Australians at War Film Archive

William Darcey (Jack) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:37 **So Jack whereabouts did you grow up?**

In Leederville, Western Australia.

What was Leederville like to grow up in?

It was on the edge of settlement when I was growing up. North of us was bush. It was about three miles from the centre of the city. It was a different city all together of course.

01:00 It was all right. Working class area.

What did your house look like?

Typical federation style. It was in a row of very similar houses - not identical, but pretty similar. It was a house for ex-service people.

01:30 Just a two bedroom cottage really.

And how many people in your family?

Eight.

Quite a big family.

Yes. Bit of a squeeze in two bedrooms.

So where did you all sleep?

We had a front veranda and my father built on a back veranda and the kids all slept out on the verandas. Had pines.

02:00 **And where are you placed in the family?**

I'm the fifth. I have four older sisters and a younger brother. I'm the oldest boy.

That was a lot of women around you.

Yes. A lot of women.

You mention that it's a war service home, what did your father do in the First World War?

He served in the 28th Battalion.

02:30 He was gassed on the Hindenberg Line. And was invalided home in 1917. He was handicapped from his war experience in that his voice had gone so he could only speak in whispers. But he worked on the railways.

03:00 He was I think well treated by the railway officials because they gave him a job that he held for the rest of his working life. I grew up during the Depression of course but we were never really hard up. Weren't flush by any means, but there was always bread on the table as they say.

03:30 **What was it that your father actually did on the railways?**

He was a stationmaster before the war. But when he came back they gave him a job in the uniform department I suppose you'd call it. He used to send all the uniforms out to the railwaymen and negotiate with the suppliers.

Did he have any trouble breathing because of the gassing?

No.

04:00 But he used to become quite emotional at times and have difficulty getting his breath but I don't know that was caused by the gas.

Did he ever talk to you about what happened to him in the war?

Not much. No. I'm sure he didn't enjoy it. He never

04:30 marched on Anzac Day but he always took my brother and I in to watch the march. Knowing him he was not a person of great enthusiasm for the military.

You mentioned the Depression. What sort of things did you notice about the Depression?

I noticed mainly my school friends

05:00 many of whom had fathers who were out of work. They really were in trouble financially. Patched clothes and would go to school with a jam sandwich wrapped up in newspaper. Quite poor. We weren't quite in that category. But yeah

05:30 they were hard up all right.

Whereabouts did you go to school?

I went to a Christian Brothers school in east Perth. It was a pretty minimal school I must say.

As far as things that you could do?

There was a foundry opposite and the morgue was just across the road and there was no playgrounds and we used to use

06:00 Wellington Square which is a public square/park as our playing fields. But the curriculum was incredibly narrow. No languages, no science. Looking back on it, it was just unbelievably poor really.

Hard to get inspired with the bleakness of it?

06:30 Yes. I was never an inspired student at that stage I must say. Quite the reverse.

Did you enjoy any sport?

I played in the school football and cricket. That was the only sport we had of course. Yeah I did. In those days we used to play a lot of street cricket.

07:00 Do you know what that is? Kerosene tin for wickets, someone's coat or a jumper at the other end. And regardless of the traffic, battle though. It was good. We enjoyed it very much.

What were the Christian Brothers like as far as discipline was concerned?

Savage. They really were.

Can you give me some examples of that savagery?

07:30 I wouldn't want to be unfair to the brothers because they were all volunteers and dedicated their lives to the education of boys. But their ideas on education were pretty immense. If you hadn't done your homework which was the common thing everybody was lined up around the room and

08:00 the brother would go along with his little straps that they had and wallop everybody. The beltings were constant. Don't think it did us all that much harm.

Was it just across the hands?

Oh yeah. But there was a technique of course. You got your hands belted so you put them against a cold wall.

08:30 So it didn't hurt too much. It was really quite primitive when you think about it. I'm sure they don't do it like that nowadays, but in those days that was the accepted thing.

Was there much religious education as part of the Christian Brothers?

Yeah. Lots and lots.

How often would the religious education filter through into your syllabus?

There were prayers throughout the day. You start off with prayers

09:00 and then we'd have the angelus and then we'd have prayers before lunch and prayers after lunch and prayers before going home. And every day there'd be religious instruction. Then of course there was all the being marched off to church. Particularly if you lost a football match.

Really?

You had to go to confession didn't you? You think I'm pulling your leg, but I'm not.

09:30 We didn't lose too many football matches.

You had to confess your sin of loss?

Why didn't you go in harder? Cause you were frightened. Why were you frightened? Because you're in mortal sin. I know it sounds ridiculous, but it's true.

It's quite bizarre really that your sins are actually causing the loss of the football team.

10:00 Football was important.

Was there a lot of competition going on between the schools at that time?

We played the other Christian Brothers schools mainly. They had schools at Fremantle, Lateras and Highgate. We also played first boys occasionally which was a bit of a bloodbath.

10:30 **Were they a bit rough?**

I don't know who was the roughest, but yeah it was pretty rough.

So what sort of things did you get up to on the weekends?

I don't know that we should go into that.

What did kids do in those days?

Cycling. Everybody had a bike of some sort.

11:00 We used to ride miles and miles and miles all over the city. Used to go swimming down at Crawley Baths, ride the bikes there or out to the beach at Scarborough or City Beach. That was a major thing. I used to serve on a baker's cart. The idea was that the bread carter would

11:30 hire me on a Saturday morning. I'd start at six o'clock, help load up the cart. It was dark of course in the winter time. I'd ride my bike and he'd drive the horse and cart. A basket on the handlebars. I raced the bread into all the customers. We'd finish at about two o'clock in the afternoon. I got

12:00 twenty cents for that, two shillings. But it made me something of a plutocrat among my friends. I was always available for a few bob if the kids needed it. Just that sort of thing. And of course we were a very Catholic family. So there was a lot of church going.

12:30 **Would this be on the Sunday?**

Confession Saturday evening. Sunday mass of course, special days, benediction. It was pretty common.

Did the whole family go to church on the Sunday?

Yes.

Did you have to wear anything special for church?

No. You just wore your

13:00 best clothes. Weren't anything flash.

You mentioned that you were hacking around on your bikes on the weekends apart from your bakery job. Did you sister hack around on their bikes too?

No. I don't think my sisters ever had a bike.

So you were just with your own mates?

Yeah. Young kids nowadays, I suppose they still do, but in my

13:30 day you had your crowd you got around with. You'd spend a lot of time in each other's company doing all sorts of things, talking about all sorts of things. It was very companionable. You always

14:00 had mates. That was good.

How did you learn to swim?

I used to cycle down to Crawley Baths. We didn't have swimming at school. I took a course in swimming. There was an instructor there. Not that I was ever a great swimmer. But used to enjoy it. Again we'd go as a group.

What

14:30 **were the roads like to ride on in those days?**

There was nowhere near the same traffic. There was very little traffic comparatively. They were all

right. Used to go into town and up through Kings Park and down the hill to Crawley Baths. Very enjoyable.

Was that a bit of a social thing, the Crawley Baths?

Yes.

15:00 Lots of people, lots of youngsters went there. Sometimes they were quite crowded.

Did you have any special duties to perform as part of living in your household?

Yes. I had to chop the wood. That was the main thing. And do the shopping which meant you had to walk to the shop and order the

15:30 whatever you want and they'd wrap it up in brown paper parcels. Big brown paper parcels. So you would cart those home. That was about my job, that and the wood. Wood fired stoves, of course.

What sort of food would you mum cook?

Good plain fare. She'd come out from the Shetland Isles really.

Where is that? Is that

16:00 **Scotland?**

North of Scotland. Well north of Scotland. As a 17-year-old girl with her younger sister. This was in 1911 and she'd become a cook at the Newmarket Hotel in Fremantle. South of Fremantle. So she was quite a skilled cook. But plain fare. The usual

16:30 mutton and beef and sausages and mince. But she cooked on a wood stove for most of my growing up years. Later on got a gas stove. I clearly remember the joy of when the grilling the chops and they'd catch fire and there'd be fire smoking.

17:00 It was a pretty hard life for a woman in those days. She didn't have a sink in the kitchen for instance, certainly no washing machine and dishwashers were not even dreamed up. So it was a lot of hard work for her. But she managed.

Didn't the kids have to do the dishes?

Yes.

17:30 The girls did the washing up and they helped prepare the veggies and stuff.

Did you do anything in the house as a family group?

We always used to eat together. Other than breakfast. Didn't seem to have it together for breakfast. But yeah we always dined.

18:00 On the weekend we always had hot meals at lunchtime and that was always together. There was a lot of conversation of course around the table. A lot of arguing too.

About what?

My family were a most argumentative lot. Still are. They just argumentative people I suppose. Whatever you say'll be

18:30 challenged. You know that sort of thing. Not in an unpleasant way but you'd have to satisfy your critics or substantiate your case. It was good training in a way.

That sounds like a really positive thing.

Yeah. I would say so. Sometimes ended up pretty hot. But by and large, good. I have

19:00 very happy memories of my childhood. Were you still at the Christian Brothers by the time you left school?

Were you still at the Christian Brothers by the time you left school?

Yes.

And at what point did you actually leave school?

At year nine in those days, year ten now, we did a thing called a junior certificate in this state. I think they're called intermediates in the eastern states. That was a sort of end. You did that at age fifteen.

19:30 Then if you had the opportunity you went on to upper school in another institution. I badly wanted to go on but couldn't.

Why couldn't you?

I couldn't get a scholarship, I wasn't bright enough for that and my parents couldn't afford to send me

to a senior school.

20:00 So I left school as everybody did pretty well.

Did you have any ambitions?

I wanted to fly. I always wanted to fly. But other than that - this was 1939. We were at the end of the Depression, just starting to come out of the Depression. And jobs for kids

20:30 leaving school were very difficult to get. It took me 8 months to get my first job. It wasn't a question of what I wanted to do. It was what was available. I got a job as an office boy with a firm of agricultural machinery makers. That was all right, but I remember

21:00 when I was interviewed by the accountant he said, "How much do you expect to get in pay?" "A quid a week, say". A pound a week, what's that? Two dollars. He said, "17 and six". So that's what I started on.

How did you go about finding a job over that eight-month period?

Well I looked at the paper every morning. Spoke to everybody

21:30 I could think of that might be able to give me a lead. But there wasn't much help to find a job. You found it yourself. Some of the kids whose parents were tradesmen and such, they got apprenticeships because of Dad. But my father wasn't a tradesman so there wasn't an apprenticeships. But it all works out in the end.

So what sort

22:00 **of things did you have to do being an office boy in agricultural machinery?**

Fill the ink wells, change the blotters, answer the telephone if none of the girls were around. Run down to the post office, pick up the mail. Unpack the stores that came in. Do a bit of filing. That was about it. Very

22:30 low level work and interestingly - I was doing that when I joined up and when I came back - I joined when I was 18 - when I came back I was almost 22. The firm was required to give ex-servicemen their job back. So I

23:00 got my job back. Which was office boy. And I was 22. I'd served four years and I'd been in charge of people. It was a bit difficult, a bit hard to take.

I bet. We'll talk a bit more about that later on. But I can understand your conundrum. Why were you so interested in aeroplanes?

I'd

23:30 read every book that I could get hold of about the First World War flying. I had made a collection of aircraft - copied them. Not models, just drawings. I'd read every Biggles book of course. It was just something that I was

24:00 fascinated by. It was always a major interest.

Was there anywhere you could go to watch aeroplanes?

Went out to Mainlands Aerodrome once or twice, watched the aeroplanes there. That's about all. There wasn't much activity in the air around these parts in those days.

24:30 That was a lifetime interest.

So you were obviously an office boy and trouble starts brewing in Europe. So what was the reaction of other people around you to this news coming in from Europe?

Unbelief I would say. It all -

25:00 first off was in the period they call the phoney war. There seemed to be nothing much happening. It really wasn't I think it didn't hit home here until the Japanese came into the war. And then it did, it made a big impact. Prior to that I - cause the troops were going

25:30 away. The 6th Divvie [Division] went over to the Middle East and then the 9th and then the guys went up to Singapore and Malaysia, the AIF [Australian Imperial Force], I mean. So yeah there was, but it was all rather low key. We really weren't geared up for the war

26:00 in those days. But when the Japanese came in of course that was a different story. Because they came down so quickly, unbelievably quickly, virtually destroyed the British navy in these parts, took Singapore, were bombing Darwin, Broome and Townsville. That changed the whole tenor of the war in Australia.

26:30 **Your decision to join air crew reserve, was that to do with your passion for flying or was it in response to what was going on in the world?**

I decided to try for air crew because I wanted flying. But everybody was joining something. And if you didn't join you were drafted into the chocos as we used to call them.

27:00 That was much preferable to my point of view to go air crew.

So how did you go about being first of all in the air crew reserve?

They had a scheme whereby at 17 you could join the air crew reserve. You made a commitment to join the air force when you were 18

27:30 because you couldn't join before that. Whilst you were on the reserve you did 21 books as they called them. That was a series of books that covered things like physics and maths, a bit of navigation, learnt a bit of Morse code, did some air force law. It's a preparatory course.

28:00 And I used to go to Perth Boys School one night a week and volunteer teachers used to take us through this stuff which I found quite interesting because I hadn't done anything like that before. My maths were not all that good. And then of Fridays we would go to Shell House I remember and they had

28:30 a theatrette there and they would show us films or have perhaps a speaker. One of the old guys from the First World War perhaps. And sort of induct us into the ethos if you like of the air force.

What sort of things would they tell you about?

What it was like to have a Gerry [German] on your tail.

29:00 One I can remember is "Beware of the Hun in the Sun". This sort of stuff. For a young bloke it was very interesting. I enjoyed it very much. And then on Sunday morning we'd go down to the esplanade and do physical exercises as a fitness thing. It was all right. Good.

How much of an emphasis was there on physical

29:30 **fitness?**

A lot. A great deal all through my service physical fitness was a very high priority.

So while you were in the air crew reserve how often are you training and doing things?

That happened every week for the almost a year that I was in the reserve.

Is it once or twice a week

30:00 **that you're doing this?**

Three times. Once to do the academic sort of stuff, once to do the Shell House stuff and the once to do the physie.

Have you made any mates while you're doing this?

Oh yeah. Too right.

Were they friends of yours before?

No. None of my mates from

30:30 where I lived or at school joined air crew as far as I know. Not with me anyway.

So how much of a diversity was there for lads your age?

Diversity?

Yeah, was there a big diversity? Or was it more of an elitist thing to join the air crew reserve?

Oh. Well there

31:00 weren't taking ordinary people. You had to be good to get into air crew. You had to be good in the sense that you had to be A1 physically.

Even with getting into the reserve?

You still had to measure up to the normal requirements for entry into the air force. I remember when I did my medical it took a day and a half to go through

31:30 the whole works. It was a very thorough examination. Might say, when I was discharged it took about two minutes. "You alright? Okay, off you go".

So what did you actually have to do to join the air crew reserve? Was it some sort of interview process that you had to pass?

You applied of course on a form.

32:00 Part of the induction into the proper air force you were interviewed yes and obviously were assessed. I don't know what the basis of the assessment was. But they knocked back quite a lot of young men for whatever reason. If you had the slightest thing wrong with your hearing

32:30 or your eyesight or the heart wasn't quite right or whatever or if they were assessed as unsuitable. That's a pretty broad category. How you did that I don't know. But they seemed to think I was all right.

Do you think that this intricate process of assessment contributed to air crew being a bit of an elitist force?

They were an elite.

33:00 No doubt about it. You had to be good to get into air crew.

Was that also the public perception?

I think there was a bit of jealousy among other young men, particularly young men who'd been knocked back and quite a lot were knocked back. As I say for all sorts of reasons. We came in for a bit of flak. Blue Orchids. You've heard all those terms I'm sure.

33:30 But I suppose there was an element of jealousy. It didn't worry us too much but some people seemed to be a bit resentful. On the other hand and particularly in England during the war the air force just couldn't go wrong. The people were enormously

34:00 supportive and helpful and kind. It was a special force. There's no doubt about that.

So being in the air crew reserve, are you about 17 years old?

17.

And is it just then a process of waiting until you turn 18 in order to flip over into air crew?

Yes. I turned 18 on the 29th of November

34:30 and I was called up in December. Much to my mother's chagrin. But that was the situation. Then the Japanese came in in December and we were all put back a month so I didn't actually go into the air force until January 1942.

Sorry why were you put back a month?

Because the Japanese had come into the war.

Is it because they had to have time to think

35:00 **it out?**

It did cause great upheaval in the services. The Americans had arrived for one thing and they all had to be accommodated and so on. So it set back the Empire Training Scheme that I was part of by a month. It set me back a month.

Sounds like chaos.

35:30 No. It wasn't. Actually that Empire Air Training Scheme was an incredible organisation. Really. To be able to select and train so many air crew with very little equipment and accommodation in such a short time was a tremendous achievement. And it happened all over the Empire.

36:00 Canada, South Africa, Rhodesia and so on.

So where were you first sent to do your training with the EATS [Empire Air Training Scheme] program?

There was an ITS [Initial Training School] here at Pearce. But I was sent to - not only me but quite a trainload of us - to Victor harbour in South Australia where we did what they call the ITS - initial

36:30 training scheme or school.

Is there any particular reason they were sending you to South Australia instead of accommodating you within your own state?

They didn't have the facilities here.

So there were that many blokes going through that they ran out of space.

Yeah. But it was an operating airfield too. It wasn't just an initial training school as Victor harbour was. So they had other uses for Pearce.

37:00 Later on they opened an ITS at Clontarf, a boys' orphanage on the Canning River. But that was after my time.

So tell me about the train journey over to South Australia?

It wasn't exactly in cattle trucks, but it wasn't in first class carriages either. They used to

37:30 stop the train when it was mealtime and the cooks would brew up a big tubs of stew or whatever and we'd all line up with our tin plates and have a meal. And then had tubs of boiling water that you washed your dishes and knives and forks and things.

38:00 Got back on the train and off you went again. It was quite relaxed. But basic.

Was the element of excitement about being on this journey?

Yes. For me for sure. I'd never been out of the state before. Yes it was exciting. Great mob of blokes. It was good.

Whereabouts

38:30 **would you sleep on the train?**

We didn't have sleepers. I think we just dozed wherever you could find a place.

Did you arrive at Victor harbour completely exhausted?

No. We were all in civilian clothes still. When we arrived at Victor harbour which is a nice little town, still is al thought its grown a lot the station band

39:00 met us and we had to march through the town and off to Mount Bracken I think they called the place where the ITS was. Of course we were all in civilian clothes and none of us had done any marching before so we must have been a pretty ragged looking lot having just had four or five days on the train.

I thought you might have actually covered marching

39:30 **with air crew reserve.**

No. We didn't march. Marching was never a big deal. Certainly wasn't with me. But you do these things because it's part of the deal.

And what were the barracks like at Victor harbour?

They were tents. And again the eating facilities much the same as on

40:00 the Nullarbor. Tubs of food, you lined up and got it and rinsed off your gear afterwards. There wasn't much of finesse mess in the whole thing.

How big were the tents?

Six man.

So quite a few blokes crammed into a tent.

Yeah. There's enough space for sleeping on.

40:30 But that was about it. You had things called palliasses which were a big hessian bag that you filled up with straw. they were reasonably comfortable. Everybody got two blankets. They stayed with you, good blankets. It was just a normal military camp really.

And what sort of uniform were you issued with?

41:00 We used to get what are called goon skins. Goon skins were overalls. Our hats were felt. The army type hat. And we weren't doing any flying at that stage. And blues. Your usual. One of the most interesting

41:30 things, if you were going on leave, the air force was so particular. You'd all be paraded and they would inspect you in absolute detail. The slightest thing out of place or wrong then you weren't allowed to go on leave. You'd go back and either peel spuds or pick up rubbish or whatever.

42:00 I was not very happy about that I must say.

Tape 2

00:31 **What was the daily routine of initial training school, Jack?**

We were woken with bugle calls early in the morning - very early. We'd have breakfast. Typically. We would then perhaps go for an extended run and do physical exercises and such and then we would go to classes.

01:00 All sorts of things to do with air force, theory of flying, air force law as I remember was an interesting

one.

What was that about?

The rules of the air force, what happened if you didn't do the right thing and what your responsibilities were and that kind of thing. I was

01:30 quite fascinated by that. As a matter of fact, I topped a course in air force law. It's the only thing I really was good at I think. The whole course was interesting. Did a lot of morse code.

Was that difficult to learn?

Some people just could cope, couldn't learn it. Majority of people learnt it. Not terribly well most of us.

02:00 I became a wireless operator later on so I did develop.

How did they instruct you to learn Morse code?

We had a fellow from the post office who used to send beautiful Morse. That sounds strange perhaps, but Morse can be well done or badly done. If it's well done it's relatively easy to read.

02:30 We'd spend hours and hours listening to this and this fellow sending this Morse. And we'd have a key too that we could send from. Really it was a matter of just learning a language. Some people just couldn't learn it as I say thought and they had problems.

I imagine it would be quite a difficult language to learn?

03:00 Not really. We used to sing like dadah, A. This sort of thing. You ultimately learnt it. As a wireless operator

03:30 we were supposed to get to 25 words a minute which isn't terribly fast and we I think got there.

How long were you given to comprehend Morse code?

We started at ITS and then I was sent off as a wireless operator so I did another six months there. ITS lasted a couple of months, six months there, then when I went to the UK [United Kingdom] you did

04:00 other radio schools. So I suppose I'd been learning Morse for perhaps a year or more.

So it was something you did progressively.

Yeah. You got better and better at it.

How did you find the theory of flight during ITS?

Very interesting. As all the science side of flying

04:30 was. And navigation too I found fascinating. It was good. I think for the first time in my life I saw some sort of application for maths. Before that it had just been rule of thumb stuff that didn't have any relevance to anything much. But when you knew if you didn't learn your navigation you didn't get home it gave you an incentive.

05:00 **I imagine it would have been fairly complicated mathematics though?**

Navigation isn't but some of the physics are pretty complicated.

Enough to send a chill up most students' spine I think - physics.

Yes. But it was I suppose selected in that it was the physics that was applicable to flying.

So was it fairly competitive, initial

05:30 **training?**

No. I wasn't aware of any competition in it. It was demanding. They worked us very hard indeed. But I think we all found it interesting and of course it was vitally important to us too. We needed to know this stuff they were giving us.

06:00 Not competitive in that I'm trying to beat the next bloke.

Did you have your heart set on becoming a pilot?

Yes. Like almost everybody. At the end of ITS you all go before a board one by one and the board consists of the senior officers and instructors. They tell you how you performed and ask what

06:30 category you'd like to go into. In my case they said "The flying schools are fill. If you like you can wait for another draft or we desperately need wireless air gunners and you can go straight on and be a wireless air gunner". The Japanese were knocking at the door. It really wasn't a time for personal ambition.

07:00 And I didn't want to hang around for at least another month. So I elected to go on as a wireless air gunner.

So you were borderline between the two categories?

No. The categories were pilot, navigator or we used to call them observers, or wireless air gunner. The wireless air gunners -

07:30 those who couldn't cope with the morse or the radio theory, they became straight air gunners. So that was an extra category. Then later on the war they broke up the navigators into navigators and bomb aimers. So there was a range of categories. But the basic ones were pilot, navigator or wireless air gunner.

What had

08:00 **you heard about Japan entering the war?**

It was always the big headlines and the radio. We were at a time of great threat to Australia. The British navy which we depended on - and Singapore - had been virtually wiped out. The Japanese had come down

08:30 through Malaysia - or Malaya as it was then - and taken Singapore unbelievably quickly and were bombing our cities in the north. We fully expected to be invaded. So it was a time of some stress.

Whereabouts did you do your wireless air gunner course?

09:00 Went to Ballarat in Victoria which is a very cold place in the wintertime as you perhaps know.

What was there?

It's a fine old town, Ballarat. Lots of history, Eureka Stockade and the gold mining era. It's an interesting town, nice place. You've got Lake Wendouree

09:30 which is a pleasant area. But it's a rich farming part of the world and there was a specially constructed aerodrome for the wireless school. We occupied that. It was not very fancy - just huts and the aerodrome. But when I was there the Americas

10:00 arrived and they were camped just across the road from us. So we had a bit of the Yanks.

What was the relationship like between the Aussies and the Yanks?

Good. There was no strife as far as I was aware. The Yanks were a bit trigger happy. You'd hear these shots through the night. Some sentry had seen a rabbit I suppose or something move

10:30 and had opened fire. But they were all right. They weren't bad blokes.

What kind of training exercises were you doing?

We did mostly on the ground. Again heaps of Morse code. A lot of radio theory. How to work the radio and do elementary repairs.

11:00 **Can you elaborate on the kind of theory in repairs that you did?**

There wasn't a lot you could do. It was mainly things like tuning like aerials and connecting aerials. In an aeroplane you have a trailing aerial which is a lead weighted long piece of steel wire that you wind out

11:30 and it trails behind the aircraft. Most rookies forget to wind it in again and when you land you lose your aerial and then you get into trouble. And you've got to be a bit careful that you don't leave it down when you're low flying too. Because it could do damage to property and people. Could hit them.

12:00 It was pretty simple in my day at that level. We used to go out in a van way out into the farming country and contact base and send signals, that kind of thing and the when I was there we were flying in Wakits [Wapiti], a little aeroplane two seater, Australian designed

12:30 and built. My first flight was a bit of a fizzer really in that we were only air borne a few minutes when the oil came back out of the engine all over the canopy and we had to land. The pilot said, "I was going to ask you to jump, but I didn't".

13:00 I'm glad he didn't because I really hadn't thought much about parachuting. We landed in a paddock - incredible - the farmer's wife came out with a basket of hot scones. She must have been just making scones when we lobbed in. The oil pipe had cracked or come undone.

13:30 So we rang the base and they came out and fixed that and the pilot was able to take off but I wasn't allowed to go because of the weight. So I was all togged out in my flying gear but I had to go home on the back of a truck which was a bit undignified. However that was all right.

14:00 Just made the first flight memorable.

I don't' imagine you were in a hurry to get back up in that aircraft?

No it didn't worry me. Not really. What did worry me, the pilots that used to fly these were all frustrated fighter pilots. They didn't want to be instructors and they were just stooging around with this wireless thing and the other fellow tried to raise signals.

14:30 and bored out of their mind. So they used to sit up there reading the paper while they were supposed to be flying the aeroplane. One of the tricks was to fly down over Lake Windaree where there was a yacht perhaps and try and blow the yacht over with their slipstream. They would formate on one another and have their wings to wings just about touching.

15:00 Which didn't inspire much confidence in the back seat. But there we go.

Were there many other accidents?

No. I can't recall anyone having problems at Ballarat. We didn't do a heck of a lot of flying really.

What sort of radio procedures were you learning?

The regulation, the procedures,

15:30 they're all laid down in the book of procedures. You learn the codes. Just they had to become second nature.

Can you give me a general description?

You'd know SOS [an International radio distress signal] of course. But we had things for radio silence, control -

16:00 there's always a control station. If there's a lot of radio traffic and control wanted to hear some particular person they'd send this signal which means be quiet so that he or she could hear what they wanted to hear rather than have all the interference from other aeroplanes. Then

16:30 operationally you had signals which indicated you'd had a sighting of a submarine say or whatever.

Were they all code?

Yeah. I can't remember what they were. It might be DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal] that you'd send which meant I've sighted a submarine or whatever.

What signal did you transmit when you crash-landed the Wakit?

17:00 I was able to raise the base. I don't think I knew what the relevant signal was. Just sent it in plain language.

Mayday or something?

No. Mayday seemed to come in much later and that was RT, radio telephone. We were always on WT, wireless telephone with telegraphy.

How much later was that radio technology?

17:30 It was in. It was available, but we didn't use it. You'd use it on approach to landing or get permission to take off. Short range stuff. Nowadays of course they don't use morse or WT at all. It's all RT.

Were you using RT later on when you went to Europe?

18:00 Only locally.

As you just described. You were doing gunnery training as well weren't you at Ballarat?

No. Not at Ballarat. We did gunnery training at East Sale which is another Victorian school.

Was that after Ballarat was it Jack?

Yeah.

How long were you at Ballarat for?

Six months.

18:30 Two months at ITS and I think it was about another month at bombing and gunnery school at East Sale.

Before we get on to East Sale, did you get any leave while you were at Ballarat?

Yeah. Not enough to come home to Western Australia. But I just went down to Tasmania and met relatives. Spent a bit of time in Melbourne.

19:00 Got a fair bit of leave.

Sounds respectable.

Yes it was quite all right.

Was there any recreation available at the base in Ballarat?

Yes. There was. The people in the town were very good to us and we spent a lot of time in the pubs of course which is fairly normal. And got very

19:30 friendly with some of the publicans. Under the Town Hall at a sort of a basement they used to have a place for servicemen where you'd get pies and stuff like that. There was a lot of phys ed [physical education] again doing all sorts of

20:00 group marches and stuff. And again unarmed combat and how to treat a parachute with respect and lots of that kind of related stuff that you really need to know. I don't remember any organised games. There may have been. But I

20:30 don't recall them. It was quite a pleasant sort of life. Not a problem.

Get up to any mischief in Ballarat on leave?

No. Of course not. Came back late once and they made a big hoo hah about that. But no long term problems with it.

What

21:00 **was the behaviour like of most of the rookies when they were on leave locally?**

Good. Air men didn't misbehave. Not in public.

Much mischief during the training on base?

No. Well there was the usual initiation nonsense and stuff that young blokes go on with.

What

21:30 **were they?**

I couldn't tell you that. They if anyone snored they would be carted out into the cold and left out there to wake up. But there were other things which were quite traditional but it's all done in good spirit. Not vindictive or unpleasant.

22:00 More fun really.

You don't care to elaborate?

No.

Okay then. What happened before you went to East Sale? Were you graded?

Yes. We got a badge if we succeeded in passing the thing which was a hand with a lot of sparks coming out like lightening which you

22:30 wore I think on a sleeve. The badge, a radio badge.

Sounds impressive.

It was gained by a lot of hard work. We didn't get our Brevi until after the bombing and gunnery school. That was a treasured item

23:00 like the pilot's wing, half a wing.

That's the training you did at East Sale.

Yep. East Sale that was pretty simple. We were flying Fairey Battles. They were an aircraft that had been used in the earliest days of the war against the Luftwaffer but hadn't proved

23:30 capable so they were using them as training planes, and the old Hawker Demon which was a biplane which was an interesting aeroplane in that it was open cockpits and the pilot sat at the front cockpit and the gunner was in the rear cockpit but he didn't sit because there was no seat. They just crouched down. And there was a thing

24:00 they called a scarf ring where the machine gun mounted on it - go gun they called them. Vickers gas operated. The thought was that when your turn came to fire you'd stand up. Which meant that you stood up in the slipstream. You wore goggles and the goggles if they weren't tight on your head would go off.

24:30 If you opened your mouth the wind would go into your cheek. There'd be a big bulge out on the side. And those aeroplanes they were really ancient. The Hawker Demon. But people liked them. But they

were coming to the end of their time. They used to line them all up in the morning

25:00 and try and get them to go. Some would go. Some wouldn't. Most of them were wheeled back into the hangars to try and get them to operate. One of the intriguing things - they were fabric covered - they had a bar through the fuselage down near the tail with three weights on the outside because the aeroplane was so nose heavy

25:30 that when it landed the mechanics would run out and hold the tail down. But if the mechanics weren't available then these weights, the intention was that they would ballast the aeroplane in case it was - they had a big heavy Merlin in line engine. Had been designed as a fighter aircraft. And it tended

26:00 to fall over, nose over. That's the only time I ever saw that done and it was primitive. But it seemed to work. But the thing was we did air to air. That is, one aircraft would trail a drogue as they called it and the gunner in the other one would ping away and the trick was to try and cut the wire - that wasn't what you were supposed to do.

26:30 **What were you instructed to do?**

To fire at the drogue. Gave you practise in aiming off and that sort of thing.

What was the technique that you used to hit the drogue?

It depends on the relative speed and position of the two aircraft. If you are just flying side by side well you just aim at the drogue. But if the

27:00 relative speed - but you might have to aim off. In other words, you didn't aim at the thing, you aimed ahead of it. So that by the time your bullets got to the drogue they'd moved on so you hit the drogue. It's called aiming off. It's a common, very elementary sort of thing. But then we did air to ground which was quite exciting in that the gunner would stand

27:30 up in the rear thing with the wind hitting his body and going down the back of the pilot's neck. The pilot wasn't very happy. You'd swoop down going at a fair bat I suppose and fire at this big square marked out on the ground. Ad the rumour was that you had to get two percent

28:00 hits otherwise you didn't qualify. I never heard of anybody who didn't get two percent hits. But it was all pretty elementary. Very elementary when you think about what the real requirement was.

What did you say the gun you were training with was?

The Vickers gas operated. It was a good little gun but it was pan fed.

28:30 That is, you only had a hundred rounds in a pan and when that had been expended you had to take that one off and put a another new one on. Which is nothing like the Brownings that were belt fed and they threw out a lot of lead.

So is the pan a round magazine?

29:00 Bit like World War I Lewis gun. It was air-cooled this one. It was an interesting operations within the gun in that the bullet would go up the barrel when it was fired and part of the gas that followed the bullet would come back down through another barrel, but come backwards and

29:30 so put the next shot in the breach. So that's how it went. Gas operated. Gas meaning the gases after the bullet had been fired that set it up for the next bullet. Sounds pretty slow but it was fairly quick.

Any stoppages.

Heaps.

30:00 Lots of stoppages.

What would cause those?

Anything, any little thing. A warm part, a bit of dirt, a bullet that didn't work properly. All sorts of things would cause stoppage.

That must have been frustrating.

Yeah. It didn't matter in training. It mattered very much on operations.

30:30 A lot of the gunners job was to clear stoppages, knowing how to clear stoppages, recognising what they were, what was causing them and clearing them.

Did you have a tool kit or something like that to break down the gun?

No. I don't recall a tool kit. We had a toggle I think they called it

31:00 by which you can load the thing.

How would you try and fix the stoppage?

Depends on the stoppage of course. In the Browning which was a much more complicated gun you could lift the top of the gun and the

31:30 mechanism was all exposed and it all could be taken apart. In fact there wasn't a lot you could do. You had to do something. You couldn't just sit there.

So they were fairly user friendly once you knew how?

Yeah. The Browning was a very good gun. It threw out a lot of lead. It was

32:00 very quick. They were good guns.

Did you get your introduction to the Browning at East Sale?

Yes.

What was the main difference?

The Browning is a much more effective and I think modern gun and a much higher rate of fire.

What was the badge or medal that you received

32:30 **when you completed that training?**

You got your brevet, AG [air gunner] half wing. Which indicated to the world that you were air crew at least and it probably didn't mean much to anyone else, but it meant a great deal to us.

Did you receive your brevet in a ceremony?

Yeah.

Can you describe the ceremony that was held?

Just like a wings parade. The whole station

33:00 would parade and each one would be called and you'd step up to the CO [Commanding Officer] who would present you with your wing and then step back and salute and go back to your place. That's about what it was. It's a routine that they do in the air force. There's always wings parade as they call it.

33:30 **Were there drinks after the ceremony?**

Bound to have been I'm sure but I don't remember.

Was there a mess that you could drink in or did you have to go into town?

No. I don't think we were in the airmen's mess at that point. I think we became sergeants as well at that level. sergeants or officers. Some became commissioned. Some

34:00 were a sergeant. Of course once that happened you did have a mess. The sergeants' mess or the officers' mess. But the airmen I don't think had a mess. I'm not quite sure what they did. I know they went to pubs a lot

How long were you at East Sale for Jack?

I think about a month. I went for a little while to Port Pirie too

34:30 which was just being developed as a gunnery school and spent a few weeks there doing much the same as at East Sale. Then we went home on leave.

I wonder why it is that you went to Point Pirie for a couple of weeks?

I don't know. Perhaps they couldn't find anything for us to do so they sent us off to another gunnery school.

35:00 It was sort of on the way home. Other than that no-one ever explained. It was being developed at the time.

How did you get home to Western Australia?

By train. Always by train.

What was that journey like?

Very interesting. There was a lot of trucks on the train. It was a sort of a mixed goods train and

35:30 airmen coming home on leave. We were able to lie in the sun on the canvas roofs of the trucks which was all very pleasant.

Sounds comfortable.

Yeah it was good fun. Don't know whether it did the roofs much good.

You weren't ordered off the roof?

I don't recall anyone being there to

36:00 give us many orders. I don't think the officials would have been very pleased.

Where did you stop along the way for meals?

Wherever mealtime came they'd stop and brew up outside the train. It was primitive travel. And

36:30 slow. But it was nice to get home.

Had you missed home while you were away?

No. I hadn't. I can't say I did.

You didn't write at all.

Oh yeah. I wrote and some of my people kept some of my letters and they were the most miserable little efforts.

37:00 I was impressed with the need for secrecy. You weren't allowed to tell anyone anything. So there wasn't much to write about. I must say when I look back now I was quite remiss really in the sort of way I treated my family. I didn't forget about them

37:30 but I was never worried about them. I imagine they were worried about me but I didn't worry about them which was a remarkable thing. I suppose I was too busy and too selfish perhaps.

Honest evaluation. What happened when you arrived home?

That was great. This was the only leave I had at home during the whole four years that I served.

38:00 It was about Christmas time and I had Christmas at home. We were at a personnel depot in Wembley, number five personnel depot. There didn't seem to be much happening so I went home. I was supposed to be at the

38:30 place. And I was at home when a friend of mine who was also an airman and pilot in the same situation as I was came to our house and said "You better get back, your mob are shipping out." So I grabbed my gear and ducked back to this place where they were all just about to

39:00 move and I often wondered had I not made it I probably would have been charged with desertion because we were going overseas. But I did make it. We went to Fremantle and got on a British ship, navy ship. I think it was a fleet

39:30 tender they called it. HMS Engadine. That took us to Melbourne via the South Pole or near it I think. From there we went overseas.

Where was the depot in Wembley?

I think it became a factory later on. There's a park - Jollimont Park -

40:00 nearby. It was a big tin group of huts, metal huts. Not sure of the name of the street but I know it was near that park. It was one street back from Cambridge street.

What was it like? Was it very comfortable?

No. It was just the usual

40:30 army huts or air force huts.

Tape 3

00:36 **So what did you actually get up to when you were on leave?**

Depends on where you were of course.

As far as you coming back to Western Australia.

Family stuff. We knew we were about to be drafted overseas.

01:00 **Were you old enough to go overseas?**

You had to be 19 before you could go overseas. I turned 19 on 29 November and I was posted overseas on I think it was 1st January. So yeah I was old enough.

Were you getting posted with a bunch of mates that you'd made?

Yeah. We left here with

01:30 a group of blokes I knew pretty well. We had this trip on the ship.

What was the ship like?

It was a fleet tender I think.

What does that mean?

It was a dogsbody. It did all sorts of things to service the fleet, take ammo and stores to the big ships.

02:00 It was armed. Whilst we were going around to Melbourne we stood watch with the sailors.

And you had to man the guns too.

Yes. The machine guns, not the heavier kind. We'd play cards and talk.

02:30 Lazed around. It was quite fun.

What were the conditions like on the ship?

Like a navy ship. Spartan.

Where were you sleeping?

On the floor somewhere. It wasn't first class travel by any means, but it was all right. It wasn't any problem. They were English sailors. Good fellas.

03:00 No worries.

What sort of food were you given?

I suppose the normal navy rations. I don't think we got any rum like the sailors. No. I don't recall and hardships at all on that. Except we must have gone very far south and there were fears of submarines around the coast.

03:30 It got very very cold. We didn't see any ice. But I was very cold so I'm sure we were well south. But we got to Melbourne okay.

Were you escorted by any other ships?

No. Not on that trip.

Was it just English on board?

Yeah.

And what happened when you got to Melbourne?

04:00 We went to a personnel depot in Melbourne. We were only there a few days.

What is a personnel depot?

It's where the airmen in our case gather before they're sent off to other places.

So it's food, accommodation …

Yeah. And wait out until you're posted somewhere else.

04:30 **Did they give you any idea how long you were going to be waiting around?**

No. Never told anything like that. We went off then to a beautiful big American ship. USS America. It had been a cruise ship on the South American run. But the navy had taken her over.

05:00 But a lovely vessel. Lovely to look at. There would have been about 30 airmen I suppose on this big ship. We called in at New Zealand, Wellington, and picked up some of the wounded US [United States] marines from Guadalcanal.

05:30 The battle of Guadalcanal had recently been fought. They were badly knocked around, all sorts of problems. That brought the war home to me, that this is really what war is about. It's not uniforms and having a good time. Anyway we sailed across

06:00 the Pacific without incident.

It seems like with these chaps coming on board you must have had pretty good hospital facilities there on the ship?

The American services are very well equipped. Everything that you could wish for. And they were

geared up to pick these fellows up so they obviously had all the hospital requirements.

Were the conditions on board the ship far superior

06:30 **than what you …**

Yeah. And the American crew were very good to us. They have different ideas from us though in that as a treat they made us tea - because they drink coffee all the time. But it was cold. It was iced tea. We just don't drink ice tea.

07:00 We didn't. But yeah it was all right. Anyway it was quite uneventful. We had no escort but the ship was armed, but there was no problem. We got to San Francisco anyway.

Did you have any duties to perform while you were on the America?

No. I think we just

07:30 were passengers.

What about food and sleeping facilities?

American rations which were better than our own of course. Sleeping. I don't recall where we slept. I think we might have been in cabins. I think we were. It was a troop ship, but not all the cabins -

08:00 in the troopers they usually have bunks down the hulls and three or more tiers where the guys sleep. Very often sleep in relays. So one group would sleep and then they'd get out and another mob would get into the same beds.

08:30 We didn't have that kind of thing. I'm pretty sure we had cabins.

Any instances of seasickness?

Not for me. No, I was only ever seasick once in my life.

We'll get to that later. What was it like getting into San Francisco?

Fascinating. You know

09:00 the first time I'd ever been in a foreign country. Everything seemed to be so well done. The transport and the trains and the buses and

09:30 all that seemed so ahead of us. And San Francisco was a fascinating city anyway. It was quite an experience, America.

What did you do in San Francisco?

We were only there hours I suppose and we were put on a train and we left

10:00 for the eastern coast of America. It was a train of civilian standard. Our lot had the whole train. But we still had the people who made up the bunks and served meals. Even though it was a troop train it was quite unbelievable really. The

10:30 American people were very very kind to us. Their blokes in Australia had written home and told them the wonderful way they were being treated by the Australians. I think the Americans tried to reciprocate. But they couldn't have been more friendly and helpful. Some of our blokes played up a bit. I'll tell you

11:00 a story. We had in charge, the OC [officer commanding] of the train was a RAF [Royal Air Force] fellow, British air force. Flight lieutenant I think. Very pucker. Very proper chap. And years later when I was the principal of the senior high school this same fella

11:30 came on my staff as a youth education officer. And he used to come into my office almost every morning when I was absolutely busy and he'd regale me with these stories about these white aboriginals as he called us that he was in charge of going across America and how they wouldn't do as he wanted and nicked off and did

12:00 all sorts of terrible things. I never ever told him that I was one of the white aboriginals. We became good friends. Lifetime friends until he died. And I never told him because it didn't seem quite right. But it was amusing to hear from his perspective because we thought he was a very proper gent.

12:30 But the blokes they used to any stop we came to in America very often they'd get friendly with someone on the station and go off and spend time with them and then fly up and pick us up further up. They were sort of unaccounted for. Nobody

13:00 knew where they were or whether they were coming back or what. But anyway - we went along the Santa Fe trail right across America through Buffalo to Boston and there's a camp there - sort of an invocation depot - called Miles Standish just outside of Boston. It was wintertime.

13:30 Freezing. Terribly cold. We were there I suppose a couple of months perhaps. Then we were sent off down to New York and caught the boat to Britain.

Did you get much time to have a look around New York?

Yeah. A lot of time. Used to get free tickets

14:00 to some of the night clubs. They looked after us very well.

So what were those nightclubs like?

Very noisy, very loud, very rude, very wicket in some ways. They were great fun though.

What are we talking here? Booze and girls?

Yeah of course.

What were the American

14:30 **girls like?**

I didn't find them as attractive as the Australian girls. They were very friendly and very hospitable and wanted to give you a good time and all that. Nice people but not - they were just a bit different. There was I suppose it's a

15:00 you're not quite used to them. There's a culture gap.

As part of the cultural gap were they just more forward?

Yes. I would say so. More outgoing. A lot more to say. A bit of a surprise to a young Australian

15:30 bloke, yeah.

It would have been a pretty big cultural difference between Perth and New York. I mean, it still is.

Yeah. Worlds of difference. But it was a very interesting visit.

Did you get to see any of the sights of New York?

Yeah. We spent quite a bit of time in New York. We had nothing to do there of course so we got leave and it wasn't very far down from Boston to New York.

16:00 We used to go to a lot of restaurants. New York of course was all fully lit still. There was no wartime precautions at all. We did a march through a little bit of New York.

What was that in aid of?

I can't imagine

16:30 but it was an interesting experience in that we weren't a big contingent but we did this march through lower Manhattan, tickertape stuff. Again the cultural differences were quite marked in that people'd be lining the street and a woman would rush out and throw her arms

17:00 around you and gush and go on. It was very difficult to maintain a military presence. They were good people.

This parade, was it just Australians on parade?

I think so.

Was it all the services?

Just air. I don't know

17:30 why it was on. Probably some special day or something.

When you went out and discovered some of the restaurants in New York, did they have any sort of rationing at the time?

No. You could eat your head off. No there was certainly no shortage at all.

That must have been a bit of a welcome relief.

We weren't short of food here. I was

18:00 never aware of being short of food. But the Yanks are much more lavish. They eat a lot more than we do for one thing I think. But they eat something that we would think of as a special occasion dish they have all the time. It's just different. I don't that it's any better but it's different?

Buy any souvenirs?

18:30 No. Didn’t give it a thought.

So how long in total were you on the east coast?

Perhaps two months. Not very long.

Still long enough to have a look around. Were you looking forward to getting back in business so to speak?

No. Not particularly.

I don’t blame you.

19:00 I was looking forward to getting to Britain because again I didn’t know anything about Britain and I had all sorts of expectations. I must say I was enjoying the trip and still look back on it with a great deal of pleasure because it was a unique experience.

What were your expectations for England?

19:30 I thought England - we’d been getting press reports about the blitz and the shortages and the expected invasion and all that sort of stuff so I was expecting it to be pretty torrid. In fact I found it wasn’t at all like that.

20:00 But we left New York. I’m not certain whether it was the Queen Mary or the Queen Elizabeth. It was one of the queens. I think the Mary. She was a trooper, troop ship. We had a regiment of Canadian soldiers on it.

20:30 And I suppose about 30 or 40 Australian airmen. We had an escort by the American navy for the first day perhaps. Then they turned back and we went across on our own. But the Queens travelled like that because they could outrun any U-Boats. But it did occur to me

21:00 had we been sunk the loss of life would have been enormous with all these Canadian soldiers on board. But we weren’t attacked in any way. But as we got close to the coast of Scotland - when I say close, perhaps a day out - this great white beautiful aeroplane came out and flew around the ship.

21:30 Low down. Was sending all its lamp signals to the bridge of the ship and then the ship was replying. And I was fascinated, the troops lined the railings and cheered. I suppose there was a sense of relief that they were now

22:00 being looked after, were relatively safe, because the aircraft was looking for the submarines ahead of them. It was quite an experience. It stuck in my memory. I had no intention or desire at all to go on flying boats at the time, but this was a Sunderland.

22:30 First time I’d seen a Sunderland and didn’t realise within a few months I’d be out there doing just that.

I do want to ask you about the conditions on board the boat. What were the conditions on board like?

Very good.

23:00 We certainly had cabins. We sat at tables to dine and the troops were on their decks, they had trestles and stools. Whereas we were well looked after. The class distinction’s a bit rough really. But

23:30 that’s the way it was.

And the fact that you got the good stuff?

Yep. And the troops put up with what was left. But there was a lot of men on board that ship.

How about ablution facilities if you had so many men there?

We were all right. Far as I know we had ensuite stuff in the cabin.

24:00 Don’t recall going to a communal place.

Very spectacular.

A bit like peacetime travel.

So you were heading towards Scotland, am I right?

Yes. We went north about Ireland and landed at Greenock on the Clyde.

Was a bit cool, that area?

Not excessively.

24:30 I don’t recall it being cold and cool. We got straight of a train off the boat virtually and travelled

overnight down to the south coast of Britain.

At what point were you told where you were heading?

We were never told where we were heading. No. We all knew we were going to Britain, but beyond that we didn't know.

When you were on the train what are you suspecting is going to happen?

25:00 I expected that we'd be strafed from the air and there'd be bomb damage everywhere. And there wouldn't be enough to eat. All of which was nonsense. Nothing like that at all. Instead by the morning we seemed to be going through the outskirts of London and that was from my point of view absolutely

25:30 fascinating to see the English countryside and then the things that you'd read about and heard about all your life and here they were in actual fact. It was quite great.

What sort of things that you identified?

The churches. The towns, the villages, the hedgerows, the green fields, the little fields.

26:00 That kind of thing. It was just storybook stuff that again was all new to me and the expectation coming to life.

So was there a general feeling of excitement amongst the men?

26:30 Most of them were in the same boat as I was. It was the first time they'd ever been to England, but being Australians we'd always heard a great deal about it. So I think they were agog to see all they could. Anyway then we went to Brighton which is as you know is a seaside resort which the air force had virtually taken over although it was still functioning

27:00 as a seaside resort. We were billeted into various guesthouses and stuff that were still operating as guesthouses.

What was your guesthouse like?

Good. It was just like the usual British guesthouse. There was an elderly lady who was a real martinet in charge. Comfortable.

27:30 Not a problem.

You got rooms to yourself?

Yes. Might have h ad two to a room, something like that. But it was quite civilised. It wasn't like army or air force barracks or anything like that.

Do you get meals?

Yeah. The usual meals. And there was no shortage of food that I could see. Certainly no shortage of beer.

28:00 It was the common pastime, to go to the pub.

So what would your average day entail in Brighton?

They'd march us around. We'd have to fall in. We'd go for medical checks and injections and

28:30 lectures and all that kind of thing. They'd fill the day in for us.

Was this still part of the training or were the lectures … ?

Yeah. They were part of the training. I suppose they were also to keep us involved and active rather than dying of boredom.

Were the lectures about things that you didn't know? Or was it revision on things that

29:00 **you've already learnt?**

I would say more revision on things. You picked up a lot of stuff informally about the RAF because we were going to serve with the RAF. It's hard to say whether it was done by lectures or just word of

29:30 mouth - people talking. But it was an adjustment period. Whilst we were there we got a fair bit of leave. I used to go up to London every time.

What would you do when you were in London?

We used to get a lot of leave all the time I was in Britain. I think we got a week every six weeks. And you got a free rail pass to anywhere in the UK [United Kingdom]

30:00 that you wanted to go. And a lot of people invited us to their homes. They had organisations, you could say you'd like to stay in Scotland for a week or whatever. But I only did that once or twice. I used to go

to the West End in London which was a wonderful place during the war. People from all over the world.

30:30 Really a great place to be, London, in those days. It was still being bombed occasionally. It didn't seem to matter terribly much. It was the sort of camaraderie of the people.

31:00 I can recall being in hotels or pubs when the place was being bombed. There was a tremendous sense of togetherness. I've never experienced it elsewhere. Quite remarkable. But it was just a great place to be. There was so much to do and see. And

31:30 we always used to stay - most of the Australians, I certainly did - at Strand Palace Hotel which is quite a posh place in the Strand. Fearfully expensive. But we either got it for free or very heavily subsidised. I believe it was Lord Nuffield that provided it for us. Anyway it was where we stayed and it was right in the centre of things.

32:00 And Australia House was great. The bottom of the basement had been turned into an airmen's club where we met all the guys, all Australian airmen when they come to London used to go to the Boomerang Club just near St Clementine's church which is the air force church.

So you'd been mixing with airmen who'd already been on operations?

32:30 Yes.

What sort of things would you ask them?

They'd tell you who'd been knocked off and who'd done this and who'd done that. They'd exchange views on stories and spend time together.

Did it help you acclimatize or did it make you more fearful of what you might

33:00 **see in later months?**

I don't recall being fearful. I didn't expect to survive. You don't. But on the other hand - and I was certainly scared when it got dinkum - but I never

33:30 lay awake at night and worried. Too drunk I suppose.

At what point did you actually come to this realisation that you believed that you weren't going to survive?

Most people didn't. There's something like two thirds airmen didn't survive so why would you expect to be any different.

Was this a slow realisation or a bolt of lightning?

34:00 No. It was just something that you lived with. It just was.

Did you realise that before you actually joined up?

No. I hadn't thought that far ahead.

So this was maybe something that you figured out when you were still training in Australia?

Yeah. It just wasn't to the forefront of my mind. I didn't think

34:30 much about it. I just didn't look ahead that far.

But still you accepted that you weren't going to survive.

I accepted that I probably wouldn't. I didn't think of anything postwar. Postwar didn't register with me. Because you didn't know when the war was going to end anyway. No I think

35:00 if I thought about it at all it wasn't whether I would cop it or not. It was more how and when. Not if or not. That just didn't happen. Strange isn't it?

It is.

But it wasn't a worry. That's another interesting facet. It just didn't greatly

35:30 concern me. I didn't want to be burnt and a lot of airmen were. They were horrific burns, awful burns, terribly scarred. But other than that I wasn't all that concerned, but I was scared.

So you're still based in ...

36:00 Bournemouth.

What was the town like there?

It was a holiday town. A superior holiday town. But with wartime and the invasion was expected still and the beaches were all mined in barbed wire entanglements and gun emplacements. Gerry was still

36:30 coming over and strafing which was an interesting experience. One minute it's all peaceful and fine and then suddenly there's a noise and blam blam blam and then it's all quiet again and they've gone. And the crowds are still drifting by. It's all unreal. All so

37:00 quick. What impressed me, it was so sudden. The peaceful one minute, awful for a seconds really and then peaceful again and everything back to normal almost. Quite interesting.

So what happened next?

37:30 We were getting a bit fed up with standing around doing nothing and almost all the guys were going to bomber command and they called one day for volunteers for coastal command. My father being an old soldier had said, "Now never volunteer". But my friends said, "Come on, let's have a go at this".

38:00 So I went with them and we volunteered. I was accepted and most of them weren't. So I went to coastal command and initially I was posted to a torpedo bomber squadron flying Hamdens.

38:30 I was posted there but I never got there. And I was pleased really about that because that was a very dangerous job. The tour on torpedo bombers was three strikes. That was the life expectancy. Whereas bomber command was 30 operations. But whilst before I joined

39:00 the squadron actually they changed from Hamdens which had a crew of three to Beaufighters which only had a crew of two. In other words they didn't carry a wireless air gunner. So I was redundant as far as the torpedo bombers went.

So getting assigned to torpedo bombers is way worse than assigned to bomber

39:30 **command.**

Your life expectancy is far less. Yes. It was a dangerous job. Not a good one to be in.

So you were in the situation there for a few moments where you thought, ooh my life expectancy could be very very short?

I don't think I thought about it to be honest. There was no heroics about it.

40:00 That was the job. That's what you were down to do. That's what you did. So fortunately for me I then was sent off to join the Sunderlands. Which was a lifesaver.

So how did you get informed of this information that you were going to be on Sunderland's?

I suppose they

40:30 you know you got a posting as they said. I was posted to the Sunderland OTU [Operational Training Unit] in Furness in Scotland. Whilst there we crewed up. I crewed up with a group that were going to 461 Squadron.

Tape 4

00:33 **Jack, can you tell me a little bit more about the torpedo squadron that you were originally posted to?**

I never got there. So really I don't know much about it but that squadron later on flew to Russia. They lost three aircraft I think on the way across and they

01:00 spent time there but I was not involved in that. As I say I never really got to the squadron.

What planes were they using?

Hamdens. They were unsuitable really for the task that they were given. They carried a crew of three. They were a very narrow fuselage. And there was a pilot and a navigator and a wireless air gunner. But the reason I didn't get there

01:30 as I say they converted to Beaufighters. Which were a much superior aeroplane and they only had a crew of two so they didn't need me.

Did the torpedo squadrons operate in the Atlantic?

Yes. And the North Sea.

Did you operate together in the squadron that you were in?

No.

02:00 In Sunderlands it was always the one aircraft. A lone aircraft. Sometimes if you were in trouble the fighters - Beaufighters - would come down and provide an escort to get you home.

Did the torpedo fighters torpedo ocean craft?

02:30 Yeah. They were anti-shipping. They had a technique that I think they developed later on with the Beaufighters in that a flight of Beaufighers would go in and strafe the gunners on the ship. And whilst the gunners were following the Beaufighters

03:00 the torpedo Beaus would come in. That was a highly dangerous job.

What was the main difference between the torpedo patrols and the patrols that you were doing on the Sunderlands?

Ours we didn't carry torpedoes and normally we didn't attack shipping. Our role was anti submarine. In our case some convoy escort, but mainly anti submarine.

03:30 **How did you feel when you were posted to the 416 Squadron?**

It was called the Anzac Squadron and it was quite a famous squadron. It was a very good squadron. It was an off shoot of the 10 Squadron which was legendary. But it had been originally formed in 1942

04:00 from a nucleus of them and from 10 Squadron experienced airmen. I joined in 1943 after OT [OTU] at Furness where we'd crewed up and went down to Broke [Pembroke] Dock where the squadron was.

What happened in the OT unit , Orness?

The OTU, you went there

04:30 as individual people. An experienced pilot from the squadron was also there learning to be a skipper. There'd be a gathering in one of the hangars - the navigators and the gunners and the wireless operators and the pilots all got together and you sorted yourselves out into crews.

05:00 In the Sunderlands case we had a crew of 12. It was all done in a very apparently haphazard way but it worked very well. You had to have the right number of pilots and the right number of gunners and so on. But other than that you were free to

05:30 join whoever either asked you to join or you asked them if you could join their particular crew.

What happened in your experience?

I think with a friend who had decided he was going with a particular pilot said why don't you come with me? So I went to see the pilot, "Are you looking for a wireless operator?"

06:00 I imagine this is what happened and he probably said, "Yes if you want to come on board". So there we were . Before you knew where you were you were a crew. You stayed with that crew then for a long time.

Can you tell me about some of the fellas in your crew?

Yeah. The skipper

06:30 was a fella named McHugh. Neil McHugh. He was a teacher but after the war became an airline pilot as many of the Sunderland skippers did. The co pilot was a fella named Prentice I think. Dick Prentice who later on became skipper.

07:00 The navigator was Colin Bremner. He stayed in the RAF [Royal Air Force] after the war and became navigator on the Queen's Flight. So he was pretty good. There was flight lieutenant straight air gunner from South Australia. There was a Canadian chap who was a straight air gunner. There was

07:30 two English RAF flight engineers and the rest was all radio operators or wireless operators. So we were a bit of a mix. The top people if you like in the crew, the skipper, co pilot and navigator were always Australians.

08:00 In my experience they were. The rest of the crew were a mix.

How long did you spend at OTU?

I think about three months. We always flew as a crew. Did a lot of ground training as well. My first experience of night flying was at the OTU.

08:30 And did a lot of simulated attacks on submarines and all the usual stuff. Had a lot of leave. Nice little town.

Can you describe Furness?

It was quite a big base. It was near Invergordon. Invergordon was a naval base of some importance.

And there'd been during the First World War a naval mutiny

09:00 at Invergordon. All this as they say - it's on Moray Firth which is on the east coast of Scotland and well to the north of Scotland. North of Inverness which is the sort of northern capital. It was a little typical of Scottish towns. Grey stone buildings. Pleasant people. But not very outgoing.

09:30 Not many facilities at all. There were a few little shops, interesting little places. It was on the railway line so it was easily got to.

What impression did it make on you as a young Australian?

I thought it was a bit dreary, but I had a Scottish family background so I was

10:00 a bit onside with them. It's not the sort of place that I would want to live in. My wife and I went back years later and the base had become a big hush hush experimental thing. But Orness itself hadn't changed much. The town was just

10:30 the usual little sleepy Scottish village really.

I'm assuming there's a lake there?

No. It was a firth, a sort of inlet from the sea. Moray Firth's a bit inlet into the highlands. That's where the aircraft went.

What was the daily routine like?

11:00 The usual routine. Up early, breakfast and to work. Whether flying or if you weren't flying there'd be ground instruction. One of the interesting things we did do was they had a clay pigeon range. We used to spend a lot of time shooting these clay pigeons which is quite a sport really.

11:30 But interesting. You'd have a little machine that you'd pull back and put this clay like a Frisbee and shoot it off and it'd go up in the air and you'd ping away with shotguns. The whole idea being training firing on a moving target. And people got very good at it.

So it became like a sporting pastime?

12:00 Yeah. It was part of the training. We had to do it. But it was more pleasure than anything.

What was your introduction to the Sunderland?

They had this Sunderland hull. No wings. So therefore no engine. They were floats. But it was in a hangar. And I can remember it was enormous. I just couldn't believe that a thing of that

12:30 size could fly. And cavernous inside. It was the biggest aeroplane that was - on either side - that was employed during the war. But very very impressed. Because it was like a great ship. They used to call us web footers the people on flying boats

13:00 in the air force really. We were known as web footers. And we had to learn all the nautical terms because if it went in the harbour on the water it's virtually a ship. It's got to be moored up and you've got to have anchors and drogues. All the things that boats have. So that was another dimension that we had to learn.

13:30 It was good. Always interesting. And it was a wonderful aeroplane, just incredibly - terribly fortunate to get on it. In it. One of the best things that happened to me to get onto the Sunderlands.

I've heard a little bit about the Catalina and they really impressed me.

The Sunderland's much bigger. It's a four engine aircraft.

14:00 The Catalina's two engine. Catalina's a good aeroplane but it's nowhere the size or the complexity of a Sunderland. We had 15 machine-guns on a Sunderland. The Cat [Catalina] had one on each blister on the sides and perhaps two in the nose. So we were much more heavily armed.

Sounds like you were a force to be reckoned with.

Yes.

14:30 The situation was, we would go down in the Bay of Biscay mainly looking for submarines. We'd fly on patrol as they call it, across the mouth of the bay because when the Germans had captured the coast of France they put their submarine bases there. So that the

15:00 subs going out to attack shipping coming across from America mainly or up from the south had to go through the mouth of the bay. So we patrolled up and down the mouth. The idea

15:30 being that if we didn't sink them at least we kept them down. A submarine as you know probably has to surface. In those days it had to surface every day and usually they'd try and surface at night, but often they had to surface during the day. But they had to go through this mouth of the bay going out and coming back and that's where we used to try and get them.

Before I ask you more about those patrols, Jack,

16:00 **I'll just ask you a little bit more about the completion of your officer's training unit at Orness.**

Operational training. OTU it's commonly called.

You mentioned that you were doing mock sub patrols there. What was the procedure, the introduction to those patrols?

16:30 We'd have a royal navy submarine who would do what was thought a German U-Boat would do. It was our function to find them and drop a smoke bomb on them. Only a little fellow about 11 inches long which just made a

17:00 bit of noise and a bit of smoke. It was good training for the navy crew, the submarine crew, and good training for us. But then we did all sorts of other things like fighter affiliation where the fighter boys would come up and do mock attacks on us. I didn't like that much because

17:30 they came a bit too close for my comfort.

What kind of flyers did you do those kind of exercises with?

Lightnings was a common one. But any of the fighters. Hurricanes, Spitfires, any fighter. We were very slow lumbering

18:00 aircraft of course. But in the actual fact as I say we had 15 machine-guns which gave us a lot of firepower. But the German Luftwaffer - we were looking for their subs, they were looking for us. They would come with 6 or 8 aircraft, fighters, JIDH [Luftwaffe JU 88?]

18:30 usually. And try and shoot us down. We would do our best to defend ourselves and often did get the better of it. But then as we were going home as I mentioned the Beaufighters would sometimes come down and escort us. The only problem with that was that

19:00 the Beaufighter was a twin engine aircraft and so was the JIDH and in the distance and they always came in groups you'd see these black dots coming and as they got closer you could see they were twin engines and you didn't know whether they were JIDH or Beaufighters until they got close enough to see them. So it was a bit scary. I was frightened

19:30 I must say. And so was everybody else whether they say it or not. But I read a book just last year written by the Luftwaffer pilots who were our enemy. And they were terrified of us. So it's interesting to hear about it or see about it

20:00 from the other side because I thought they were far superior to us because they could stand off and hammer us with their cannon whereas we only had .303 machine-guns. But we did have 15 of them.

Where were those machine-guns positioned on board?

In the tail there were four, the tail turret. Earlier on we had a midship turret which had

20:30 two, all Brownings. But later on we had not blisters, but positions on each side. Then in the galley we had a gun out of each galley window. In those nose we had four fixed machine-guns which the pilot operated. We had a turret with two

21:00 machine-guns and in the bomb aimers position we had a point five Browning, bigger one, which a gunner lay on his stomach and fired. So 15 in all which was a lot of firepower.

Armed to the teeth. Can you describe the interior of the plane?

21:30 As I mentioned it's absolutely enormous to walk into. You walked into the front door into the mooring compartment and in the mooring compartment was a winch, an anchor, boat hooks, a bollard that could be laid down and stood up,

22:00 those nose turret which could be wound back and you went across that into the toilet and little bathroom - no bath of course but toilet and hand basin. The bomber command blokes are green with envy when you tell them this because theirs was much more primitive. Then there was a companionway that went up

22:30 flight deck which was above and came up between the skipper and the first pilot's seat onto the flight deck where the navigator and the radar and the radio and the flight engineers worked. Going back downstairs again you went in a little

23:00 couple of steps into what we called the ward room which had bunks in it and a table where you had your meals. Go from there into the galley and the galley went right across the aeroplane with windows that you could raise up and that's where we'd put the guns.

23:30 And also we'd stream the drogues from there. They were canvas bags that you helped to steer the

aeroplane on the water.

Why were drogues necessary to help the steering?

Sometimes with some conditions of wind and tide it could be very difficult to control the aeroplane. So if you streamed a drogue it

24:00 held one side but you'd turn the other way or if you were going too quick you'd stream them both and they'd pull you up. But in the galley we had stoves, three blue flame stoves, plus cupboards and all that sort of thing and a stairway up to the flight deck again.

24:30 Then if you went further to the rear of the aeroplane again you came into the bomb room where there were more bunks and where the depth chargers were on racks up to roof level. When they were needed there was big doors that came down on the side of the aircraft and they were run out under the wing. Then you went on beyond that - there was another stair or ladder

25:00 going up to the pyrotechnics. That's the smoke floats and all that sort of stuff. You could go up that way on the flight deck again. There was also a gun cleaning area near there. And then a long walk up a catwalk to the rear door and the rear turret and from

25:30 the just after the bomb room there was a way that the midship gunner could get up into the gun turret. So that was about it.

What kind of food did you have on board?

When we were going on ops we always had pre-op breakfast which is usually pretty lavish.

26:00 Eggs and bacons and all that stuff. And then the cooks would put us up a hamper of food to take with us. Again, good food. And cigarettes and all that. To take with us.

Sounds like you were well catered for.

We were very well catered for and some of the crew became quite

26:30 good cooks. It was alright.

Obviously landing and taking off in a Sunderland must be quite interesting.

Fascinating. Quite exhilarating. It's an unusual experience. Taking off for example the crew

27:00 downstairs have to make sure that all the hatches are closed and ready for take off. And then they all go up onto the flight deck and each man just in front of the main member of the aircraft they all sit on the floor. Each one with his legs

27:30 around the one in front. So you're a combined group. So that if anything goes wrong you're not going to be thrown all around the aeroplane. The escape hatch is an astrodome which is up from the flight deck. The pilots and the wireless

28:00 operator and the flight engineers and that, they're strapped in, they've got seat belts. So when the power is on - first of all its got to be taken off the buoy so the crew go down and have a struggle with the mooring ropes and so on to get the untangled and put them

28:30 on what you'd call short slip which means they're just hanging on the bollard.

How did you board the plane?

Dinghy. What we called a dinghy was a speedboat about 16 feet long that would take two crews if necessary, about 25 people, was driven by a couple of the water people.

29:00 They'd zoom along very quick and take you out to the airplane. There was a bit of a routine about that too. The skipper was always first on board and always last to leave. I don't quite know why that was. I suppose some kind of naval tradition. We had quite a lot of boats

29:30 vessels that used to service the aircraft. Had a bomb scow as they call it. That used to bring out the ammunition and the depth charges and the armourers would fit all that together. We had refuellers that would come out. They would pump fuel from their vessel into the

30:00 aircraft's tanks. Then we had a thing called a crash boat that if the water was absolutely calm and the aircraft therefore had trouble getting off it would go ahead of us and break the water up a bit. Or if there was an accident and - a high speed launch. There were things called pinnaces. The pinnace

30:30 was a heavy launch, large vessel that towed aircraft and generally did all the work around the place and acted as flare paths. Landing on water you can't have a flare path like you do on an aerodrome so you have a couple of these pinnaces which have

31:00 lights strung along them. They indicate where you can land. So there was a lot of waterworks went on. We weren't really involved in that other than to use them. It was one of the peculiarities of the

Sunderland, we didn't really see a lot of our ground staff. Bomber command they did. And fighter command they did.

31:30 But we didn't because when we landed we'd go ashore and then the ground staff would take over and do the maintenance and all that sort of thing.

Just getting back to take off, what would happen once you'd … ?

When they opened up the put the power on the aircraft would sit back until it was

32:00 got up on the step as we called it. When it was on the step it was sort of planing. The tail would come up. Depending on the load and the wind and all that sort of thing, the state of the sea, it might be a long way before it came unstuck and got airborne. Had an interesting experience with that too.

32:30 Want to hear about it?

Yes.

Doesn't reflect much glory I must say. We were a pretty experienced crew. The crew downstairs all reported all hatches closed ready for take off. But one guy hadn't done the checks properly and there was a

33:00 a camera hatch up near the tail. A rear facing camera that was put in there. It was only a smallish sort of space. But when the skipper put the power on and we sat back to take off of course it acted as a scoop and the water just poured in and instead of getting airborne we sank.

33:30 Which was a bit unfortunate. But to get out of the machine we had to all go through the astrodome, the escape hatch, onto the surface of the aircraft. The first man out just sat there instead of getting clear and letting the next fellow out. There was nothing to hang on to

34:00 and he didn't want to fall in the water. So we were all standing waiting our turn and the water's coming up and up. Anyway we managed to get out and ran for a mud bank, shore. Had to get out into this deep deep blue mud. Stinking stuff.

34:30 So the CO [commanding officer] wasn't pleased with us. But that sort of thing happens.

What was the camera that you mentioned for?

After an attack on a submarine you need evidence of what's happened and this was an automatic camera that when the depth charges were dropped this would start taking photographs. So when you got home you had a

35:00 record of the attack and where your depth charges had fallen and so on.

You mentioned earlier that the water surface was important when you were taking off? Can you describe why?

If it was flat, glassy calm, it was difficult to become unstuck as we say. It just was difficult to get the aircraft airborne. Whereas if there was a bit of a slough it's much much easier.

35:30 Not too much but enough to break that surface tension that hangs on to the hull.

Could cause a interesting situation if the water was too calm.

Yeah. You needed a little bit of movement on the water. Course you always had to take off into wind.

36:00 But when the waves are going one way and the winds going another way and the airplane's got to go in a particular way it can become a bit difficult for pilots.

How many Sunderland were there at Orness?

At Orness I don't know. Don't recall ever making a count. But it was a bit OTU in that the Norwegian army had Sunderlands there they were training.

36:30 The RAF had Sunderlands. The Canadians had Sunderlands there. We had Sunderlands there. It was a big operation. But Pembroke Dock where 461 [Squadron 461] was mostly based was the biggest flying base in the world at the time. It had American, Canadian, Australian squadrons all operating out of

37:00 Pembroke Dock.

What did you know about flying boats before you were posted?

I didn't know anything about them. When I came home on leave the Americans had their Catalinas on the Swan River and their headquarters were in the University boatshed. And I thought I'd rather like to go and have a look at the Catalina. So I went into the boatshed

37:30 and talked to the boss man there and he said, "Yeah for sure" and they took me out and I had a good

look around the Catalina. But that was the only contact I'd ever had with flying boats.

Was that on embarkation leave?

Yes. I wasn't all that impressed. They were interesting airplanes but I didn't think

38:00 I would like to serve on it.

Was it until you'd actually flown on one that you developed your appreciation?

The Sunderland was a glorious aeroplane. It was just a beautiful aeroplane. I think everybody who flew in them loved them. They were so - from the pilot's point of view they tell me it was a most

38:30 forgiving aeroplane. It was a dream to fly. You got very fond of your aircraft like you get of your car.

But it seems that aircrew who've been on flying boats have a greater appreciation of their aircraft.

That probably varies a bit.

39:00 Some aircraft were not really suitable for their role. The Lancaster for instance. Most people who flew on Lancs were very happy to be on Lancasters. There was an aircraft called the Manchester which was underpowered and that was not popular. Sterling wasn't very popular

39:30 because it didn't have the power the Lancaster had. There was an aircraft I trained on we called the Bossa [Boston Bomber?] which had been supposed to have been a torpedo bomber but again an air ministry design that was underpowered so they couldn't use it operationally and they used it for training. So yes some were popular aeroplanes. Some were not. Depending on their -

40:00 I suppose a number of things. I know the Hamden was not very well regarded because it was a brute of a thing to fly for one thing.

Flying boats are quite a spectacle aren't they?

There an interesting machine. After the war there was a great controversy as to whether the developing airlines would go as flying boats or as land planes.

40:30 A lot of research and work went into trying to decide which. The land planes won and rightly so because not every city is on water which you'd have to have for flying boats. On the other hand it's very cheap to comparatively

41:00 to have airports that are water places. Because you don't have to build runways and such. But there's no doubt the land planes are the ones.

I suppose the (UNCLEAR) would have helped make that decision?

Yeah. Hughes was probably ahead of his time really.

41:30 But I think that aeroplane perhaps above all others demonstrated that the future lay with land based aircraft rather than water borne aircraft.

Tape 5

00:32 **So before we left for lunch you were finishing up on your training. So what happened next?**

We went down to the squadron, 461, at Pembroke Dock. The skipper we had trained with - they had a peculiar system at 461 - the skipper that went up to the OTU and picked up a new crew was taken off that crew when we got to the squadron.

01:00 And someone else was allocated to the same crew as skipper. We got a chap called Dick Lucas. Dick was a 21 years old, a very competent pilot.

Was this normal for them to change the skipper?

Yeah. They did it always at 461. I don't know why. 10 Squadron on the other hand

01:30 they didn't use the OTU at all. They trained their own people. Just to exert their independence or something. I don't know. But it was a strange thing to do. Anyway we got Dick Lucas who was a great guy. He became a big wheel in Qantas after the war - director of training or something.

So what was he like as a bloke?

02:00 Nice fellow. Seven of us on the crew were clerks. He was a clerk before the war. The Canadian was a bank clerk and the navigator was a clerk at Insurance World. I was a clerk. Another fellow, one that was from the crew was a clerk. When we sank a submarine there was in the paper "Seven Clerks

02:30 Sink U-Boat". I don't know what was special about that. But there it was.

I'd imagine it'd be quite disruptive to get a new skipper.

You had a period before you went on operations where you did familiarisation flights and training flights so you got to know things. And he was an experienced pilot of course.

03:00 **Had he been out on operations before?**

Yeah. Spent a lot of time as the first pilot to another skipper so he wasn't a new chum by any means.

So did that actually give you more confidence?

I was always confident flying with Dick, yeah. He always did the right thing as far as I knew. I wasn't a pilot so I'm not in a position

03:30 to criticise his flying. But he always got us there and back so what more could you ask.

Did you attempt to spend any social time together to familiarise yourselves?

Yeah. We often used to go on leave together but we spent a lot of time together around the pubs in the town. That was fairly normal.

So when you say you were doing familiarisation flights before you started on operations, what sort?

04:00 We had diversion bases in Northern Ireland along the south coast up the west coast of Scotland where if the weather closed in and our base wasn't usable we would be diverted to one of these others and the pilots had to know the intricacies of that particular landing area. So we -

04:30 and it was a fair bit to get the right signals.

In order to find your way?

Yeah. You couldn't just fly in and lob down and hope for the best. It was necessary for the crew to know the alternative base.

Was there a lot of air traffic around?

05:00 Not a lot. It varied as to where you were and when. Before D-day there was a lot of air traffic on the south coast but where we were flying no there was not a lot.

Would you be on patrols during that familiarisation?

No. We'd fly to perhaps the

05:30 Scilly Isles, go ashore, have lunch, come back and go home. Filled the day very nicely.

Where's the Scilly Isles?

They're off the south west coast of England. A little group. They grow a lot of flowers there for London and the European market.

Sounds quite picturesque.

It is. Scillys are nice.

So you'd land, go into town?

06:00 Go into town, have lunch, sometimes at the base if there was an air force establishment. Sometimes in the town. And then go home.

Were you still being billeted out during this time?

No. We were in our proper billets.

When you say proper billets what do you mean?

Our permanent places.

06:30 On the station I was on which is a permanent air force base which had a big grey stone wall around it - it had quite a history. That port was a seaport. Big naval base too.

What's it called again?

Pembroke Dock. But I

07:00 was billeted in a bombed out hospital. The part we were sleeping in was not damaged but the rest of it had been wiped out.

So it wasn't functioning as a hospital at all?

No. Devoted entirely to us.

So what were the facilities like considering it was bombed out?

They were all right. The bathrooms and that sort of thing were okay and the bedrooms were fine.

07:30 **So the plumbing still worked?**

Yeah.

You still had a roof over your head?

Yeah.

What were you sleeping on?

The RAF had cots and things they called biscuits. They were a sort of a mattress in three bits. So you just took one and put them along the bed. You always had your own blanket. And we had

08:00 sheets and pillow slips and all that. The laundry people did those.

Was it English people who were employed to do laundry?

Mostly. We had the WAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] of course who did a lot of the work around the station.

Did you have much contact with them?

Yeah.

What were they like?

Lovely. When I was at ITS

08:30 in South Australia the WAAFs first came in, the first contact I had with them anyway. They transformed the air force. They made such a difference. They just introduced a different sort of note. It was great on the squadron because they were the radio operators, the ground operators, so you talked to them by the

09:00 WT and the acted as mechanics and armourers and did most of the work in the place. And the nurses. We had a hospital on the base. They just were great. And they introduced a very nice note into it.

09:30 They were concerned.

Did you have to watch your Ps and Qs [bad language]?

No. They were pretty broadminded. They were good girls, great.

Were there any relationships that would go on?

Yes. Quite a few marriages. And close friendships. It really made a big difference

10:00 to have the girls.

So it was pretty much the same situation in England?

That's right. They did fantastic things. They were always so willing and kindly and friendly. They were nice.

Could you ask them out?

Yeah. We had lots of good times. The station dances and all that.

10:30 **Were the dances a bit social occasion?**

Yep. It was a very well equipped station, Pembroke Dock. Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton? Their relationship was illegal of course but the nation after Trafalgar had built a house for

11:00 them. That was on the station at Pembroke Dock. Still there. It was used as the commanding officer's headquarters. And there was a church and a big hall place. The messes were excellent. Big hangars and an oval.

11:30 Quite a largish open playing space. It was quite a well developed - and we had a wonderful gym and library. I spent a lot of time in both of those places. The library was particularly interesting because they used to get all the intelligence reports and you could read up what was happening

12:00 in the development of the U-Boat war. Quite interesting.

Was that classified information?

Yes. But you read it in the library. And you could if you wished do educational courses. It was very

civilised.

Was there any sort of security that you'd have to go through in order to get hold of some of these intelligence documents in the library?

You had to ask for them. They weren't

12:30 just there. I don't doubt you had to account for them.

What sort of things were you learning from these intelligence documents?

New tactics. It was a very tactical war the U-Boat war. We would get an edge with some piece of equipment and the Germans would learn to cope with that

13:00 and they would put in something that gave them the edge and so it went on and on. One thing countermanding another, or counteracting. There were all sorts of differences in tactics. The German U-Boats - Donets, the admiral, armed them with machine guns and cannon

13:30 and ordered them to stay on the surface if aircraft found them in the belief that the allied airmen wouldn't press their attack in the face of close range heavy fire. But by so doing he took away the U-Boats main form of defence which was to submerge. So

14:00 that kind of thing. Then there were the - what did they call them, the packs, the wolf packs. For a while they were hunting in groups of submarines. That was pretty expensive for them. The submariner - the U-Boat crews had a shocking wastage - the most of all the services on either side.

Was that at all -

14:30 **you mentioned if they stayed on the surface with their gunnery pointed up at the aircraft, was it actually true that aircraft would give them a wider berth if that was happening?**

I suppose some people did break away particularly if they were hit. But we didn't. Our skipper went boarding. See, your at

15:00 50 feet. You had to get down low to drop the depth charges. Which meant that you couldn't manouvre very much. You could go up and down but you couldn't bank or you'd dip a wing. So yeah it wasn't a good feeling.

That's incredibly low, 50 feet.

Mm.

With a really big aircraft.

Yeah. Just to get over the top of the conning tower.

15:30 See the thing about the depth charge, they were set to explode at 30 feet I think. But a depth charge, the explosion goes up in a cone shape. If an aircraft's up there, it's in the cone. If it's down low it's not because of the shape of the cone. But also

16:00 the depth charges were designed to be dropped from a low height. So it was necessary to get right down on the deck to attack. You couldn't stay up 1000 feet. It wouldn't work.

And how does the actual depth charge work as far as knocking out the submarine?

You don't drop it on the submarine. You drop it close to it.

16:30 As close as you can. And then the water pressure from the thing cracks the hull and when the water comes into the U-Boat it's in two, it's like an inner and an outer shell. The U-Boat construction. When the water seeps in or comes in it's

17:00 likely to get into the batteries. And they have big banks of batteries. Seawater and battery acid is a very explosive mix. Slightest spark and the U-Boat explodes.

And when you're dropping these charges and you were explaining this cone thing that you just did, by dropping them so low you're actually avoiding your own ... ?

17:30 **You're outside the cone. If you're up higher I don't know what harm it would do but it would do some harm to the aeroplane because it's a massive explosion and usually they're dropped in a stick of six one after the other. The aeroplane if it goes into this one and gets knocked around and then this - you don't do that.**

18:00 **I suppose the accuracy is better lower down. We didn't have bomb sights. It all had to be just by skipper's judgment.**

Would it be the skipper who would call that sort of an action?

Yep. He was flying the aeroplane, he dropped the depth charges from his - he had a button on his

control column. If he was good

18:30 you killed a submarine. If he wasn't, you missed.

I'm just surprised that you have to be so low. That's just ...

It is. It's very low.

Because everything'd be coming at you pretty fast from that height.

Yes. I don't know whether you've ever experienced but there's a lot of trace - they put a tracer every fifth bullet or whatever

19:00 and mix it with the armour piercing thing and the traces seem to come so slowly and then they go wooshoo slowly away. Quite an experience to be under fire with that kind of thing.

So getting back to a bit of a chronology kind of thing, how long were you in the familiarising zone

19:30 **before you went on operations?**

I suppose couple of months. Then we started doing patrols.

Did you feel confident by the time you came off the familiarisation?

Yeah. I think we'd melded into a team. They were a jolly good crew. They were trained to the minute.

20:00 Everyone knew that everyone'd do their job. It was good.

So how did you get briefed for your first patrol?

They had a crew room and in the crew room they put up what they call a form black. The form black was the flying details for the next day. You'd be Lucas and crew flying

20:30 aircraft D and take off time. So if it was a daytime takeoff you'd spend the rest of the day getting your aircraft ready as much as you could, fuelling up, perhaps flight testing. Just generally getting the machine ready. Then

21:00 before take off you'd assemble in the briefing room and the various officers doing the briefing would stand up and show you where the patrol area was and what to expect and what to look for if there was a lost aircraft or a ship had been sunk.

21:30 The weatherman would tell us what weather to expect. Signals bloke would tell us what frequencies to use. We also always had to be very careful that we didn't bomb submarines outside our area because they're probably one of ours. By and large they told you

22:00 all that they could. Then we'd go and have breakfast whatever time of day it was and then go down to the pier and the dinghy would take us out to our aircraft. We'd just make sure everything was right. When we got near to take off time the

22:30 mooring people would get that all organised and when we were all okay everyone would report to the skipper for take off. Go upstairs, take up our crash positions and away we went. Once airborne we'd test the guns.

23:00 There was an island off the coast a bit. It was a bird sanctuary. We used to fire at that to test the guns. Don't think we ever hit any birds. Weren't trying to. In the middle of the bay there was a buoy which we could test the radar on.

23:30 Then we'd go to our patrol area and do the patrol which lasted 8, 10, 12 hours.

How much fuel would you have on board to keep you airborne?

About 2000 gallons. It was a lot of fuel.

How long could you fly on that amount of fuel?

About 12, 13 hours stretching it. I remember one

24:00 patrol we did they put another tank in the bomb room which gave us a bit of extra distance. One of the problems in the Atlantic was that there was a gap. They call it the Atlantic Gap. The American side the Canadians and Americans could patrol. Then there was the gap. And then we could patrol the European side. But in the

24:30 middle we didn't have aircraft that could go that far until the Liberators came in and then they could close the gap. But we didn't have the range to do that. So the U-Boats knew this so they used to wait in the gap to get the convoys. Very sensible thing to do I suppose from their point of view.

Sure. What sort of relationship would you have with your ground crew who were preparing your... ?

Very little.

25:00 Our exercise was a bit different from most of the air force. Fighter pilots had their particular ground crew who looked after their aeroplane. They made quite a close connection. Somewhat similarly with bomber command. The same crew would look after that aeroplane and they'd get to know the aircrew and the ground staff.

25:30 With us, when we came back we'd go ashore and then the ground staff would take over, go out to the aeroplane, service it, all that sort of thing. Or if the aircraft needed to go up on the hard for servicing on the land or into the hangar then the aircrew would bring it onto the

26:00 rundown. But then the ground staff would take over so we didn't really see much of the ground staff so we didn't build up that close relationship like the other commands did. It's a pity really.

How often would they have to go onto so called dry dock?

26:30 Not all that often. They had to do a thing called a compass swing which was done every few months I think. That had to be done on the hard and involved turning the aircraft around and checking the compass. Experts in the compass would adjust the magnets to make it accurate.

27:00 And then if there was any major overhaul required or major damage that would be done on the hard or in the hangar. But most of the maintenance was down out on the water which must have been hard for the mechanics, the airframe and engine fitters. In the Sunderland they had a little platform

27:30 that came out the front of the wing beside the engine. They lowered that and could stand on that and service the engine.

You'd want good weather.

We spent some time in the Shetlands at Sullon Voe and really it was the weather that drove us away mainly because the aircraft couldn't be serviced. The weather was so foul that the guys couldn't work on the

28:00 engines in those conditions. So we went back to Pembroke Dock after it.

Was there any sort of problem with corrosion being in salt water?

Not that I was aware of. The aircraft got very dirty cause there was a lot of oil slick around. It's a harbour at Pembroke Dock. Milford Sound, it is.

28:30 They did become very grubby. They were supposed to be white, but not very white after they'd been in port for a while. But no I don't recall corrosion being a problem. They're built of duralumin of course which doesn't rust. It does get fatigued, but it doesn't rust.

How about all the gunnery equipment, is that affected by the salt air

29:00 **at all?**

No. They're all oiled up. The gunners used to clean the guns after firing them. The armourers would take over then and do whatever had to be done with them. But no it didn't affect them.

Would you always be flying the same aircraft?

When we started, yes, you had your own aircraft.

29:30 But then that was changed and you took any aircraft that was serviceable. It was not as good as having your own aircraft but it was the exigencies of the service as they say.

Were there lucky aircraft and unlucky aircraft?

Well there were some that got in the trough and some didn't. I suppose you'd have to some were lucky, yes.

But you know

30:00 **some that have just consistently got a bit of a close shave.**

Some are more reliable than others I think. Engine trouble was a major problem with us. That and the weather. I think I did 61 trips and I think I worked out something like 10 of those we had to come back to base with engine trouble.

30:30 They were with the Pegasus engines. Later on we had Pratton Whitneys which were a much better engine and much more reliable and more powerful. The Pratton Whitneys we couldn't fly - we had to have four engines going if we had a load on.

31:00 With the Pratton Whitneys we could fly on two. So they were a much superior aeroplane with a bigger engine. And a much more reliable engine.

So with the previous engines did you have to have all four engines running?

Mm.

So what happens if one engine gets knocked out?

You don't fly forever. You get

31:30 gradually lower and lower and lower. You throw everything overboard that you can. The old ammo and the guns and anything that's movable you throw it over to try and lighten the plane. Jettison all the fuel you can though keep enough to get home on. And keep your fingers crossed.

Did that ever happen to you?

No. We had to jettison fuel on

32:00 occasion. Never had to throw stuff over no. I had a fairly mild tour.

We were talking about lucky aircraft before. Were there any lucky charms or anything like that you blokes carried on board?

Some fellas did. I didn't. No. I

32:30 didn't find that very - no need for that. But some people did. They had all sorts of things that they reckoned brought them luck.

Like what?

Rabbits' feet or girl's photograph perhaps. It could have been anything. I think it was just a hope.

Any of these planes have names?

33:00 We called ours Hopalong. I don't know why we called it Hopalong. I think Hop-a-long Cassidy was a character of some note at the time. Had a kangaroo painted on it. Some did. But most didn't.

Had a kangaroo?

Little kangaroo painted on the thing. I've got a photo of our skipper there with it. So that I'll show you later on.

33:30 A name wasn't a big deal in our thing. The Americans were very keen on that and the bomber command used to usually put the trips that they'd done - "bombed" on the fuselage.

You didn't have anything like that?

No.

Much more modest squadron.

For one thing we didn't have our own aircrafts later on.

34:00 And there wasn't much point in putting things on and the next crew that used it didn't want it on. Initially we had the squadrons' number or letters. Ten squadron was RB. We were UT. But later on in the war they stopped

34:30 doing that because I think the Germans would know what squadron you came from and could deduce from that where you were based.

What your job is?

Yeah. So it was all very ordinary really.

What sort of things about the briefing before an operation would be really relevant to you?

I was radio operator or

35:00 wireless operator so which frequencies to use were certainly relevant. Things like I'd need to know if we were likely to find a dinghy with people in it and need to report to base, that kind of thing. Wasn't very arduous.

35:30 But the frequencies were sometimes changed and sometimes they had one frequency for one set of signals and another for another set of signals. It was all fairly simple really.

How would weather conditions affect your job?

Very much. We flew in dreadful weather.

36:00 It was necessary to do so. And weather was probably our major enemy really. And not infrequently we'd be recalled to base early because the weather had closed in or diverted to a different base and might

have to stay there several days while the weather settled down.

36:30 But yes it was a major hurdle for us. In the early days on the squadron if we found a dinghy say. Someone had been shot down and they were in a dinghy our aircraft would try and land and pick them up and did so successfully on several occasions. But that was

37:00 banned later on because they found that they were losing too many aircraft. It was hard to get a Sunderland down on the open water particularly if there was the sea running, but almost impossible to get off again. Very skilled piloting required. So we were losing too many aircraft doing it. So they banned it.

37:30 Partially banned. They were not to land unless the skipper decided it was safe to do so. It was just to wasteful. We lost our first CO that way. He had landed to pick someone up and crashed on takeoff.

Is taking off actually more difficult under bad weather conditions?

Yes. I'd say so.

38:00 He crashed, a fellow by the name Singleton, he had landed to pick up a downed aircraft crew. And couldn't get off. So a French - three French destroyer came along - I think it was French. And they transferred all but a skeleton crew - both - picked these

38:30 other people up - to the ship and the ship took them in tow. But being navy and French of course they burned off and the poor old Sunderland's left behind getting a hell of a thrashing and the skipper of the Sunderland decided that his aircraft couldn't take that. So he got them to abandon the tow and tried to fly it off.

39:00 Which he did successfully. But when they came to land they found that there was a great hole in the hull. It had been bashed in by the waves as they were trying to take off. So he couldn't land. We didn't carry parachutes. We didn't because we felt it was better to go down with the aircraft and get in a dinghy rather than jump out

39:30 into the ocean on your own. There wasn't much point in that. So he had to land on an aerodrome quite close to the Pembroke Dock.

On the land.

On the land. It was a fighter base with a grass take off area. He did a perfect landing

40:00 and you could see the furrow that the hull made until it lost speed and just gently rolled over. That was there for ages that aeroplane.

Did you actually see it land?

No. I didn't see it land. But when we flew through to Pembroke Dock we saw it there. But it was a great piece of airmanship.

40:30 Anyway, that sort of thing happened.

It was left there as a bit of a skeleton.

They left it there because it they couldn't move it really. Ultimately I think they …

They didn't know what to do.

Yes. They couldn't fly it away.

We'll just leave it there for a little while, we'll figure it out later.

41:00 **Was it relatively safe to just not carry a parachute so you were always confident that you could just land on water?**

No. You weren't confident you could land on water. You certainly couldn't in a high sea. That would be suicide. But if the aeroplane was going to go into the water it was going to go into the water anyway and you were probably better off - your chances were better with the aeroplane

41:30 which carried dinghies than you would be if you just jumped out in a parachute. Because your Mae West wouldn't keep you afloat for long and if you were a hundred or two hundred or three hundred miles out in the ocean all on your own drifting around din a Mae West it wouldn't be very pleasant.

How many

42:00 **dinghies would you have on board?**

We had I think two in the wings.

Tape 6

00:35 **Can you describe the harbour at Pembroke?**

Yes. It was a long - it's Milford Haven is its name. It's always been a naval base from Elizabethan times. There's a Martello tower there. You know Martello towers?

01:00 They were an early form of harbour defence in the old days of shooting cannon balls out. It's still there. But in latter times it's become a naval base. But in my time there it was the biggest flying base in the world. It's along arm of the sea that come well

01:30 inland in south Wales. It's got a bridge across it now. It didn't have in our day. It's a big oil port now. But when we were there it was - a lot of ships, convoys and things used to come into Milford Haven.

02:00 Relatively calm water. Very high tides. 26 feet. Which meant there was a tremendous outflow of water when the tide was going out which made it very difficult to control aircraft on the water. That's about it. A railway

02:30 ended at one side of the Haven. We were on the other. So to go anywhere you needed - say to go to London - you had to go across the Haven on a boat. A pinnace or a dinghy. Had dry dock facilities for ships. It was quite a big show.

Were there any hazards to taking off and landing there?

03:00 Not really. It was a fairly safe sort of place. Much safer than some of the other places. The main hazard was at night with shipping. We had to go further down the harbour for night take off and then there'd be ships moored here and there and some of the people

03:30 that used the harbour didn't understand that there'd be an aircraft landing and get in the way. Had some hairy dos on that score.

What kind of boats did you encounter in the way?

They'd be little boats going from ship to ship or something of that sort. People going ashore. Just got in the way.

Must have given them a shock to see a Sunderland descending?

I reckon.

04:00 The flare path for Sunderlands was a pretty makeshift sort of thing. But we managed.

You mentioned that was the biggest flying boat port in the world at the time?

Yes.

How many flying boats were operating there?

There were at one stage

04:30 I think there were two RAF Sunderland squadrons - 228 and 201. There was a Canadian squadron, there was an American squadron of Catalina and there was ourselves so there would have been five at least squadrons. Each would have about - originally we had eight aircraft in each squadron but later we got 12.

05:00 So nearly 100 flying boats. Quite a bit show.

Who was in command of your squadron?

When I was there there were three different COs by the name Douglas, then Jack Hampshire and finally Dick Oldham. Squadron only lasted from 1942 to 1945 so it was purely a wartime squadron.

05:30 **Why was the changeover of those COs?**

They went on to other things. Promotions or go back to Australia or whatever reason. Dick Oldham, Jack Hampshire was a Western Australian too. Dick's still alive. He's ninety odd years old now.

06:00 Good guys.

Who was in high command of all of those squadrons?

There was a station commander. He was an RAF fellow. I didn't have much to do with him. We had our own people, we associated with our own squadron.

Were you the only squadron patrolling the Bay of Biscay?

No.

06:30 Most of them were doing that. The Catalinas used to do what we called a Z patrol which was they'd go south west and then due west. They were long wanes. They could fly further than us. So that they weren't really in the Bay but our main area was the Bay of Biscay. But we spent time in the North Sea as well.

07:00 **How significant was your patrolling of the Bay of Biscay?**

It was vital from the point of view of the U-Boat warfare because it was the highway that the U-Boats used because they had bases along the French coast and to get out into the Atlantic they had to go through the bay. And to get back home again they had to come through the bay.

07:30 So our patrols were from the south-western part of England down to the north-western corner of Spain. We patrolled that night and day. The submarines have to surface, or they did in those days, at least once a day for a couple of hours in order

08:00 to recharge their batteries and to recharge the air. It becomes very foul very quickly. So whilst they were on the surface they were very vulnerable. And if we could make them keep down then they lost time and lost effectiveness. And of course whenever they saw or heard an aeroplane

08:30 they'd crash dive. Which means that they mucked up their operation. So that was the drill.

How many submarines did your squadron?

Sink. Definitely seven. I'm not sure how many indeterminate attacks but there were quite a lot of those.

09:00 The crew I was in we sank one. And we attacked, carried out an underwater attack on another one. But we didn't know whether we'd got it or not.

Can you talk me through those two attacks? Blow for blow details.

Yeah. Okay.

Your moment of glory.

Not much glory associated with them I'm afraid.

09:30 The U-Boat war was pretty well won by the end of 1943. There were still a lot of U-Boats around. But nothing - we weren't having anything like the shipping losses that we were. We'd have lost the war if we hadn't mastered the U-Boat, no doubt about that. Because all the stuff coming over from America

10:00 had to come by sea and the ships were vulnerable. We escorted the convoys and we did what we could with the U-Boats but they were losing more ships than we could build. So the U-Boats had to be stopped and they had been pretty well stopped by the end of 1943. In January 1944 for whatever reason they suddenly

10:30 people controlling our squadron decided that we would do patrols straight out into the Atlantic from the west coast of Ireland. We were the first aircraft off when that new thing came in and we were flying along about 200 miles west of Ireland, January so it's

11:00 winter over there. Quite a rough day. Lots of cloud and pretty strong wind. And the nose gunner sighted a U-Boat on the surface. And we had a drill that we'd practised hundred of times where the bombs were run out and the galley guns were manned

11:30 and so on. We bought into the attack. They opened fire, hit a box barrage with heavy machine gun and cannon. We managed to go through that. The skipper did a wonderful job. He went as though he was going to dive

12:00 under it - no as though he was going to climb and break away and they raised their barrage - a box barrage they call it - and then he dived in under it and went over the top of the U-Boat and dropped a stick of six depth charges. The

12:30 depth charges were missed by a mile, a long way off. Because of a malfunction in the dropping mechanism. So we went round again and came in again. We had two depth charges left. The front gunner and the tail gunner -

13:00 I was in the tail at the time - we disposed of the gun crews on the submarine. And Dick Lucas, the skipper, dropped the last two either side of the coning tower, a perfect straddle and we went around again. We'd used all our depth charge by this time.

13:30 I know I was wondering what the hell are we doing now. Nothing seemed to be happening. Then all of a sudden there was a tremendous explosion and the submarine just blew apart. We flew around. There was lots of bodies, dead and alive in the water. We had a tradition in the Australian

14:00 Sunderland squadrons where when that sort of thing happened we always dropped them a dinghy, one of our own, which we did. But it didn't open. It was supposed to open when it hit the water. But this one didn't. So we just flew around until they all got under the waves.

14:30 And went home. And that became quite a story. The Americans put out a film just recently called U571 and the reckoned that they'd sunk U571 and that they had captured the Enigma

15:00 encoding machine from it which is absolute crap because the encoding machine had been encaptured from U110 by HMS Bulldog in 1941 before the Americans came into the war which meant we were able to crack the German naval codes and so we knew what they were doing

15:30 all the time. Unbeknown to us they'd also cracked our code, but the Enigma machine was a war winner. Having captured it - they didn't know we'd captured it - and were reading their signals.

What can you tell me about the Enigma code?

Not much. It was a very highly

16:00 sophisticated piece of machinery. What had happened, the HMS Bulldog had blown this U-Boat to the surface and the crew of the U-Boat abandoned ship so the Brits [British] put a prize crew on board. And one of the people who were from the British ship

16:30 was a signalman who recognised that this was an important piece of equipment. So he grabbed it and took it back and it went to Benchley Park, the place where the codes and all that spooky stuff went on. And they were able to crack it. Which was really as I say it was a war winning thing. But it

17:00 was a bit irritating to find the Americans saying that they had captured the Enigma machine and they hadn't and that they had sunk 571 because I know they didn't. I was part of the crew that sunk it. I saw the whole thing and there was not an American within miles. So that was that.

Sorry, has the American

17:30 **story been refuted?**

They made a film of it. It was quite a splash - it was a good film. There was some wonderful simulations of undersea warfare. I saw the film but I didn't notice that right at the end at the credits they had in tiny little

18:00 things that it was really sunk by an Australian submarine. But they showed it totally different. This whole story was a lie, just a plain lie, it was false. Doesn't matter. It's too far away to matter. But it just seemed to me to be improper and unfair

18:30 to make that sort of claim. I've read another similar claim in a Readers' Digest of years ago where this American naval commander reckons he captured the Enigma machine. But he didn't. We had it before they came into the war. It's just false their story. And they certainly didn't sink 571. We did.

What

19:00 **was the name of the film that you saw?**

It was called U571.

And it's a drama or documentary?

It's not a documentary in the sense that it tells the truth. It is a drama. It's a very effective film. I found it a wonderful film except it's lies.

It's preposterous that they would claim defensive feats achieved by in this instance

19:30 **an Australian and British force.**

Yes. I think it's unacceptable. It's all very well to big note yourself, but it's not the done thing in my view.

With regards to 571 you mentioned that you circled the sub -

20:00 **why did you stay and circle the sub?**

I suppose to see what was going on. It's a long way out in the ocean. It must be a dreadful feeling to be in that sort of predicament. I really thing that when we were

20:30 going down to drop them a dinghy that they thought we were going to machinegun them. Which of course we weren't. We were trying to help them. They were swimming very energetically to get out of the way. But we had a number of cases in our squadron and in 10 Squadron where our dinghies as I said

21:00 we always dropped. We used to get into trouble for it when we got home because the brass there believed that the dinghies were there for our use and not for the enemy and we didn't know whether our aircraft had been damaged and we might have needed that dinghy. But the crews and myself I think we always thought that it was the right thing to do. But some of the

21:30 people that - their lives were saved by Australian Sunderlands dropping dinghies to them after they'd been sunk, the people who'd escaped from the U-Boat - we've met them since. There was a guy, Kurt Laber, he was in this situation. He was the first officer on a U-Boat. Young man.

22:00 When one of our Sunderlands dropped dinghy he managed to get into it, but I won't mention the nation but you can work it out for yourself they came in and machine-gunned him. He lost a leg. But a Canadian destroyer picked him up and took him to Canada where his leg was - fitted up with a wooden leg.

22:30 But he stayed in the German navy after the war and he had access therefore to the records and when our people, some of our Sunderland people went back on a reunion trip to Germany and they visited Bremen, the port where all these

23:00 U-Boat memorials are this German naval officer found them, had been looking for them and introduced himself and it was quite remarkable because he visited Australia later on and we passed him on from state to state. We had dinners

23:30 for him and that sort of thing. We kept in touch for ages until he died five or six years ago. But great guy, nice fellow, family man. Just one of those little things that I think was worthwhile.

How seriously did the

24:00 **brass take the ... ?**

They never took any action against us. My skipper got a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] and the nose gunner got a DFM [Distinguished Flying Medal]. So they didn't only punish us for it. They didn't dock our pay. But you just couldn't go off and leave them. I don't think so. I suppose it'd be a bit different for us.

24:30 Different even for the English blokes because it wasn't our town being bombed and families being wiped out. So we probably had a little bit of a different attitude to the U-Boats from what they perhaps had. But I don't know of any other nation that dropped dinghies to their enemy.

25:00 I suppose in a way it didn't make a lot of sense because if they got into the dinghy and survived and were picked up by the Germans and went back to being in U-Boats again and they'd have to go through it all again. But that was pretty unlikely.

You just mentioned that your pilot and I think nose gunner were decorated. What actions

25:30 **were they decorated for?**

That sinking of U571. It was quite a - the nose gunner had sighted the U-Boat in the first place under very difficult circumstances and he had very much quietened the gun crews down before I got to them in the tail.

26:00 The skipper of course had done a great job with the gear that wasn't working properly.

Am I correct in assuming that you'd been relocated from Pembroke Dock when you sunk 571?

No. We were at Pembroke

26:30 Dock. We did time up in Solenvo in the Shetlands. That was patrolling in the North Sea along the coast of Norway up to the Arctic Circle. But the weather was hopeless. We had a small detachment up there. We rotated

27:00 I think about three aircraft went up. We used to fly through the Caledonian ship canal. You may not know that but it goes from Oban through to virtually Inverness. Through the mountains. It's a ship canal that's been dug through. We had to take the ground staff and all our depth charges and stuff like that.

27:30 And when we were going through with our team we landed at Oban and then we were going through to Orness. the weather was foul. The clouds had come down below the tops of the mountains. We had a crook engine that was not functioning properly. It was still going but not properly.

28:00 We couldn't turn round because of the narrowness of the thing. I was on the radar at the time which fortunately was working perfectly well. So I was able to guide the aircraft through. You could see the outline of the water anyway. We got through okay. But I think the guys

28:30 the ground staff guys we had with us didn't realise the hazard they were in. It was quite interesting to go to the Shetlands. My mother had been born there. I had that connection to it. We lost one aircraft. Just took off and never heard of it again. But oh the weather drove us away.

29:00 **Do you think that aircraft was lost due to weather?**

Could have been weather. The Luftwasser had fighter bases along the coast of Norway so it could have been fighters.

Did you squadron lose any other aircraft?

Yes. We did.

How heavy were the casualties in your squadron?

29:30 It depended on the year. I joined with seven fellows I'd trained with. They came about the same time as me. Two of us finished. I'm the only one still alive. But I was a bit younger than most of them.

Where were your casualties greatest?

In the Bay.

30:00 The Bay of Biscay.

During what period?

1933 was the bad year. From both our point of view and the U-Boats. U-Boats had tremendous casualty rate. Almost no chance whatever. I have

30:30 a lot of admiration for their courage.

Would you like to pause there Jack? We can pause for a moment.

31:00 **You mention the heavy toll on the U-Boats, was that mostly due to contact with the coastal command?**

The aircraft and the navy. Not only coastal command, but the Americans too. There were more U-Boats sunk by aircraft than there were by

31:30 ships but that's not to decry the efforts of the navy. We used to see the flotillas of these hunting packs of naval ships at sea in the Atlantic, getting a real thrashing, in terrible weather. We would know we'd be home in a few hours time and comfortably in bed and they'd still be battling out there weeks

32:00 from then. So they had a rough time. But the aircraft were the masters of the situation really. I think. They were the ones that kept the submarines submerged. And we did. We killed more submarines than the navy. And 461 was particularly efficient

32:30 U-Boat killer.

How difficult was it for the U-Boats to get through your patrols across the Bay of Biscay?

Very difficult indeed. The U571 when we sank it had sunk 8 ships. It had been attacked

33:00 in its first patrol and had to return to port. It had another serious accident somewhere and the patrol had to return to port. So U-Boats were death traps.

You mention that when you sunk the U571 it was once the war against the U-Boats had

33:30 **relatively been won. Were you surprised at all to find the U571 in the area?**

Yes. Amazed. Didn't expect it at all. Certainly didn't expect it to be sitting on the surface in daylight. Whether it had trouble or not I don't know. Never had any communication with it. It

34:00 just was odd that it was sitting there. Because it had a very experienced skipper. I don't know what the crew was like but the U-Boat itself was a very successful U-Boat. It cost us dearly with 8 ships to its credit. It had to be dealt with.

Was the U-Boat sitting in waters that had always been heavily patrolled?

34:30 No. The most of the patrols, certainly the ones we were involved in were in the Bay, the Bay of Biscay. But this one straight out into the Atlantic was quite rare. And at that latitude it was - if you drew a line from Galway Bay in Ireland straight out into the Atlantic 200 miles, that's where we were.

35:00 It caused quite a degree of concern in naval circles because they thought there was a new U-Boat tactic being developed. We were all taken up to London and grilled and grilled and grilled. We had to recall every tiny little detail that we could and go over and over and over it.

35:30 Because the naval people thought as I say that there was perhaps a new development in the U-Boat war. Don't think there was. But they were concerned.

Can you describe that detail when you were being grilled?

Just each one in turn - there would have been about a dozen or more senior people interviewing us

36:00 with gold braid up to their elbows and each crew member had to go through his story and what he saw and what he did. They whole thing in absolute detail. You just wouldn't believe that they could want such detail. .And every one of us did the same. Just what it was.

36:30 **To determine that you'd reported the incident accurately?**

No. I think they just wanted to get all the information they could. Not that we could tell them much. It was a U-Boat. I could remember they had little insignia on the spotting tower. I think it was probably the ships they'd sunk or something like people do.

37:00 They obviously were concerned.

From your knowledge of the U-Boats movements, what would have been the new tactic, given the location that you sunk U571?

I don't know. I really don't know. I can't imagine why they would suddenly get into that part of the world.

37:30 U-Boats were far ranging. They went all around the world, not just in the Atlantic. So who knows? It could have been any reason.

Obviously warranted a lot of investigation.

Yeah. The U-Boat war was terribly important for the whole of the war effort. Churchill

38:00 said that it was the one battle they had to win otherwise they'd lose the war entirely. I don't think we realised that it was so important really. Clearly it was. And when you think about it, it's all the food and the armaments and stuff coming to Britain ready for the invasion of Europe

38:30 had to come across the Atlantic or up from the south Atlantic. It was clearly important.

You mention that the navy played a large role in that war against the U-Boat.

Yeah. It did. It was a naval battle really. It was the biggest, most extensive, complex naval battle in the history of the world.

39:00 And as Churchill said it was the one we couldn't afford to lose. Anyway.

What was morale like once you began to feel that the U-Boats were conceding in the Atlantic?

We weren't losing aircraft nearly as much either. The whole thing had settled down

39:30 which was a good feeling. It was good I suppose it still no-one had any idea when the war would end. We were all keyed up waiting for the Normandy landings. But they were still some time away.

40:00 It was good to know that we weren't, that the U-Boat menace wasn't nearly as much as it had been. And it was good from our point of view that we weren't losing aircraft as much.

What awareness did you have of the Normandy landing?

I had to do it. Do you want me to tell you?

Tape 7

00:31 **When were you went off for the so called interrogation with guys with braid up to their elbows were you actually excited about that or were you a bit fearful?**

No. I wasn't fearful. I wasn't particularly excited. I was interested. I was

01:00 intrigued as to why they were so concerned about it all because it just seemed to be a routine sinking as far as we were concerned. But they were obviously concerned that there was something more to it than we knew. I was impressed with the interviewers too. They were very intelligent people. They knew their game.

01:30 Very competent in drawing out the least little detail.

So they were - what is it MI..?

There were civilians there, but mostly they were naval and air force people.

So you had a full panel?

Yeah. There was a lot of them all firing questions. It was quite an experience.

02:00 **What did you blokes say to each other after the experience?**

Phew, I think. No it - they weren't unkind. They were - we knew we'd done a good job and they acknowledged that. We did what we had to do.

You were

02:30 **just starting to talk to Julian [interviewer] about D-day and the build up towards that? What did you see?**

We were told on the squadron that we'd be flying 24 hours a day and our job would be to bottle up the western end of the [English] Channel to prevent U-Boats coming in to the channel

03:00 and attacking our shipping taking the people going across to Normandy. But we were quite an experienced crew by that time and they gave us the job of flight testing aircraft down at Calshot. That's aircraft that had been through the factor again to have major repairs and so on. So that meant that we

03:30 were flying out of Calshot which is down near South Hampton and we were flying along the south coast of England. That was a tremendous experience because every little anchorage and harbour was packed chocabloc with shipping of all sorts, mostly landing craft. All the roads were full

04:00 of tanks and trucks and guns parked ready to go onboard these ships. In the paddocks or fields the troops were in camps. The aircraft for the invasion had black and white stripes painted on their wings. They were thick

04:30 patrolling the area. And we were just stooging along testing these aircraft. Some of the pilots were a bit anxious we thought. They were very threatening. And we were unarmed. I think we had one machine-gun in the tail just as a deterrent if they should try to shot.

05:00 But it was quite a thing. We didn't do a lot of flying. Only when an aircraft came out of the factory and we had to flight test it. So we had a lot of free time. One day I was walking along the pier there and it was also a air sea rescue base where they had these high speed launches that would

05:30 when an aircraft go in the water they'd send a air sea rescue launch out to try and pick up any downed airmen. They're armed. And this air sea rescue launch was preparing for sea and I fell into conversation with the skipper and I asked him where he was going and he

06:00 said he was going over to the coast of France because they were doing patrols off the beaches in Normandy. So I said, "Can I come with you?" and he said, "Yeah. Come along". So I went back and got my tin helmet and a couple of mates and down we went and we went off to France.

What were you flying on?

We were testing Sunderlands, but I wasn't flying. I was

06:30 just walking around then. Anyway there was quite an interesting trip across the channel because all the ships were going across and vessels, a cruiser, a big cruiser and one of ours came over and it had a huge hole in its bow. But mostly American ships taking mostly Negro [African American] crews or soldiers that I saw across

07:00 to Normandy. As we got closer to the Normandy beaches the rumble of the guns was louder and louder. Ships of all sorts were standing off the shore firing their heavy guns into the defences on the Normandy beaches.

07:30 When we got to the coast of France there was an arc of ships, about 10,000 tonners sitting on the bottom of the sandy bottom of the water with just their super structure out of the water. That was the original harbour. A sort of a breakwater.

08:00 On board those were the naval officers that were controlling the shipping including our air sea rescue launch. So our skipper reported in and said he was going off to patrol the coast and at that point an amphibious jeep came out to see us

08:30 and asked if we'd like to go ashore, and yes, we would like to go ashore. So we all piled into this jeep and the air sea rescue launch went off about its business and we chugged off to the beach. The soldiers on the beach were still in their foxholes and gun emplacements and things. And engineers had

09:00 marked out safe areas with tapes because it was heavily mined. The air force bomber command had raided Cannes which was on the periphery of the beach head, town, the night before. And of course from the ground seeing the aircraft

09:30 sailing sedately through all this flak and stuff that the Germans put up - a very impressive sight. And the soldiers obviously thought that we'd been part of that because we were in air force uniform. And had come to grief. Which wasn't the case at all. We were only there on a weekend jaunt. Anyway they were very good to us and shared their

10:00 rations with us. They were the Green Howards I think. It was a British beach at a little place called Armonish [?]. We spent some time with the troops and then we thought we'd go up town which we did, being careful to stay in the tapes. Because the tanks and things were coming ashore. They also went

10:30 through the tapes areas. Then we got up to the town. It had been badly knocked around. The railway station and the church really battered. But the shops were still functioning and they had more in them than the British shops and we didn't need ration cards or anything like that.

11:00 So we bought a few clothes and bought some cheap grog. The British press were saying how the French had greeted us with flowers, all that sort of thing, the invasion forces. Not what I saw. The men of Normandy were standing - little dark fellas in their berets - around I thought with hatred in their eyes. They certainly weren't

11:30 pleased to see us. And understandably. After all it was their town that was getting knocked around. Anyway we spent some time shopping and then we thought it's been all very pleasant and interesting, we'll now go home. But when we got back to the beaches a whole line of manned

12:00 craft that run up to the beach. We went from one to the other and asked if they'd take us home. No way. They'd been given strict orders they were to take no-one off the beaches for fear of deserters of course. Some people when it gets hot they think it'd be nicer to go home so they go. Not from Normandy

12:30 They weren't even allowed to take the wounded out of the water they told us. So we had to spend the night on the beaches and the next day we still had the problem of getting home. So an army captain in a jeep put us on his jeep and he took us right along

13:00 the beach asking every vessel if they'd take us. Not one would. They were all manned by royal navy people of course and they don't disobey orders. So we were in a bit of a fix. We were probably a bit of an embarrassment to the army. Anyway eventually another

13:30 air sea rescue lot, RAF, came in shore and the army captain whittled up a duck - that's a water borne truck and it took us out and the skipper immediately agreed to take us home which was good. We set off

14:00 in company with a motor torpedo boat about the same size. There was a tremendous storm blew up. I'm not quite sure what period it was, but it was certainly before Cannes fell, before they broke out of the beach head and they were just toeing the

14:30 cashions. They made mulberry - you may not know, but they towed across prefabricated large concrete slabs really that they then sank to form a harbour. They were being towed into position as we were going across.

15:00 The crew of this air sea rescue boat were very concerned about seasickness from me. I'd never been seasick, but it was a terribly rough trip. I can well remember it and everybody including the skipper got seasick as I did. I was the last to get seasick. All the others

15:30 succumbed before I did. But when we were getting close to south Hampton my mates were deciding between themselves that I was the senior officer therefore I was responsible and I would have to make the explanations. Which I suppose was right. But when we got back no-one had known we were gone.

16:00 So it was quite a little adventure. I don't claim to have been in the Normandy landing, but I did visit the Normandy beach head while it was still a beach head and had a good look at it because the army captain and his little jeep.

I've just got a few questions to ask you. I have to rewind a little bit. You said earlier that when you

16:30 **were flying around pre D-day and you could see this build up, could you see the build up over a daily period or was it just like that?**

No. It had been building up for ages. There was so much material there that it would have taken weeks to put it in position. And the shipping that had collected in all the harbours and anchorages, yeah, it must have been a gradual

17:00 thing for a long time ahead.

How much rumour was getting built up during that time?

We were all expecting it. Everybody knew it was coming. The only thing that wasn't known as to where it would be and the Germans naturally thought it would be across the narrowest part of the channel which it wasn't. And

17:30 D-day we were very fortunate with the weather. There was just a gap in the weather that enabled the landing to take place. Had the weather closed in at the wrong time we'd have been in trouble. It was a tremendous military exercise. The biggest invasion from the sea that had ever taken place. Unbelievable the number of ships.

18:00 **You also mentioned before that other pilots who were flying around became quite aggressive. How would you see that?**

They'd come up and formate on you and you're staring down the barrels of their guns. If they were American you were expecting anything.

Suggesting that Americans are a little bit gun-happy?

They tend to shoot first and ask questions later.

18:30 And they wouldn't know a Sunderland from a bullfrog. It's not their ship, their thing. Very British aeroplane.

Was it at this time that all your operations were over? Is that why you were … ?

No. We went back to the squadron for a bit. But very soon after that I finished my tour.

19:00 I went off as an instructor back to the OTU that I'd trained at.

So it was quite towards the end of your particular tour?

Yeah. We did a tour of 800 operational hours or 18 months on the squadron. So my time expired and I was sent off back as an instructor.

When you went over to the beach

19:30 **who did you actually go with?**

Air sea rescue launch.

Your mates as well, who were they?

They were a couple of crew mates.

And who's bright idea was this?

It was mine. I just thought of it as a little outing. I didn't really expect to go ashore. I thought we'd just join with the air sea rescue bloke

20:00 while he did his off shore patrol and come back with him. But then things got out of hand a bit.

One thing led to another?

Yeeah. But a very interesting experience. I'm glad I had it. It's unimaginable the stuff that was being poured into Europe from Britain.

You also mentioned that they were instructed

20:30 **to leave the wounded in the water.**

The skippers of the landing craft were instructed not to pick up even the wounded out of the water. They were to take no-one off the beach under any circumstance.

Were there wounded people about?

I didn't see any. There was the occasional mine would go up. Whether someone trod on it or what I don't know.

21:00 But no I didn't see any blood and gore.

So the situation was stable enough for you to feel relatively safe?

Yeah. Long as you stayed within the areas that had been cleared. You wouldn't go wandering around other places.

You also said that

21:30 **soldiers were under the impression that you came down in the water, which you didn't?**

No. That we'd been shot down as part of the bombing raid that had gone on the night before. That's not how it was at all.

Did you tell them that at the time?

Don't think so. I don't' remember whether we did or not. I probably didn't.

22:00 I don't know why we didn't, but there was no point in spoiling their story.

How long were you actually over there?

I suppose you could say two days. One night.

So where were you sleeping?

I vaguely recall we slept in a boat. And I think we got under the flared bows of the ship because there was still

22:30 shelling going on and shrapnel falling. And I had this very vague memory of being in a dinghy, a little boat, under the flared bows of the ship to stay out of the shrapnel.

Some weekender?

Yeah. It was an interesting weekend.

23:00 **Was it what you expected to see over there?**

I didn't imagine the scope of the operation. It was mind-boggling.

Is that the curiosity that you went over there to fix?

I wanted to see what was going on, yeah.

You're lucky you weren't caught AWL [absent without leave]

Yes.

23:30 A lot of red caps around Haramons directing the military traffic so we needed to stay a little bit clear of them. That's the military police. They wouldn't have perhaps understood.

You said that you weren't exactly

24:00 **welcomed into the township.**

Not by the French.

Was there anybody that you were welcomed by there?

We only saw shopkeepers and these little Frenchmen standing around in little groups just looking. They weren't friendly. As I say I can understand

24:30 that.,

With your observation of how the press dealt with the situation afterwards do you just see that as a great big piece of propaganda?

Well, from what I saw there was no great welcome in Normandy. Mind you it was only one tiny little corner of the whole operation. But the people of Haramon weren't all that keen

25:00 on us.

Yeah. They'd gone through quite a bit.

Yeah. Not good for them.

So you were back at your normal base after your adventure. What was next for you to do?

Finish my tour and go off as an instructor.

Were there any other highlights

25:30 **of the rest of your tour that you'd like to share with us?**

No. Not really. Oh I was - we carried out an underwater attack on a U-Boat. It's a bit technical but we had a thing called a radio sond. It was a

26:00 about a metre long I suppose. It was a wooden tube. We'd drop it. A microphone would drop out from it which would listen for the U-Boat and an aerial would pop up. There was a radio in the top of it so you could hear what was going on in the submarine. And we'd drop

26:30 a pattern of these and then fly from one to the other and from the strength of the signal that we got we could determine where the sub was and what direction it was going in. A bit cat and mouse stuff.

How far away from each other would these be?

Half a mile perhaps. and the aircraft

27:00 would fly a particular pattern around them. We'd drop about 8 of them. Anyway we got this contact which sounded almost certainly was a sub. And we …

What does it sound like?

You can hear all sorts of things. Underwater is incredibly

27:30 noisy. All sorts of clickings and gurglings and screeches going on. If there's a U-Boat there you can hear the shutting or the clanging of the water tight doors. All that sort of stuff. Water is a very good conductor of sound as you know. So you'd get a pretty good idea that there's

28:00 a U-Boat down there. We did depth charge, but we didn't get any certain results one way or the other so we couldn't claim it as a kill.

Were you the person with the headphones on all the time?

No. Various people took turns as on the radar. We'd change every hour or so. But on this particular occasion yes I had the I was on the

28:30 set.

Did you get any training for this kind of stuff?

Yes. We were training all the time.

When did you get this sort of training, because this sounds like new technology maybe.

It was. It was a very recent development. So was radar. Although very primitive forms of radar had been available had been available, but it had been enormously improved in a very

29:00 short time. We'd gone from very primitive early stage when the aircraft had aerials all over it, sticking out the front, down the rear, to just two little bulges under the wings which rotated. And

29:30 in the aircraft the early models you'd got the reflection from the sea so you lose the target once you got close.

This is visually on the radar?

On the radar. On the screen. But on the later models you got a very good picture of whatever was there.

30:00 If we hadn't had radar when the Germans brought in the snorkel - it's a - the main weakness of the U-Boat was that it had to surface to recharge its batteries and replenish its air and so on. And it had to stay up for two hours. With the introduction of the snorkel which was a

30:30 large tube, it stayed under the surface itself, but this tube came up to the surface. So it breathed through the tube. It could stay submerged and still recharge its batteries and run its diesel engines, which you can't do without a snorkel, not for long. It enabled them to stay submerged

31:00 and present a very small target. But the radar we were using was so improved, so sophisticated we could pick up the snorkel with care. So you didn't need the whole big steel hull. You could pick up this little bit. Had we not had the snorkel, the radar, the snorkel would have beaten us. We could never have found the subs, U-Boats.

31:30 **How would it appear on your radar screen? You are talking about a very small target.**

Yeah. Just a little blip, little very bright blip. There was some skill in determining what it was. Or what you thought it was. You couldn't be sure until you got there of course.

What other things would come up on the radar that could be mistaken for it?

A small fishing boat, say. Any

32:00 thing at all that was floating - debris if it was a sizeable lump. All sorts of things.

It wasn't straightforward at all.

No. There was a skill in it. That's true.

When you say that you dropped these - forgotten what you called them - things in the ocean … ?

Radio songs, yeah.

Do you actually have to pick them back up or do you … ?

32:30 No. They're left.

Do they keep pumping out information once you've done a package?

Until the batteries run out, yes.

How long would the batteries last?

I don't know. Perhaps half a day.

It just seems like quite an expensive exercise.

Yeah. But war is expensive in many ways isn't it?

33:00 **Was there any success with that new piece of technology?**

It's used now in a much more sophisticated way than we had. Ours was the beginning of it. So I suppose it must be successful or they wouldn't be still using it. I know the U-Boats now they don't wear boots

33:30 like they used to. Where you could hear them tramping around in the U-Boat. They wear some kind of a sock thing so they're not making noise - because of the listening devices. The navy had another thing

too that sent out a signal that would hit the U-Boat and bounce back like underwater radar.

34:00 Very technical. That was one of its interests. When we first started using radar it was a war winner. But then the Germans found that they could develop a technique whereby they could hear or detect the allied aircraft's radar beam.

34:30 So we're searching from them and our radar is telling them where we are. We didn't know they knew. It's a sort of cat and mouse game.

An ongoing chess game.

Very much so.

How often would you be faced with learning about a new piece of technology?

It was on all the time. Training

35:00 training training. It just went on continuously. If you weren't on leave and were not on operations you were training.

Would you find that part of your service quite interesting and the fact that you had to keep up?

Yeah. I didn't find it at all boring. I found it quite interesting.

What part of new technology did you at the time find most fascinating?

35:30 I think radar. Radar's proved itself so much. It had other values besides finding U-Boats. It meant that you could fly home on a beam on a beacon. There'd be a beacon at our station and from 100 miles out particularly if you didn't quite know where you were at night

36:00 you'd just pick up the pulse and home on it. Couldn't go wrong.

At what part of your operational time did that come in?

Radar? Early on, but it greatly improved during my course on the squadron. But yeah we used to call it SE, special equipment.

36:30 The name radar seemed to come along later on.

SE is kind of wide ranging.

Very wide ranging. Yes. Very secret. You were threatened with your life if you said anything about it.

What were they telling you about the importance of secrecy, particularly in regards to the fact that you were seeing new technology all the time and applying it?

Well we didn't

37:00 want the enemy to know about it. Secrecy was a big issue. Seems to always be the case with anything to do with the sea or naval warfare. I suppose all forms of warfare but the navy particularly seems to be obsessed with secrecy. We couldn't use the radio for instance.

37:30 Unless in grave emergency. For fear of giving our position away. So radio silence was the requirement.

How much banter would there be during an operation?

Within the crew? No. We didn't chat on the intercom.

38:00 As I say, we'd change positions or jobs about once an hour I think. And you'd report to control, that was the navigator, when you were getting out of your turret and when you were getting into your turret. And you'd report anything else that happened to be going no or you'd thought you saw. But there was no chatter.

38:30 No way. And at night if you're sitting in the tail turret and you think they're all asleep u there because there's no one said anything for ages and you're stooging along and you seem to have the world all on your own. Quite an unusual experience really.

I expect it'd be

39:00 **quite an alone feeling.**

Yeah. Tail turret is a lonely thing. You're a long way from the rest of the crew. You're very isolated. The turret in foul weather is a real rock and roll experience. It's shaking and wobbling and going on cause the tail's gets a bit of a thrashing. Yeah. It's a bit different.

39:30 **How often would you break for a meal considering the fact that you told us earlier that you had three gas burners up there?**

Well we didn't really break for a meal. Someone would make a cup of tea or a sausage or make up some kind of a meal. When you were off duty you'd have it. If no one else did it, you did it yourself.

40:00 It was all very civilised in some ways.

What about the toilet?

We had a nice little toilet with a hand basin and all that stuff and a mirror. It wasn't a big toilet but it was quite adequate. Different from bomber command people.

40:30 They had a bucket thing. But we were much better served than that.

Sounds like you had a very comfortable situation and could also keep yourself nice.

Yes indeed. We always took a diversion kit, a uniform and toilet gear and stuff. Because you might be diverted and have to spend several days at that strange

41:00 station. And you had to be reasonably presented. Seems a bit strange doesn't it. But yeah you always took a diversion kit.

Would it be more often than not that you'd be hauled over to somewhere to...?

Mostly you'd come back to your own base. But if the weather was foul or you couldn't quite make it to your own base

41:30 because of a problem with the machinery or whatever then you'd be diverted.

How exhausted would you be at the end of one of those operations?

I've never been so exhausted. Absolutely. So tired that I couldn't close my eyes. Just couldn't close them. They were staring.

42:00 It hurt to close them.

Tape 8

00:31 **Jack, you were just describing how tired you would get during ops.**

Yeah. I can recall several things. One was that after hours and hours of watching the ocean it was sometimes you would hallucinate. My hallucinations used to be little men riding bicycles

01:00 over the waves. That was one. The other one was seeing tram cars travelling on the surface of the Atlantic. But the tiredness when walking back to the mess or wherever we were going - unable to close my eyes. I'd been staring for so long that it hurt too much

01:30 to close them. Perhaps they'd dried out. But it was very very tired and you'd just flop on your cot and stay there for hours without even getting under the blankets. But coldness was one of our main problems or discomforts. The aircraft weren't heated and our flying gear wasn't heated.

02:00 It was a question of putting on all the clothes you could possibly get into and - well, not sweating it out, but you know what I mean. Very tired, very cold. Not bored. I was never bored. The ocean can be beautiful of course even in bad weather. I can well remember the night was the moon and particularly

02:30 if it was cloudy and sometimes you'd see ships in the light of the moon going from one dark patch of cloud shadow to another. Beautiful sight. Just quite special. The cumulus clouds were wonderful

03:00 whether in daylight or at night. You could often see the reflection of the aircraft on the cloud. It was just sometimes quite beautiful. But never boring. Not in my experience.

Why were the Sunderlands painted white?

It was a type of camouflage. They were grey on the top surfaces and white hull and under

03:30 the wing surfaces. They were less obvious. But any aircraft in the distance looks black because you don't see the colours. In fact the colour is the same as a seagull if you think about it - grey on top and white body and under surfaces.

04:00 **Makes sense. Can see the logic in that. What happened when your tour finished, Jack?**

When you finished your tour you went off in my case as an instructor back to the OTU that I'd trained at. When I got there the flight commander that interviewed me took me off flying and gave me a ground

04:30 job which was to do the signals briefing for the crews that were training and then keep in touch with

them through the signals cabin. I found that pretty heavy going because I was very unused to talking in public and having to stand up in front of all the brass of the station and the

05:00 and the crews and tell them what was expected of them I found very demanding. Then when they were all off my function was to be in charge of the radio cabin where there was a lot of WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] radio operators. They were great girls but they gave me a pretty hard time. But it was

05:30 interesting.

Why did they give you a hard time?

They were in a pretty remote area and they used to make some rather suggestive remarks. To the extent that I had a little bedroom sort of thing - I had to be there all the time - but I used to lock myself in.

06:00 I suppose more imaginary than anything. But I couldn't cope with 12 of them. One of the other things I found a bit demanding down there was, part of my duties was to act as the air traffic controller. All it entailed was to take an Aldus lamp down

06:30 to the end of the pier and if all seemed clear - this was at night - I'd give them a green flash of light. If there was an obstruction I'd give them a red and they'd have to go round again. But I was never sure whether the coast was clear or not. I couldn't tell. So you'd give them a green and hope like hell it was right.

07:00 Always was. I didn't cause any accidents but it was a worry mainly because - I suppose I was in the best position to know whether there was an obstruction. But I certainly was not clear as to whether that was the case or not. Anyway I was still doing that job when peace was declared.

07:30 Very soon after that I came home.

How did you hear that peace was declared?

On the radio. I know I was down in the village and the people all were saying about it, that there was about to be an announcement. So I went back to the mess and we all stood around and listened to the radio and Churchill

08:00 I think it was announced that the war had ended. Came as quite a shock really that you'd survived and you had all these years ahead of you. What the hell are you going to do with yourself? It hadn't been a big consideration up until then.

08:30 So it was a bit sad to say farewell to the people that you'd served with. We went down to Brighton which was then the personnel depot. We stayed in one of the big beachfront hotels. They're still there. Within a matter of weeks I was on board

09:00 the Sterling Castle and coming home .

Did celebrations break out before you left?

Yeah. They did. That's right. I don't think we were all that involved in celebrations. Probably were. But I didn't have any great sense of

09:30 victory. I just was glad it was over. But a bit sad for what it had all cost and what the hell was it worth anyway. It just seemed to be such a pointless thing. The whole war. Not that we could have done otherwise than what we did do.

10:00 But I don't get any joy out of war in any way. Just seems to be a terrible disaster to me for everybody concerned.

So you were feeling more reflective than celebrating?

I suppose I was feeling sad more than anything. Because of the worthlessness and pointlessness

10:30 of the whole exercise. The harm and damage and loss of life, the set back to the world. It was not a very good idea. That's when I decided to be a teacher. UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation] had published their manifesto which said something

11:00 to the effect that wars begin in the minds of men which I thought summed it up pretty well. I decided to do what I could to change the minds of men. That's a big statement. But I was concerned not to waste the opportunity that I'd been given. So I went teaching.

11:30 **I can see the logic in that.**

I think so. Whether it was effective or not and to what degree, that's another thing. But I think at least I made the effort to do something worthwhile. I suppose I could have gone back to - I did go back to my job for a bit as a clerk and office boy.

12:00 Which I couldn't have stuck. That wasn't for me.

I'll just interrupt there, Jack, what was the voyage like home?

Good. We were on the Sterling Castle which was one of the Castle Line ships that served South Africa. But we came home via the Panama Canal. And Sydney.

12:30 We were quickly on a train. I came home with a lot of the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] blokes that had been captured on Greece and Crete and had spent the war in prison of war camps in German, plus some airmen that had been shot down and taken prisoner.

Must have been interesting interacting with them on the way home.

Very much so. I made some good friendships among the guys.

13:00 A couple of Kalgoorlie fellows particularly. They were dead keen that I become a hard rock miner in Kalgoorlie with them. That was their function.

They try and pitch that idea over a beer?

Many beers. When we got to Kalgoorlie, they'd been away for years of course, but before the train left they came along the platform armed with armfuls of

13:30 bottles of beer. I wasn't really serious about being a miner.

What was happening on the voyage home as opposed to the voyage over there?

Much the same. People played crown and anchor and cards and dice. Again, we did all right in the air force. I think we had cabins whereas the troops got it rougher. It was all

14:00 right. The train journey was quite interesting when we got to civilisation. We had a case load of air force people in the front of the train and then all the army guys were in the other coaches and as we went through each station they were all decorated with bunting and people cheering.

14:30 I think mainly for the army blokes. The ex POWs [prisoners of war]

How spirited were the ex-POWs on your way home?

They were good. They were very friendly. Our blokes that had been in Germany, they were in good health. They'd been working as POWs are expected to.

15:00 They were fine. There was no trauma with them. They wouldn't stand any nonsense from their superiors. I remember there was nearly a riot in one place. I don't know what it was over, but it was purely an army thing. We weren't involved in it. But they made it clear they weren't going to be pushed around.

What wouldn't they tolerate?

I don't know what it was. It was something to do with

15:30 the train and their accommodation I think. But it was none of my business. We got to Perth Station. I'd had a bit too much to drink actually and I happened to know the paymaster, sergeant paymaster, on the train. And he had a little caboose down in the guard's van with a

16:00 bed. He gave me the use of it for the night. In the morning before I was fully awake we'd got into Perth Station. It was absolutely crowded and unbeknown to me of course the air force had sent telegrams to our people to say we were coming and what time we'd be there. So my father and sister came in to meet me.

16:30 But I was at the wrong end of the train. Air force people were all up the front end and I was right down the back end. I didn't see them. So I grabbed my gear and walked across to catch a tram at the bottom of Horseshoe bridge. Which I did. The tram conductor was a girl. They'd all been men when I left. Now the girls had

17:00 come in. And she gave me a rough time. She really did. For some reason for another she thought I thought I was a hero which wasn't of course the case at all. But I think she was concerned because it looked as though the troops were coming back and would take her job. She didn't want that. Anyway that didn't matter. So I got home, walked

17:30 into the house. My mother was cooking over the stove. I hadn't seen her for three years. She was a Scot, a Shetlander, and she looked up and said, "Well you're home then Jack". I said "Yeah" and that was about it. So that was good. Nice to be home.

18:00 **So you had a family dinner?**

Yeah. We're not a very demonstrative lot. I went on leave and when I came back they said do you want to go to the islands. The Pacific war was still on. It was a strange thing about the air force. They never seem to force you to do anything. They'd ask you would you like to. I suppose if you said

18:30 you wouldn't like to they'd get a bit strong. But I said, no I didn't particularly want to go to the isles, but I would if needed. So they said, you better go on leave again. Which I did. I went up to my sister's farm in Wagin. Coming back on the train peace was declared in the Pacific. So when the train got into Perth I walked uptown

19:00 up to the Methodist Church on the corner of William and Hay street and the mob were going mad. They were dancing and raving. Doing all sorts of things. But again I didn't feel very happy so I went home and I got my job back. But fortunately the - I was

19:30 going to go back to school because I couldn't go to teachers' college. I didn't have the qualification. I was going to use my deferred pay and so on to go and do a leaving and then go to college. But when I went in to see the Education Department they told me they'd just that morning decided to set up a qualifying course for people like me and

20:00 they did that and we did a year at tech with excellent teachers, a great course, to bring us up to standard for the teachers' college. Which happened and I went to teachers' college and got through that in a couple of years. Then started teaching and - they were paying me three pound a week - that's six dollars a week

20:30 which in those days was enough to live on and run a motorbike. But when I started teaching they still supported me financially through university. So I did uni work. It took me ten years to get a degree. That was the quickest time that you could do it in, part time and by correspondence.

21:00 I taught in various places. I started off at Beaconsfield and Fremantle and taught at Fremantle Boys and then got married and we ...

How did you meet your partner?

Gwen was a nurse. I took on rowing. I missed the company of

21:30 crew. I needed to be involved with some sort of team. Having had contact with the water rowing seemed to be a suitable one. I did that and greatly enjoyed my years of rowing - four years or so. But we had a lot of social activities

22:00 associated with the rowing club and one of them was a barbecue down at White Beach on the river. Gwen was there and she wanted to go and see a film called [The] Red Shoes and she'd gone to the barbecue with some other bloke - a friend of mine - but I took her home. It's gone on from there.

22:30 It's been pretty good. We've had six kids, 17 grandkids, four great grandchildren. I've served in every type of school from one teacher to 100 teachers plus. Always as the principal. Ended up as the principal of several

23:00 big senior high schools. That's about the story of my life.

So it sounds like you lived happily ever since.

I must say I've no complaints.

This year you're celebrating how many years together?

53.

Something to celebrate.

Yes. It's been wonderful. We really have been extraordinarily happy.

Did you have any difficulties settling down

23:30 **into civvy life when you came back Jack?**

Oh yes I did. Indeed I did.

What were they?

They gave me my job back as I might have said as an office boy but I was almost 22 then and I had four years service and I'd been doing pretty responsible work supervising

24:00 the work of other people. But they gave me the job of doing the inkwells and running the messages. I couldn't hack it. I just couldn't manage that. I used to go to work. When the pubs opened I'd go up the pub. I'd come back stark stonkered.

What pub did you drink at?

The Maylands.

Who did you drink with?

Myself.

24:30 Because there was no one else. Anyway we parted company to their benefit and mine.

Were you sacked?

Oh no. They were very understanding and kind. I just couldn't do it. I just couldn't, couldn't do it. I was bored out of my mind. I was resentful of course.

What resentment did

25:00 **you feel?**

I was being treated like a child when I was no longer a child. I had more life experience probably then any of them in the place. They didn't understand me. I certainly didn't understand them. And the sooner we parted the better for all concerned.

25:30 I was just lucky that it happened that I could get what I wanted, which was to teach.

How lonely were you being separated from your old crew?

I missed them badly I must say. I did. We kept in touch by mail for a bit but you know how it is. You become less and less, fewer and fewer contacts until I

26:00 don't know any of them. I think most of them are dead now.

What helped you move on and slowly settle back down?

The rowing. That was enormously helpful. I think the qualifying course that I did - they were all ex-servicemen and girls and we were all, we became

26:30 a group of friends and we went right through that qualifying year and college together. And served in the schools together too. So people I was friendly with there are still our friends. Friends were the thing that helped I think more than anything.

How did your service change you as a person for the better?

27:00 I grew up considerably. During the war I developed a sense that nothing mattered. I remember in London with the buzz bombs - a buzz bomb landed fairly close and it

27:30 didn't affect me and I knew then that something was happening to me. I could look at the wounded and the dead and not feel anything which didn't please me. I didn't want that at all. That was one of the things. I think it gave me

28:00 a tremendous hatred of any war, anything to do with the war and for a long time anything to do with military matters. I just didn't want to be a part of that at all. Since then I've changed my tune a bit in that I've been president of the Sunderland branch here now for more than a decade or more and vice

28:30 president of the air force association and served on their committees and division council and board of management and just generally got back into it.

How fulfilling did you find those roles?

Very. Very interesting from my point of view. I was concerned for the guys. And

29:00 clearly I'm considered to have some kind of capabilities in terms of leadership roles. That sounds a bit grand I suppose but everywhere I go I'm either the president or vice president, or certainly on committees. Everything I've joined I've ended up in charge of. Must be some kind of quirk of character I suppose.

29:30 **You don't see you as a natural authority figure?**

I don't know. I don't know how they see me. It seems when I walk into a thing they - I must have antennas sticking up to say, "I'm available to serve on committee". Then things just happen. But I've been president and vice president of

30:00 so many organisations and it always seems to happen and I don't seek it. I'm not blowing my own trumpet at all. I'm usually asked to do these jobs because they can't get anybody else really.

I think you might be being a little modest.

No. Not really. I know I can do the job.

30:30 I'm very confident in my own capabilities. Probably over confident in regard to that. But we manage.

Jack, you mentioned earlier or quoted "war begins in men's minds" and said that inspired you to your career as a teacher. What attitude have you adopted in your teaching and how's that lead to

31:00 **the way you've taught and run schools as principal?**

Yes it has had an affect. I've run very big schools and some tough schools in depressed areas with high migrant populations. With some very wicked kids.

31:30 I've never suspended any child ever. I've never done anything to prevent them from getting the best education they can. If they can't grasp their opportunities well then there's not a lot I can do about it. But they've never been denied it with anything I've done. And the same with staff. I've always done what I could to make it right for them.

32:00 Because obviously they're the crucial people. So I think I have, I can reasonably claim to have had a concern for people and particularly for the people who are battling like the kids from depressed areas.

32:30 And I've found a great deal of satisfaction out of it. If I had to do it all again I'd take teaching because I like the active teaching, I like to teach, but I also like running schools and I think the schools are far more influential than most people realise. And influential

33:00 in a very positive way. Particularly for the kids who are less advantaged. So yeah it has affected me. I'm quite happy to admit. Probably I'm a bit - what's the word - Pollyanna perhaps.

I think it's great that you can find that sense of accomplishment

33:30 **in what you've done.**

I look back on it with a great deal of pleasure, with a great deal of satisfaction. As I say, if I were in a situation of having to select a job again as a young person I'd go for teaching because I don't think there's any more satisfying task in the world really.

34:00 You may not achieve much, but at least you're trying. I think you can come to the end of it and say, we'll it's been okay. I did what I could. That's it.

What is it that you could do and what did you find most satisfying in that role?

When we came home and we went through an

34:30 assessment they were bringing in the CRDS, the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme for ex-servicemen. And if you had joined before you were 21 you were assessed as having not really established yourself. So you were tested as to what you were capable of doing.

35:00 I went through the tests. They said, you could do university work. You could do pretty well whatever you want. But I had made up my mind I was going to be a teacher. And I didn't consider anything else. So that's what I did.

But what actually satisfied you in that role?

In teaching?

Mm.

Well I like

35:30 to teach. That's probably a bit of an egotistical thing. But I love to teach.

So it's about performance.

Yeah. I just get satisfaction out of the act of teaching. I like the contact of minds, even kids who are backward

36:00 it's good to be with them mentally.

Just to have an influence on them.

No. Not quite that. It's just a pleasure to me to do teaching. That's one side of it. The other side, as the principal of the school you've got tremendous opportunity to make or break

36:30 young teachers. You can destroy them so readily by being overly critical and not appreciating their problems or the efforts they are making. On the other hand you also have the opportunity to encourage them and get them going along what you consider to be a satisfactory path.

37:00 I always enjoyed the staffroom very much. And that's the only thing I missed of schools when I retired. I didn't really miss the kids. I didn't miss anything other than the contact with staff and I was a bit of a lost soul for a while because we had a very big staff room in

37:30 both South Fremantle and Dalcuta where I finished up. Over 100 teachers plus ancillary people. So I think it was the ability to in some way influence the people you work with.

Sounds like you've been a really guiding figure, Jack.

I hope not misguiding. Not too far

38:00 misguiding anyway. Yeah. I've always like the job. Liked the people. I think they've tolerated me. Obviously they have, or couldn't do anything about it anyway.

How do you spend Anzac Day?

This Anzac Day we've got a dawn service here in the village at six o'clock. Then we have breakfast

38:30 in the club. Then I go to Bull Creek and this year our Sunderland people can't march. They're all too old and sick and so on. So we're going on one of the air force association's buses. Then we're coming back to Bull Creek and there's a lunch planned. Then I'm

39:00 going to be taken down to Subiaco Oval where I'm to be driven around the arena in a car and do the royal wave I guess. And then we're going to watch the football and come home. That's the Anzac Day.

And what does Anzac Day mean to you?

It means great

39:30 deal. Recent years I've gone to - at my school we've always had Anzac Day ceremonies. In recent years since I've retired a group of us in this village go to the surrounding schools at the schools' request and give the kids a little talk and they usually have the ceremony which the kids nowadays organise

40:00 and do it very well. I try and read them a few poetry pieces that seem appropriate. I certainly don't glorify war. I always find it a very touching and delightful experience because the youngsters are so well behaved

40:30 and conduct themselves so admirably. And they do things that I couldn't have possibly done at their age like stand up in front of three or five hundred kids and parents and teachers and talk as though they're to the manor born. I'd have been a bumbling idiot at their age. But they do it. So yeah. Anzac Day

41:00 does mean a great deal, not from the point of view of warfare. But from the point of view of comradeship, loyalty, sacrifice if you like. It's just important I think.

Important day for all of us to pay our respect.

I don't know whether it's respects -

41:30 well it is of course, we do honour the guys who didn't make it. But it's more than that. It's part of the Australian ethos. The Australian outlook. Australian troops have always been well regarded by both the enemy and the allies.

42:00 There's something about them.

INTERVIEW ENDS