was in it. I was in a crew. What else could I do?
- There must have been times when perhaps you weren't in danger and you could climb up into the astrodome and look at the stars?**
- When I wanted star shots, only for
- 21:00 navigation but later on you didn't need those because we had radar and all these other devices to use.
- Was there ever a time that you actually just did that for enjoyment?**
- Sometimes on the way back just to have a look out, if I got bored at the wireless and there were no messages coming through. You never transmitted, only on the way home. If you transmitted on the way it would have given you away, what you were doing. Sometimes it got boring.
- 21:30 The Germans used to jam our radio and you could hardly read the signals. You'd have to change bands all the time to pick up different messages. It used to get a bit boring and you'd get up, and have a look out there. It's amazing up there when you've got a clear sky above you and it's dense cloud underneath.
- It's hard to imagine.**
- Isn't it?
- It sounds beautiful.**
- Amazing.
- 22:00 We used to get up about 20 000 feet in Lancasters. Hallies got about 16 to 17 and the Stirlings around about 12, I think.
- When you were flying in the Manchesters were you nervous?**

Yes once we found out what happened. We had a couple crash. Once one motor went you had no hope of bailing out or getting out. The only one that had a hope of getting out was the tail gunner.

**22:30 The odds of getting killed were pretty high. When did this really sink in to you?**

Once you were on the squadron. 100 000 aircrew flew over Germany and 58 500 were killed. A lot extra were shot down as well but 58 500 were killed, a pretty high percentage.

**23:00 Did that make you nervous?**

No. I think it made you apprehensive. I was never frightened. I think if you have fear, it's like losing your temper. If you get fear you lose control. It's like losing your temper. You lose control. You get people who lose their temper, they've lost complete control. Once in my life...I'll tell you that later on.

**23:30 But something you would have fear about though? Apprehension?**

Apprehension and the adrenalin was flowing I think. The worst thing of the lot was when you looked at the battle order on the day and saw your name on the list. My stomach, you know? Ohh!

**So knowing it was going to come up?**

Once you did your briefing and once

24:00 you were briefed, and once you were out to the aircraft, that was it. That was the risk you took but you'd never get shot down. It was always the other bloke! I think that was a way of some people. I never looked at it that way. I always thought there was a fair chance of getting shot down. I never looked at it as though it couldn't be me.

**Can you take us through your first raid then?**

24:30 Through Cologne? The briefing then was quite strange to the briefings later on. All they had was a map on the wall with a bit of string on it pointing to Cologne and back, and this is the easiest way we think for you to get in. In a Wellington you couldn't fly more than about nine or ten thousand feet. "We think that's the best way in. You've got an hour and a half worth of petrol and

25:00 that's the best way to get there." So we just took off and joined in. You never went in formation of course because it was night time. You just had to be careful you didn't fly into someone else. That happened a few times. There were often crashes. We just went in and we were the third wave in. Being an OTU new crew, we were later

25:30 and to go in was an incredible sight. I got up in the astrodome on the top and looked out, and to see the whole of this city on fire was incredible. We had to go through the middle of that and drop our bombs, and turn around, and come out of it. That was an experience that brought you up to what war was all about. Dropping bombs on the enemy didn't worry me because I'd been in London and been bombed in London,

26:00 and been bombed in odd spots of parts of England I was in. I thought, "If they're doing it to us, what's wrong with us doing it to them?" It was a war. If you try to talk about it now, whether bombing was bad, that's a very different thing but when you're in the middle of a war and Britain was about to lose in 1942. They were running short of food. Churchill knew that. If you ever read his books he'll tell you that. He was close to giving in

26:30 to Halifax, who was the other one who wanted to be Prime Minister because food was being lost coming across the Atlantic, and the country was starving. It really was in trouble. So you were just fighting a war for your own existence. I think when you look at it in perspective now, it's a terrible thing to drop bombs on women and children but it was a different

27:00 act to what you were doing. I think really that a lot of these shots at bomber command, we did a lot of special raids on special targets, which are never mentioned. They like mentioning Berlin, Dresden, Hamburg and that but they don't like to specialise targets because it doesn't give them anything to have a go at.

**In the raid on Cologne did you know beforehand that this was going to be a massive raid?**

Yes.

**27:30 Were you surprised when you saw Cologne?**

Saw it on fire, yes. You wouldn't see the devastation. We just saw the whole fire, the whole city burnt. The aiming point must have been the cathedral because we missed it. That was the joke! The next one was worse, Essen. That was the worst target to bomb in Germany,

28:00 Krupp works, harder than Berlin. Berlin was hard because it was a long way over enemy territory but Essen was ringed by a five to ten mile deep belt of searchlights and about 100 miles long...80 mile long belt of searchlights. All they did was fill that with Ack, Ack. It just went all through the aircraft and around you. The fighters weren't a problem over the

28:30 target because they didn't want to get hit by their own Ack, Ack. They waited for you on the way in and on the way out but over the target!

**So there was a ferocious fire?**

An incredible sight.

**And so your plane was hit?**

We got hit on the one to Essen on the wing of it. The Wellington was a fabric aircraft, a geodetic construction by Barnes Wallace, the man who designed the bouncing bomb for the dams.

29:00 It was only covered in fabric, so when it got hit they just stuck a bit of tarpaulin over it and a bit of dope over it, and it flew again. the aircraft we flew in on Cologne and Essen were aircraft that had been taken off operations. They were just OTU, Operational Training Unit aircraft but that's the only way Harris could get what he wanted; 1000 aircraft to prove a point. He did Bremen as well. I didn't go on the Bremen one.

29:30 I think that was a failure. Some of our early raids were failures. We couldn't find the target. Once we got Pathfinders that changed.

**Do you think the raids on Cologne and Essen were successful?**

Cologne was. Essen wasn't, no, partly successful. Well if you take success as ruining a city, yes Cologne was. It was devastated but Essen

30:00 was not successful. I don't know how many raids on Essen before we really did any good, until we got a thing called OBOE [Target Marking System].

**What is OBOE?**

OBOE was a very secret thing that threw out two signals from certain parts of England and it could only go 400 miles. It could only reach the Roué and they met together, and the Pathfinder aircraft were flying on one beam, one beside another, coming in on

30:30 that, and when they got to the point, there was only a few seconds from the aiming point, the signal cut out, so they knew it was time to mark. It was done by radar but it wouldn't go further than the Roué. The Germans never found that one out. It was one that they never woke up to. A lot of other things were used, H2S and all these other things. They found some way to jam them but they couldn't jam OBOE.

31:00 It was on such an easy frequency they never thought of it!

**But it was effective?**

It was very effective.

**Moving on to Scampton where you went to**

31:30 **after Wellington, tell me a bit about the base there.**

Scampton was a pre-war base, a beautiful base, polished cedar tables and silver. We went there and we were only sergeants. We were in the sergeant's mess and eventually halfway through the tour I was commissioned into the officer's mess. Even the sergeant's mess, the messes there were terrific. They were pre-war and really set up well. We lived in

32:00 nissan huts and then they had married quarters at Scampton, which they used pre-war. They wouldn't have wives around during the war, so those married quarters were empty. They then took crews and put a crew in a whole married quarter, put the whole seven of us in, which kept you close together. That was a good thing for bonding and we lived in those. Mac, the navigator decided he'd do the washing once. He said, "I'll do the

32:30 washing." It was only a copper with coal and coke. He put everything in, pyjamas, socks! I got socks back that size by the time he'd finished! Everything went green because I had a pair of green pyjamas. We had to go and get new shirts! So Mac never got the job of washing again. Perhaps he did that to get out of it! So that's where we lived, in those quarters. The aerodrome was excellent, didn't have a runway.

33:00 There was only a grass runway. In the early days of the war they were all grass runways. They didn't have time to build concrete and bitumen runways. Scampton had a lump in the middle. When you got in the middle you sort of took off and went down again. How the dam busters ever got off with their weight I'll never know.

**The conditions sound pretty good?**

They were good at Scampton. Yes, they were excellent.

**Did you find it**

33:30 **an easy thing to fit into?**

Yes, we fitted in fairly well.

**Were there many Aussies?**

I was the only Australian. The wing commander was an Australia but he was in the RAF [Royal Air Force]. He was a chap called Hopcroft. Prior to the war, I don't know what party was in power but someone decided they didn't want these short term pilots. They got rid of them all. Mickey Martin was one. Some of the other blokes, Aussies I met, Fisher was another one,

34:00 wing commander later on in the RAF, an Australian. They all went over to England, worked their way over to England on boats as stewards or anything. They just wanted to fly and they worked their way up in the air force because they were there early in '39, so by the time we got there '42, one was a wing commander. He was quite a good bloke Hopcroft, a big solid bloke Cameron Hopcroft.

34:30 **By this stage you were becoming more of a seasoned flyer. You were getting used to the anxiety I imagine?**

Yes, quite used to it.

**Did you form any kind of rituals that you would do before you went flying?**

Yes, before takeoff everyone went out and peed on the tail plane. It was quite funny! The navigator and I always got an aircraft

35:00 first because we had tings to set up. The gunner stayed outside. The pilot went and checked, and then he came out. Mac and I had more work to do. Then we came out, had our last cigarette and all peed. The WAAF officers thought it was a great joke. Everyone at the tail...a ritual! That was about all I think and the last cigarette. I made a rule in the crew, we nearly all smoked but I had a rule that no one smoked in the aircraft. There was enough smell of petrol in there without idiots lighting cigarettes.

35:30 **Not such a crazy idea. Did you have any special clothes or a badge, or anything?**

No. I always wore a tie. Some of the fellas wore...they had a pair of knickers they'd got off some WAAF, as a cravat or a pair of stockings as cravats. Whatever was a souvenir I suppose, they wore them as cravats but I

36:00 always wore a collar and tie, which was quite a joke around the place!

**Like you were off to the office to work!**

Halfway through the tour I got decorated. I was the first one of the crew. I got a DFM [Distinguished Flying Medal]. Then later on the pilot and navigator got DFCs [Distinguished Flying Cross] when they were commissioned. I was commissioned before them but

36:30 I got my DFM when I was a flight sergeant.

**For anything in particular?**

There is a citation somewhere in the book.

**Was it for any particular act?**

No just continuous acts I think, setting a magnificent example to the squadron, so he said!

**You said it was as a result of**

37:00 **your activity there that you changed the way you thought about God and religion.**

Well, no I think that came to me when I was shot down, much later.

**All right we'll get to that later. Another change for you around this time was that you started drinking and smoking?**

Drinking and smoking, yes. Well cigarettes were hard to get in England because they had bombed some part the Germans.

37:30 They'd lost a lot of their tobacco but by that time the Yanks had come into the war and they were buying cigarettes from America, Lucky Strikes and Chesterfields. You could buy them for threepence a packet. You can imagine how many we smoked and everyone told us smoking was good for us, relaxed your nerves. I think a lot of the carry on in the messes was more high spirits than potent spirits. There wasn't much whiskey or anything like that about, plenty of beer.

38:00 **What sort of carrying on?**

All sorts of stupid tricks, climbing up poles and backwards up a pole with your feet covered in charcoal so that you could put your footprints on the ceiling. One in Scampton mess was a good one. They had some very good murals around the walls, girls with quite good breasts painted on the walls and to be initiated into the mess at times, they stood you up on the mantle piece and made you kiss one of them.



- 38:30 As you lent forward to kiss them they'd pull your hands away. You know what would happen? You'd land on the floor, so that was the initiation. 630 Squadron, when they were formed from 57 there at East Kirkby, I became their signals leader as well. Their initiation was to stand on your head against a wall and they held your feet, and they gave you a glass of gin and whisky, and you had to drink both. Try doing that upside down!
- 39:00 **I have to say that I have. I've drunk a pot upside down.**
- Have you? You know what it feels like!
- We've all done stupid things in our time.**
- It was a way to get rid of high spirits I think!
- Was there ever a time when these high spirits went too far?**
- Yes. Sometimes someone got a broken arm going over chairs and stupid things.
- 39:30 One of the funniest things I ever saw was when 617 formed the Dam Busters. I was loaned to them. Our crew was posted to 617 and our wing commander, Hopcroft knocked on the door while Guy Gibson was in viewing. He came in and Gibson said, "What do you want Hoppy?" He said, "I want this crew back on the squadron because they are the best crew I've got. They are the first one that looks like finishing a tour and the morale is
- 40:00 not good on the squadron. Everyone is getting killed and they look like finishing a tour." Gibson said, "If I did that for every bloody wing commander that walked in I would have a crew, would I?" So they had an argument and he said, "All right, on one condition. I want Stevens." I could help Hutchison on the signals. We were flying with Gibbo one night trying to get 60 feet off the deck to drop this bomb in Germany and we didn't know what they were going to bomb of course. I was flying with him
- 40:30 this night. Hutchison was sick. It was pouring rain and he said, "This is bloody dangerous. I think we'll give it up." So we came in and that night there weren't any ops over Germany. The weather was bad and everyone was in their uniform. There were no ops on. We walked in, in battles dress. Some idiot from 57 Squadron said, "Have a look at these bright blokes with all their ruddy decorations and all they're doing is flying aircraft around here."
- 41:00 I think it was Mickey Martin and Dave Shannon, they said, "Come on! Let's fix that bastard! Let's debag them all." Gibbo said, "Not Steve. He can help." I went out to the door. We had two double doors to stop black out and I've forgotten who the other bloke was. They took all the trousers off every 57 Squadron bloke and threw them out the door in the rain. The WAAF officers thought this was a great joke. Imagine some of the blokes in long johns
- 41:30 and all their trousers were thrown out, whether they had a wallet in them or not. They were all thrown out in the rain, so that stopped any arguments against 617 from then on! That was one of the funniest things I've ever seen.

## Tape 5

- 00:36 **I'm very interested in your first 1000 bomber raid over Berlin, first and only was it?**
- We did another one over Berlin.
- Can you tell us about that?**
- Who did I go with on that one? My own pilot. I did a few 1000 bomber raids over Berlin. I did 12 trips, 12 or 13 to Berlin I think.
- 01:00 **1000 plane bomber raids?**
- There were 700 or 800, about two or three 1000 bomber raids but there was always 600 or 700, in the early days only 400 but as they built bomber command up. One on Berlin wasn't funny at all.
- How many major bombing raids have you done over Berlin?**
- 12 or 13 over Berlin.
- Were there always**
- 01:30 **huge numbers of planes?**
- In the early days no. There were only 300 or 400 but then as bomber command built up, Harris built it up with Lancasters, we got up to 1000. 1040 was the biggest I went on.
- Can you walk us through the toughest raids you've been on over Berlin?**
- One we came in. It was with my first crew. We came into the target

- 02:00 area and we'd been hit on the way in. As we came in the flight engineer said to the pilot, "Where are we?" The pilot said, "Over bloody Berlin! Where do you think we are? What do you want to know for Billy?" "I just want to know." Anyway, hell was let loose as we went through the target and did our bombing, and a couple of minutes later he said, "Where are we now Paul?" Paul said, "We're just coming out of the bloody target. What do you want to know for?" He said, "Well we've used more than half the petrol." Paul said, "Well why the bloody hell didn't you tell me that before?"
- 02:30 So he eased back on the fuel. We got over the North Sea and it looked as though we were going to crash in the North Sea. I said to the pilot, "I'm going to send an SOS [distress signal]." He said, "No I won't give you permission." I said, "I'll do it without your permission." So I called as SOS and straight away you get a call back, and they hold the key down, and they give you a reading, a QDM [?], which is a direction into your own aerodrome. Heading in towards the coast
- 03:00 we knew we would never make Scampton and they changed my frequency over to another aerodrome, quickly changed me over and they called me in. We landed there and as we landed there on the drome, the four motors cut out. We had about 20 gallons of fuel left. Another night from Berlin, that was with Paul too I think. Coming back Mac got off course. Basically it wasn't his fault. The wind had changed and the wind in an aircraft
- 03:30 as you know has got a lot to do with where you go. All of a sudden we ended up over a town called Oznabrett [?], we found out afterwards. The whole of hell let loose. They must have just caught us in searchlights, hit our tail and the aircraft started to dive, and Paul couldn't pull it out. He yelled out for me to come and help him. The flight engineer was not a big strong bloke. Paul and I were hanging onto this stick and we couldn't get it back, and he yelled to the flight engineer to
- 04:00 cut the four throttles. He said, "Cut the bloody throttles!" So he cut the throttles and we pulled the stick, and we eventually got it to come back. The bomb aimer reckoned we were below the spires of the churches and it started to climb, and then he opened the throttles, and the rear gunner reckoned he'd never seen so much flame and smoke come out of four motors. Two picked up and then eventually the other two. Then we couldn't stop it climbing.
- 04:30 It climbed up to 20 000 feet again, so then Paul decided to ease the motors back. I went up and helped him. We got the stick back a bit further and we flew back like that all the way back up and down. When we got to Scampton we called them up. They told us to all bail out and send the aircraft out to sea. Mac said, "I'm not bailing out." Paul said, "Why not?" He said, "Steve's parachute is blown up." It had been hit with flak and it
- 05:00 was all over the floor. He said, "I'm not going to bail out and leave Steve behind." So we called them back again and they said, "Bail everyone else out except the pilot and wireless op, and try and land it." The rest of the crew said they weren't going to bail out either, so we all stuck in and we landed it. It was a pretty rough landing! It broke in half when we landed. They were fairly wild sort of days and fighters get on you. Coming out of a target you always got a
- 05:30 few fighters, coming in and out.

**What sort of formation would you fly in?**

No formation, all loose gaggle. You all flew your own track to the target and back. The navigator and you just worked together, no formations.

**You're talking about big bombing raids?**

Yes, no formation. You can't of a night time. It's a bit dark when you get up there.

**Does formation only apply to day time?**

Day time flying, yes. That's why the Americans didn't do night

- 06:00 flying because they couldn't navigate as well. They weren't taught the navigation as our blokes were taught. It wasn't that they couldn't do it but they weren't taught it. That's why they stuck to daylight.

**You mentioned before that the Lancaster was the best bomber in the war?**

Yes.

**What about the American B52s?**

No! They couldn't carry any where near the weight that we could carry. The Americans always had a full petrol load and then they put bombs on. We had to the target and back, and one hour over, petrol,

- 06:30 so it depended on where you went as to the amount of bombs you carried. If you went to the Roué you carried more bombs than if you went to Berlin but we could carry, the Americans couldn't carry the weight of bombs we carried until they made the one that carried the atomic bomb, the stratosphere one. Lancasters carried up to 24,000 pound bombs in the finish.

**The B24 Liberator was not as effective?**

No.

07:00 It wouldn't carry the bomb weight ours did, neither did the Fortress. The Super Fortress did. The thing that carried the atomic bomb. They were the first pressurised aircraft. We weren't pressurised and we always wore an oxygen mask. Below 10 000 feet, when we got to 10 000 feet I always had to turn the oxygen on and make sure everyone had their oxygen.

**What was so significant about**

07:30 **the Essen raid? Why was it so heavily defended?**

Because it was the Krupp works, the main German armament works. The Krupworks was the biggest manufacturer in Germany. Before the war they made pots and pans, and all that sort of stuff, and steel equipment for buildings. During the war they just went straight on to armaments. They wanted to defend their armament factory and you can't blame them. That was covered in Ack Ack and searchlights.

**What were the**

08:00 **losses like of the allied planes?**

From Essen? It was higher than any other target I think. The percentage was five, six, seven percent and you can't stand that loss. You could stand three or four percent. I think during the war it was generally about four and a half to five percent.

**Each raid?**

No some raids you only lost one percent. Some would go up depending on the amount of fighters they put up.

08:30 **Which aspect of flak did you most fear?**

If you're down low it's always light flak that is hose piped up. When you're up at about 18 000 or 20 000 feet It's all six inch shell stuff. It's pretty big stuff.

**Can they reach that high?**

Yes, they got up to that height.

**That's amazing. I didn't know they could reach that high.**

Yes, they get up there. We could get a bit above it if you got over 20 000 feet but with a bomb load on, you could quite

09:00 get there. You could get above it once you dropped your bombs. Yes amazing. Once we took a lieutenant commander from the navy submarines. The navy wanted to see what a bombing raid was like. We were an experienced crew. We got him. We took him over and he sat next to me.

09:30 He said, "Look at those lovely black clouds out there." I said, "They're not black clouds. They're Ack Ack." He said, "Gawd, I've had enough of this. I'd prefer to be in a submarine!" So we came back and later on, quite a year or so later on, the wing co [commander] called me. We'd had a few drinks afterwards and he said, "You're going out in a submarine." I said, "I'm not going out in a bloody submarine. What are you talking about?" He said, "You volunteered one night and now they're going to take you out

10:00 for a few days in a submarine in the North Sea." I had to go. He said he'd get his own back on me! So I spent four days and five nights out in the North Sea with them. They were just dropping people off.

**What was the purpose of the bombing raids over Berlin and Cologne? Did you know at the time?**

Yes. The idea of Harris was

10:30 to break the morale of the German people.

**Was it basically just indiscriminate bombing?**

No, I don't think so. A lot of it was target. There were a lot of factories in Berlin as well, a lot of aircraft factories and Brunswick was very close to Berlin. There were a lot of fighter planes made there. Cologne had a lot of factories but I think the Cologne raid originally was to prove the point that he could put 1000 aircraft over Germany. He'd just taken over bomber command

11:00 and up until then bomber command weren't doing any good. We were a failure. We couldn't find out targets. Once we got Pathfinders we found our targets. I did a lot of Pathfinding. I belonged to the Pathfinders.

**Which area were you assigned to target in Berlin?**

That depended on the map of Berlin. It depended on which area. They used to take reconnaissance photos the next day in Mosquitos after a

11:30 raid. They'd know exactly what part you'd knocked out and then they marked out another part to knock out the next night. That was really area bombing.

**Yes, area bombing.**

I have no regrets about it. People have said that to me and I've said no. "I got bombed in England by the Germans, so what the hell are you talking about? You weren't there. You didn't see it. Living out here 13 000 miles away, you don't understand." "But

12:00 we had a war!" I said, "You didn't have a war. You had a war in the Pacific. You didn't have a war in Australia. Nothing happened here. Darwin did but you didn't down here." If you read the history of it, I got one from the war museum, the Japanese were never going to invade Australia. It was too long and too far away for them. They could never have controlled the supply route. What they wanted to do was frighten them that they would.

**It was not a feasible venture.**

No.

12:30 **That's true. Were the targets you were assigned essentially industrial targets and armament targets?**

A lot of them were, a lot weren't. A lot were just big cities. Harris was an incredible man. He got the blame for it all but he was an incredible man. He had a pigheaded idea that he could win the war by bombing. That was wrong. He couldn't. I think we

13:00 all knew you couldn't win the war by bombing. You can make a mess of it and tie up a lot of people, tied up a million and a half people making bombs. Even Albert Speer, the German armament minister said that the biggest problem that Germany had during the war was the bombing raids. It mucked up their production, tied up one and a half million people, and it ruined their production for the Russian front. So that's the main thing

13:30 that bomber command did I think. It ruined a lot of cities but...

**Do you think Arthur Harris deserved his criticism?**

No. He was blamed for it. You see he never wanted to bomb Dresden. I've got his book there written by a very clever man. I also have a DVD on him. It was very well done. Harris was pigheaded about bombing. He thought he could win the war by wiping Berlin out. He couldn't win the war by doing that. He was pigheaded

14:00 there a little bit but he never wanted to bomb Dresden. He wanted to bomb Leipzig and somewhere else. The chiefs of staff, the Americans and Churchill said, "Dresden." So if he's given the order from Portal and Churchill, he bombed Dresden but when the war was over Churchill didn't want to know him, and neither did the chiefs of staff. Every commander of navy, army or air force were

14:30 all given an earldom. Harris was given nothing. He went to South Africa. The only reason he came eventually was he got a knighthood. Churchill offered him an earldom and he wouldn't take it then. He said, "I'll take a knighthood only." I think Harris took the brunt of the hatred. You've got to remember the politics after the war. Churchill, even though he was the conservative one, when Attlee [Clement Attlee, English Prime Minister] took over, Attlee didn't want to know

15:00 anything about bomber command, the Labor leader of Britain. You can't blame him. They wanted to be friends with them again, so no one wanted to back bomber command.

**When were the bombing raid over Berlin conducted?**

When?

**Yes that you were involved in?**

They started in 1941 I think, '42, '43, '44. The main Battle of Berlin was December or

15:30 November '43 to February '44.

**When you say the Battle of Berlin you mean the air war?**

Harris called it the Battle of Berlin because we went night after night. The biggest raid I went on was on my second tour with Edgars I think. 1040 aircraft went over Berlin in 35 minutes. Think of that.

16:00 1040 aircraft dropped their bombs in 35 minutes. I've forgotten how many tons of bombs there were. That's incredible. That was the biggest raid.

**What was Berlin like at night?**

It was a big city, blazing. You could see it blazing. All together I did 60 raids.

16:30 **60 raids?**

60 raids. I was shot down on my 60th raid.

**Was that twice the normal quota?**

No. The normal quota was 30 for the first two and 20 for the second all together. You were allowed to do two tours but to go over two tours you had to volunteer.

**After the first tour you had to volunteer?**

After the first tour you got six months rest. I didn't. The squadron kept me on the squadron. The squadron commander kept me there as signals leader.

- 17:00 I wasn't allowed to fly for six months but I used to fly. Everyone shut their eyes until the AOC [Air Officer Commanding] caught me once. He dressed me down. I used to just fly with odd crews. I was signals leader. I was in charge of all the wireless ops, so it meant if you had a wireless op short in a crew who was sick or something, I used to hop in and fly with them, pretty dangerous practice with all these odd crews.

**Can you walk us through a very difficult raid over**

- 17:30 **Berlin?**

I think they were all tough. Berlin was tough for the main reason that you were so long over enemy territory. Essen in the Ruhr was a three or four hour trip. Berlin was eight and a half hours. The longest trips we did were Danzig, Konigsberg, Danzig, into Poland. They took ten and a half hours. One to Friedrichshafen, which

- 18:00 is in Germany on the other side of the lake in Switzerland. That was a Zetland works and they were making a lot of radar stuff for U-Boats. We bombed that and then we went on to Maison Blanche in North Africa, and landed there. It was the first shuttle raid of the war.

**What is a shuttle raid?**

It means that we bombed Frederickshaven and didn't go back to base. We went on to North Africa and landed in Maison Blanche. Then from Maison Blanche we bombed

- 18:30 Spezia, which is on the coast of Italy. We got shot up and lost two motors, so we couldn't get over the alps on the way back, so we went back to Maison Blanche. Then we eventually flew the aircraft, Paul and I only, on three motors to Bleeder, which was a British aerodrome in northwest Africa. They took a motor out of a Spitfire and put it in because they were the same motor. Then we had to fly back via Gibraltar.
- 19:00 When you fly via Gibraltar it was frightening. As you came in every gun on every ship was aimed at you. I had to fire certain coloured signals every minute, half a minute, and keep sending messages, codes. Make one mistake and they would have shot you down. You can't blame the navy. It could be someone trying to drop bombs on them. We landed at Gibraltar and the Lancaster had never landed there before. We just made it on the end of the runway.
- 19:30 Then when we took off with a full petrol load, we couldn't test the motors. You generally run them up before you took off, test the two magnetos on each motor. They just pulled us up to the end of the runway and we took off, just got over the end of the runway, and just missed the water. We flew back to England then.

**What was your relationship like with the senior officers?**

All right except for one. I got on with them all. I didn't care whether they were RAF, well they were all RAF let's face it. I got on

- 20:00 very well with them except for one and he was a real bastard.

**Was he a senior officer?**

Yes. He was a group captain.

**What took place there?**

When we were at Scampton they decided to put runways in at Scampton, 617 and we were still there. 617 were posted to Conningsby, which was a peacetime drome and we were posted to East Kirkby, which was a new aerodrome just built. Fisher was an Australian RAF, he was our wing commander, our new wing commander

- 20:30 because we lost one in between. He flew me over in an Oxford and said, "Righto, you're in charge Steve. You're in charge of the whole set up of 57 Squadron here." I said, "I'm only a flight lieutenant." He said, "You're in charge. You've been here long enough. You know it backwards." So we went back and he said, "Righto. You can fly over tomorrow. Get some of your gear ready. Your batman will bring the rest. I'll give you half a dozen others and you set the squadron up." So I went over. It was a good runway.
- 21:00 The rest was mud and slush, terrible place after Scampton. I went to see the group captain, a chap

named Taft. I told him what I...he said, "What do you want to see me for?" I said, "I came here to set up the squadron. I came to get your permission." He said, "You don't need my permission. I run the station. You run the squadron. Get out on your own and do it." I thought, "He's a nice old B." Anyway, there was

- 21:30 nothing there. There was nothing in the officer's mess. All they had for them at headquarters was enough plates and glasses. I had to get everything. I'd never been mixed up in anything like that. I went to the cook and he gave me a few clues. I got the plates and the cups. Then I had to set the squadron up, each office, flight commander, signals leader, nav leader, wing commander's office, get telephones on and
- 22:00 tables, and all. I had three days to do it. We got it done and then they flew in. They finished the raid and flew in. I had to have it ready for them and they had to be ready to do a raid the next night. So luckily we were ready. We didn't have a briefing room. We used somewhere else. That was 57 on our own. Then they formed 630, which we had three
- 22:30 flights and they took one flight. I became signals leader of both. The group captain evidently didn't like anyone from the dominions. He called us colonials and that really niggled me. We weren't a colony. We were a dominion. We were a colony up until 1901. I was out one night...we used to go out shooting pheasants if there weren't any raids on. Guy Gibson,
- 23:00 he was our base ops officer then and the base nav officer, and the gunnery leader, we used to go out, and shoot pheasants and hares. We dropped them into a pub for a lady and the chap, who owned the pub, was a good cook. We came in this night and we'd only had one beer over at the pub, we came in, and he said, "Here comes that bloody colonial again." So I let it pass and then he really had a go. I got stuck into him.
- 23:30 I went over and said, "You want to learn a bit of history sir. We're not a colony. We're a dominion. I came 13,000 miles to fight for this country and you're the only bastard I've met in this place." So we had quite a slanging match. He then argued with me and I was bar officer, so I said to the corporal at the bar, "Close the bar. The group captain is drunk." That really upset the applecart. I closed the bar. The next morning the wing commander
- 24:00 Bill Fisher, who is still alive, we see him when we go to England, he called me in and he said, "You better go and apologise to the group captain." I said, "I'm not going to apologise. He was wrong." I said, "Yes I know he was wrong but you better go and apologise." I said, "No." He said, "Well go and see the flight commander." I said, "Righto." I went in and I said, "What do you want to see me for?" He said, "Sit down Steve. What you've got to do is go back and apologise to the group captain.
- 24:30 I know he was wrong in what he did and the way he spoke to you, and the way he's treated you ever since you came here. There's a Canadian he has done the same to but go and apologise to him." I said, "No I won't." He said, "You'll regret this for the rest of your life." I said, "No. No apologies." He said, "I'll tell you what, you have been put up for DSO [Distinguished Service Order] and an AFC [Air Force Cross]. The wing commander put you up for an AFC." That's
- 25:00 not a medal in action. It's a sort of King's medal for work you've done in the background. He put me up for a Distinguished Service Order. I said, "What the hell for? I don't deserve that." He said, "Yes you do. If you don't apologise to him he's using this as a way of knocking it back." I said, "Well he can knock it back if he wants to", which he did. I still had my DFM, so why worry? I could have had a DSO and an AFC but so what? What good would that have done me? Another medal in my drawer. So from then on,
- 25:30 when I was shot down, I came back to the squadron and there was another wing commander, Humphries, there then. He said, "Go and see the group captain." I said, "No. I'm not going to see that old B." He said, "Go on. You're a bigger man than that." I went in, I saluted him and I stood there for a minute, and he said to me, "The night you were shot down Stevens, Wing Commander Dees of 630 was shot down." I said, "Yes." He said, "Did you hear anything of him while you were down there?" I said, "No
- 26:00 I didn't. I didn't meet anyone except a couple of other RAF blokes." He said, "It would be a bastard colonial like you that came back." I said, "I'm now saluting the King's uniform not the bastard inside it" and walked out. When I went to wing commander I said, "I'm not coming back to this station. I can't put up with that." He said, "You know why your previous wing commander, Fisher left don't you? Because of him, because he was an Aussie in the RAF." He just didn't like anyone
- 26:30 from the dominions. That's the only one I struck in the whole lot. The rest were a good bunch of blokes.

### **Was he old fashioned?**

He was an older fellow from the First World War, yes. I think he was partly Dutch or something.

### **That explains it!**

It wouldn't matter much what nationality he was, he just didn't like us. He called us all colonials. Anyway, that's the only one. The rest of them were good blokes. Blokes from Cambridge, there were a couple of

- 27:00 knighted blokes that flew with us.

**Being in the air force you have a strange lifestyle compared with the army. You do a bombing raid, you come back and you go to bed.**

Mmm a strange life.

**How did that affect you?**

You got used to it after a while. I remember the wing commander said to me, "I don't know how you can stick this out Steve. I've got to get a break but you don't take a break. You've done this for over two years."

27:30 **What made you more tolerant than others?**

I don't know. I was just posted there and I just carried on, and did it.

**Did you find it a mental strain?**

Not really I don't think. I think you had apprehension every time you went on a raid, every time you saw your name on the battle order.

**Tell us about the more horrific things you saw on bombing raids.**

28:00 To see a Pathfinder aeroplane blown up in the sky is incredible. A Pathfinder aircraft carried pyrotechnics, very coloured flares of all sorts. That was your aiming point, red or yellow with blue stars coming out. They changed them every night so the Germans couldn't follow and going in on a target if you saw a Pathfinder aircraft as it blew up, it was incredible. You knew the whole seven were killed.

**You saw this happen?**

I saw that happen

28:30 a few times and you saw plenty of aircraft shot down over the target area. You'd see them shot down on the way in and the way out by fighters. It always happened to someone else, didn't it? You knew it could happen to you. Well, it's no different to soldiers in the army. They go out into a trench or go out as

29:00 they did on D Day. They went in and landed. I watched D Day from the air. We bombed sites on D Day, gun sites. Those blokes did the same thing. They went in one after another, same as the navy blokes put up with it all. I don't think the air force were any...Bennett, the head of Pathfinders, always pointed out that bomber crews had far more

29:30 courage than any other branch of the RAF but that was only his opinion. I don't think I had more courage than the army or the navy.

**They all had their own peculiar dangers.**

Of course they did. I think the danger was possibly stronger in aircrew because we lost more people percentage-wise than any other service. Bomber command was the biggest losses percentage and next to that was the merchant navy. They

30:00 lost an enormous amount.

**What about when chaps couldn't handle their...?**

We only had one lack of moral fibre fella in the time I was there.

**Was that from your crew?**

Not our crew. Another crew. I had one flying officer there who was the son of an

30:30 air vice marshal and he was a wireless op, and he wouldn't fly. He'd been there before I took over as signals leader. I couldn't get him to fly, so I made him. I put him on the battle order one night and he backed off, so I was going to put him up for lack of moral fibre, and the wing co said to me, "You're in trouble here. His father is an air vice marshal." I said, "Well he should fly. I don't care. He's not going to be on my...I've been flying

31:00 on raids when I shouldn't because he won't fly." I made him go to the doctor and the doctor OK'd him that he was fit but his father stepped in, and got him posted. That was the only one I found.

**What is lack of moral fibre?**

Lack of moral fibre was not game to fly if you were fit. You were put on the flying order, the battle order and that night if you said you weren't flying, that was lack of moral fibre.

**Was it almost tantamount to cowardice?**

Cowardice, yes.

31:30 They were drummed out but I don't think there were many done. There weren't many. He was the only one I saw out of our squadron.

**Have you seen that film called the Memphis Belle?**

Yes.

**Is that accurate?**

No.

**Why?**

It's built up for film. Some of the Dam Buster

32:00 films were built up a bit too. That was a different bomb that was on it. It wasn't even the shape of the bomb. I think they make these things for viewing, don't they? You've got to sell them. I think a fair bit of it was partly accurate. I was very fortunate enough at Scampton to meet Clark Gable [famous actor] and the other blokes with him. I'll think of it in a minute.

32:30 They were in the bar one night in a pub in Lincolnshire, the Lincoln Arms. The barmaid said, "I know that face up there. It's Clarke Gable the famous actor." He and the other chap with him was Nelson Eddy's brother, Gene Raymond, and he was an intelligence officer, and Clarke Gable was then flying in Fortresses. He did 20 raids I think over Germany and he did a lot of filming. There was a camera gun there.

33:00 I asked him about the raids and he said, "Well, you know what it's like in your night raids. The day raids were frightful, blokes just shot to pieces in the aircraft."

**So there was a high kill ratio for day raids?**

Yes, a higher kill ratio. I don't know whether their losses were not as high as bomber command because they hadn't done it as long as we had but their ratio losses were...they may not lose the whole crew but they lost a lot in the crews. They had a lot more in the crew. They had a lot

33:30 more heavy guns. We only had 303s. They had point 5s. We only had Browning 303s. I think their raids in daylight, I don't know how they did it. In the finish they got away with a lot because the Mustang when it was built in America, was a failure. The Allison motor was no good and they put in the Merlin motor, and then drop tanks on it, and they

34:00 could escort them to wherever they were going. I think that helped.

**Was that a formidable fighter?**

Oh yes!

**A ground attack escort?**

It became that with the Merlin motor.

**Tell us about the German fighter planes you came across.**

They were good. The 109s, the 110s, and it was one of those that shot me down, the JU 88 I think.

**Is that the ME 110?**

Yes.

**Twin engine?**

Yes, twin engine. The Lancaster was very vulnerable

34:30 underneath because there was nothing to see underneath. We had a thing called fish pond, which was a radar thing part of H2S, a scanner that went underneath. You were supposed to be able to pick a blip up of a fighter underneath. Messerschmitts were very cunning. They put two guns pointing up, so they could sneak underneath and just fire straight up. That's how we got shot down. That's how most of our blokes were shot down.

**So they'd just come underneath?**

Germans are very clever.

35:00 They are no fools. The Germans are very clever people.

**As the war went on their fighters got more sophisticated.**

Yes.

**Did you ever come across any ME 262s?**

No. They had the jets. Strangely enough I was in hospital here in Coonara, a funny little hospital here in St Kilda Road. This arm is held together with plates and screws. I was getting that fixed and my hip, and there was a bloke in the bed in front of me having his knee done, and he was complaining in a foreign language.



- 35:30 The specialist walked in one morning and he said, "I don't know what the hell you're complaining about Kurt. How about the bloke at the back of you?" I had one leg hanging on a hook and this arm on a hook. He said, "He's not complaining. Anyway, I'm glad both of you were bad shots. Kurt was a fighter pilot in Germany and you were a bomber!" We became quite good friends. He was one of the test pilots for the jet aircraft. They had jet aircraft before we had them.
- 36:00 **So you never encountered the ME 262?**
- No. I never saw them. They would be mainly daylight I think.
- Did you hear anything about Adolph Galland and his elite squadron?**
- Yes.
- What did you hear?**
- I heard about his fight. He was the one against Bader. I met Bader once.
- He shot him down.**
- Yes, he shot him down or one of his crew in that aircraft. He was an amazing fellow,
- 36:30 Bader, no legs. One was off up here and one down there.
- Was that as a result of being shot down?**
- No as a result of having an aircraft accident before the war. He was in the air force and he was fooling about doing loops. He hit the ground and crashed. Then they put him out of the air force of course. He fought and struggled, and argued to get back into the air force, and he eventually got in legless. That leg was off there and I think that one below there.
- 37:00 **Have you ever met him?**
- I saw him once, just once on the squadron, an amazing character, had to be.
- The other German planes were the Arado...?**
- I didn't see all those.
- Was the Arado Italian or German?**
- It was Italian I think the Arado, wasn't it?
- They used to have very fast planes. There were ones that were like little bubbles.**
- I never saw those.
- 37:30 The V1 and the V2, the V1 Rocket when they first built that at Piedmont, that wouldn't fly level. It was a giro thing and they put a girl in that. They killed half a dozen pilots until a girl volunteered, a German girl volunteered to fly and she called back before it crashed to tell them what was wrong with it. That's how they got the V1 working.
- Was she killed?**
- Mmm. We bombed Piedmont. The V1s would have been over Britain
- 38:00 earlier but we had a special raid over Piedmont one night. We were told if we hit what was there, they thought they had atomic energy there, if we hit what was there, none of us would come back. One bright gunner said, "What the hell are we going for?" We blew the place up, killed a couple of the scientists. Von Braun, the man who worked for America and put the man on the moon, he was the main scientist there. That was the V1. We blew that up and
- 38:30 they had to take it to the Hartz Mountains.
- You were also put into a commando course?**
- Yes. I did a commando course.
- What happened there?**
- The wing co said to me, he called me in one day. He said, "You're going on a commando course Steve." I said, "I don't want to go on any ruddy commando course." He said, "It will do you the world of good, get rid of you for a few weeks. You can get off ops. You silly bugger you're always flying." At Scampton aerodrome
- 39:00 it was, where they were putting the runways in. I struck the hardest, toughest, sergeant bloke I'd ever met in my life, an Englishman. He was rough. He'd been a commando and he was a warrant officer or something. Well he drove me mad. I was the only senior officer on the course. Most of them were sergeant aircrews. He drove me nuts. What ever I didn't do properly I had to do
- 39:30 again. One morning it was all going on and I thought, "If I get that bloke I'll throttle him." One morning

he had us all on parade and he said, "Sir will you report out here." I came out and he said, "Go and report to headquarters. You're wanted back." I said, "Why?" He said, "I don't know the answer to that. How did you enjoy the course?" I said, "I reckon you're the worst.

40:00 bastard I've ever met." He said, "Well I had to be tough on you. You're the senior officer. I couldn't lean towards you. Thanks for putting up with me." It did me good. Then I went back to East Kirkby because D Day was coming up. D Day was within a week or a fortnight.

**When you say commando course, was this hand to hand combat?**

Yes climbing up things, trying to kill

40:30 people with spikes on your fingers. Ughh! I think they did it with aircrew because at that stage they had a lot of aircrew there that weren't on squadrons and they were bored. They did the commando course to do that. I think the wing co heard about it and just said, "I'll get rid of Steve for a while. He can go." When I came back I said, "Yeah I'll never talk to you again." I still see him when I've been to England. He's still alive.

## Tape 6

00:34 **Where we left off you were telling us about your commando training. Can you tell us a bit more about that and specifically what you were trained to do?**

A lot of it was physical exercise to keep you fit. I think this was mainly set up for aircrew. It wouldn't be a full commando course. It was run by a commando warrant officer but it was mainly climbing up

01:00 and over things, attacking other people. We all had to attack one another, through water, crawling through water, under barbed wire. For a bloke who had been an officer in charge of a certain part of a squadron in a fairly responsible job to suddenly do that was really a difficult break! I said to the wing co when I got back, "You're a..." He said, "Well it's done you the world of good. You're as fit as anything. Look at you now."

01:30 It didn't last long after that. I got shot down about a month after!

**Did you learn special techniques for throwing a man?**

No. I learned how to break a neck, yes.

**How to put a man down with just a touch?**

Yes. That helped to...I'll tell you that later on.

**I read in your book that at one point you were sent**

02:00 **some white feathers?**

Yes.

**Can you tell us about that?**

I walked into the mess one lunchtime and there was a great heap of mail for me. I saw one and I thought, "I know that writing." I opened it and a white feather fell out on the bar. The wing co said, "What the bloody hell is that?" I said, "It's a white feather." He said, "Good God!" I read it and it was someone who knew me because it had my name, rank, decoration, number, everything. I was about to tear it up and he said, "Don't

02:30 tear it up. Send that to Australian headquarters which is in Kodak House in London, which we did. We only got a letter back. Nothing was ever done about it. It was someone here who was evidently disgruntled.

**What did it say in the letter?**

It said in the letter that I was living at government expenses, having the time of my life in the best hotels in London...half the time the bloody things were blown down...and having the time of my life just on leave around Scotland, and England, and thoroughly enjoying myself at government expenses.

03:00 I'd left Australia at its direst hour of need. I'd left 12 months before they'd even started a war in the Pacific. I have a fair idea but I've never divulged who I thought it was. I could never prove it so what was the sense in trying to prove it anyway. Who cares? I thought it was a big joke but the wing co didn't. One day Curtain [Prime Minister of Australia] came over and we were invited,

03:30 Australians to meet him, Waddington it could have been, somewhere and one of the pilots said, "I'll fly you." We went over in a little Oxford. One of the blokes asked him and he said, "No one in Australia would do that." A couple of blokes, we looked at one another and just walked off, got in the Oxford, and flew back to our station. We thought, "That's the end of Curtain. We don't want to know him any more."

He was only trying to cover up I suppose.

**You're a hard man!**

04:00 **Were there a few of these?**

A few of these white feathers, yes. It must have been a group of people somewhere in the country here had their ideas. It might have been the commos [communists], who knows? Maybe the blokes I didn't like in the Commos!

**It might have been your brother?**

It could have been but no, it wasn't his writing. I could have worked that one out!

04:30 **It's intriguing.**

Yes it's amazing how people could think that up. There are pacifists and all sorts of people, aren't there? You can understand some people's opinions. In those days you couldn't understand it. We were doing something that...

05:00 If you look back at it, to break that regime of Nazism up was incredible. Had the world had to live under that, believe me it was frightful. I lived under it for three months and it wasn't much fun I can tell you. I could never get over and never ever could accept... the Germans were very clever people, as clever as we are, look at their designs, the things they do, the things they

05:30 make, how they could ever follow the regime that he started. It's no good saying Hitler did it all. He had plenty of henchmen under him but some of the things I saw them do you wouldn't believe and I only saw part of it. There's a book if you can ever get it called Stoker. Try one of them, Dymocks or someone, they might tell you where you can get it. It's written by a young Austrian who was 17 when he joined the army. He was a prisoner at Crete. He ended up as a stoker

06:00 in the concentration camps throwing bodies in the fire because if he didn't throw them in, they'd have thrown him in alive. That's a book to read, an incredible story. There's quite an argument here between the prisoners of war in Europe and the prisoners of war in Japan because the ones in Japan got 25 000 dollars a while ago, and the ones in Europe didn't get anything. I don't want it because I wasn't a prisoner of war long enough but

06:30 some of the poor devils were there for three or four years, even long than they were in Japan. There's always an argument against why they don't look after them. You see even the gold card I've got has EDA, extreme disability acceptance plus "Prisoner of War, Europe". Now the ones in Japan have "Prisoner of War, Japan". Why the difference? Why the difference? It is all right to

07:00 say that they were all well looked after in Germany. A lot of our blokes ended up in concentration camps. There is an article there in that if you want to read it, in that bomber command there where 35 Canadians at the time I was living in France were taken and put in a concentration camp. No one was to prove when you were shot down, no one could prove where you went, like you just disappeared and that was it.

07:30 **I guess they make that distinction because of the money they may get from that government.**

They got nothing back from Japan. They won't pay anything. You can't blame this government here. It was started by Blair [English Prime Minister] in England. He gave it to the Japanese prisoners of war, the British Japanese because there weren't that many Brits prisoners of war and then

08:00 the New Zealanders gave it, so Howard [Australian Prime Minister] had to give it. I don't begrudge them getting 25 000 dollars but I think they should have given it to the blokes that were four years in Germany as well, not me. I wasn't a prisoner long enough, so it doesn't worry me. There is feeling here I know amongst some of them here with Ivor and some of them, another chap here who was a POW [Prisoner of War] in Germany.

08:30 **There is a bit of enmity between them?**

Yes. When he brings it up I say, "Forget it. Let's talk about something else."

**There is always a bit of rivalry between the RAAF and the RAN [Royal Australian Navy], and the AIF.**

Always a few anomalies that don't work. Yes.

**You mentioned before that you actually saw some of the bombing of**

09:00 **London?**

Yep.

**Can you tell us about that?**

The early bombing I didn't see, the early blitz but later on I did. Neet and I were there a couple of times. When I was decorated at the palace, Neet came down from Scotland and we stayed with the

Andersons. That night at the Anderson they wiped the street out at the back of us, bombing. The next day we were going to the palace to get our medals pinned on. I met my pilot there,

09:30 Paul. He got his DFM the same day as I did, so that was one night. Another night we were chased into a bar having a few beers somewhere in Charring Cross and we got chased out of there down into the underground railway. Often in London any time if I ever was on leave there, you'd go into the underground and there were all these people sleeping in the underground to get away from the bombing. That was the safest place to be. Imagine with kids and all,

10:00 trains hurtling past.

**Can you give us an impression of the people's reactions, the Londoners who had been living through all this?**

Amazing! They were stoic about it all, the same as the Germans must have been, what we did to them. They put up with it. Some of them sent their children out into

10:30 the country and then brought them back again later on but they just put up with it. Everyone knew it was going to happen at some time. We used to get intruders come in at times and we had a couple of aircraft shot down just as they were coming in to land. The Germans would send an intruder in. He snuck in under the radar and if we didn't pick him up he'd just shoot one down but it was warfare. It's between armies and

11:00 air force isn't it?

**A lot of confusing things happen in wartime and maybe that explains the white feathers from Australia, because people don't know.**

Yes, I think so.

**I guess a lot of people in Australia were ignorant of what was happening...?**

Over there, yes

**They wouldn't have had much idea of the role of bomber command.**

No, they wouldn't and they were here mainly worried about the Japanese

11:30 War and that's fair enough because it was closer to them. The other was a long way away. When you look at the casualties most of the casualties were in the European War, far greater casualties than there were in the Pacific War. 68 percent of casualties were in the European War, of Australians.

**That's all Australians?**

Army, navy and air force.

12:00 **Tell us about the process of getting a DFM and going down to London?**

You had your medal, you had your ribbon on. You got that when it was passed through. When the wing commander recommended you, you got it. Then you were sent to the palace to have it pinned on by the King. Neet came.

12:30 They were all sitting in the gold room on chairs. All the blokes were in the toilets smoking and of course the smoke was pouring out the toilet window. Up came the guards, "Stop this smoking!" They thought the palace was on fire! You can imagine! Then they brought you all up one after the other. They played the national anthem for whoever was coming up. When the Aussies...when I came up they played Waltzing Matilda because we didn't have a national anthem! You step forward and bow to the King.

13:00 You haven't got a cap on. He pinned it on and he said, "I've seen you before Stevens." He had but he wouldn't remember me. The Lord Chamberlain had a note and he must have said you've seen him at Scampton before. He stuttered a lot, the King. We'd had lunch with the King and Queen at Scampton when they came up after the Dam raid. They drew straws. I was invited because I'd done a bit of flying with 617. They drew straws amongst some of the officers and we

13:30 had lunch with the King and Queen. We moved around so that everybody got a chance to sit next to them. He had an awful stutter. You were told just to wait until he got it out but he just said to me, "I've seen you before Stevens. What did you get this for?" I made some stupid remark about being a good boy. You stepped back, bowed and walked on. Then as you walked on further a hand came out and took it off you. It was hanging on a little hook, put it in

14:00 a box and further on they handed you the box back. That was it.

**What was your relationship with Anita at this point?**

We were engaged at that point, yes. We got engaged in January '44. When I finished my first tour Mac,

14:30 the navigator went out to India with Squadron Leader Leyland. They went out to test a Lancaster in the heat in India and he wanted me as the wireless op. The wing co said, "No way. He's the signals leader. He stays here." So I never saw Mac again and I just stayed friendly with...his mother then wrote to me,

and said, "Even though Mac has gone to India you are still welcome to come and stay here." I did and that's how Neet and I became friendly. We'd been friendly before that but that's

15:00 how we got closer.

**How did you manage to keep seeing her?**

When I got leave but I never got my full leave. Every time I went on leave some idiot recalled me with a telegram. "Report back immediately." There was always some reason. The last time was D Day. No the last time I was up there...I left her on the Thursday night it must have been and

15:30 I was shot down on the Saturday. I got back to the station on the Friday and I was shot down that night. I was recalled because of something. I've forgotten what. They were going to post me somewhere else but I never got posted there. I ended up in France instead.

**After you got your DFM, eventually the rest of the crew were decorated as well?**

The pilot got a DFM.

16:00 The navigator got a DFC and then the gunners hadn't done the full raids. When we finished our full tour I'd done 34. Paul had done 30 odd. He collapsed in the finish. His nerves had gone and strangely enough we were going to Cologne on our last trip on the first tour, and he collapsed over the North Sea. We had a second pilot onboard, George Holmes A Court. He would be an uncle of the Holmes A Court here.

16:30 Paul just collapsed and we dragged him out of the seat, dragged him back on the bed, pushed the other bloke in and said, "Fly the so and so thing." I got Paul back on...there was a bed in there, a rough sort of a bed, put him on that, strapped him down and put oxygen on him, and let him there. Then Mac and I were the senior ones of the crew, so we decided we wouldn't go on to Cologne. We weren't going to fly in with a sprog pilot on our last trip, so we dropped the bombs into the North Sea, and came back. When we

17:00 landed I called up and told them but they didn't know that we had a second pilot onboard. When we landed Hopcroft was there, the first wing commander we had and they followed us up with fire carts and ambulances as we landed. I opened the back door and he said, "I'll get you a VC [Victoria Cross] for this Steve." I said, "What the hell for?" He said, "That was a good landing." I said, "Don't be stupid. Sergeant Holmes A Court." He said, "He wasn't in your aircraft." I said, "Yes he was." He said, "He's not on the battle order. If we'd lost him we wouldn't

17:30 know where he was!" I said, "You can argue that one with the adj [adjutant] but it's nothing to do with me. Here he is. He's the one who flew the aircraft." So we were lucky we had him onboard otherwise Mac and I would have had to try and land the thing. He must have been an uncle of this one.

**Can you tell me a bit about the WAAFs and what they were involved in?**

They were involved in everything. They drove tractors,

18:00 carted the bombs out to the aircraft. Some of them worked in the...the armament section was underground of course with all the bombs in it. They used to take these tractors in with trailers on, collect all the bombs and bring them out to each aircraft. They used to help some of the blokes put them on the aircraft. They did everything. They did that. They controlled the air traffic control of a night time. They were always there on the traffic control. Some of them worked as cooks.

18:30 I lost my batman. The group captain pinched him. He was a good bloke. I ended up with a woman batman. She was hopeless. She used to darn my black socks with white thread!

**That's a heinous crime!**

She did a good job I suppose. The night I escaped and got back to the squadron, they said to me you can sleep in your own bed because your room, the

19:00 flight lieutenant is away that's in there. This is funny. We all got pretty full. By the time I went to bed they'd put a great sunflower in the bed alongside me they'd pulled out of the ground outside. I woke up the next morning and this WAAF batswoman came in, and fainted. She took one look at me and went "boom" on the floor. She couldn't believe that I was...you know? It was quite funny. We had to revive her with a bit of water.

**I'm sorry. I don't follow this one?**

19:30 She came in. The batswoman always came in the morning to do your clothes and Muggins is in bed. She wouldn't expect me to be in bed. I'd been shot down three months before, so she just took one look and fainted. It was quite funny.

**She must have thought you were lying in state?**

I'd forgotten about that. That was quite funny.

**You mentioned before about your**

20:00 **pilot got sick for a while?**

We both got a bad wog [illness] in the Middle East when we went to Bleeder and Maison Blanche. He had it worse than I did. It was a sort of dysentery. Paul had been studying to be a doctor. His mother and father were in Kuala Lumpur. I think his father was a senior consul in Kuala Lumpur. They were both murdered by the Japanese and up chucked up.

20:30 He'd started flying before that and I think those sorts of things evidently caught up with him. It was a fairly hair raising business and very physical on a pilot flying. You never flew straight and level over Germany. You were up 500 feet, down 500 feet, over to the port, over to the starboard. You flew in a sort of a gaggle like that. If you flew straight and level you wouldn't live. So I think weaving

21:00 and climbing all the time just took too much out of him, plus the dysentery but he was grounded then. I met him. He was a flight lieutenant in the finish. He was an instructor.

**You were all under a lot of strain. Was there anyone that suffered because of the strain?**

No. The crew all stuck well together. Only the two gunners were left and the flight engineer, they had to do

21:30 more raids. They hadn't done their 30, so I made sure when I was signals leader, I knew the gunnery leader very well, I made sure they both flew in good crews to finish their tour. Kim got a DFC, Kim the rear gunner. I put him up for that. That was the only other decoration. He's the one that is still alive in England.

22:00 **When you mentioned before that you had to put a chap up for LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre], can you explain how that process works because we don't actually speak to many people who have done that?**

It never got off the deck because his father got him posted somewhere. His father got him posted. What happened was it went before the medical board. If the doctor said he was fit for flying and he didn't

22:30 fly, then he was posted as cowardice. LMF they called it. Then it had to go before a court martial but that never got to fruition because his father got him posted away to save him.

**Was there anyone that cracked up and just cut loose?**

Some of them were taken off ops, yes. Some of them cracked up. We had the odd navigator and the odd

23:00 wireless op that cracked up. He just said, "I can't fly any more." I said, "Well go over and see the doc." The doctor said, "I think his nerves have gone." So he was just posted away on a training unit somewhere. That was fair enough if they couldn't take it any more. A few gunners I think that happened to.

**The Catch 22 didn't apply?**

If you could prove that he was...

23:30 if the doctor could prove that his nerves were gone, that's fair enough. It was only when they refused. I think it was only when there was a definite refusal that it went to lack of moral fibre. If they came to you and said, "Look, I've had enough. I can't take it any more." That's fair enough.

24:00 **Do you know of any men who perhaps didn't go that far but displayed reckless or erratic behaviour because of the strain?**

Some of them drank too much and carried on. We had a concert pianist, a well known concert pianist and he used to play the piano in the mess before takeoff, and coming back from raids. He played all the concertos and he just collapsed in the finish.

24:30 It got too much for him. He was a navigator.

**Getting back to the idea of area bombing, perhaps a controversial tactic, did the men discuss this at all?**

I don't remember that. You see you got far away from them

25:00 on the second and third tour. As signals leader all you're interested in is your wireless ops and the other leaders. You all mixed together. You weren't mixing with the whole of the crews. You were sort of an elite area. I think I remember one pilot complaining once to the wing commander. I wasn't in that. I just heard the story

25:30 afterwards.

**But it was mentioned that somebody had complained about it?**

But not many. He was the only one I knew of.

**There must have been some conversation in your briefings?**

Not in briefing, no. In briefing they'd say, "Your target tonight..." and whatever it was. Perhaps 57 Squadron were a very tough bunch. They were

- 26:00 a very tough squadron. They'd been going from the First World War and they might have changed it but their motto was, "The body dies but the spirit lives on." No, they were all a fairly tough bunch of blokes. Good wing commanders, we had really good wing commanders. One poor devil only lasted three weeks. I can't even remember his name but the other wing cos were good, two Australians and then another blokes, Humphries came along.
- 26:30 **We're probably up to the point now where you got shot down. That's a bit of an epic tale so you had better tell us now or forever hold your peace!**
- I came back from leave as I told you, a day before. It might have been that day. No it was that day. I came back on the Friday. I'm sure it was a Friday. I came back. I arrived out of the...
- 27:00 we used to come back by train. I arrived out of the station, just rang up the station and they sent a car down to pick me up. I arrived back, went straight into the office and my deputy signals leader, Dick Gouch [?], I said, "What's wrong Dick?" He said, "There's a raid on tonight as far as I know." It was about eight o'clock or nine in the morning. He said, "I'm flying with my crew. You better take over as signals leader."
- 27:30 So I did and a pilot came in, chap named Owen. I'd just seen him in the mess, a pilot officer. He said, "I'm minus a wireless op. My wireless op is sick." I said, "What's his name?" He told me. I had a look down. So I check with the Doc. He said, "Yes. He's got a dose of the flu." I said to the wing co, "It's a maximum effort tonight isn't it?" Every aircraft that is serviceable must fly, otherwise if it didn't, you'd have to report it to group and look out. Cochran would be
- 28:00 really on to you, Air Vice Marshal Cochran. I said to the wing co, "We're minus one wireless op." He said, "Have you got a spare?" I said, "No. I haven't got any spares." I said, "I'll go with them." He said, "You're a bloody idiot." I said, "Look I don't know the target but I don't want to know it now." He said, "It's in France somewhere." I said, "Well for goodness sakes. It's only a two or three hour trip. I'll go with them." He said, "You're a nut." Anyway,
- 28:30 I did the briefing with the wireless ops and then I had to do a main briefing. Then I came down to sit with the crew. They all went to stand up. I said, "Sit down." They were all sergeants and the pilot was a pilot officer. I think the navigator might have been a pilot officer. I said, "It doesn't matter what rank I am. We're just all flying together tonight." The wing co said to me, "You're still a nut!" I said, "Oh Well! It's only over the coast and back."
- 29:00 Little did I know it took me three months to get back. We went in and we got hit with flak on the way in. It was St Leu d'Esserent, a place where they had 4000 V1s underground in caves where the limestone had come out of there and built most of the churches in Europe. It went in 100 kilometres, the caves. They had 4000 V1s and V2s there. The Yanks had
- 29:30 tried to hit it and our blokes had been there two nights before. Cheshire tried to mark it and couldn't mark it because it was a very dirty night evidently. This night...I've forgotten who marked it but anyway, on the way in we got hit by Ack Ack and the pilot was thinking about turning back. I said, "Cut it out. The thing is flying. We came over here to drop bombs. Let's finish it off." So we went in, dropped our bombs. We were in the last
- 30:00 of the raid because inexperienced crews were put in at the back of the raid. As we came out of the target we got hit with a fighter. It came up underneath and gave us a burst. Luckily it didn't hit any of the crew but made a mess of the aircraft. It was on fire alongside me and the port wing was on fire. Then the starboard wing caught fire. The navigator must have
- 30:30 said to the pilot...he pressed the button for me. I said, "No, I'm on the intercom." He said, "What do you reckon?" I said, "Well you're the captain of the aircraft. But if you get back you'll be minus everyone else." He said, "Righto! We'll bail out." I said, "I'll go down the back end because there's four of you to go out the front." I had to blow up all the IFF [Identification Friend or Foe] secret equipment and the Fish Pond, and the radar, all that stuff, the H2S. I had to put the detonators in them and blow that up, and grab the Rice Code, and eat it because
- 31:00 that was your code, in case the Germans caught you with it. By that time it was a real mess. I headed down the back and was on fire. I grabbed a fire extinguisher and stopped the fire. The rear gunner had gone. He was a Canadian. I heard him say, "Go". When I got to the door, the rear gunner was stuck in it. He panicked, only a young bloke, a young Aussie, the only other Aussie in the crew. I pushed and shoved, and yelled,
- 31:30 and tried to get him but he didn't feel like moving. I thought, "Blimey! We're both going to die in this thing." So I pulled his legs apart and jumped out. I thought, "If he wants to stay there I've done all I can for him." As I went out the pilot must have tied the control or pulled it back because I felt it start to climb, that means he'd pulled the stick back so that he could bail out the front. As I went out the tail plane came up and broke my shoulder, and hurt my back, and then I couldn't pull the parachute. I couldn't move

- 32:00 this arm. I eventually got it up. I must have pulled it up, pulled the parachute and it opened. The rear gunner eventually, after seeing me go he followed me. When I got back to MI9 they said, "It was the best thing you could have done. It gave him the courage to follow you." Then I floated down. I was a bit sick at that time. It was 18 000 feet and minus oxygen, which you need from 12 000 feet up but evidently being fit enough at the commando
- 32:30 course, I was still getting on all right. Then they were shooting the parachutes down on the way down. Ack Ack was shooting parachutes down. They missed me luckily and I crashed on the edge of a German aerodrome on the side of the runway. I pulled the parachute underneath me. I saw all these lights as I hit the ground. I thought, "I'm seeing stars." It wasn't. It was the lights of the runway.
- 33:00 I jumped over a bit of a fence. There was some corn growing there and being a country kid I knew not to run across the corn. I ran down the edge until I could run up with the corn, so that I wouldn't flatten it all. I ran into the middle of it and got rid of my parachute harness and Mae West, and dug a hole with the parachute harness, and put the parachute in there. I saw a copse up the road, a bit of a wood, so I raced up there and got into that. I sat down under a tree and I thought, "Now I'm in a fix! Blimey!"
- 33:30 I started to feel sorry for myself. "Blimey after all these raids I get shot down on this stupid raid." I'm feeling sorry and all of a sudden I said, "Pull yourself together you idiot. You've given lectures on how to escape. Smarten yourself up." So I shaved my moe [moustache] off, which was a giveaway. We had a little razor about that wide in the kit, in the escape kit. I opened the escape kit, got rid of that and all that was in it was some Horlick's malted milk tablets, and benzedrine pills,
- 34:00 and a plastic thing that you could water in, like a balloon, it was pretty hard rubber, and another pouch with money in it, French money, and a hacksaw blade with one end sharpened like a razor. I put that up my sleeve and I cut the top off my boots. You could cut the top off your boots and just use your boots. There was a knife in the boot to cut it off. I decided that I better not start walking.
- 34:30 This was about two or three o'clock in the morning. I thought, "Well I better hide here somewhere, no good under this tree." I got in a bush, a big bush and got myself in there. I was a heavy smoker of course and in the morning I was about to light a cigarette when I heard some guttural voices. I thought, "Blimey they're Huns [Germans]!" It was the Germans walking up past me all day because their mess was down the end and they were walking up to the aerodrome. I had to spend the whole day without a cigarette.
- 35:00 Then two corporals I think they must have been, came in with dogs looking because there were so many shot down that night. We had 242 aircraft and we lost 44. They put the whole of the German fighter force of that area on us that night. They knew what we were trying to do. There were 210 110s and 109 109s, and a few JU 88s, so we had a far opposition against 240 of us.
- 35:30 I found this out afterwards of course. I didn't know that at the time and I just stayed in the bush all day until night time when it became darker. That's the best time to walk and I got my compass out, and realised I was going the wrong way, so I turned around, and went the other way. I must have spent three or four days hiding at night time, sleeping in the woods, nothing to eat but mangle worts.
- 36:00 Don't ever eat those. They feed cattle on them. They gave me dysentery and I've suffered with that for the rest of my life. I think anyone that has eaten the rotten things...it rots your guts out but that's about all I could eat, water out of the roads with this plastic, this rubber thing we had and you had a pill you could drop in the water to make the water better to drink, purify it. Then I was in the woods one morning and I heard some
- 36:30 blokes whistling the Marseilles. I thought, "I know that tune. It's the Marseilles." They must have known I was in there. They came in and I thought, "Oh well I've got to talk to someone." They couldn't speak English and my French was PA [?]. They then gave me a bit of bread. Oh they came back later on with some old clothes that I put on over the battledress and gave me a bit of bread. They said, "Come on." They took me
- 37:00 through a town and we got caught in the middle of the town by the Wehrmacht, the German Army. You can imagine what I looked like. I had this great sandwich with a bit of pork in it, chewing it and they made me go like this, make out you were silly. They had an identity card, which they'd given me, which was good enough to pass. God knows how! They passed us, the Germans and let us go. This big German sergeant gave me a kick in the backside as I went out.
- 37:30 We hadn't gone far from the village and they said, "We'd better break up. It's too dangerous." They went off and I went on my own again. I found a wood and spent the day in there. I must have gone for eight or nine nights. I've forgotten how long. I was getting exhausted with not much to eat. I ended up in a woods and I woke up in the morning, and I looked out, and I saw an old farmer and his
- 38:00 wife working in the field. I thought, "Well I've got to do something. I've run out of energy. I've had nothing to eat for about 12 days." I had dysentery and my shoulder was driving me mad. I thought, "Well I've got to get on my own." So I went out to talk to the two of them. The old bloke, I thought he'd been old enough to have been in the First World War and he would hate the Germans. Luckily I pointed up, "RAF".
- 38:30 I undid my old...showed him my battledress. I'd taken all my epaulets and ribbons off it. He chucked me



in a dray, threw some straw over me, drove me into a town I found out later was Pronlery [?]. Drove me into his house where he was, closed the gate, drove down, backed the horse down and pulled my foot to say get out. I got out and wiped the straw

- 39:00 off, and there were two little girls, one of 11, and one of about 9 I think, two daughters in the house, in there with them. Imagine leaving this dirty, dishevelled, unshaven, dirty looking idiot with these two kids! He went off to work in the fields naturally. He had to in the day. The kids looked after me, gave me some black bread, made some Ersatz coffee, which was made of acorns. Terrible stuff but it was better than nothing.
- 39:30 During the afternoon the front gate opened and some Germans came in. They put me in a pantry with all the pots and pans in there. The funny things you think of, I thought, "Gee if I hit a pot or pan, or sneeze I'm gone." The Germans knocked on the door, spoke to the kids and the kids knew a bit of German. They wanted a drink of water, so the kids gave them a drink of water. They just looked in and went off. That night at about six o'clock I suppose,
- 40:00 the old chap, Robert Alexander and his wife came back. Our language...they didn't have anything, a dictionary to...so our language was a bit of a battle of wits. When it became dark, a tall, fairly solidly built bloke came in, a Frenchman. Later I got to know him as Georges. That wasn't his right name naturally. They all had nom de plumes.
- 40:30 He had a knife and was ready to cut my throat. He didn't like the dark blue uniform because the German Air Force was a dark blue uniform. He thought I was a spy put in amongst them. I produced a photo of Neet I had in my cigarette case and some English or Scottish cigarettes I had but that didn't ring a bell. He had this knife up at my throat and he was ready to kill me. I thought, "This is a good way to die, in a bloody French farmhouse, after
- 41:00 all I've been through!" Eventually I must have convinced him of something because he went away and he brought back this lady. She could speak English, an intelligent woman. I found out later that she had been a director of Coty's Perfumes and had been in Australia.

## Tape 7

- 00:35 She came in with Georges and I found out later on that she had been the Manageress of Coty's Perfumes, and had been in Australia selling her wares out here. She then asked me the names of all the stores in Australia, which I knew a lot, even the one in Launceston at that time because I had a cousin who worked there. Then she asked me and this is a tricky one,
- 01:00 asked me the name of the hotel on the corner of Swanston Street and Flinders Street. I said, "Young and Jackson's." She glared at me and Georges knife came closer. All of a sudden I looked at him and I thought, "I know what it is!" I said, "It's the Prince's Bridge Hotel." She jumped up, both arms around me, two kisses on each cheek! I think the whole lot kissed me, kids,
- 01:30 even Georges put his knife away. He started to kiss me. I had two kisses on each cheek, great hugs and the kids, everyone joined in. It proved that I had come from Australia. She knew that because if you look at that hotel, on the Swanston Street side it's called The Prince's Bridge Hotel but if you didn't look at that, you wouldn't know. You'd know it as Young and Jackson's. Everybody knew it as Young and Jackson's, so luckily I had the answer. So then
- 02:00 she stayed and asked a few more questions, and I answered them. She was in charge of the whole resistance in northern France, a very clever woman. We used to land our aircraft on her property and pick up spies, and all sorts of things, Lysanders aircraft. I never saw her again. She disappeared. Then Georges and I became quite friendly. The next morning, Georges never came out
- 02:30 of a day time. I found this out afterwards, why. Early in the war when the Germans occupied France they called up all the young men as enforced labour. Georges disappeared. He wasn't going to get called up, so they grabbed his father, Poppa Morel, who I got to know later. They put Poppa in the clink [jail] and the Gestapo said they'd shoot Poppa if Georges didn't turn up. So Georges gave himself up. Poppa was let out. Georges was taken to work in Essen
- 03:00 as enforced labour but strangely enough he escaped from Essen one night I was bombing it. We found this talking one night. He got back to France. The other three he escaped with he never heard of. I think they were killed. Georges then never came out of a day time. His proper name was Roger but he took on the Georges and another name. I didn't see him for quite a while. Then next morning after the OK, this old chap turn up. It
- 03:30 was Poppa Morel, his father and a very attractive young lady, his daughter Nanette. "Could I ride a bike?" They found out the night before. "Yes I could ride a bike." So they turned up with a bike, Nanette and Poppa, and this bike for me, which didn't even have tyres on it. It had grass and old tyres on it. If you had a good bike the Huns would take it off you. It had a bran bag on it for a saddle. Boy it was rough! I think it was made in 1812. Anyway,

- 04:00 it was a bike. They were going to take me to another place called Remerangles, which I found out later on. We set off. We hadn't gone more than about a couple of mile and Poppa's tyre blew out. He had to get off and give up, so poor Nannette and I, a little girl, she'd be about 18 I suppose, and she had the job of leading me to Remerangles. I'd get on the wrong side of the road now and again.
- 04:30 "Get back over this side." I ended up running over the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK of some old farmer and he kicked up a row. We eventually passed a few German cars, staff cars and eventually got to this place Remerangles. It was an estaminet. I think it was quite funny. I used to play bridge with the Church of England Catholic padre. The Church of England padre said, "Steve if you ever get shot down you'll end up in a pub."
- 05:00 Here I ended up in an estaminet. Nannette then left. Mamma Morel was there, a big solid woman. I find out then that she was living with another bloke. Poppa wasn't with her then. He'd left. She was living with this other bloke. Poppa owned the property and they paid rent to Poppa while they ran the bar. It was a funny family set up. The next morning another girl turned up and I thought it was the same one as the night before. The next one was Renee.
- 05:30 It was Nannette's sister. Boy was she a wild girl! We used to go out sometimes with her and blow up bridges. We never succeeded in blowing a bridge up. We used to blow a lot of railways lines up but old Poppa Morel worked for the Germans. He was a cunning old fox. He was in the resistance but he worked for the Germans and he was repairing the railway lines. He got paid by the Germans to repair the railway lines, old fox!
- 06:00 He had been a blacksmith before the war. He made me a ring strangely enough, out of French coin, a signet ring with the Cross of Lorraine on it, which the last time I went back to France I gave to his grandson. He was a very clever old bloke, a real rough old Frenchman, great big tummy with a belt underneath it, loved his grog and whatever food he could get. Food was very scarce. One meal of the day might be
- 06:30 beans. The next day would be potatoes but whatever they had they gave you. You got the same as they ate. One morning I was sitting in the kitchen listening to the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation]. They had a radio hidden in the wall and they had a mirror at the door to see if anyone was coming in the front. I looked up and there was a Gestapo officer and a couple of SS [Schutzstaffel German special guard] officers walking in the front door. I turned the wireless [radio] off quickly and closed it, and put the plates in front of it.
- 07:00 The old bloke, old Pierre wasn't about. They came up to the bar, so I grabbed a tea towel, threw it over my arm and raced into the bar. "Cognac!" Cognac they wanted. So I grabbed the bottle of Cognac and put up three glasses. I went to pour it and they grabbed the bottle, and poured their own. I looked in the kitchen and there was Poppa. He was as whiter than that sheet of paper you've got there. I looked at him as much to say, "If you do anything we're gone!" So they had about three rounds.
- 07:30 I don't know how much cognac they had and they were going to walk out, and I banged the plate as much as they haven't paid, so they threw a Francs on it, and walked out. Thank God! They walked out the front door and left the door open, so I walked slowly down, and closed the door. I came back and Pierre and I finished the cognac off! Amazing! They never woke up to who I was. Incredible!

#### **What about your accent?**

I didn't speak to them.

- 08:00 I went like this, "Mm, mm, mm" like I was dumb and couldn't talk!

#### **And they fell for that?**

They fell for that. It's the luck of the game. Prior to that during the time that I was on my own, I got caught a second time. I got caught the second time by the Gestapo. I was walking along one morning,

- 08:30 two days before I met old Robert Alexander and it was my own fault. It was too light. I dived off the side of the road but these two SS corporals picked me up in a thing like a jeep. They had a couple of guns, took me to Gestapo Headquarters, I found out it was, in Compien. They put me in a room. Then one bloke came and took me, put me in a room
- 09:00 with a Gestapo officer. If you said fear, that's the first time I felt fear! I think for a minute I panicked. You look at a Gestapo officer in a black uniform with a Nazi band on here, his cap on the table with the skull and crossbones on it, and on his lapels, with his black uniform, and leggings, it would make you panic. I thought, "That's no good. If you panic,
- 09:30 you're lost." He started different languages. He knew what I was. He did the unforgettable thing; you never turn your back on the enemy. He did and the commando course worked. I dived in the back of him and knee up on his neck, hands across the mouth, so he would yell. Whether I broke his neck I'm not sure but I did him a bit of harm anyway and I grabbed the hacksaw blade, and used that
- 10:00 a bit. Then I left him on the floor and jumped out the window. I thought, "I'm really in strife here. If I'm caught this time it's caput." I got into a barn and there was a funny sort of part of the barn up high, with a ladder there, with a whole lot of straw on it. I raced up the ladder and pulled the ladder up after

me, and pulled the straw over me. During the day I heard a noise down below and I thought, "I wonder what that is?"

- 10:30 Anyway, I looked out. There was a funny little window and I looked out during the day, and the Gestapo had brought back three blokes, and just shot them, three Frenchmen. They just lined them up and shot them. One of them was one of the blokes who helped me a few days before. Another bloke they hung. They didn't tie his hands or anything. They just put him on the rope and pulled him up, and let him hang. So I stayed
- 11:00 the night in there and I heard this noise down below, and early in the morning I thought, "I'd better get out of this." It was still dark. I got out. I didn't find anyone down below but 15 years later at one of our Escape Society dinners, we all gave a little resume on it and a chap jumped up, Dick Foden. He said, "I was the bloke down below!" He said, "I saw what you saw." He said, "I didn't know there was a noise. I heard a bit of a noise up top."
- 11:30 I said, "Well I must have heard you moving around." That was it. He has since died. Anyway, I got out of there and disappeared, and the next day was when I got picked up by Robert Alexander. So had I have been caught, caput. I wouldn't have been too popular I don't think. The Gestapo, what I saw some of them do and the SS in France, was incredible. One boy and girl were
- 12:00 caught putting sugar in the tank of a Gestapo car. They got the boy and tied a weight around his testicles, and left him in a wardrobe for two days. You can imagine what happened to him. The girl, they did the unspeakable things to. Incredible.
- 12:30 The family had a meeting and made me president of a court. They had a court to what to do with the girl. They decided just to take her out and shoot her. They couldn't do anything else. They'd done shocking things to her. The boy staggered around. I didn't see him for quite a long time after that. They'd walk down the street and shoot someone who got in their
- 13:00 way. How could you have white educated people? Whites are supposed to be educated. Why could you have them walk down the streets and have them do the things they did to people? How can they be better than any other race and yet they were clever educated people the Germans. How did Hitler and his cohorts of Nazism, how did they educate these fellas to be so cruel? They could throw people in an
- 13:30 oven alive. For goodness sake they weren't even dead some of them in these concentration camps and look who they killed, the Jews, and their own people they killed. They don't want to admit they killed their own people because that doesn't look good. They don't mind now they know about the Jews. That's where religion went 'Boom', after seeing what they had done there. I couldn't believe it, some of the things that happened to them, some of the things that the
- 14:00 French Resistance people told me had happened to their families.

**What sort of things did they tell you?**

They'd taken them away and tortured them. You might have read in my book, there's a sign that the Germans had on all the buildings, "Any male caught assisting any aircrew, British airmen, will be immediately court marshalled and shot. Any female caught helping any aircrew

- 14:30 will be taken to court and then put in a concentration camp." But they didn't tell you what they did first. They raped them first before they put them in the concentration camps. They even raped some of the blokes. Resistance can tell you this.

**Raped some of the guys?**

Yes.

**Are you saying it was homosexual activity?**

Yes. It wouldn't worry them. The women then were stuck in a concentration camp. Some were shot but a lot of them were stuck in concentration

- 15:00 camps. Those were the things. They knew these people. They had lost part of their families. They were working in the resistance, so they knew what had happened to them. Fresnes Prison in Paris was the place where they tortured them mainly, got the information they wanted and then when they got that, sent them off to concentration camps or took them out, and shot them there.

**What year was this?**

It was '44 when I was shot down, July

- 15:30 '44, a month after D Day, the 7th or 8th of July '44, just a month after D Day.

**So you knew by that stage that the German Armed Forces were losing the war?**

Yep. We could see them. At that stage they were panicking. You could see them trying to bring their tanks up. They didn't for a while. No, it wasn't until August. It was July I was shot down.

16:00 It was towards the end of August before they broke out of the Fallow's Gap and came through the Conge. Then they were bringing a lot of their troops us before that but then you could see they were starting to panic after that, at the end of August. We got cleared in September where we were.

**You got picked up?**

We got cleared by our troops coming through.

**What exactly happened there?**

I'd left Remerangles

16:30 by then. Renee and I rode bikes from Ramarand to Claremont and on the way in, we were on back roads, and we were pulled up by a German staff car. They wanted to know where some village was. Renee and I got down to draw it on the road. I drew something and she wiped it off, drew, and told them exactly where it was. They got in the car, saluted us and drove off thank goodness, so we then took to the paddocks, and rode our bikes across the paddocks, got off the roads. We went into a little place called Geincourt ,

17:00 just in Claremont. Her aunty lived there and another couple of girls, Denise and Yolande. Yolande was engaged to Georges, the resistance bloke and I lived with them. That was another estaminet. They owned a couple. I lived with them until early September

17:30 when they broke through. The Canadians and the Americans came through. Georges came around one morning and he said, "I think we are getting freed. I think the enemy are chasing back. The Yanks and the Canadians are coming through." So we went into the town to Claremont. In the main street of Claremont was Georges and there was another RAF bloke living with me at the time, Bill. We'd picked him up somewhere and I'd cleared him as being an airman.

18:00 We went into Claremont and we were standing, and there was a tank came along, an American tank. The Yank called out, "Does any God damn idiot here speak English?" I said, "Yes Yank! What the hell is wrong with you?" He said, "Not a bloody Aussie. I've been out there and I've come back here to fight this war. Get up here!" So I climbed up on the tank. He pulled me up on the tank and they had some cigarettes, and chocolates. He said, "Throw some out to some of the people."

18:30 Then the French people wanted to sing the Marseilles and when I got up, two girls jumped up on the tank with me. I'd never seen them. I don't know who they were and they gave me a couple of homemade flags that they'd made, little French flags on a stick, and a bottle of champagne, and a flag in the other. I was supposed to lead them in singing the Marseilles. I didn't even know the words of it but I stood there and carried on! Everyone cheered

19:00 and to hear them sing that anthem for the first time in four years, a moving, emotional moment, something that I suppose has always stuck in my mind.

19:30 An incredible sight to see them clapping and cheering, and singing their national anthem. It was amazing. They didn't know what I was. They thought I was a Frenchman. They didn't know me from a bar of soap. Then the Yanks said, "We've got to move on." So I jumped down. There was a commotion up the end of the town, so Paul was there, this other bloke Paul that that letter came from the other day, Paul and Georges, and Georges said, "Let's go up and see what's on."

20:00 Up the end of the town were four girls, four French girls. They stripped them stark naked and shaved every hair off their body, with a cut throat.

**The Germans had done that?**

No. Their own French people. These four girls had been living with Gestapo and SS blokes, so they just shaved their hair off, and every bit of hair off their body. You can imagine. They pelted them out of the town with wet towels but that's war with emotion.

20:30 **That's an extraordinary experience.**

Amazing really. Amazing to live through that. Then they decided they wanted a big dinner party, so that night...oh we went up to help some people who had been interned, some civilians. Then the next day

21:00 we had a big lunch, the whole family. They dug up wines. They dug up their champagne. See they'd buried it in the ground so that the Germans wouldn't get the good stuff. They dug that up under the carrots and there was plenty of red wine, and champagne. A horse had got killed, so that was the meat for the day and we had a big lunch, an enormous lunch together. I said, "Well I've got to go." Mamma Morel said, "Oh no! You've got to stay." Renee, the strange thing with Renee, she'd been married to a

21:30 Frenchman not long before I was shot down, for three weeks and they found out he was a collaborator. They took him out and shot him. I fell out of the sky and I think she thought, "He'll do." But I didn't. She was a real character, a wild girl, quite a very brave young woman. We had quite a party that day and I'd given Mamma my identity disks because if I was caught I didn't want to be caught

22:00 with those on. It would have given them all away. I could have made out I was someone else. I had a big

battle getting my identity disks back off her. I said, "I need them. I've got to prove who I am!" I eventually got them back. The next morning, Bill couldn't ride a bike, so they put him in a dray I think, put him in a dray and took him into Beauvois, and I rode a bike back into Beauvois. We went to the Hotel de Ville, which is what their town hall is,

22:30 as you know. I had to say goodbye to them. I went in with Bill into there and walked into a brigadier. He said, "What the bloody hell are you Frenchmen...?" I said, "Hang on. I'm not a Frenchman." I told him who I was. "God!" he said. "There's my identity disk." He said, "You blokes, where the hell did you come from?" I explained to him and he said, "Who is the other bloke?" I said, "He was a sergeant with me." He said, "Well go outside and when you go outside, there is a bloke in a jeep out there. Tell him to drive you to the nearest aerodrome." I went outside

23:00 and the corporal said, "Who the bloody hell are you talking to?" He said, "Well come with me into the brigadier." We went back in and the brigadier said, "What are you back here for?" I said, "Well this idiot won't listen to me." He said, "Salute him! He's an officer. Drive him out to the nearest aerodrome." So they took us out to the nearest aerodrome. There was a DC3 there and they were loading it with fuel cans. The flying control tower was a tent and they yelled at me again, "Dirty Frenchman!" I said, "Hang on! I'm flight lieutenant

23:30 so and so." "Oh! What do you want?" "They told me I'd get a ride back." "Well hop in that aircraft. You'll be right." I got in with Bill, in the aircraft and we sat on these jerry cans full of petrol, and the ruddy thing flew east not west. It was going up to the front line with a load of petrol. I thought, "Oh God! You get out of one hole into another!" So we ended up a Lille, right on the Belgian border. The front had moved up there quickly.

24:00 We got out and unloaded the petrol. Then it was too dark for the bloke to takeoff. Then the Germans attacked the aerodrome and some bloke threw me a rifle, and said, "Get in the slit trench and shoot!" Oh God! Luckily there were enough Canadians and Americans around to keep the Germans back. The next morning the pilot said, "Let's get these empty jerry cans in and we'll take off." You've never seen empty jerry cans go into an aircraft so quickly! He flew us back to Avignon, dropped us at Avignon. He said,

24:30 "I can't go any further. I've got another load to take back. Go over there to the control tower." I went over and I eventually sorted someone out. They said, "Well, there is a jeep going back to Arromanches." That was the old beachhead where they first landed on D Day. He said, "Get in that, you and your mate. Sit in the backseat and I'll drive you back." Well, that was the wildest drive I've ever had in a jeep in my life. They had to dodge trucks coming up with supplies.

25:00 Supplies were roaring up from the beachhead. We drove across paddocks mainly to get there. We got near Conge and he said, "Put a handkerchief over your mouth." I said, "I haven't got a handkerchief. I've been down here for about three months. I lost my handkerchief months ago." He said, "Well, put your shirt over your mouth because you'll never stand the smell." Oh it was frightful. There were so many dead bodies in Conge. It was a mess. It really was a mess. What they had done was bulldoze a road right through it, so they could get through.

25:30 So we went through Conge. We ended up at Arromanches at the beachhead. He was a sergeant our air bloke. I took him over to the sergeant's mess. He sat down and a sergeant said, "Do you know where the officer's mess is?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, I'll take you over." So he did. I walked into the officer's mess, imagine in these dirty French clothes, unshaven and the secretary of the mess was waiting. Everyone that came in had to pay for their meal. "What are you doing here you dirty

26:00 Frenchman?" I said, "Hang on!" I went through the whole story. I had just finished and a voice in the back said, "I knew they bloody couldn't kill you!" It was the doctor from our squadron. He'd been sent out with the War Graves Commission. He said, "God Steve! I knew they bloody couldn't kill you?" So I had lunch there with the brigadier and he. I had a bit of fun. I borrowed ten pounds. I didn't have any money, signed

26:30 the cheque. Eventually they sent me a bill years later wanting their ten pounds back! They never miss out on that. I had a meal there and then we were interrogated by MI9.

### **What is MI9?**

The Ministry of Information 9. There is MI5 and MI6. There are a lot of other numbers that go down. MI9 was started by Airey Neave to help anyone that escaped and they had blokes they used to drop into France with SOE.

27:00 We were then interrogated by them and we had to be fumigated. What do they call it? Strip off and be cleaned, throw the old clothes away. All they had was British Army uniform, so they gave us a British Army Uniform, the two of us. We were interrogated there for quite a while. I think they were fairly convinced who we were. Then we were put on a tank landing craft the next day to be

27:30 taken back to England. I've you've ever gone across the English Channel in an empty tank landing craft, you'll know what rough weather is. The thing was empty. It bounced all over the place. We got to Brighton and we had to climb up a rope ladder. They had given me a blanket and some mess gear, like a plate, and knife, and fork. I couldn't bring them up so I gave them to a bloke on the tank landing craft. They sent me a bill for those later on after the war too! I climbed up there and we were then

- 28:00 put under guard. There were four of us by then. We had picked up a couple of others. They had got to Arromances too. We were put on a train and a lot of English people thought that we were prisoners of war. They were yelling at us and carrying on. Anyway, we were taken by train into London, taken to MI9 Head Quarters. We got there and we had to be fumigated, and cleaned up, and deloused again. I said, "We've been deloused!" "No! You've got to do it again." They threw
- 28:30 that uniform away and gave us another battledress. Then we were taken before a colonel. He interrogated us and then, "Who is the wing commander at the station. Who is your group captain?" I said, "No. He's a bastard. I don't want to talk to him. I'll talk to the group captain." So they got him on the phone and I spoke to him. He said, "Who is that?" I said, "Steve! I'm alive! I've escaped!" "Oh Ok!" So I think they had a fair idea I was who I said I was. So then
- 29:00 we went up and had another shower, and we came down to dinner. We had dinner with the colonel and I wanted to make a phone call to Neet, and I wanted to get in touch with my people. He said, "No. You can't make any phone calls." So I'd met an Aussie then. He'd escaped one of the four. He was a real character. He said, "Let's get the old bloke pissed." Have you ever drunk Pimms neat? Do you know what Pimms is?
- Yes.**
- Have you ever drunk it neat out of a
- 29:30 small tankard?
- No.**
- Well don't try it. We got nicely piled [drunk]! We got the old colonel piled. We talked him into allowing me to ring Neet. So he took me into a room and there was a couple of WAAFs or whatever they were there, MI9. "Do you know the phone number?" This was midnight by then. I said, "Yes." So they rang and he said, "If you say one word out of place. If you answer one question out of place, you'll be court marshalled and so will I." He said, "Be careful!"
- 30:00 I shouldn't do this." Some woman answered the phone. It must have been the woman that owned the hostel where Neet was living. They had to go and wake Neet. Imagine waking her up at midnight, this drunken idiot on the other end of the phone. "Where are you?" "I can't tell you." "Are you wounded?" "I can't tell you." "Are you safe?" "Yes I'm safe." "Are you in the UK?" "I can't tell you but I'm alive." Imagine the drunken idiot on the other end and Neet didn't drink! Imagine this idiot on the other end. Anyway,
- 30:30 that was it. At least she knew I was alive. So the next day this other bloke and I, we decided we wanted to send some telegrams. We had a bit of money we'd got from the mess. We thought, "How the hell do we get out of this MI9 building?" So we found a way out through the kitchen and we found a Post Office. We put a couple of cables through, to my mother and father, and one to Neet. The other bloke did too.
- 31:00 So then we went back to get into the building and we couldn't get in the place. We had to go to the front door and there was a bloke with crossed rifles. "Where have you two been?" He brought us in and the colonel said, "I've had enough of you two. You've caused me enough trouble. You didn't end up in your room last night. Where did you sleep?" I said, "We were a bit full [drunk] last night. We found the first empty room and we slept in there." "Where?" He said, "We're not supposed to go on that floor. That's SOEs floor." Anyway, we had breakfast
- 31:30 and he did some more interrogation. They kept us there for three or four days I think, interrogating us. They were cleared by then that we were OK. Then we had to go and pick our kit up at wherever it was, out at St Pogues.
- That's a fascinating story.**
- Then I went to the bank to get some money.
- 32:00 They couldn't give me the money. I showed my identity disk because I didn't have an identity card by then. They had to make a new identity card for me. Then I went to Kodak House. I went to Carson and Walls in Saville Row, who made our uniforms because they made me a new one to get married in, and I hadn't got it. They said they'd posted it but they hadn't been paid for it naturally because I was wandering around in France. As I went in there was a chap there who I'd helped,
- 32:30 a wireless op who I'd helped out, who was in trouble. He was grounded and he was doing a job there. He said, "I thought you were dead." I said, "No I'm alive. I was only missing. I'm right." I said, "I'm trying to find a uniform at Carson and Walls." He said, "I know where they are. It's in that room over there. There's a flight lieutenant that's got a heap of them in there." So I went in and I was in a battledress uniform. He said, "What are you doing in here?" I said, "Shut up. I want my
- 33:00 uniform." "I'm a flight lieutenant. I'm a higher rank than you are." I said, "No you're not. I'm a general duties flight lieutenant. I'm a higher rank than you." I opened up his cupboard and there were all these suits. He'd purloined them from blokes that had been shot down and he was going to sell them. So I pulled them all out and there was mine amongst them. I tipped the rest on the floor and walked out with mine. I went up to the...I've forgotten who was the CO then, old Ridley but he was out. I saw a group

captain.

- 33:30 He said, "What are you doing in here?" I explained to him who I was. I said, "You better go and fix that flight lieutenant up down the end. He's been pinching uniforms. I'm going to put him on a charge." He said, "I wouldn't do that. Leave that to me to sort out." I thought, "Oh well! I've got my uniform anyway." "How did you find out it was in there?" I said, "No comment. I'm not going to tell you who told me." Then MI9 sent me to MI5, to Bletchley up where they did a lot of the decoding.
- 34:00 I wanted to tell MI9 something and they wouldn't accept it. I had to go somewhere else. I went up there and I had to go, taken under armed guard on a special pass to a brigadier. He checked me and said, "You're clear. You're OK." He wrote something on a paper and gave it to me to read. I said, "Oh!" "You know that?" I said, "Yes."
- 34:30 He said, "I can't ask you to sign the Official Secrets Act because you already signed that at MI9. All I can do is a handshake that you'll never divulge this." That's it. I've never divulged it because it would hurt someone. I just kept my word. Neet doesn't know. No one knows. Then they drove me back from there back
- 35:00 to London. At MI9 they said, "OK you can stay here a day or so until you sort yourself out with your uniform." We were allowed to stay there for a couple of days. Then I got some leave. I had to go and do a medical before someone in Harley Street. A brilliant surgeon he was supposed to be and he said, "Why didn't you get your arm looked at when you broke your shoulder?" I said, "Well, if you went near a doctor the Gestapo would pick you up in five minutes because
- 35:30 they kept their eye on all the doctors in case anyone wounded ended up there."

**Were there a lot of airmen in France?**

Yes, quite a lot. I think when you work it out through the whole war there were 2850 escapists, some were evaders. They'd never been captured. I'm counted as a prisoner of war because I was caught by the Gestapo. Evaders and escapers, there were 2800, and it cost ten lives for each one.

**36:00 Ten French lives?**

French, Belgian, Dutch, some German because some of them were resistance people in Germany. It cost nearly 30 000 lives. The risks they took were enormous. If they were caught they were...we've been back twice.

**36:30 You said you were taken to the front line from France to Belgium, can you tell us more about the attack that took place?**

The Germans were going to attack the aerodrome because they wanted to take the aerodrome over again and there was only small arms fire, mainly machine guns. I was in the slit trench, spent the night in a slit trench there. It was freezing cold too in these dirty old clothes

- 37:00 we had. The Canadians and the Americans had tanks around there and they soon broke the attack. I think it only lasted about quarter of an hour and they broke through, and pushed them back. It was just a rough drome, somewhere to land supplies because they needed fuel and these aircraft, DC3s were carting up air fuel. These ordinary drums, you know these ordinary jerry cans?
- 37:30 The old aircraft was full of those. It was good fun sitting on those on the way up. If someone had shot at you it would have gone up "boom".

**Did you have any near misses in that engagement?**

No. There was nothing there, no aircraft. I think by that time Germany was getting very short of fuel and they didn't have enough fuel for their fighters. Anyway, the air was covered with allied aircraft. On D day when we went in and dropped out bombs on

- 38:00 Pennel, La Pennel was the place we bombed, there was a gun embankment firing out to sea. We had to blow it up to save the navy. To see the armada in the air as we...I flew with a Wing Commander Wyatt. I wasn't supposed to go. I wasn't supposed fly. His wireless op was sick and he wanted to go on D Day. He came in and said, "My wireless op is sick. Got a spare Steve?" I said, "No."
- 38:30 I'll come." He said, "You're not flying." I said, "Mind your own business. I'll fly with you but don't tell the wing co I'm going. Leave the other wireless op's name on the battle order and I'll tell the Doc. The Doc and I are friends." So I flew with him on D Day, Wyatt. On the way back we had a look. The whole of that English Channel was covered in ships. Incredible sight and then they opened, the
- 39:00 navy opened up with their bombardment. God's truth! We were sitting up at about 15 000 feet and you could watch it. You could see it and the whole air was covered in fighter aircraft. It was just coming down. It must have been about five or six o'clock in the morning, just coming dawn. The whole of that sky was covered in aircraft, fighter aircraft. We were just a few bombers. We had to stay at 15 000 feet.
- 39:30 They were above and below.

**So this would have been far bigger than 1000 plane bombing raid?**

Oh God! Incredible! To see the navy when they started firing and all these tank...we didn't see the tank landing craft. They were going in but we couldn't stay there long enough to have a look at that but to see it was incredible.

**Did you actually view any of the landings?**

No we couldn't see that. I couldn't but I think the rear gunner saw it. The rear gunner said he could see it from

40:00 the rear turret, see them just going in.

**Landing on the beach?**

Mmm.

**I must have been quite a sight.**

Then I got into trouble when I came back! Blimey did I ever!

## Tape 8

00:35 **You were telling us a bit about D Day before. Can you go into a bit more detail about what your role actually was?**

When I was called back to the station after that commando course, it was about a week or so before D Day, the station signals officer, who was in charge of signals at the station, was sick and I became

01:00 acting station signals officer as well as squadron signals officer. The first signal came through on the 4th I think. I was woken up at three or four, or some ungodly hour of the night by SPs [Service Police], had to go down to the signals, and you had to have a code word to get into the room. It was a very tight tied place and the girls all knew me, so I went in, and D Day was to be the 5th of June.

01:30 I had to tell the two wing commanders and no one else, which I told but then it was cancelled because the weather was too rough. Damn it all the next night I'm dug out of bed again. I go down and it is to be the 6th of June. It was a different code that day to get into the building, to get into the cipher room and I remember the WAAF girl that did it, she said. "Ha ha! You're in the frontline now mate! Aren't you?" I said, "Yes I suppose I am." I had to

02:00 get both the wing commanders of 57 and 630, and tell them, and the three of us were the only people that knew on the station. Then it was prepared. Our target was given to us by the group. La Pennel we had to bomb. 630 had to bomb some other one I think. They were all briefed and the new D Day was on then. D Day would be starting the next. The whole station was locked. There could not be a phone call outside

02:30 the station. The group captain or anyone could not ring outside. The only ones who could ring out were the wing commanders on the red phone, which was the scrambler phone. If they wanted to they could ring group but they couldn't ring anyone else and no one was allowed in or out of the aerodrome. It was a complete lockup. I think that happened in the whole of England, would have been done everywhere. Then

03:00 we were all briefed for the raid and I snuck in with Wyatt, and did the trip. When I came back and got out of the aircraft, who was there standing there but the wing co. He said, "You!" I said, "I beat you didn't I? I had a look. You didn't." That was D Day. I was the first one to know except the girl decoded the message. She couldn't decode the message

03:30 until I came in. When I went in to the cipher room and we could now decode this message, she said, "There it is. The 6th of June."

**Can you remember exactly what the message said?**

"We're going. 6th of June." I think that was Eisenhower's [American President] remark wasn't it? "We're going" or some word like that.

04:00 When they held back the day before, he had to make the decision on the 6th of June. "We're going." They couldn't hold them any longer because they were all loaded on the boats ready.

**They would have been discovered before long.**

I hear a lot of people are anti-Americans. Americans have done a lot of stupid things. All nations have but without the Americans

04:30 D Day would never have worked, without their production, which is incredible. How the south part of England didn't sink I'll never know. It was covered in tanks, covered in tanks and arms, guns, and tanks.



Incredible! We could see it because sometimes we flew and they even had over on the east coast of England they had mock aircraft , and mock tanks made of wood, so the Germans saw them and thought they were going to come near Calais.

- 05:00 That tricked them. They went into Normandy. Without American production and their manpower of landing, they would have been in trouble but the Americans lost a lot more on the landing than we did because they went in "Gung ho" in their old...they would use these flail tanks that we had. Neet's brother was a commander in a flail tank. They were the things
- 05:30 with the chains on the front to clear mines. They had great flail chains that flew out and they cleared the mine fields, and some other funny dummy tanks they made, stupid things that the Americans reckoned wouldn't work. In the finish they had to ask for them. I think on one hill alone, not Arromances but further around where they went in near the Utah Beach, one hill alone a whole
- 06:00 battalion of Americans are buried there. They lost a whole battalion. The Germans fought pretty hard there. It took them until the middle of August really, from the 6th of June to the middle of August, the 10th of August to get clear, to break through Conge. Even with 1000 bomber raids on Conge and they used
- 06:30 bomber command in front, even with that it took them all that time to get through, nearly two months. Anyone that was in D Day, the French started a thing. I've got a badge they gave me. It's the Coat of Arms of Normandy. You had to be from the 6th of June to the 10th of August, if you were in that part of the landing you can belong to the D Day Committee.

- 07:00 That cravat, that's the Escape Society. The cross part is barbed wire.

**In telling your story when you were shot down, I couldn't help**

- 07:30 **thinking that your decision to go up just after being called back, against all advice was a little bit reckless.**

No. It's a job. No that aircraft had to fly. Every aircraft that was serviceable had to fly on that raid. That was a very important raid. For once the only time that...I've got it somewhere

- 08:00 in my logbook there. The only time that Cochran ever gave something to put in my logbook was on that raid. Do you want to see it? It's in my logbook.

**We'll have a look at it afterwards.**

It was one of the best raids that 5 Group ever did, even the Dam raids. It saved 4000 bombs over London. We really blocked the whole entrance to the caves. When we went back with the French, we went into

- 08:30 the caves. They drove us in. I was made number one citizen of the town, St Leu d'Esserent for the day. The mayor made me the number one citizen and they took us in, an old Frenchman, a funny old character, he led us. He drank his red wine on the way through. He was a real old character. We had an interpreter lady from Paris and she was as frightened, and as panicked as the rest of us. Going in there, the thing went in 100 kilometres underground. We did go

- 09:00 that far but we went around a lot of it and they showed us where a lot of it was bricked up. German bodies were still in there. They didn't bother. They just bricked the place up and left it.

**The French did?**

Yep. The French had it before the war for growing mushrooms underground and then they had a bit of electrical stuff in it, then when the Germans got it they used it for their V1, to assemble their V1s and V2s there. They did make them there but they assembled them there and then spread them out to their launching pads.

- 09:30 Most of the Germans that were locked up in there when we bombed the entrance, they just died in there. They just left them in there and bricked the walls up. Neet went in with us. I don't think she was very happy.

**Somehow I prefer the French way. You were shot up a few times.**

- 10:00 **Did you ever have to go through a crash landing?**

Yes we had four crash landings.

**Can you tell us a bit about those?**

One at Tangmere. One was coming back from southern Germany, Stuttgart or somewhere. Stuttgart or Nuremberg or somewhere we got badly shot up. We lost two motors and then we lost a third motor over the coast of France. Tangmere was a fighter aerodrome in 1940. There was another aerodrome in

- 10:30 line with the runway and they joined the two runways together because Lancasters had a bad habit of losing brakes, a very cheap little valve used to collapse. You could land on there and you could pull up at

the end of the runway. We called in to Tangmere. We just made it on one motor, just glided down. That smashed that aircraft. There were a few of them written off. The worst one was at Scampton when we crash landed over...we'd been shot up at Osnabrook

11:00 and broke the aircraft in half, really just broke off. We came out like rabbits. I think we came out of every hole that was in the aircraft, fire carts and ambulances around. None of us were marked luckily. We were very fortunate when you look at seven blokes to go through that. We had some really bad trips. On the second tour I went one night with a crew and the rear gunner,

11:30 we got attacked by a fighter, and the pilot said to me, "Steve will you go down and see if the rear gunner is all right?" He was dead. I went down and dragged him out of the turret, and put him on the bed, tied him down, and he said, "Would you go down and look after the rear turret?" Blimey! I had to sit in that turret for the rest of the way back, until we got close to England then I had to go back for the radio but to sit in there. How the rear gunners ever put up with that I wouldn't know. One minute you're looking at the ground, the next minute the sky. You're twisting around,

12:00 freezing cold! He came down below 10 000 feet because there was no oxygen. The bomb aimer came down and I said, "We haven't got any oxygen. I'll pass out if we don't." So he came down below 10 000 feet. All I had on was the battledress. I didn't have all the gear on that gunners had. It was freezing, absolutely freezing. Another night the bomb aimer got hit and the flight engineer and I dragged him out,

12:30 this was in another crew, and I put a morphine needle in him, and put him on the bed, and the pilot said, "Well you can do the bomb aiming" because I had learned that. That was the first time I'd really seen the whole of a target, from a bomb aimer's point of view. It's an incredible sight to see it all and the marker flares in the middle. The first one over I missed it and the crew, the language was frightful. They had to go around again and come in. I dropped the bombs the next time.

13:00 When I got back the doctor said, "Who put the needle in him?" I said, "I did." He said, "He was dead when you put it in." I said, "Well I'm not a doctor. I was trying to save him." But he was dead before I put the needle in him I think. A few of the crash landings were a bit...one was just a flat tyre, where a bit of flak had hit the tyre. When you land a Lancaster on one wheel it sort of goes over but luckily at Scampton it was all grass. There was no

13:30 concrete runway, so you had a fair chance in grass not sparks coming up from the runway. Another one was a Downham Market. We had another crash landing at Downham Market. We'd been shot up. They were places you got into closer to the coast than where your own drome was.

#### **Getting back to my original**

14:00 **question, why the flight was necessary and it was your duty to go?**

The raid on St Leu d'Esserent?

#### **When you were shot down.**

Yes?

#### **The way that you told it obviously your wing commander didn't agree with you and thought you were crazy doing it?**

No, he didn't. I said to him, "What are you going to do? How are you going to get in with 5 group tomorrow? Are you going to talk to Cochran and tell him you had a serviceable aircraft that didn't fly?" He said, "No." I said,

14:30 "Well what the hell am I going to do? Someone's got to fly in it and I'm the only spare wireless op." So I went. If it was a maximum effort every aircraft serviceable ...each day group got a record from each squadron of how many aircraft were serviceable so they knew what they could send out that night and if you had so many serviceable aircraft, they had to fly.

#### **Once you were up there and**

15:00 **the plane was shot, you were the one that insisted on getting back in there and dropping the load.**

Oh yeah. Well the pilot agreed. He said, "It's fair." He was inexperienced let's face it. It was their third trip. They'd only done two trips before. It was their third trip, so they really hadn't had a lot of experience.

15:30 **You don't think there is a touch of you that is a little bit reckless?**

No.

#### **Daring?**

No. There was a war on.

#### **You did a lot of raids.**

Yes a lot of raids.

**A lot more than most people.**

Lots of blokes did more than I did. Some of the Pathfinder blokes, they did more. Guy Gibson did 77 or 78. Cheshire

16:00 did well over 100. A lot of blokes did as many as me I suppose. I was fortunate because I think of the 55 I went to bomber command three of us came out. I had something in common with Nancy Wake, the famous underground lady. We were both born with a caul over our head .

16:30 **That sounds lucky after all.**

It's supposed to be a lucky omen. She was born in New Zealand and the Maori midwife when she was born said, "That is called a Kaylue in Maori language and that means very fortunate life." So it might have been the luck! I've still got it somewhere.

**Did you ever worry that you were tempting fate?**

17:00 No I don't think so. It's like if you've got a job to do, you're doing a job now, you've got to do it, right? That's what you're told to do. It's a different thing when there is a war on. It's more dangerous of course, naturally because there is danger there but if you signed up to do it, you do it or you shouldn't have been there. You're endangering six other people aren't you, in the aircraft if you don't do it. That's why our crew was very

17:30 good, the first crew. They all worked well together. There was never any animosity. We all got on well. Other crews I flew with, they were all odd crews in the second and third tour. They weren't the same crew. I flew with a wing commander quite a few times, Fisher and Humphries. I flew with Gibson once and they were mainly flight commanders, mainly blokes who had done a few raids.

**Later did you**

18:00 **ever look back and think, "Gee I can't believe I did that"?**

Mmm.

**Is there an electricity of the moment that drives you on and pushes you beyond something that you would not normally do?**

I suppose there is really but it was fighting for freedom,

18:30 wasn't it? Fighting for something. People don't realise that. They think it was just a war fighting Germany. It wasn't. It was fighting a regime that was going to take over the whole world. God the mess they made of France, what they did to the French people! Imagine what they would have done to British people. Imagine what they would have done to you or me, or him if they'd have caught us. They weren't very friendly in their ideas, so you were fighting for freedom of the world. It's all right for people to sit back and say now,

19:00 "That war wasn't necessary." That was a necessary war. Some wars aren't necessary but that was necessary. Hitlerism had to be killed, that National Socialism. It had to be killed. Communism killed itself in the finish. They joined in with it. Luckily Hitler attacked Russia. If he hadn't attacked Russia, what would have happened? He would have used the whole of his troops that side but once he attacked Russia, that just

19:30 split and that was his problem. He was frightened of Communism because he knew it was the same as his. It didn't matter whether you called it National Socialism, Nazism or Communism, there's no difference really. They all say left and right wing, who cares? Left and right wing? The only right wing about Hitler was that he allowed capitalism to keep going because he wanted the factories to make stuff, whereas Stalin pushed all

20:00 those out. That's why he got into so much trouble when Hitler attacked him. Stalin had killed so many of his own generals and people. He was as big a despot as Hitler really. I don't care what the colour of his politics were. He would send people up to Siberia. He killed millions the same as Hitler did. Mussolini wasn't as bad as that. I think he was just a follower. He thought this is the way to follow

20:30 on and get some control.

**You mentioned before about how you came to be discharged. Can you take us through to the end of the war and your return to Australia?**

When I got freed in England I went back to the squadron, as I told you. Then I got leave. I got so many weeks leave to go up and Neet and I were getting

21:00 married. We were to be married in the 2nd of September but I was missing then. I was late! We were to get married and we had plenty of time to get the banns called again, and get married but all of a sudden I got a recall, like I always did every time. This recall was from Australian Headquarters. I had to report to Brighton and come back to Australia. I was not allowed to fly over Germany any more. MI9 and MI5

- 21:30 decided I was not safe to fly over Germany any more. Then they recalled me, so we had to get married in a hurry. We had to get a special licence. That was real fun! That's in the book anyway! We had to get a special licence and go before an old sheriff. I think he was 95 years old with an ear trumpet in. He didn't know what was going on. Everyone asked me why I was in a hurry. I got niggly and I said, "Well it's not
- 22:00 what you all think. You've got bad minds. It's not that reason why we're getting married in a hurry." I had a piece of green paper that they'd given me at MI9 and I had to show that to anyone that asked me questions because you weren't allowed to answer anything. You weren't to say where you were or what you'd done, so that quietened all that down. Then I went to the minister to get married and he had the same idea. So I said he had a dirty mind too. "There's the green paper." So we got married on the 4th of October. It was a bit of a rush. Neet couldn't get her wedding gown and

22:30 a veil, and all that.

### **What was on the green paper?**

It's around here somewhere, in that book over there. It's just a warning.

### **A warning?**

That you're not allowed to talk to the press or tell anyone because anything could get back to the enemy.

### **So how did that**

23:00 **relate to you getting married?**

That gave us an answer when people asked me why we were getting married in a hurry. I said I was missing when I should have been married, now I'm here and I've got to go back to Australia. So we got married in a hurry. Luckily we went to Brighton and they gave me another seven days leave, so we had a honeymoon partly in London chased by V1s, didn't we? We got sick of the V1s and then we went to Arundel down in the south of England, and

23:30 stayed at Arundel in a hotel down there. Then came back to Brighton. Then Bournemouth had closed and they were using Brighton. Neet had to go back to work in Scotland. She worked in the war department and I got put on a ship, and made baggage officer and adjutant. I said, "Isn't there anyone else that can do these jobs?" "We've got your record. You've done all these things. You can do that." Then we

24:00 got to America. We went over on the Mauritania I think, from England to America. I got someone else to act as adjutant for while and then he got fed up with that job. I got it again and baggage officer. We got put off on an island in New York in a camp there and then we were given three weeks leave in New York. There was this other chap Frank Bradley, who I'd met on the ship on the way

24:30 back. He'd done one tour and was being sent home. He and I got quite friendly, and we went into the Waldorf Astoria to have a drink again, and we struck another stockbroker. It was on a Friday and he said, "What are you doing on the weekend?" We said, "Just wandering around New York." He said, "Well here is my address at home out at Connecticut. You can come out there." So Frank and I got on the train, and we went to Connecticut. This attractive lady was

25:00 waiting for us, his wife with a Cadillac. She picked us up in this four door Cadillac and took us to a shopping centre, and I think it is now what we count as a supermarket or something like that. We went in, she had a basket and got all this food. I said, "Don't you need coupons for all this?" She said, "Normally we need coupons but you have both been in action. I can see by your decorations that you've been in action, so I can get it all without coupons." Then on the way home she pulled into the garage to get petrol. "Do you need coupons for this?" She said, "No!

25:30 You've only got to show yourself and I can get petrol!" So it was very handy. Then when we got back there she gave us something to eat and then said, "Here's the keys to the Eldorado. Will you get it down and fill it up?" I said, "No way! I'm not going to drive on the other side of the road. You can drive me down." She drove me down and we got that filled up with petrol. We spent the weekend with them, a couple of big parties, terrific parties really. They were very...he was the manager of the Chase National Bank for the whole of America, so you can imagine how rich they were.

26:00 We had a big party that night. They made their own punch but old Fran drank too much of it and passed out! It was very strong punch I can tell you in these big crystal bowls. Then we were invited the next night to another one. One was a Member of Parliament, one was a chap in charge of all armaments for America, it was amazing the people we met there and they were easy people to meet. We spent three or four days there, excellent! They were lovely people.

26:30 Then we came back to New York and I said to Frank, "I'm going up to Canada to see the people that helped me, the Andersons." So we went up and saw them, spent a couple of days up there, and then back to New York. Then the wing commander got in touch, Wing Commander Billy Brill I think it was or Doubleday, one of them. He said, "Come on. We've got to round everyone up." So we had to round everyone up, put on a train, across to Frisco [San Francisco]. I've forgotten...

- 27:00 it must have been a week on the train. It was all over America and we eventually got to Frisco, and then on the Lurline ship to come back to Australia. The funny thing was they had a big sign up over the entrance as you got on the ship, "Through these doors pass the greatest fighting men in the world." It was the Americans getting on the ship. So Billy Brill said, "Let's walk in and prove it!" So we went through and they got a bit upset I think!
- 27:30 Then I was given another job on the ship, I always got a job, in charge of security. Well how you could keep security on a ship I don't know. I had to have blokes posted on the water because you could only use the water for drinking, the fresh water. You had to shower in salt water. The captain called me in one day. We'd been to New Guinea, north and south of New Guinea
- 28:00 and I said, "I thought you were going to unload some of the people off there." He said, "Yes. You haven't done a good job as security officer." I said, "Why?" He said, "Five of the WAAFs are pregnant!" I said, "Well don't blame me! I didn't do it." I said, "What do you expect with men and women on a ship? What do you expect?" So they had to go back to America. Then they brought us into Brisbane and
- 28:30 the wharfies went on strike, and wouldn't unload the ship. We had a big Jackeroo, a pilot, a big tough bloke and I don't know what his mate was but they walked up to the leader of the union, and had an argument with him. He wasn't going to work so they just pushed him in the water, pushed him off the wharf. There was a bit of a scene with Stevedores. We did our block. "We've been over fighting a war while you bludgers have been sitting here enjoying yourself. We'll unload the ship ourselves" and we did. Anyone that got in the
- 29:00 way in the Stevedores got really knocked out of the way. We had to unload all our own gear, get down in the hold and baggage officer, I had to check everything that came out. They just put us in a camp there overnight. The next day on a train and I think it took us about a fortnight or longer to get to Melbourne. It was a slow train. Then I got here and on the Melbourne Cricket Ground...I got into trouble on the Melbourne Cricket Ground. I was
- 29:30 the only one in a blue uniform on the parade. The group captain got annoyed and I had to go, and report to him. "Why are you in a blue uniform? It should be khaki. It's summer." I said, "There wasn't any summer where I was. I was fighting a war in a blue uniform." I had to get a khaki uniform the next day. Anyway, we overcame that and then I got bored with nothing to do. I met a Wing Commander Smibert. He gave me a job. You won't believe this. Three wristwatches
- 30:00 on each arm and an office in St Kilda Road in a bluestone cottage. There was a WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] who had one part and I had the other part. I had to report there at quarter to ten every morning and I had to check those three watches against the time signal from the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Commission], to see how many second they gained or lost in a day. I could play golf, play billiards, do whatever I liked the rest of the time but I had to be there at quarter to ten every morning. I did that for a couple of months and got bored with that
- 30:30 idea. He said, "You're mad." I said, "No I've had it Bill. That's a stupid job." He said, "Someone else will get it." I said, "They can have it." He said, "You'll get yourself into trouble." So then I got posted to Bougainville and I decided I wasn't going to Bougainville. I'd done enough. Luckily the group captain was a fairly decent bloke. He gave me a discharge. So I didn't get discharged until the end of May. So the European War had finished.
- 31:00 The Japanese War was still on but it didn't last long after that, July I think wasn't it? June or July when they dropped the atomic bomb. So that was it and then I came out of the services. I got a job selling typewriter ribbons and carbons, and typewriters, and won the Australian competition as the best salesman.

### **Where were you on VE [Victory in Europe] Day?**

On VE Day I was playing

- 31:30 golf at Huntingdale. I belong to Huntingdale Golf Course.

### **VE Day or VJ [Victory over Japan] Day?**

VE Day.

### **Where were you on VJ Day?**

VJ Day I was just home I think, just in Melbourne. We lived in Parkdale at that stage. Neet and I were living in Parkdale until we built our house in Ormond. Neet had come out by then. VJ Day she was out here because she left England on

- 32:00 VE Day.

### **What was your reaction when the whole thing was finally over?**

Peace!

### **Did you celebrate?**

No, I think we took it fairly quietly. I think the day at Huntingdale, I'd been playing golf and I heard it in

the bar as we came in, and I walked out.

32:30 **It must have been an overwhelming feeling?**

Mmm. I think I left them all in the bar drinking and I just walked out. I went for a walk. Then I got sick of that typewriter business. I used to do a lot of repair work when I had the workshop in South Melbourne for Jack Raybold, who was a Bugatti agent.

33:00 I got in touch with him over something and he said, "Why don't you come and work for me?" So I did and got a job. I started off as a salesman and ended up as a director, and CO, then managing director of it. Then he died and the family wanted to sell it to get their money naturally. I got out of that and went into used cars for a while, and got fed up with that. When we were selling sporting cars it was all right because the cars were good. They had their own finance company.

33:30 We never bought rubbish. Any rubbish we bought we'd just send to auction, trade it in. I found the used car trade with someone else wasn't what I liked, so I started my own business in Prahran, a workshop doing repairs. I did that until I retired. I joined Legacy. I was a Councillor in Oakleigh for some years. I was on the Board of Management for the VACC and one Committee of the

34:00 VACC.

**Did you have any difficulty adjusting to civilian life?**

Yes, rather difficult.

**Tell us about that.**

I think I was rather difficult to live with! I must have a laugh! I think I was quick tempered. I couldn't stand fools. I never could stand fools but I

34:30 was worse then I think. I think I was anti a lot of people who didn't do anything during the war. That was fairly normal. The ones who got themselves a soft job to make sure they didn't get called up, I think that was part of it. It took a while to...I think working at business equipment helped me a fair bit. Kilpatrick was a very clever fellow.

35:00 He started business equipment from another company and he would not employ anybody as a salesman or any of the top executive jobs unless they had been in action during the war. He was a wing commander, a ground staff wing commander and we'd all been in action, some had been POWs in Japan. They'd all been in action somewhere. It was a good comradeship there.

**Did you find that the war had made you more aggressive?**

35:30 No a little different I think.

**You said you were angry.**

Well straight after the war but later on I think I calmed down, more helpful to people. I would have been president here four times and done these things. I think part of that comes from possibly living with the French people.

36:00 **You put a lot of effort into keeping up with them didn't you?**

We kept up with them because they're important. Georges has since died. He and I became like brothers. He died a couple of years ago I think, cancer. Paul is still going. A lot of the girls are still going, some of the girls. Poppa has died of course, Poppa and Mamma, and all that. They were much older

36:30 of course.

**You went back over to France?**

We've been back twice.

**What's it like to go back?**

No I think I've done enough of that.

**What was it like?**

Oh it was terrific! It was terrific. It was like having a red carpet out for you. They were the ones really

37:00 that I owed something to but they looked at it the other way, that they owed us for what we'd done. The only one, Paul was a bit of a problem because he was a real left wing Communist and his brother was a Royalist. He reckons there should still be a King in France. They never were very friendly after the war. They didn't get on very well except when we were there. They met together then

37:30 but normally they just walked on opposite sides of the street. Amazing!

**Did you talk to other people about your experience during the war?**

No. I never did much about it until we came down here and someone found out what I'd done somewhere along the line, and Probus got me to talk at a Probus thing. Then once

- 38:00 you talk at one Probus everyone knows about it, so you get carted around to all of the Probuses and Rotary Clubs. Then the book...everyone wanted me to write a book and I wouldn't write it. I said, "No way" until Jean Connell got onto me and worked on me, and we started the Anzac Day parades we had here. I just taped it and she typed it all. How she could sit down and type eight or nine tapes I'll never know but she had been
- 38:30 a court stenographer. Then to get it printed was a problem. I got it put on CD and then I rang so many people, publishers. They are the rudest people you'd ever meet, publishers. You might know that. Unless you wanted 3000 or 5000 they weren't interested and I couldn't be bothered going around, and selling them at my age. I found one in the mufti, a chap down at Traralgon,
- 39:00 Murray Tucker. I rang him up and when he told me how much it was I thought, "God that's too dear." Then thinking around I thought, "Well" and I'd sold the whole first lot he'd done anyway as soon as I got them. It's on its fourth reprint but they're not big prints. There are only 30 or 40 at a time. He only does 20 but I got him to do 50 first up. He thought that was a bit much because he does it all himself, prints them all
- 39:30 and binds them, hand binds them. So that's how the book came about but up until then I think once a year we had a dinner with the Escape Society. We weren't like reunions of barrels of beer and so forth. It was always a sit down dinner under candlelight. It was well run.

**Did you talk to your family about it?**

Not a lot. They weren't really interested I don't think. Pop was very

- 40:00 proud of me when I came back with my decorations. I ended up with seven decorations in the finish, from France and Poland, and so forth.

**We're just about out of time so is there anything further you'd like to add?**

I don't think so. Have you got all you wanted?

**I know there is more there!**

Yes there is possibly a lot more there.

- 40:30 A lot of it has never come out!

**I'd like to thank you very much.**

Thanks.