

Australians at War Film Archive

Douglas Butterworth (Digger) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1601>

Tape 1

00:43 **So, Doug, can you tell us a bit about your life? Just a summary of your life.**

Okay. Well it started off, I was born in Ayr and my people owned a cane farm. Well they owned about three cane farms up there.

01:00 And that's where I had my early childhood and that's, I suppose... The last farm was very close to the sea and I used to do a lot of fishing and messing around like that. That was my life until I grew up a little bit more and I eventually went to work as a laboratory assistant in a sugar mill laboratory in the research department.

01:30 And then I went and did a course in sugar technology and chemistry and gained my diploma in about 1939 and worked as a shift chemist until 1940 when the war broke out. That is about it, I suppose. My people have been farmers for a long time in the Burdekin district.

And can you tell us just a summary of

02:00 **where you were in the war and what happened since the war?**

Oh yes. Well I did the training in Canada, advance training, and operational training units in Scotland, and then was posted to a squadron, 460 Squadron when the squadron was first formed at a place called Beaton. And that's about it I suppose. I did quite a bit of training in

02:30 England before I went up to the operational training unit too.

And then if you can just tell us when and where you were during the war, just for those war years, and then give us a summary of what happened?

Yes, well in England. Arriving in England.

Sorry to confuse you. Just a little summary

03:00 **of what happened during the war years, where you were in what years and what happened, and then since the war if you can?**

I joined up. I was medically examined in April 1941. It took quite a while to get that far because I was a reserved occupation. I then did initial training in Sydney in Bradfield Park.

03:30 Moved over to a wireless school in Calgary, Canada, and a bombing and gunnery school in a little place called Mossbank in Saskatchewan. And then we went overseas over to England and we went to Cranwell, which was a huge RAF [Royal Air Force] base where we did the radio training and so forth. From there we went to Lossiemouth in northern Scotland

04:00 for the operational training unit; that is where we really got into the system of being a crew. And from there we eventually, we arrived in England in round about July '41 and after the operational training unit we went to the 460 Squadron, and round about, I think it was the end of '41, the 31st October

04:30 1941. So that's in a squadron in Beaton, a little place not far from York and that's where we operated from there and that's where I left from. That's about it I think. I don't know whether that suits what you want.

No, no, that's fine. Let's go back then to the beginning of your life, and can you tell us a little bit more about growing up in Ayr and what your childhood was like?

Yeah. I suppose I could.

05:00 On the first, I suppose about four years old was the first thing that I can remember. Just little things that don't mean anything, you know. I can remember putting two pins on the railway line for the loco [locomotive] to run over it to make a pair of scissors. That's about the first thing I remember. I was a

bush kid, brought up in the bush on a farm

05:30 and I used to run all round the bush, go fishing. I had a mate and used to go fishing. The other thing I used to do, for my pocket money was I used to go and catch carpet snakes and sell their skins. I was a bush kid. And then I suppose the usual teenage, a mob of blokes getting together and getting on the grog and all that stuff I suppose.

06:00 And then come the period of doing the sugar technology course. You had to pull your horns in a bit then. And from then on I was working in the sugar industry.

Can you tell us about your family life? What it was like at home and what your parents were like?

Yes. Hard working and they never had a lot of time to spend with us kids, you know. They just had to work all the time.

06:30 It is a little bit different to a lot of people today. So they were very supportive parents, very supportive and I had two brothers and two sisters. Well the two sisters had left school by the time I was a teenager. The two brothers were still home. The elder brother had a heart problem and the other brother, Les, he took up flying. This is well

07:00 before the war and gained his A licence and B licences of commercial flying. He never got into the commercial business but when war broke out he was grabbed as an instructor. But with regards to our life it was in the Depression years, 1930s. Being on a farm we probably ate a lot better than a lot of people in cities because we had cows for milk,

07:30 we had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s for eggs and so on, so we didn't do too badly.

Fantastic. We'll just pause there for a moment. So the Depression didn't have much impact on your family?

Not really. Not as I saw it anyhow. No doubt financially it did with my old folks. As a kid I didn't notice it because we were always well fed. So I had a breeze.

But did you lack for anything at all or...?

I don't think so.

08:00 We didn't really need a lot in those days. We made our own fun. We raced out in the bush and played cowboys and Indians and that's about it, you know.

What was Christmas like?

Oh it was a full-scale job, hey. Mother would start cooking about six o'clock in the morning on the wood stove. Cooking all the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and the ham and whatnot. It was great for us kids. It must have been a terrible thing for mother but, oh yes. It was the

08:30 full-scale business, Christmas.

And what sort of presents would you get as a child?

The old Christmas stocking, for a start? Do you get a Christmas stocking? You didn't. You missed out. Oh well if you were the right age you got a bike or something like that. That style of thing.

I just wondered about what sort of toys you would have had growing up.

We used to make most of our own toys.

09:00 Yeah. Well we used to get the general rubbish stuff out of the stocking but we used to make a lot of our own things.

What sort of things did you make?

Oh we made little tractors, little aircraft, that type of thing. We were just always busy in the shed. Things have changed now - you didn't have to buy it in those days, you made it.

So as a boy, what was your interest in aircraft and flying?

Oh yeah, well

09:30 we were all keen on aircraft, particularly my brother because he went to the aero club and had training. Yes, I was always keen on it. But I suppose just association with my brother and so forth. He was older than me, only a couple of years older than me.

What did you like about planes?

I don't know. Free and easy, like a bird. I've always been interested in birds. You get to get up in the air and away from everything.

10:00 **So did you dream about flying as a boy?**

No, not really. No. Just dreamed of what I am going to do next day.

Did you have any aspirations or ambitions as you were growing up?

Not particularly, no. Just progressing through life type of thing. I didn't have

10:30 any real idea what I wanted to be. I don't think so. No.

So what was school life like for you?

What?

School life.

A disaster. An absolute disaster. For a start we started off in a little school that was around about four miles from where we lived so the brother and I used to walk for four miles every morning and afternoon. It was quite a long day for little kids.

11:00 And then I progressed to horseback to go seven miles into the town to go to high school. That was another drama. I fell foul of a particular teacher there and halfway through my secondary school I just shot through and that was it, finished, no more. He hounded me out of the school.

11:30 **What happened?**

Oh for some strange reason he was a... It's probably racist because he was a tried and true Irishmen and he hated everything of the British Empire and the Australian in the British Empire, and I fell foul of him somehow. I forget what the actual story was.

12:00 The last thing he did, we were having singing lessons and he singled me out. Even though my mouth was going he reckoned I wasn't singing. So he took me out in front of the class and made me sing and that was the crowning finish so I just walked out, hopped on my pony and I went home and my parents never forced me to go back after that. School is a lot different now, apparently.

How old were you when that happened?

12:30 About thirteen I suppose. Twelve or thirteen.

And can you describe that school for us, what that school was like?

Yeah. Well generally speaking it was a state school and well run. There was a few personalities that clashed with kids. Most of the teachers were quite good but there were a few that really

13:00 couldn't handle kids.

So how big was the school?

Oh I don't know. It was about three or four hundred people in those days I suppose. It might be a little bit less, a couple of hundred.

So people came from all around?

All round, yes. High school, that was the only opening for high school at Ayr.

Can you tell us what Ayr was like back then?

Yeah. Well it was a sugar town, of course.

13:30 I wouldn't even guess what the population was. It wasn't real big but everybody knew everybody like in those small towns. Oh it was a good place to grow up in. It was all related to sugar production and so forth.

What about the property that you lived on, the family home, can you tell us what that was like?

It was a cane farm of course and it had

14:00 various paddocks of cane growing and it had another paddock that we kept our school ponies in. They were the greatest bane of my life going to school, trying to catch these ponies in the morning. We'd go round with a piece of bread and they'd just reach out and grab the bread and off again. It took hours to catch these ponies.

And as a boy did you have to work on the property as well?

14:30 Oh well we did little things, but when I look back on it now not enough to help the old bloke. No. My elder brother did for a while but I don't think we were ever much use.

So what was your father like?

Easy going. Hard working. Not enough time to be with us kids. That's about all I can say about him.

And what about your mum?

15:00 Oh she was a lot stricter. She had a strap hanging up behind the kitchen door and if we did something wrong we got it.

So discipline was pretty tough back then?

Yeah. And it was a good thing too, hey.

And what sort of things did you do together as a family?

Not a lot because they were so busy, you know. We mostly did our own thing but occasionally we would

15:30 go down to the beach together and have a swim or something like that but it was only very occasional. They were so busy.

So as you were growing up, what did you know about the war, or what was your understanding of what war was?

Not a lot. Not a lot. Very naive.

Did you have any idea in your head about war as a boy?

Oh I suppose I would after seeing all kinds of movies and things like that.

16:00 Yeah, certainly.

What do you think the idea was that you had as a young boy?

Oh I suppose it's a glory business as a young fellow, but there is not too much glory.

Did you have any contact with anyone who had been in World War I?

Yes. My uncle. He was in World War I.

And what did he tell you about the war?

Not a lot. A lot of interesting stuff but not exactly anything

16:30 meaningful about the war. Just interesting places he'd been and so forth.

Do you remember any stories that he told you at all?

No, I don't.

So did he talk positively or negatively about his war experience?

Oh positively I'd say, but as a kid you didn't know what he was talking about really. You know,

17:00 you didn't really understand it.

And so your own father didn't participate in World War I?

No. He was a farmer and just like in the Second World War it was reserved occupation sort of thing to keep production going.

So what would be your most significant memory of that time growing up in Ayr, do you think?

Oh you've put me on the spot now. Let me see now.

17:30 Oh I think as far as I was concerned it was the outdoor living that I was really rapt in. I used to go camping as a young fellow at the drop of a hat by myself, so just outdoor living was my main concern.

You went camping by yourself?

Oh yeah, a couple of times.

So staying out overnight?

Yeah.

18:00 And also with mates.

So what would you do when you went camping?

Oh nothing much really. I would go fishing, generally down on the beaches I would go fishing.

What sort of fish did you catch?

Whiting, flathead, bream and so forth.

So they are the happy memories that you have of that time?

Oh yes. I had a great mate, he finished up in the air force too. We used to go camping with his family too.

18:30 The whole family used to go camping and I'd tag along.

And when you went camping what sort of gear did you have for sleeping?

Oh just the basics, a couple of blankets, that's all. We didn't take pillows or things like that. We had to cart all the gear across huge sand dunes so we kept our gear to the minimum, but it was really comfortable really.

What about sport as a boy?

19:00 **What did you enjoy?**

I was not... I wasn't very interested in any sort of sport. I was a bush kid, out in the bush.

And you were happy to while away hours all on your own?

Yeah, and with my mates.

So who were your mates?

I had one bloke. Two were in the air force as well. One was a bloke called Colin Steely. He was on 10 Squadron

19:30 on Sunderlands. Went through his tour of duty over there and came back here, fell off a ladder and was killed. The other chap just died recently, Frank Casalino. He was a pilot over in this area, over here. Yeah, they were the main two.

You said earlier that as you grew up, as a teenager, as you got a bit older you went out and you were a bit of a larrikin, I suppose. Was there a bit of drinking as you got older?

20:00 No doubt there was, yes. Usual teenage bloke thing. You know.

What did you do when you went out as a teenager?

Well we would either go to a dance or go to the pub. We would probably go to the dance after going to the pub of course and breathe beer fumes over all the girls. Nothing's changed, has it?

Why did you go to the dance after the pub?

Oh, you are getting up courage.

20:30 We used to go into the doorway of the dance hall. We weren't game to go and ask a girl to dance and all that sort of business. We were very naive people in those days. Not like you mob.

Can you describe one of those dances for us, what they were like?

Yes. All the girls sat down on the seats on the side and you just picked your mark and away you went.

21:00 **What would you ask them when you went up?**

May I have a dance please? Nice and polite. Yeah.

Did you ever get refused?

I don't think so. I suppose they reckoned they had to have a dance, you know.

What sort of dancing did you do?

Oh the old time dances, old time waltzes and the jazz waltz and all of those things, foxtrot and that's about it.

21:30 That's about it. There were a lot of old-time dances too, real old-time dances.

Were you a good dancer?

Oh just medium.

So did you have any sweethearts?

Oh I thought I did occasionally. Oh well, you were trying all the time. There was nothing very serious about it. No.

So did you go on any dates as a teenage boy?

Dates. Yeah, I suppose a couple. Yeah.

What would you do on a date?

22:00 Probably go to a dance. That's about it.

What about the movies. Did you have any there?

Yeah we would occasionally go there.

Do you remember any particular films that you would have seen?

Oh I don't know. Ben Hur. That's about the only one I can remember.

So as you got older and the war started to develop in Europe, what did you understand about what was happening over there?

22:30 Looking back on it now, not a lot. We were all mad keen to get into it for some reason, you know.

Do you remember the day that war was declared?

Yeah, I've forgotten the date now but I can remember it well.

Can you tell us about that?

I can remember hearing it over the radio. It's pretty dim now, my memories of it.

What do you remember actually thinking when

23:00 **war was declared?**

Oh mixed feelings. Of course being a young bloke you couldn't get into it quick enough. That's the funny part about it. You don't really know what you are letting yourself in for. You don't really know.

Why do you think you were so keen to get in?

I don't know. At that age I was

23:30 twenty in the first part of 1940. At that age you are ten foot tall and bulletproof, you know. You think you are but I don't know. I don't know what got into us.

Did you have any sense of defending the country or...?

Oh yeah.

What were your thoughts about that?

We were very patriotic. Very, very

24:00 patriotic towards the empire as well as Australia. That was a moving factor really I'd say. So at that stage Australia wasn't threatened. That's why a lot of us, we all joined up and a lot of us were sent over to England regardless of what was happening in Australia.

24:30 No, that was a motivation. Yeah, certainly.

How did you find out about what was happening in the war? What information did you have about what was happening?

Oh we knew about the information in regards to Poland being attacked, right from the word go [the beginning]. That was apparently the moving factor to get England into the war.

But did you

25:00 **read that in newspapers or what was your source of information?**

Oh mostly newspapers. Yes.

And what about the radio?

I think we had radio then. I'm not too sure. We did too. We had radio. That's where we got the news of the war starting.

So at what point did you decide that it was time to join up?

Practically straight away. Well I suppose it might have been a month afterwards. I forget the date of the war.

25:30 I don't know. The main problem for me was I was in a reserved occupation and I took a while to get out of that. It took until April 1940 before I had a medical for the air force. That's after reserved occupation

26:00 was waived.

What do you mean you were part of the reserved occupation? What does that mean?

Oh farmers. I was a chemist in the sugar mill. You can't operate without a chemist in a sugar mill so to keep industry going. These various people have to be kept on their own trade or whatever.

Can you tell us a little bit about that job, about working as the chemist in a sugar mill?

Yes.

26:30 Our main, there's two reasons why you have a chemist. There would be about two hundred farmers in the area and they would be sending sugar cane in and that had to be analysed so they could be paid. If that parcel of cane had so much sugar then they got paid accordingly. The other reason was

27:00 analysis of all the various processes for factory control. That's where that came in, that's one of the main reasons why we were there.

So how did you spend your days? What was your work like? What did you have to do?

We were on shift work, three shifts. Well you had to analyse all the composite samples from the previous shift.

27:30 All through the shift you were analysing each individual farmer's. They used to take samples of juice out of the cane and they would be brought over to the laboratory and we would analyse those for sugar content and so on. And all the rest of the stuff, the lab [laboratory] boy would be getting samples all the shift and you'd be analysing those through the factory control.

What sort of training

28:00 **did you do for that job?**

Oh I did four years down at Brisbane at the technical college in sugar technology and chemistry. Actually it was not four full time. It used to be in the slack season, the slack sugar season. It might be about four months I suppose for about four years.

So you went down to Brisbane to do that study?

Yes.

So what was that like for you coming from Ayr to go down to Brisbane?

28:30 Oh yes, pretty good.

What did you get up to in Brisbane?

Not a lot actually. We had our nose to the grindstone really because it was a crash course because of the limited time. I suppose we played up a bit occasionally, I suppose.

So how did you find that study? You'd had a disastrous time at school, how did you enjoy studying then?

Actually I learned more

29:00 since I left school than I ever did at school, and I could apply myself to things that I was interested. Before in school you didn't know the reason why you were doing it, but when I got out into that thing I was keen on the chemistry bit and I was able to apply myself. It was a big difference to schooling.

So you quite enjoyed that course?

Yes.

29:30 It was a bit of a grind but I was keen on the subject so that made a big difference.

When the war started you wanted to join up straight away but you couldn't.

That's right. That's correct.

So how did that affect you?

Oh well I kept on grizzling away until they finally got an older bloke to take my place.

So can you tell us about the day you did actually finally,

30:00 **the day you joined up, what that was like?**

The time I got down to Sydney, you mean?

Well the day you joined the air force.

The day I joined the air force, I joined the reserve for a start.

Well can you tell us about that first?

We were sent up to Townsville for a medical, a very strict medical. We were on tenterhooks to see if you might fail. It might have been better if we had failed.

30:30 No. That was a pretty full-on medical.

In what sense do you mean full-on?

Oh your physical and mental approach and so forth.

What sort of tests did they do?

They did all the normal medical tests and we had a head shrinker [psychiatrist] doing all the psychology business, you know. What it meant, I don't know.

So was that a bit intimidating

31:00 **for you as a young man to have that?**

Oh it certainly was. It's a big learning curve. You were out in public again. As a bush kid you were by yourself mainly. Intimidating to a certain extent, yeah.

And were there many other boys there with you?

Oh yes.

So did you meet anyone when you first signed up for reserves?

Not really, no. My friends joined up later so I

31:30 didn't. No.

What about when you were having the medical? Were there other young men going through the same thing?

Oh yeah.

Did you talk about what was going on?

Yes.

What did you talk about?

Well particularly the bloke who had been through. You grabbed him and seen what was going on. Oh yeah. It was pretty straightforward stuff really.

And so what happened after that?

We were put on reserve. It was September

32:00 13th before I got called up, April, May, June, July. So we thought the war would be over before we got there.

So can you tell us when you did finally get called up what happened then? And how did you react when you finally got the call? Did they write to you or what?

I've forgotten now, probably wrote to us I'd say. Oh well they did

32:30 write to us with a rail warrant to get down to Brisbane. So we all hopped in the train and went down to Brisbane and went to Creek Street in Brisbane I think it was, and you had to sign on the Bible and all that type of thing, what you were going to do for your country and so forth.

What did your parents think about you joining up?

They weren't mad keen on it I don't think

33:00 but they never stood in my way at all.

What makes you say they weren't mad keen?

Well you could see it in their reaction really. They didn't wish I was going, put it that way, but they didn't stand in my way.

What about your brothers and sisters?

Les joined up straight away too and my sisters were married and well away from

33:30 the family home then. And Charlie was the other son and he had a heart problem and couldn't join.

What did they think about you joining up?

Much the same I'd say.

So you went down to Brisbane on the train. What was that like, that train trip?

I met up with a few of the blokes there of course and we had a bit of a ball on the way

34:00 down.

When you say you had a ball, what did you do?

Oh we had a few beers and so forth.

And when you got to Brisbane what happened from there?

Oh it was the indoctrination turnout and then we were marched to South Brisbane railway station to go down to Sydney.

And why did you choose the air force as opposed to the army or navy?

34:30 I was oriented towards it with my brother flying and so forth. I think that was my main motivation.

So did you have any idea what the air force would be like?

Not a lot, no. We all wanted to be pilots I suppose.

You wanted to be a pilot?

Everybody wanted to be a pilot.

And did you think you would be?

Well I had high hopes.

35:00 But I previous, after I was on the reserve I went down to Brisbane and took a flying course and hoped I would be a pilot. I'd had about five hours solo flying but the whole lot that came down from the north were all categorised as wireless operator air gunners, so I was one of the mob.

So you must have been a bit disappointed.

Oh yes. To a certain extent. Yes.

35:30 Once you got into the camaraderie of the blokes it didn't mean a lot.

At that time in the war, pilots in the war in Britain really had a short life expectancy. Were you aware of that?

No, I don't think so. The main thrust over there was all fighter pilots mainly.

36:00 There was a certain amount of Bomber Command. It was different because we weren't going to be fighter pilots.

So anyway you were categorised as a wireless what?

A wireless air gunner.

So what happened from there?

Well we went down to Sydney and all got brand new uniforms. As we walked in the gate there was a mob of blokes inside in brand new uniforms

36:30 saying, "You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry." So that's how we started off. And well it's a big change from being a civilian to being a servicemen. It takes a while for discipline to filter through. All kinds of things that you don't like.

What sort of things?

Oh being told to do this when you didn't want to do it and all of that.

37:00 **What was the first day like for you?**

Chaotic. You had to get all your equipment and so forth, pushed around from one place to another. You didn't know what it was all about really. And then they started... Of course we were all going overseas so they started giving us vaccinations and needles,

37:30 six or seven altogether, and in between all of this you were marching, doing drill on the parade ground with sore arms and sore bums and the whole lot.

So it was quite hard work?

Oh we thought so at that time, mainly because we were not used to discipline. They had the right type of bloke there to instil discipline into us, you see, which is always the case in

38:00 initial training.

What do you remember about him?

Well there were several of them and they were all sadists. They had to be. They had to be sadists to keep us mob in line.

So when you say they were sadists, what did they do?

Well if your boots didn't have a proper shine or something like that they'd be right on you, you know. You'd have to do kitchen duties if you didn't

38:30 toe the line. You'd have to go and peel spuds and that sort of thing.

So what sort of training did you do there?

Mostly all we did was all day long on the parade ground drilling and also lectures on various things about King's regulations, air force law and all that type of thing. How to behave as a

39:00 recruit.

And how did you like the training?

Very tiring, very tiring and you couldn't see the sense in it at the time. We didn't realise that discipline had to be strict. It was a bit boring for a while.

So when you first put on that air force uniform, the new uniform, how did you feel when you put it on?

Pretty smart, ay.

39:30 **Did you sort of feel somehow transformed? Was that a big change for you?**

Yes. It was a big change, and you looked around and saw so many other people in the same thing. It was a bit different to the days when you dressed as an individual. We were just so many peas in a pod.

So how quickly did you make friends?

Immediately.

40:00 My main friend was a chap from Townsville called Bernie White. We just clicked straight away. He would probably be the complete opposite to me but we really clicked.

Okay. We'll stop there.

Tape 2

00:30 **We were talking about Bernie. When did you actually meet him?**

Well the first day down there. We were all put in a barracks. The whole mob had come down from the north here, we were all northerners at the barracks and we just happened to talk to each other. He's from Townsville, I'm from Ayr, that's only fifty miles apart, and from then on we just clicked. He was a real extrovert and I was a bit the other way.

01:00 It seemed to work out pretty good.

So you clicked and what did that mean? How did you spend your time together?

Where we went, we went together. It was, you know, we had heaps of fun together. I suppose we were bits of larrikins, I don't know. But we used to have fun.

So it

01:30 **sounds like it was a bit of a shock for you that training initially?**

Oh yes, the discipline. For a start you didn't expect it. Well I suppose you did expect it to a certain extent but being such a freedom lover it came a bit hard.

What sorts of things did you have to be disciplined about?

Oh your dress and your movements and

02:00 interaction with civilians and all that type of thing.

So regarding your dress, for example, what?

Oh you had to be spot on, spot on. You had your bed and your blankets and your gear and everything had to be put on your bed in exactly the right way, and that bed next door has got to be the same and that one has got to be the same. If something got out of line a bit,

02:30 if you can stand back and look at it and it is out of line then you're in trouble. That type of thing, you know. Just to show who's boss and that's what it's all about.

And what about weapons? Were you issued with weapons?

No. No. That's initial training school over there. No.

Did you learn to fire a weapon there at all?

No. No. We were only there for a month. And then we had final leave and then back to the embarkation depot. It was only about six weeks from the time we joined

03:00 to the time we left for Canada.

So what was drill like? What did that involve?

Oh the usual thing. Marching, left turn, right turn, the full stop, you know. And on and on and on. You were all dressed in fatigues, like an overall. I forget what they call them. They had a name for them but my memory is a bit dim for those things. You'd be

03:30 racing round in these things, marching all day long, and your arm would be aching and your boots would be, my boots were too small and I had blisters all over my feet, you know. But it was all a big learning curve.

What about time for recreation?

Very little. Leave was very limited but there was a hole in the back

04:00 fence and a lot of blokes used to go through there and have their own leave of a night-time.

So what about you? Did you get out into Sydney at all?

Yes. Oh yes.

So coming from the country Sydney must have been a bit of a shock for you.

Yeah. I suppose we were country kids but it didn't take long to become a city kid.

What did you think about it?

Oh I had been to Brisbane a few times before

04:30 and it was no big shock to me really, because even though Brisbane was a smaller version of Sydney it was much the same. Wherever you go, a city is a city.

And what sorts of things did you do when you went on leave into Sydney?

Oh down to the local boozier [hotel], I suppose. Go to a dance or something.. Actually there was quite a bit of entertainment there. For some reason there was always a party on so you

05:00 went out of a night-time and you wouldn't know where you would finish up. You'd finish up at a party somewhere.

And when you went out on leave were you wearing your uniform?

Yes.

And what sort of impact did you find that had on the girls, for example?

Oh I suppose it must have improved our chances, I suppose. You didn't have much time because when you got leave it was only one night, type of thing, that was about it. You might have had a couple of

05:30 nights while you were there, three at the most.

So when you had your final leave did you have the opportunity to say goodbye to your family?

Yes. I had a rail warrant back home and I think I had about a week at home and then straight back to Sydney embarkation depot.

What do you remember about saying goodbye to your parents?

Oh it was an emotional thing really. Yeah. Very emotional. Yeah.

Do you remember

06:00 **what was said?**

No. I can't really. Just look after yourself and all this business, you know.

Do you remember what your expectations were about seeing your parents again?

Well I mean I knew it was problematic whether I would see them again so you took a fond farewell.

And at that point you knew that you were going straight overseas to Canada?

Yeah.

06:30 **What did you think about that?**

Oh great, great, something new. It's getting away from a life that was getting pretty boring at home type of thing and we were going to see places, so it was good.

So can you tell us about leaving Australia?

Yeah well we left around about the, what was it,

07:00 in October 1940 and we went on the Aratia. It was a smaller motor ship doing the run between Auckland and Sydney. We went over all the way to Canada on that boat.

Before you left on that boat did you do a march through Brisbane?

No.

07:30 No that was when we joined up first, we marched through Brisbane.

Can you tell us about that march?

Well after we were indoctrinated, all of us blokes were formed up and none of us knew much about marching and we marched to the Brisbane Post Office. That photo you saw there was in front of the Brisbane Post Office. We marched from there to South Brisbane Railway Station and where we

08:00 hopped on the train. And all the crowd was there. It felt good. You know.

Was it a big crowd?

Oh yes. Quite a big crowd. Yes. There were a number of those things going on so I suppose you got a bit blasé about it after a while.

When you say it felt good, what do you mean?

Oh no. You felt that you were being, particularly when people noticed you, you felt that you were doing something that was good. You felt you were anyhow.

08:30 **So when you did leave on that boat it was a New Zealand boat did you say?**

Yeah.

Can you describe the boat for us?

Yes. A small motor ship. We went to war in style on that. We had good accommodation and excellent meals, seven course meals, it was unreal. Because there wasn't a lot of us, you know, and they could afford to do it those days. It was a really good trip.

09:00 We lived well. And things were only going to get worse later on.

So on board during that trip over, what sorts of things did you do?

Played the usual shipboard games and so forth and walked around the deck and so forth. Generally speaking it was a really pleasant trip.

Was there any drilling?

09:30 There was a certain amount, yes. A lot of it was physical training. We used to do a lot of physical training with the air force instructors. That was when we joined up and also on the boat on the way across.

And what were the sleeping conditions like?

We were in proper bunks and everything. We were in style.

So you must have been thinking this air force stuff is pretty good?

Yeah. This war business is great.

10:00 **But in fact you had experienced a bit of a shock with the training.**

Oh yeah.

Had you been changing your mind at all about what the war might mean, even from the training?

Oh I don't think I was greatly influenced. We were all caught up in the authority of the moment type of thing and we couldn't think much further than that.

10:30 It was going to be great. We would see new places and so forth, you know.

You were feeling pretty excited?

Oh yes.

So how long did that trip take to get to Canada?

Oh I suppose about, well first of all we went to New Zealand. We had leave there and we also marched in the street with the New Zealand air force blokes, just along the main streets of

11:00 Auckland. We were only there for a day I suppose and then we went to Hawaii, but we weren't allowed ashore there because America wasn't in the war. I suppose it took about ten or twelve days I suppose. It might have been a bit longer than that. Maybe two or three weeks by the time we stopped in places.

11:30 Went to Suva, Fiji and then on to Hawaii and then on to Canada.

You said there weren't many of you on the ship, how many would there have been?

Oh I think air force there would have only been round about fifty.

And there was just air force people?

No, there were civilians on board too, but they mostly just went to New Zealand. From New Zealand on

12:00 it was mostly just air force men. They had some New Zealanders on too. They picked New Zealand air force blokes up in Auckland. There was quite a few more of us. Exactly how many I don't know.

So what were your first thoughts when you landed in these foreign countries?

Oh, "Things are different here." Well they are different, you know. Looking forward to it and seeing what was going to happen around the corner.

12:30 **And did you have any time in Fiji? Did you have much time out there?**

Oh we had a night out there. We drank kava and that is about it.

How did you enjoy that?

Oh terrible stuff, like soapy water.

So when you finally arrived in Canada what happened then?

We arrived in Vancouver. I suppose within an hour we were on a train heading for Calgary and Alberta.

13:00 So a trip across the Rockies [Rocky Mountains] in a train, Canadian Pacific Railway.

What was that like?

Oh exciting. Terrific scenery. The middle of winter and snow everywhere and all of us north Queenslanders had never seen snow before so we got out and had snowball fights every stop. It was good; it was fun.

13:30 **And what happened then?**

Oh well we arrived at Calgary, bitterly cold day. They arrived with open trucks and whizzed us at great speed through this cold atmosphere. They just wanted to liven us up a bit, which they did.

Why was your training in Canada and not in Australia?

I don't know. It was

14:00 all organised that there was Australia, Rhodesia, Canada, the Empire Air Training Scheme, and as far as Australia was concerned I suppose they couldn't handle the whole lot at the time and the infrastructure hadn't been built up, you see. They had to build all the infrastructure up before they got it started. So a lot of us went over to Canada, some trained in Australia and some trained in Rhodesia.

14:30 They all split up everywhere.

It must have been a bit of a shock for you coming from Northern Queensland to being in the middle of winter in Canada?

It was definitely a shock. Yeah, it was. It was a really cold place, Calgary. It was on the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, just where the plain country starts.

And how did you find the cold?

Pretty hard to take for a start.

15:00 Your huts were heated, internally heated, so it was all right there but when you went outside it was cold there. That didn't stop us from going down town and so forth. No, it was good.

So can you describe the setup for us at Calgary?

At Calgary we went to a wireless school. It was quite a big... It was originally a children's school.

- 15:30 A big turn out. And we were quartered there in barracks and so forth. There we learned Morse and radio theory and all that type of thing to do with the radio transmission and so forth. There was no flying. We also had a little bit of small arms training but not much. Very little.
- 16:00 Yeah, it was pretty boring doing the Morse all the time. The bloke would sit there sending us Morse and you'd be going to sleep with the dit dotting in your ear.
- So how did you find learning Morse?**
- No worries. I can still do it now.
- Can you give us some, can you give us an example?**
- 16:30 Butterworth. Da da da dit [Morse demonstration], Butterworth.
- Excellent. So it sticks with you all through the years. You never forget it.**
- No. You never forget it. No.
- So how long did it take you to learn that?**
- We arrived there just before Christmas in
- 17:00 1940 and I'm not too sure when we left, it would be about five months I suppose, and from there we went to bombing and gunnery school. But Calgary, the Canadians really gave us a great time. They really took to us. We would go down town and we would seldom be able to buy a beer for ourselves.
- 17:30 There was no bar, just tables and chairs, and the women would be over here and the blokes over here and you'd sit down and the next thing a beer's in front of you. "That bloke over there's just bought you that." That's how good they were, ay, unreal.
- So you liked the Canadians?**
- Oh yes. Great.
- 18:00 And there was always somebody ringing up who wanted a couple of Australian blokes to come to tea tonight so we used to go to private homes and have tea and so forth. It was great. We were really looked after.
- Do you remember any of those specific nights out with families, any people you met?**
- Yes. I can always remember their name was Lloyd. I will tell you how it came about. About four or five of us,
- 18:30 no three of us, that's right. It was Sunday and we were having a night out. Nothing to do. Nothing to do. The places closed shop on Sunday and the next thing we see this church thing was open. It wasn't a church proper, it was just one of the buildings there. And we are sitting down. We had to do something. We were getting bored so we just sat down and listened to all this stuff going on. There was no preaching. It was just a
- 19:00 get-together and there was a nice looking girl over here, a really nice looking girl. All the blokes, "Isn't she a beauty, hey?" We were carrying on like this and they said, "Hey, who is going to go and talk to her?" and nobody would so I said, "I'll go." So I went to have a talk to her. That's when we went to their place. She was already taken up by a Canadian air force bloke so
- 19:30 I didn't have any chance at all, but that's how we got to know the family.
- And what was the family like?**
- Oh great. He was a dentist and the places were all heated up. You'd arrive with all your coats on and everything and overshoes over your ordinary shoes and you'd have to take all those off. They'd have the place heated up and you were sweating. After having a meal,
- 20:00 sweating, you'd go out into the cold and the snow and it was very hard on you.
- So the Canadians just opened their homes to the Australians?**
- Oh yeah. Unreal. Unreal. In the pubs, everywhere.
- So what did they say to you? What did they ask you about?**
- Well all about kangaroos and things like that and we asked them about polar bears. And of course they are mad
- 20:30 sportsmen, ice hockey, so we had a team of our blokes who had hardly skated and they put on a show on the ice hockey night before the main event and all the Canadians thought it was great. They had a great laugh, hey. But then the main event would come on and all the professionals were there.
- So the Australians had a go at playing ice hockey?**

Yeah.

What was that like?

21:00 A bit of a shambles but it was good fun. Blokes falling over and so forth.

Did you have a go?

No. I never played. But over there they have these tennis courts and they put a railing round it and when the winter time comes on they hose it down so every kid is skating from when he is that high, you know. So they know a bit about it.

So they were quite

21:30 **amused by the Australians?**

Oh yeah. They got a great laugh out of it.

So the Aussies and the Canadians got on really well then?

Yes, really good. Yes.

Were there other nationalities there as well?

Not in our turnout, no. Just Canadians and Australians. Yeah.

So learning to be a wireless air gunner, what did you know at that point about what a wireless air gunner had to do?

22:00 Didn't know anything at the start, but you learn not only Morse but the radio theory and you learn the air force's procedure. When you put Q down it means 'wait', and all that sort of thing. R means something else. So you learn all that procedure and it becomes second nature to you when you are sending

22:30 and receiving messages from aircraft. It has got to be all on the one track, the whole lot, you know, so that there are no mistakes made.

So although you had wanted to be a pilot, how did you enjoy this initial training and knowing that you were going to be a wireless air gunner?

Oh it didn't sit too well for a start but you accepted it in the end. That's where you got typecast so you've got to stay there until such a time as you can change.

23:00 Yes, no worries.

So from Calgary how long did you spend there?

About four or five months I suppose, and then we went on to bombing and gunnery school.

And you had Christmas in Calgary so you had a white Christmas. What was that like?

It was good, yeah. We had all the officers serving us our meals and so forth on Christmas day, which is the normal thing that happens on these service

23:30 things.

And what were the barracks like there at Calgary?

Excellent. They were heated. We had double-decker beds and yes, well done. Double-decker beds and what happened one night it was cold and snowing out and they picked a bloke up, picked his tray up, and put him out in the middle of the parade ground.

24:00 Just for something to do. You lifted the bottom tray out and carted him out gently and put him on the parade ground.

In the middle of the night?

In the middle of the night. Yeah.

At what point did he wake up?

Oh he must have woken up pretty quick I think.

How cold did it get?

Well it was minus twenty-nine at one stage. It was a strange place. It used to be a,

24:30 everything would be frozen over and a chinook wind used to come over from the Rockies. It was a warm wind and within an hour everything would be running with water, everything would be melted with this wind. And the wind would only last about two hours and then it would freeze up again.

So how did you like Calgary?

It was great. It was great for our social life. Yeah.

25:00 **So you were sort of our every night really?**

Oh not really. No. No. Oh no. It was, you had to be back by midnight.

But you were frequently dining out at people's homes and having a good time?

Oh yeah, we had to be back by 23:59, one minute before midnight. We quite often didn't make it.

So what happened then?

Well we used to lie in the snow outside, my mate and I,

25:30 and wait for the guards to walk past and then we'd climb the fence and go in.

So you never got caught?

No.

And you were still with Bernie at this stage?

Yeah. Mind you, he was the main instigator.

He was the larrikin. Did he lead you astray?

Oh we both led one another astray I think.

Did you meet any nice girls there?

Not particularly. No. No.

26:00 No. That particular stage was a men's type of thing, you know. Yeah.

So from Calgary you went to?

A place called Mossbank. That is still in Alberta, down the bottom end of Alberta.

And you were doing the air gunnery school there?

Air gunnery, yeah.

Can you describe that for us?

Yeah. The only aircraft they had were Fairey Battles.

26:30 They are an antiquated aircraft. They did service in France at the beginning of the war but they proved not suitable. We had a couple of these there and we used to go up, two of us would go up at a time in these Fairey Battles. We would be in a back cockpit with a free gun mounted, a Vickers gas-operated machine gun.

27:00 That gun was out of date too. See the whole thing was out of date. And two of you would go up in the aircraft. The pilot would be up front and we two would be at the back and there would be another aircraft up there with a drogue towing behind it. And these aircraft up there used to vary the speed and we used to fire at this drogue. Our bullets

27:30 had different colours on them and another bloke had another set of bullets with a different colour so it used to mark the drogue when you hit it. But this went on for quite a while but you were never told how accurate you were, that was the strange thing. You didn't know whether you were hitting the thing or not.

Do you remember the first time that you went up and you fired one of those guns?

We had fired them on the ground previously.

28:00 **But it must have been a different kind of experience doing it in the air?**

Oh yeah.

What do you remember about that experience?

Well you get to air gunnery, it is just like duck shooting. Like whichever way the aircraft is coming your speed and direction varies. You have to be able to shoot ahead of them and know how much to shoot ahead of them to hit the target because they are flying into it.

28:30 That type of thing. Actually the training left a lot to be desired. We also fired at splash targets on the lake there and as a night bomber we didn't do any ground-to-ground firing but we did that anyhow. That is part of our training. But to do air to air gunnery and not be told how

29:00 accurate you are seems stupid to me. One of those things.

So when you say the training left a lot to be desired, what do you mean?

Well the amount of guys there who had to be put through the course and the limited amount of aircraft there, so you never got a lot of training for a start and then you didn't know if you were doing any good or not.

29:30 That's the part that stuck in my craw.

And did you think that at the time?

I probably didn't. Probably didn't realise it. I'm just trying to approach this thing as a twenty-year-old. No, I don't think we did. We probably thought we were pretty gung-ho.

Do you remember what it felt like to fire those machine guns for the first time?

Oh yes.

30:00 You had done it on the ground of course and you were a certain amount used to it. But the noise and the smell, it really does stir you up a bit.

So it stirs you up in a positive way? In a good way?

A positive way, oh yeah. You realise that you've got a chance to defend yourself. That's the main thing. But we didn't realise that we weren't getting

30:30 good training. It is only since I've thought about it.

So it is only in retrospect that you look back and think, actually?

Yes. You change your mind on a lot of things but what I'm trying to do is the way I saw it then.

And as young twenty-year-olds, how confident were you feeling?

Very confident. Yeah. Any bloke who is twenty years old and does not feel confident, well he is not with it, is he?

31:00 **So how long did the air gunnery course last for?**

It would be about two months I suppose. All together I was in Canada for about seven months, maybe a bit longer.

Once you were in the air practising using these machine guns and in the air in a plane, how keen were you then to actually get into action?

Oh very keen.

31:30 You feel that you are being trained for something and you've got to more or less get there, you know.

Did you have any fears at all?

Not a lot, no. When you are twenty years old you are indestructible.

So it didn't cross your mind to be concerned about your future at all?

Not really, no.

So you finished the air gunnery course and where did you go from there?

32:00 Went over to, hopped on a train. There was another thing I was going to mention. Going back... I can go back, can't I?

You can talk about anything at any time. There are no rules about what we talk about or when.

When I was in wireless school on 30th January was my twenty-first birthday.

32:30 Twenty-one was you became an adult in those days. Now it is eighteen. So Bernie and another mate decided we were going to go somewhere so we picked on Medicine Hat. We don't know why but we went to Medicine Hat on my twenty-first birthday and it was great. We walked into Woolworths in Medicine Hat to

33:00 buy a pair of socks and the manager gave us his car for the day. That's how good those people were.

Why did he do that?

Hospitality. He gave us his car for the day. Unreal, ay. So after we took the car back we met up with a Canadian air force bloke and he took us back home and oh we had a great time there.

33:30 **So what did you do with the car during the day?**

Oh looked all over the place. Went round and saw the sights all over the place. And this Canadian bloke had a few girls lined up so we got in the car and off and that was it. You know.

Tell us a little bit more about that day.

Oh yeah. That night we were still soldiering on and they took us for a car ride

34:00 South of the Saskatchewan river, flows through the town and it was all frozen and so they took us for a car ride on the surface of the ice, flat chat [as fast as possible], and slammed on the brakes and you go round and round and round on the ice. It was great fun, hey.

That's amazing. Was it nerve racking at all being on the ice like that?

Well it didn't feel too

34:30 good but they seemed to be quite competent, the bloke who was driving, so we enjoyed it.

What else do you remember about that day?

What do I remember? Not a lot really but just general enjoying ourselves, you know. Meeting quite a few of the locals.

That must have been a great twenty-first birthday.

Oh it was. Yeah. As we left we put a thank you notice in the Medicine Hat News

35:00 for all the people of Medicine Hat.

Fantastic. So that was, you really had special treatment from the Canadians. Was that something that you had expected?

Oh I didn't know what we expected but that was really fine.

So you finished the air gunnery course and you went to?

We became sergeants then.

How did that feel?

35:30 Good. Before you were just very small bickies [small fry], ay, but sergeants, you know. We all became sergeants.

Why was that?

Because if we were to be shot down over Germany, if you were a sergeant you weren't supposed to be sent to work. [Unclear] gunnery sergeant had to be sent out to working parties. So we were all sergeants at least.

36:00 **It must have been quite a special day for you. What do you remember about that day?**

Nothing much. Getting in a hurry for somebody to sew the stripes on. Yeah. It was good..

And what were you told about what to do in case of being shot down and taken prisoner?

Well we had plenty of lectures, particularly when we got over to England. Plenty of lectures about what you can expect as

36:30 a POW [Prisoner of War] and what you could do and what you couldn't do. We had plenty of lectures on that. But naturally we thought, "Oh we'll never get there."

So you listened but you really weren't too concerned?

No, but it paid off really. It paid off. Compared to the army, I don't know about the navy but the army apparently never had any lectures about this stuff and it was very important that

37:00 when you got there you had to comport yourself in a certain manner.

What sort of things did they tell you in those lectures about what to do?

Oh well, they told you for a start all you've got to do is, the only information you give them is your name, rank and number, that's all. And they wake you up to a lot of the

37:30 dodges that the Gestapo interviewers had to get information out of you, trying to trick you into giving information. We had all that at our fingertips so it was well organised that way.

So you left Canada for England. So then you knew you were really heading into the war.

We were heading to big trouble, yes. We went to Halifax in

38:00 Nova Scotia and that's where we boarded the boat.

Now on your way to England you stopped. Where did you travel to?

We travelled to Iceland originally.

Can you tell us about that?

Well on the way over we had escorts who dropped occasional depth charges because there were submarines around, and then we were in an armed merchant cruiser, which

38:30 more or less helps to keep all the... There was a convoy of about forty ships and the armed merchant cruiser used to race around and keep them all lined up and so forth. But the armed merchant cruiser took us off to Iceland and the rest of the convoy went on. The whole idea of Iceland was the escorts coming across the Atlantic would take,

39:00 particularly with troops aboard, they would come as far and drop the troops at Iceland and then go back to Canada and any troops leaving Iceland, they had air support from England to escort them back to England. The main reason was to, getting close to England the U-Boats [Unterseeboots - German submarines] were pretty thick. That was the whole idea, a transit point.

39:30 **That convoy of forty ships must have been pretty impressive. What did you think about that?**

Yeah, it was impressive. First of all when we left we had fog and the only way they could keep in station was sounding these foghorns. You'd hear these things beeping away all the time and it must have been pretty hair-raising

40:00 for the skippers and so forth. Then we had a gale blew and the sea was rough and you could see the props and the propellers out of the water. Even the biggest ships. It was really, really rough.

So when you left it was all fog. At what point did you see the number of ships that were there?

The fog was there for about two days and we could still see the nearest ship. Of course later on you could

40:30 see the whole lot. It was very impressive. There were about forty ships.

So was that a little unnerving, moving with all these ships and not knowing where they were and just hearing the foghorns?

It must have been for the people in charge of the boats. It must have been very hard. It was the only way they could keep track. See there wasn't any radar around in those days so it must have been very hard for those people.

Okay we'll stop there.

Tape 3

00:32 **So tell us, Doug, about Bernie and the car.**

When we went down to Medicine Hat on my twenty-first birthday we overstayed our leave. When we got back to Calgary we were charged with being AWOL [AWL - Absent Without Leave] so we had to stay in the camp for a fortnight

01:00 and every hour on the hour you had to run on the double and report to the guardhouse, and it gets really boring. So after about a week of this we thought we were going to get out of the camp somehow. Before we got to that we got pretty nasty about this, we got all the dirty jobs around the place too, being a malcontent

01:30 you get all the jobs. One job we got was a bucket of whitewash each and go and paint all the stones around the paths in the camp with this whitewash. So we were getting along the road and the CO's [Commanding Officer's] big black staff car's there and so Bernie dips in and goes right from one end to the other with whitewash.

02:00 But there's other blokes with their brushes too so they didn't know who did it. So after that we decided we were going to get out of the camp. This is before our stint of AWOL. It was not over. So we were walking down to the guardhouse trying to work out excuses about why we were going out of the camp, and they'd seen us every hour on the hour for seven days

02:30 so they knew us pretty well and as we were walking along concocting these stories the CO's car came along. He stopped and said, "Where are you going?" We said, "We're on leave, sir." He said, "Then hop in, I'm going up to Edmonton," about eighty miles away, "Would you care to come?" "Yes sir." So we hopped in and drove straight past the guardhouse and we go up to Edmonton and we spent

03:00 the night there. They go to the best pub in town and we do our own thing. And the next morning we were back in camp lining up before the CO and he says, "Get out of my sight." And he was laughing as

he said it because he thought, "What a turnout!"

You got away with it?

Yeah. He must have seen the funny side of it.

What happened when you went skiing?

Oh we

03:30 had no idea of stopping ourselves. We used to go down full belt and all the Canadians used to scatter like this. There was one bloke hurt his back there and they sent him back to Australia.

How did you manage to get away to go skiing? What happened to get there?

Oh we used to occasionally get leave and they used to encourage us to go on a skiing turnout. Yeah, it was good.

04:00 We enjoyed it.

What did you find difficult about skiing?

Staying on my two feet. We adjusted pretty well. Yeah. Not too bad at all.

And what about the officers in the training? What were they like?

Well in the training establishments they had to instil discipline, and

04:30 they were generally picked for that type of job and they weren't a very good type at all. Well the way we saw it as trainees. They had to have something in their makeup to do that job properly. That's how we saw it.

Were they Canadian or Australian?

In Canada were Canadians. Yeah. We didn't have any officers at all in Canada,

05:00 our own officers. We were all sergeants.

And when you were in Canada did you hear much about what was happening in Europe at that time?

Oh just the newspaper stuff.

Where was the war at when you were there?

Dunkirk and that had happened. Not a lot really. We didn't have a lot of time to think about it. No.

05:30 **What did you think of the Germans before you actually came in contact with them?**

Well, preconceived ideas I suppose which had been bred into you. Yes. It was definitely bred into us.

Well what sorts of things did you think?

Well their lack of sense of humour and that type of stuff and overall I suppose their brutality

06:00 which was inherent in them.

Can you tell me about your camp in Iceland?

It was a Pommy [British] run camp and absolute lack of anything that was decent, you know. That's the normal thing with the Pommy turnouts. We were in,

06:30 what do they call them, Nissen huts, the round huts, and there was no sleeping arrangements, just a bare cement floor and one blanket, that's all we had. But Iceland was summer time then. The sun would go over the mountains, come down and only disappear for an hour and come up the other side of the mountain. It was summer time. In the winter time it's all

07:00 dark, you know. Lack of amenities and food was horrible.

What sort of food did you have?

Oh these slapdash stews and things like that and mostly out of tins, you know. And while we were there the Yanks [Americans] set up a camp and they had all the luxuries. They had ice cream and fruit salad; they had the lot.

And did you manage to get into their camp at all?

Oh we had one feed

07:30 there. There was a big difference.

What were they doing there?

Oh they came there to occupy the place. Ours was only a transit camp, just for troops going to the United Kingdom.

What about the Icelandic people. What were they like?

We had very little contact. Apparently the Germans were getting before the war,

08:00 were cultivating the Iceland people. They built roads and infrastructure generally and they didn't think much of us so we weren't allowed to fraternise with them at all.

They didn't think much of you, how did they treat you then?

Well we never saw them. We were kept well away from them, you know. Reykjavik is the capital, about twelve or thirteen miles away.

08:30 I think some blokes got there but very few, we weren't allowed to do it.

How long were you in the transit camp?

Oh I don't know. About three weeks I suppose.

When you are in a transit situation, what do you do during the day?

Well they keep you occupied. You go for route marches and so forth like that, physical training. It is just to keep you

09:00 off the streets.

Any other training for your real job in gunnery or wireless operation?

No, no.

That had finished by then, had it?

Finished there. We had more in England of course.

So what happened when you left Iceland?

We went straight to Gourack in Scotland.

How did you get there?

Armed merchant cruiser.

09:30 **You were saying before that they had that transit camp at Iceland so that the ships were protected from the air and there was a lot of U-Boat action at that time. Did you hear of any ships being sunk?**

None in our convoy. They did sink a sub [submarine] on the way over, some of the escorts. But there was no boats lost on our convoy as far as I know. Well we left before we got to England. Whether

10:00 they got through I don't know.

And why were you going to Scotland?

Oh it was just a port of call I think. Something to do with the U-Boat menace no doubt. Further away from the French coast where the U-Boat bases were.

At that point you would have known a fair bit about the air force. Were you keen to get into a squadron?

Yes. Always were.

10:30 **And it hadn't happened at that point?**

Oh no. We had further training to do.

So what happened when you got to Scotland?

We were immediately put on a train and taken down to another transit point down in Bournemouth on the southern coast of England, so there I suppose we were sorted out no doubt to be sent various places. It was quite an enjoyable place to be

11:00 on the coast in the southern part of England.

What did you observe in England of the damage from the war?

Well of course we went to London, it was one of our first ports of call, to have a look around, and we saw on our first night we were there there were a few bombs dropped and so forth.

And how did you react to that?

You just take your chances. You know. That's all it worked out as.

11:30 By that time the civilian population were quite used to it and the bombing had eased off to that extent. A few bombers used to come over each night but not a lot.

Were you still with Bernie at that point?

Yes.

Did you and Bernie get into the same squadron?

No, no.

A shame.

No, well I don't know. I fell foul of a flight lieutenant down there and I

12:00 wasn't allowed on leave. Bernie went on leave and I went up to Cranwell - Cranwell was one of the biggest RAF training bases in England - and I spent my time there while the other blokes were on leave or so forth.

How did you fall foul?

12:30 I went in to the guardroom. We had been playing tennis, Bernie and I, and we went into the guardroom and we had had a few beers on the way home and we were dressed in sloppy joes [pullovers] and so forth which you shouldn't go into the guardroom with that on. We all lined up for mail, "Anything there for Butterworth?" "No." I said, "Well why you don't have a bloody look?" "There's no mail for you." And anyhow I

13:00 went up him a bit and he reported me to the flight lieutenant. "Off you go," he said. "Get cleaned up, get your uniform on and come back here." So I went and had a camp and the next thing Bernie says, "The MPs [Military Police] are after you." So I jumped up and I went to London but they caught up with me eventually.

Wow, so you ran away from them?

Yes.

And what happened when they caught up with you?

Oh well I was in further

13:30 trouble. Not to worry.

That country kid rebellion.

It must be.

Can you describe a bit about what you did in London when you were there?

Yeah well the first trips down there you'd go round and see all the sights that you've heard of: Tower of London, Buckingham Palace. You had a good look around London.

14:00 All the little dives round the place too. And there's servicemen everywhere and the Strand Palace Hotel was the hangout of all the Australians. The Regent Palace - these are pubs - was the hangout of the New Zealanders. So it used to be the point where you started your night's revelry from.

And what would happen in a night's revelry?

You name it.

14:30 Just a pub crawl, that's all.

Did you see any of the brothels? We have heard a bit about the brothels in London. Was it a big thing for you guys?

Oh I saw the streetwalkers, but no. They are bound to be there.

Did other blokes talk about it and say they'd been or anything?

No. No.

And what about dances in London, did you have much of that?

Yes. They had a few places. Yeah. But

15:00 they were generally on little dives down below the pavement and you walked down and there was smoke everywhere, you know. They were pretty low key.

How different was it being in London to being in Canada?

Big difference. The free and easy approach of the Canadian people compared to the stuffiness of the people in London. They were all good people but

15:30 a different way of life type of thing.

You said your brother joined as well. Was he with you at any point?

No, only down at Bradfield Park, that's initial training school. He was a pilot. He finished up as an instructor at one of the New South Wales bases down there. After a tour of instructing he was in Kitty Hawks up in the islands,

16:00 on actual war service up there.

So he didn't do any of the Europe mission?

No, no.

So what happened when you were doing the training outside London? What was the name of it?

Cranwell. We did more Morse training and generally lectures all the time and a Morse course, lectures, prisoner of war life

16:30 and also how to interact with civilians and all that type of thing, which was very important. A lot of stuff.

What type of things did you learn in interacting with civilians?

Just to be an equal to a civilian. Don't make yourself any different, you know, not to be too uppity about it. That's all.

Can you explain what your role was on a

17:00 **flight, or what you knew at that time your role would be when you'd go up on a flight, in some detail so that we get an idea of exactly what you had to do?**

Well would I say in an actual operation or what?

Okay. Yeah. What would you do when you went up in an actual operation?

First of all you have a briefing where the target is named and the routes to be taken and there'd be a big

17:30 map on the wall and photographs of the target area. The whole crew would be there and they'd be briefed on it. They would be given the colours of the day and so forth and all the beacons around England. There were lights flashing on various aerodromes. Well not particularly on aerodromes but on various localities. They might be flashing BR tonight and tomorrow they might be SB

18:00 so you get a list of all this stuff. The observer, the navigator, he had all this stuff at his disposal. But as far as a wireless operator is concerned you never break silence, radio silence, unless it is absolutely necessary because they can pinpoint your position by radio direction finding. That was a big no-no unless

18:30 it is something pertaining to the actual operation. You just listened out all the time in case of recall and any information required for the actual operation. That was the only thing. When you came back, say if the navigator got disoriented he could call up his stations

19:00 and hold his Morse key down and the radio direction would find about three different stations to pinpoint where you were, and they would ring you up and let you know where you were. So that's one thing that you had to do. But you'd get aboard and actually I was the front gunner. I was a wireless operator but I was allotted to the front gunner so what I used to do is I'd hop in the aircraft

19:30 and I would stand up at the astrodome, the bubble on top, this is before I got into the front turret. I would watch as we took off and have a look at the ground and wonder whether that's the last time I would see the ground. That's about the only time I ever thought about it. When you were airborne I would climb into the front turret and from then on you don't think any more.

20:00 You are a professional, that's it. You get tied up with the professional side of it and you don't have many thoughts about things, you know.

Can you describe the front turret a little bit more?

Yeah the front turret, it would be about so wide, so high and that deep. You had two guns, Brownings, came beside your ears here. Up here was a

20:30 optical sight. You've got a handlebar arrangement. They are all hydraulically driven just like a motorbike handle. If you wanted to depress your guns you went like that, and if you want to elevate

them, like that, and if you want to turn you just go like that. Very mobile thing they were and you were very, I suppose you would call it claustrophobic.

21:00 That never worried me. Your parachute was up in a rack here and down the side below the guns there were two big tanks where your ammunition belts were in. Ammunition belts were made up of about five different types of bullets, the ordinary ball, explosive, armour piercing,

21:30 and incendiary.

Did they all fit into the one gun, those different bullets?

Different bullets, yeah. .303 guns, Brownings. They would fire each at fourteen hundred rounds per minute so it was a big shower of bullets coming out.

And how did you prepare those guns when you got on board?

Well you'd previously done all that work and the armourers did most of it. The armourer

22:00 was going to check the guns over and load up the ammunition and so forth. Well you used to do your own, you'd start your own guns up. You used to have a target, this is on the ground, you'd have a target and you used to look down the barrels of the gun and they coincided at two hundred yards away.

22:30 That's about the only thing we ever did with them because the armourers did everything else.

So what had they done prior to you getting on board?

Well each day when you're on operations you did a night-flying test. The whole crew goes up for, it might be half an hour, and you try everything out and you might go down and say to the gunnery... The trouble is you can't fire your guns down there, you can't fire your guns, but

23:00 if you find anything wrong you just say to the armourers, "There is something wrong with this," you know. They'll go and check it out. Same with all the other gear in the plane. The pilot when you came down had to sign an arrangement that said he was satisfied with everything on the plane and that clears all the ground staff blokes. So that's

23:30 where the ground staff were really good.

So you had to really trust the armoury guys because there was no way you could really test it?

No. No. Yeah, well I said before about the gunnery training. When I was at Lossiemouth operational training unit we had done our course and we were all set, we've got our leave passes ready to go on leave and they suddenly decide that myself and another bloke hadn't fired enough rounds -

24:00 it was quantity, not quality. So we had to go up and drop a smoke float in the sea and practise on a smoke float. So the first burst sunk the smoke float and we had so many rounds to fire and then we had to fire at waves and we were both getting sick of this, ay. It is no good firing at waves. And the pilot said,

24:30 "This is bloody ridiculous. Just open the hatch and throw it all over the side." Which we did. We just threw the ammo [ammunition] over the side. We go back and, "You've fired your rounds," go on leave.

What was the noise like of those guns?

Well in an enclosed space like that it was unreal, ay. Really, really loud. None of the noise got away. You got the lot in your ear.

25:00 They were here and ears are here.

It is amazing that you didn't go deaf with that amount of noise?

Yeah, well as a gunner I never fired a shot in anger while I was working. You weren't, you didn't have to listen to it for very long. There was no sense in us as night bombers to

25:30 be firing at the sea. All we were supposed to be trained for was firing at another aircraft. We fired at aircraft and even then training at Lossiemouth and on the squadron we never had any air-to-air firing at all, so it is anybody's guess as to how good we were.

How did you get chosen to be front turret as opposed to...?

Oh I don't know.

26:00 The powers that be. Maybe I wasn't good enough as a wireless operator, I don't know. Just supply and demand I think really.

And at Cranwell was it, can you describe how the lectures would work and what the space was like that you were in with the lectures?

Oh I suppose in my particular intake there would be about twenty or thirty blokes, thirty blokes I suppose in a room

26:30 about the size of this here. It was like a normal school teacher thing with a board and a thing to rub it out and a chalk to write on.

And you were in full uniform for those classes?

Yeah.

And did you do much in the hangars in the way of instructing?

No. All our aircraft were on dispersals. We were in a satellite

27:00 drome on squadron and there was no buildings for aircraft at all. Round the drome they were dispersed so any bombing wouldn't get the whole lot. They were in their own little bays all around the place.

And how did the instruction in England compare to what you had had in Canada?

Well the wireless training was good but the gunnery was just...

27:30 I think at that stage the gunnery was the poor relation of the crew and I've always thought since how stupid it was.

The training?

Yeah, well I think the average bloke who had done a bit of shooting or duck shooting would have an idea about it, but there's a lot of blokes who wouldn't have.

And how long were you at Cranwell for?

About three or four weeks, might have been a bit more.

28:00 **And what happened after that?**

I went on leave. It was Christmas time I think it was. Yeah, Christmas time. Immediately after that leave I went to a place called Mablethorpe. No, what was the name of it. Whatever it was, it was another transit point where all the men were gathered to be allotted to a squadron.

28:30 We were only there for a short while and then we flew the aircraft up to Beaton not far from York. Actually Beaton was the name of the airfield and Bubwith was the name of the little village there. It was practically right in amongst all the little village, this aerodrome.

What squadron were you allotted to?

460, I was an original 460 member. Yeah.

29:00 We all flew up together and started the squadron off.

Wow, that was fantastic. It must have been a fantastic heritage to know that you were there from the beginning...

Yeah.

...because that went on to have a really long history.

Yeah. There's not much mention of flying in Wellingtons in the 460 squadron, it's all Lancasters.

So you were in Wellingtons initially. Can you describe the Wellingtons for us?

Yes.

29:30 Wellington's a twin-engine bomber. It had a maximum speed of about two hundred and fifty kilometres an hour and it carried a bomb load on short trips up to about four thousand pound and on long trips round about two and a half. And yeah it was a, I suppose a lumbering old aircraft compared to the four-engine ones but

30:00 it did a lot of the preliminary stuff and it had a lot of the preliminary knowledge of what bombing's all about. There was very, very few navigational aids, nothing really, and when the four-engine ones came along they had air-to-ground radar and all that type of stuff. So when we were operating,

30:30 if we had bad weather half the time you couldn't find your target and if you did find your target then you couldn't bomb accurately because you didn't have the gear, but that's the story.

And what were the other blokes in the squadron like? Who was it made up of?

Originally the CO was an

31:00 Australian bloke who had been in England before the war. A short service commission they called it. And Wing Commander Hubbard, he started the squadron off and he also had a couple of other squadron leaders who had been in England before the war. The same thing, short commissions. But they were the flight leaders and that's how they started off, and eventually

31:30 these flight leaders had changed because they went missing in operations or other younger blokes were brought up the scale type of thing.

What was Hubbard like?

He couldn't relate to the crews very much. He couldn't relate to the crews. Mind you he was a pretty efficient bloke but he never had the knack of

32:00 locking in with the crews, which was the big thing in a squadron to be able to be one of the mob.

Why is that so important?

Just a feeling of camaraderie and all that sort of thing, and if your CO is seen to be one of the mob it makes a big difference.

Were there other nationalities in the squadron at that point?

Yes. A few odd ones, a few New Zealanders.

32:30 Not many. Just a few. Our first fatality was a New Zealand bloke.

What happened there?

He was on an operation, just didn't come back. A lot of them you never knew what happened to them, you know.

Did they talk to you about the idea of people not coming back and how did you sort of deal with that concept?

Well you knew the next time you got on that it could be you.

33:00 It never seemed to worry us too much because bad things always happened to the other bloke, not to you.

We've heard that in some of the other squadrons people never sit in the same chair twice in case...

Oh no. We never had any of that. No. But we did have the blokes with their lucky charms, kangaroos, koalas, boomerangs. Hell to pay if they couldn't find them.

Did you have a lucky charm?

33:30 All I had, I had a cigarette case with a steel mirror that I put in this pocket here over my heart. Just as (UNCLEAR), ay.

What sort of gear did you have to wear?

Oh it was a job getting dressed, particularly on the ground.

34:00 It would be quite warm because we were operating during the summer time. I started off when it was cold. But first of all you've got your flying boots and your normal battle dress and you'd probably have a fleecy-lined pullover and then you had your parachute harness and your Mae West and your helmet and wires and things,

34:30 wires and oxygen masks and oxygen tubes that have got to be plugged into your own particular unit there. So by the time you hit the air you would be sweating in all this garbage. You had to have it later on, very much so. You had girls' stockings on the legs from the local hospital.

Why did you wear those?

To keep you warm. You might have two or three stockings. They were

35:00 all, might have holes in them but they were all to keep you warm. Turrets were very cold places because they are not entirely sealed, you know.

And they're out from the plane really aren't they, they stick out?

No, they are integral with the plane but they turn around like this. You just felt totally isolated from the rest of the plane. That's how you feel. Yeah.

35:30 **And vulnerable I suppose?**

Oh, no more vulnerable than the rest. But the rear gunner, he was pretty vulnerable.

What is a Mae West?

A Mae West is a life jacket.

So yeah, what's a Mae West?

A Mae West. It is a safety thing for if you go into the water. It is a safety jacket. It is inflated by a small

36:00 compressed air bottle and you used to pull the lever and it would come out like that. Excellent things.

Which you had to use later on, yeah. What were the wires? You were saying there was a lot of wires.

Oh yeah. Inter-communication wires, oxygen hose. Anything over ten thousand feet you had to use the oxygen.

How did you go to the toilet with all that stuff on?

You didn't.

36:30 I never had the urge to do it. I suppose they just did it in their pants I would say because you couldn't get out of your turret.

So how long would the operations usually last?

Oh we did one for eight hours. That is a long time, isn't it?

It is a long time to hold on.

I can't remember being terribly worried. I was probably too bloody scared I suppose.

So when the squadron, where did you go first?

Oh the first one was to

37:00 Emden.

And what did you do there?

I wasn't on it. The more senior members, the blokes who had come up a bit quicker than others, they went first. And I forget when my first trip came, it was some time after that.

What happened when you first got to that location? When the squadron all first came together, what happened to get it set up?

37:30 It was all pretty basic. It started with a lack of infrastructure and things and it took a lot to get the squadron moving. We'd only been at the transit point for a short while and some of them hadn't been crewed up so at that transit point they had to make everyone, who was going to be whose crew. And we started doing cross-countries there and when we got to the squadron we had to

38:00 keep flying on these long trips trying to get the crew together, coordinated. It is a pretty hard thing to get a crew coordinated. It is only through experience that it really happens and when it does happen you get a real pride about your crew and your professionalism, you know. It takes a while. Cooperation is normal because you knew you had to cooperate to survive, but

38:30 coordination. Don't speak into the intercom when you haven't got anything to say, that was one of the first things, because you distract the pilot, you distract the navigator, you distract everybody. You've only got to put your two bobs' worth [opinion] in when there's something definite to report.

How did you get crewed up and what were the blokes like?

Oh let me see now. I crewed up

39:00 partly in the operational training unit and there was a few changes then until we got down to the transit point and we got our permanent crewing up then. It wasn't permanent because we got a navigator later on. Yeah the pilot was a Sydney boy and he was a pilot officer. The rest of us were sergeants.

39:30 There were two from South Australia, a wireless operator and the rear gunner and myself, and the pilot and the navigator was from Melbourne.

And what was the pilot like?

He was a very subdued type of a person. A nice bloke.

40:00 We weren't happy with him for a while but after flying with him for a while we were right. We expected a bloke who was a bit more dynamic than him, you know. But there was nothing wrong with him. Technically he was good. But we got to a stage where we didn't feel very secure with him and we were trying to get another pilot but of course they knocked us back on it. But

40:30 after a while as I say we got into a professional mood and he was good, but we were prepared to give him away for a while. But yeah, he was all right.

Okay.

Tape 4

00:30 **Tell me a little bit more about the pilot and what it was he was doing that made you uncomfortable initially?**

He appeared to us at the start as being a pretty negative person. I think he was brought up with a silver spoon in his mouth [privileged] and I don't know. I suppose we were a mob of roughies. He just didn't appeal to us. It was just a

01:00 personality thing I suppose.

He wasn't one of the blokes?

No. He couldn't be as an officer but most officers were one of the blokes. He tried to be but he just didn't have the knack of it, you know. Just as the commanding officer didn't have the knack of being one of the blokes.

And it would be hard to be up in the air and have someone negative?

Oh yeah. Your life depended on him as well as his own life. Oh yeah. And

01:30 I'm not, he is a fine bloke but I just at that stage, but he seemed to get the knack of being one of us after a while but in a reserved fashion. See some blokes are officers and they were officers and that was it, but most of them were pretty good. Yeah.

Some of them just didn't relate to the crew at all?

No.

02:00 Most of them did in the end because they were doing the same things together, same risks. And even though personalities were you know, a bit of a clash, you put up with it.

What were the South Australian guys like?

Good. It is a funny thing about Australians, hey. You can pick the state where they come from as soon as you see them and talk to them. Honest.

How do you pick a

02:30 **South Australian?**

Oh I don't know. It is pretty hard to tell. You could pick Western Australians and Queenslanders much the same. You know, New South Wales blokes were more brash. Victorians I forget, I don't know how to describe them but

03:00 you can pick them. South Australians were a bit more reserved or something. You know.

So they were a bit hard to get to know?

No, not really. No. Just a thing you can pick them. That's all.

So can you tell us about the first time you ever went on an operation and what the operation was?

Yeah. Well the first operation you do is dropping leaflets.

03:30 The whole idea is you go with an experienced pilot and your own pilot. The whole idea of this is to get a bit of experience about an operation without the bomb load. For a pilot the heavy bomb load, if you are doing evasive action, trying to dodge fighters, it is pretty hard to do it. The idea is to have a short trip to get used to everything, you know.

04:00 And this one was on, we had to drop leaflets over Lille. That's in France. It is not as far south as Paris. The idea was to drop these leaflets. We took off and we were across the channel and we get between Dunkirk and Oostende and a blue searchlight switched on and hit us straight away. They are radar-controlled searchlights.

04:30 When that switches on all the others come over like this. They come over in a big cone and they hold you in this cone while they shoot their flak up at you. Well no sooner did the cone hit us than we were hit with the flak pretty badly and the pilot went into a screaming dive and never said a word, and I thought she was all over but what happened that time is

05:00 one of the bits of shrapnel went through the hydraulic line to my turret and my turret was just stopped like that - I couldn't move the turret. I also found out afterwards that one piece of flak went right through my parachute. It was up here at my head. And I thought it was all over and the only way I could get out of this turret was a tiny little lever

05:30 to get the turret door round, and then you open the bulkhead door and then you've got to open the

bottom hatch to get out. It takes a while to do it but as it happened I didn't need to do it, but I was halfway through the procedure.

How did the pilot get out of that situation then?

You generally, you do evasive action and you dive and try to get out of the searchlight for a start. Whenever searchlights are chasing you, you never try and get away from it, you dive straight through it.

06:00 They swing the searchlight, there is just a fleeting second where they see you but if you try to get away from them they'll get you easy. It is a weird sensation, those searchlights.

Can you describe the sensation a little bit more?

Yeah well that was only a small amount of searchlights, but on a trip over Essen I suppose about sixty searchlights hit us

06:30 and held us for five or six minutes and you get all dazzled. You see all these big eyes looking at you from down on the ground with all kinds of rubbish coming up, flak and so forth.

On that first operation, that would have been the first time you had searchlights hit you then was it?

Yeah, first operation. Yeah.

Were you prepared for that?

Well we knew we were likely to get hit, which we were, and then we proceeded to Lille

07:00 and took a long time to drop these leaflets out. People are on the ground there and they are shooting at you. Dropping paper down and they are shooting steel up. I didn't like it much, hey.

That's your first operation?

First operation. Yes.

Amazing. How did you deal with that?

You had to deal with it. That was all. The ground was nice to see afterwards.

Did anyone in the crew really panic?

07:30 No. Good. Real good. First trip.

And the pilot didn't say anything when the searchlights came on. Did he talk to you after that?

Yeah, he talked to us afterwards. Squadron Leader Leighton, he was the experienced pilot. He was good to fly with too because he knew the game, he knew what it was all about.

What happened immediately after you realised you had lost movement of

08:00 **the turret?**

Well I couldn't do anything there so I got out and stood beside the pilot in case I could help him at all, you know. I couldn't aim my guns so I just had to get out and see what I could do in the aircraft.

And you had lost the use of your parachute? Did you say that it had shrapnel?

Yeah. I didn't know until I took my parachute into the parachute section. It just looked like a mob of rats had

08:30 been and chewed the lot up. Flak went right through it. It was only a packet about that big and about that thick and that wide. The shrapnel going through it hit every crease in it, you know. So if I had baled out I would have been in big trouble.

What is it like flying through flak?

A bit scary. Yeah. Well you can see when you are coming up to

09:00 a target area, you see searchlights and see all these little twinkles in the sky. What are they? They're shells bursting, you know. You see them for quite a while and you know you've got to fly through that. It is quite a feeling.

How do you calm yourself in that situation?

I don't know. You seem to be pretty professional by that time.

09:30 Even though it was the first, second trip, pretty professional. As a gunner, that's the only way I can say it is my own business. You were so engrossed in keeping an eye out for fighter aircraft that you never thought of it, never did.

So you would just occupy your mind with other...?

Well you were looking out all the time to see if you could spot a fighter plane before he spots you, you know.

In a situation where you are in the spotlight and you are being

10:00 **fired on, do you fire down as well?**

No. Well I have heard of chaps firing down but we were at anything from fifteen to nineteen thousand feet - it's going to be a lucky shot that hit the searchlight.

So there was no point in firing at anything?

No. You never fired unless you were attacked because that gives your position away, and the fighter aircraft can see your incendiaries and tracers through the air

10:30 and they know that there is somebody there, but in the dark you can manage to slip by them. That is before they got all their radar equipment in the fighters and so on.

What were the leaflets that you were dropping? Why did you drop leaflets?

They were just a morale booster for the local French population and I suppose something to niggle the Germans. Actually I never have read one.

11:00 I have never read one at all. They were just big wide sheets and you'd shove them down the flare chute. There was a flare chute there that you would put flares down. Flares are... Every target took photos to see what hits you had done and so forth and as you bombed this flare went out and lit up and the lens would be open on the camera

11:30 and this flare would light up the ground and you'd get a photo of it.

Who would let the flares go?

Generally the observer.

So they would let the leaflets go as well?

Yeah. The leaflets were only the first trip. That's all we did. Just one leaflet.

And what happened on the next trip? First of all, when you came back from that first trip do you remember what happened when you hit the ground? Was there a debriefing or something?

12:00 Yeah, a debriefing. You go into this little hut on the drome and there is a debriefing officer there and various other officers. The whole crew gives their résumé of what they saw on the trip. There might be some different fighter activity. There might be some new ruse the Germans had got going and every bit of information they could get they would try and get it so

12:30 they were more prepared the next trip. You all put your two bobs' worth in.

Did they ask you what happened in your...?

Oh yeah.

Because on that first trip, what did you have to say about what happened to you?

Oh I just had to tell them about the shot happening of the turret being U/S [Unserviceable] and so forth. Generally speaking

13:00 what you saw, what you saw on the ground and so forth.

Can you tell me what happened on the next operations?

Yeah. The first couple of operations you generally do short ones. So the next one was on harbour installations in Le Havre in France. And you've got to remember in France you don't

13:30 let your bombs go indiscriminately. We arrived over Le Havre and there was a little bit of opposition but very little, and visibility at night was very bad so we dropped one set of bombs. They were two hundred and fifty pounders, only small bombs, on what we saw in the river mouth.

14:00 After that we just couldn't find anything. So on that one we did drop both lots of bombs and there was very little opposition. It was a moonlight night and on the way home we saw one fighter and he never saw us, luckily. A lot of moonlight and you could see for miles.

Was it better doing an operation at night?

14:30 The whole idea of it in the first place was it was thought there would be less casualties at night because you weren't visible to any large extent, but that changed during the war with all your electronic gadgets and things you had. Even so, in our case we had to use moonlight periods because we had no aids, we

- 15:00 had to do it visually, and also during the moonlight periods you are more vulnerable to fighters as well. So it was just we didn't know which was the best thing to do in regards to whether you do a daylight attack. But we were trained for night bombing. The Americans later on, they were daylight bombing so it was fifty-fifty each way I think.
- 15:30 **How was that mission considered? Was it considered a success?**
- Oh I don't think so. No. As far as our squadron was concerned I don't think we did very well. You were up against ground haze all the time and as I say it's all visual. You know, a lot of those trips were negative. The next trip was a bit more interesting because we got over
- 16:00 Le Havre again and still no opposition, very little. But there was a dead wipeout, clouds, mist, we couldn't see a thing. We had to abort the operation. So you couldn't drop bombs anywhere in France. So you got over the English Channel and dropped bombs and headed for home. Then we found that two bombs had hung up after all the...
- 16:30 They had been fused and everything and we couldn't shake them off. We tried to shake them off. As you are landing on the airfield as we came home you are holding your breath and waiting for these bombs to drop out, which they didn't. But because all the switching had been done and irretrievable after that, once they had been switched on they were fused.
- That would be terrifying!**
- Yeah. It wasn't too good.
- 17:00 **So with an unsuccessful mission, what would happen? Would you have to go back and do it again?**
- Well we did three trips on Le Havre which were negative, and I think the next one was Essen. Essen and then in the heart of the Ruhr.
- With the first ones, the ones that you were just talking about, did you fly alone or were there other planes flying?**
- At that particular period we all flew our own courses.
- 17:30 Later on when the first thousand raid, I was in that one, they really worked it out so that we would get there at certain times, but this first period we set our own courses. We had a preferred course to go but we did our own thing all the way along. We were just a single entity ourselves
- 18:00 and we decided when to bomb and so forth. That changed later on. It was all precision stuff later on, at such and such a minute you would be there. That wasn't real good at times either.
- What do you mean by that?**
- Oh you would have to be there at one minute past midnight and later on the Pathfinders, they used to drop flares. Well they had
- 18:30 started up when we were finishing and they used to drop flares, and if the Pathfinders were late then these blokes had to get over the target and keep on going round and round right in the middle of a hornets' nest until these blokes arrived. It backfired a bit.
- What did you do in between times and how often would you have a flight?**
- Well sometimes we'd have a couple of nights, one night, the next night and maybe have a day off.
- 19:00 Something like that, yeah.
- So how would they work that out, that schedule, where you would go night after night?**
- I don't know. The powers that be did that. There was all kinds of things came into it in the start. Some pilots would have a good record on petrol consumption and if there was a long trip to do they would be picked to go on these trips. That type of thing, yeah.
- 19:30 So that played a part in it, who went.
- Did you know if as a crew you were doing reasonably well with the flights? Did you know where you were in comparison to other crews?**
- Oh I think we were the greenhorns [novices] for a start but we came good. After three or four operations we were right. We were pretty green but I think everyone for the first few operations is pretty green.
- 20:00 **When you said that the crew wasn't happy with the pilot initially and you said you tried to change, how did you go about doing that?**
- Well we went en masse to the wing commander and told him we weren't happy and he said, "Just stick by him for a while and see how you go," and we did. So he was pretty wise there.

So what was the next significant operation that you remember?

Oh,

20:30 Essen. That was a hot hole. That was in the middle of Ruhr and that's where the Krupps Werk, Krupps, munitions people, and that was pretty scary.

Can you tell us from start to finish what happened on that one?

Oh yes well the normal thing, flying along and you can see down on the ground and see.

21:00 **Before you do that bit, can you tell us what they were telling you in the briefing would happen on that? What was your goal?**

Oh yeah. Well a big map on the wall of course and we weren't the only squadron going there. There was other squadrons, Australian squadrons and English squadrons, and we were given certain areas to bomb and it was never all just the Krupps Werk. It was

21:30 other stuff, other factories and also just ordinary town. That was the mindset those days. It was total war and you'd get all this information and you knew what your particular sector and away you'd go, take off. Well in the Essen trip, as you are going along you'll see lights lighting it one way down the bottom over here -

22:00 it's fighter cooperation. The controllers on the ground are just showing which way the bombers are going and so forth so they can catch up with you and so forth, and well as I said before you get to Essen you see all these little lights in the sky and as you get closer they were red with black smoke coming over them. So we got over there and

22:30 we were on the outskirts of one wondering when we'd go in. An aircraft dropped a whole heap of flares and lit up the town down the bottom and so we went in then and dropped our bombs, and as soon as we dropped the bombs all the searchlights hit us and they started blasting up the flak and we got hit badly with the flak. And

23:00 the same again. I was... Right against my head there was a lump of flak, straight up there. I wasn't meant to go then. The plane was all riddled but we bombed successfully - it was a good aiming point - and came home without... But it was pretty hairy because as you came out of the target area there was another heap of searchlights with no flak and you had to fly through them. That was where the fighters would sit out and wait for you so

23:30 we were a bit lucky. They would pin onto another aircraft and you'd slip through if you were lucky. Yeah.

Did you come across fighters?

Seen them but just fleetingly and they mustn't have seen us or they missed us. Other times we dived into cloud and lost them. Yeah. No. Never fired a shot in anger. Yeah well it is a pretty hairy experience and

24:00 on the way home we saw three fighters on that particular trip, and when we got over the sea we got fired on by our own convoys. It was hairy the whole trip, hey. And as we came into the coast we were so close to the whole balloon barrage it wasn't funny so we just dodged those. It was just one of those trips everything seemed to get scary.

24:30 **Was there any crews that went down from our own fire?**

I imagine there would be. I know there were some crews shot down by our own fighters, night fighters. Not too many but a few.

How would they mistake you?

I don't know. Whether it was the Yanks or our own mob I don't know.

25:00 We had... On our aircraft we had an identification friend or foe type of thing on there. It was a radio thing. So there shouldn't have been any problems. I have heard of it but whether it's fair dinkum I don't know. I have heard there have been some shot down.

So when you came back from the Essen trip and you got back into the... you landed, was there some discussion with the crew about what happened with the crew?

Oh yeah, yeah.

25:30 In all its gory detail.

Was it considered a success?

Yes. Because the visibility was good. There were fires everywhere too but whether civilians were killed or what, who knows.

So is the first thing you do after a trip like that to head for the nearest glass of something

that you could drink?

26:00 No, as you got down in the debriefing they had coffee and stuff like that. And then you went to an operational breakfast. It was the only time you saw an egg. A couple of eggs and some bacon when you came back. So you got something out of it.

What did you do for fun in those times?

Oh we used to do down to the local pubs about three miles away. You could walk in there

26:30 and play up there all night. If you weren't on operations you would play up but if you were on operations you wouldn't. You know, you had to be on top.

So what was the pub like then?

Oh great. Two little pubs. Just a little village, hey. All the old dodgers there playing darts; we'd play darts with them. It was good. Great little places those English pubs, ay. Friendly

27:00 **What were the people like in that area?**

Really good.

Did you get to know anyone?

Not personally but I got to know the old inhabitants of the pub, the old dodgers, you know.

How much were you getting paid to be a gunner?

Oh I have forgotten. We started off in Australia at six shillings a day and I think when we became sergeants we finished up with about fourteen shillings a day. That was a bit over a dollar or something.

27:30 **Did it feel like a lot of money to you?**

No, we used to run out quite often. It wasn't a lot of money even then.

Can you describe the accommodation? If I was to walk into that base, can you describe what would I see?

Into the base. Yes, well of course there was the airfield and it was all tarmac. Various, there was only one direction of take off,

28:00 two directions on a one, and around the airfield there were the dispersal bays where all the aircraft were parked. Then you had the administration block. It was nearly all Nissen huts too, the round huts, and all our accommodation was Nissen. It was pretty basic. For a start they were very uncomfortable, damp,

28:30 cold, but we eventually got a potbelly stove and a bit of coal and it was quite liveable after that. A couple of beds and somewhere to put your clothes, that's all, and a stove. That's all that was in the actual room. It was two blokes to a room. And I finished up with a chap who was in one of those photos. Original intake.

29:00 We went different ways and we both finished up together so we went to the same hut. He survived the war.

What sort of bloke was he?

Oh a good bloke. He was from Brisbane. A bloke by the name of Bill Chaplain.

And what position was he in the crew?

Bill was a, I think he was a wireless operator or a front gunner, one or the other. He was a gunner as well.

29:30 **Did gunners tend to hang out together?**

Oh not necessarily. The crews were very close. For a start they weren't but later on they were. I suppose the gunners hung out together quite a bit. Yeah.

And what was the next operation after Essen?

Oh I think it was Hamburg I think.

30:00 **And what happened at Hamburg?**

Oh a very scary place. We took off, we got up and we were supposed to turn at a certain point and we went too far east and finished up flying right down the Elbe River, and we got over Hamburg, well just before, Cookshaven I think it was.

30:30 The flak was, they shot down nineteen thousand to eleven thousand. So we dropped our bombs in the

middle of all that flak, otherwise they would have got us. We just kept on going down and down and down. Very scary. We saw fires started. Do you generally have a few do you?

Yeah, we do actually, we get all sorts of interruptions. So you were flying over Hamburg?

31:00 Yeah. Well I suppose it was another negative trip but we saw fires from our bombs. We were carrying incendiaries. We carried incendiaries quite a bit.

What does that mean?

There were two types of incendiaries. One was a magnesium incendiary about that long, hexagonal shape, they used to be in canisters. You'd drop them and they'd all shower out like that. The other one was a two hundred and fifty pound incendiary. This was to set

31:30 fire to whatever.

So you were over Hamburg?

Well after we dropped our bombs we just headed for home, that's all. Yeah. The flak was just too much.

Did you ever get used to those because you saw some pretty dramatic situations. Did you ever get used to that?

No, well it is a strange thing. We never thought of it much.

32:00 You were in, you knew you had a good chance of not going home but you looked at the professional side of it I think. I can't explain it because there must have been times when we were dead scared. Of course you are but you never took the worries with you anywhere.

Did you have any religious beliefs?

No. No.

32:30 Just all I did was hope that people are mostly good people whoever they are. There are just a few who are not good people. That's the way I see it. That's all.

So what happened after Hamburg? Did you have many more operations?

Yeah. I finished up having thirteen trips.

What number was Hamburg around about?

33:00 Round about fifth or sixth I think. A couple to Stuttgart. Stuttgart is way down the bottom of Germany and those trips took about eight hours, there and back. That was for factories and things and so forth down there. But the first trip we got down there and we couldn't see a thing. It was eight hours in the air for practically nothing.

33:30 We bombed what we thought was an aerodrome, that's about all. We just saw the flashing lights. The next trip the following night was much the same but we did find something to bomb. But a lot of them were pretty negative.

Did you want to see the results of the bombs?

34:00 Yeah in actual fact it would have been nice to see, I wouldn't say it was nice to see.

Did you see the photographs that were taken?

Oh yeah. We saw the photographs, yeah. And you could never pick your own photograph because there were so many bombs going down and so forth, but out of all those photographs they would pick something out. Some new thing on the ground or something, for intelligence purposes.

34:30 **What was the biggest trip you went on?**

The most aircraft was Cologne. It was the first thousand-bomber trip of the war and that was a highly successful trip.

Can you describe that from the very beginning of that, how it came about?

Oh I think it originally was just after the Germans started, when they finished bombing London they

35:00 used to do diversionary raids all round the countryside, but they came to a stage where they were bombing cathedral towns. Coventry, they absolutely missed Coventry and a few others. York had a bit of a go; it wasn't far from us. And I think the bombing of Cologne, apart from the infrastructure - and there was quite a bit of it there - it was a bit of a morale booster because

35:30 Cologne was a well-known cathedral town. I think it was just payback and a morale booster. That's the way I saw it, anyhow. Anyhow we took off and it was a moonlight period. Over England, over the [English] Channel. It was absolute ten-tenths cloud. You couldn't see anything. When we got over France or the eastern part of Germany, I forget which way we went now,

- 36:00 it was all moonlight period and the visibility was perfect to see everything. And the air was full of aircraft, all different types: Wellingtons, Lancasters, Halifaxes, Hamptons and stuff flying all different heights. And when we arrived there the place was alight everywhere. We saw a few Wellingtons shot down.
- 36:30 Fighters were very... There in numbers. I think there was very little losses. Forty aircraft lost out of a thousand. But the defences were totally demoralised, there was such an enormous load of bombs coming down. Searchlights were inactive, flak was very scarce.
- 37:00 It was a free-for-all. It was a terrible thing to do, I know, but I can always remember writing in my diary afterwards. I was pleased it was a success but I couldn't help thinking of the women and kids down below.
- Did that cross your mind much?**
- Oh often, every time.
- How did you reconcile that in your mind?**
- If you are in the air force
- 37:30 you are there to obey orders, you've got to obey orders.
- And it's a war.**
- Yeah. If Germany had won the war, 'Bomber' Harris, 'Butcher' Harris and all us blokes, we'd be war criminals.
- You'd be what, sorry?**
- War criminals, we would have been, bombing cities.
- 38:00 It helped in a big way to bring Germany to its knees. As far as infrastructure and morale went it went a long way to bringing them to their knees. And they weren't going to give up, so we were reconciled to the fact that although we were bombing cities it might teach them something about how... about stopping this war.
- 38:30 They got bigger and bigger bombing all the way through. And particularly in the four-engine bombers. A horrific thing, but that's how we reconciled.
- It must have been an amazing sight, a thousand planes in the air. Did you have good visibility of that?**
- Oh yes. I was in the front turret so I could see all around me. I had excellent visibility. And
- 39:00 after we'd dropped our bombs there were so many aircraft in the air I had to get out of my turret and stand by the pilot. See he's got to be watching his instruments all the time - it's all dark and he's got to fly by instruments -and I just stood up beside him to see the aircraft in front of us our own aircraft, dodging them all the way. So I stood up there
- 39:30 until I got a (UNCLEAR) and I went back into the astrodome doing the same thing. There was aircraft everywhere. We had to wait to get down, there were about twenty aircraft trying to get down the squadron, round and round and round, wondering when the fuel's going to run out. Yes. It was an unreal turnout.
- And do you remember what you were thinking, not exactly what you were thinking, but what it was like to watch other planes go down?**
- 40:00 Yeah. You just have a look at it and think, "It could be us." It didn't give you a very nice feeling.
- Could you see the other pilots?**
- No. No.
- It was dark?**
- Yes. You just those the aircraft in the moonlight. That's about all you saw.
- Could you see what was happening down below when the explosions were going off?**
- Yeah, you could see
- 40:30 the actual explosions and the fires. But it was very hard to pick out where they actually hit unless you had a decent photograph that could see it. You look down and see all this stuff and there's flak coming up and searchlights. Down the bottom there was heavy flak and light flak. We were supposed to fly at nineteen thousand feet so the light flak couldn't hit us, but the heavy flak would still hit us of course. Down on the ground
- 41:00 there would be some intruder aircraft down there at lower altitudes and all this light flak would be going and hose piping and fires, smoke, gun flashes.

It must have been really amazing visually!

Oh yes.

Okay.

Tape 5

- 00:31 **So that must have been really quite something to participate in that particular bombing, the Cologne operation?**
- Yes. It was a big build up for morale for sure. It was a big thing for the air force morale too really.
- So what was it like for you to be part of that?**
- Oh I thought it was great to be... It was a real success, but
- 01:00 also there were women and kids down below you so that turned me off a bit. It is bound to happen. Even when you are aiming bombs it's bound to happen. If you are aiming bombs into some particular target.
- You said in that particular operation you lost forty planes, but it was forty out of a thousand so that was pretty good.**
- Yes.
- When you did lose crews out of your squadron, Squadron 460,**
- 01:30 **what would happen when you would go back after an operation and a crew didn't come back?**
- Well anyone who came back would try and wait up to see whether they came back, and time got further and further, "Bill's not coming back." That's all and nobody dwelt on it. For some reason we never did dwell
- 02:00 on it.
- So in the evening when you sat down to have dinner or have a drink or something, no-one would mention it?**
- They would probably mention it, yeah. All felt bad about it of course. Probably your best mates were one of them.
- Did you lose anybody close to you during those operations?**
- Not in 460, no. Not real close.
- Now Squadron 460**
- 02:30 **is pretty famous, actually, for the things that it did and you were involved early on. Can you tell us more about the squadron and also about the planes that you were flying?**
- Oh well it was mainly an Australian squadron. There was a few odd bods as well. So a lot of the ground staff there were about fifty-fifty Australian and Englishmen. They were
- 03:00 just starting to build a squadron up and make it a truly Australian squadron. The ground staff were Pommy ground staff. They were great, really good. We became very good mates. They have their own particular aircraft to look after and you get to know your own ground crew. You'd have a joke when you got out with them and so forth. Even a couple of blokes would be waiting in the morning to see if you came back. They would be out there waiting for you.
- 03:30 It gave you a great morale boost to see these blokes.
- Can you tell us a little bit more about the Wellington?**
- Well the Wellington was the original workhorse of Bomber Command. There's other aircraft but I think there were more numbers of Wellingtons. And they've served a lot during the war later on even with the four
- 04:00 engines in different types of work. They were an aluminium frame, a particularly strong frame. They were made of aluminium or duralinium, all cross-members, very, very strong and covered with fabric, and the wings were also covered with fabric. It wasn't a lot to go on when you got incendiaries. Fire, fire was the big killer in those aircraft.
- 04:30 **What did you think as crews about these planes?**
- We thought they were tops. Especially as we had never been in anything else. We thought they were

real aircraft, which they were. They did a good job but they had their limitations of course. I don't think they were any more dangerous than any other aircraft.

05:00 That type of thing over there, there is not one man with a rifle shooting another man, it is just a whole mass of stuff up there and it is a matter of luck in the end. Skill is necessary but luck was the main thing.

But what was your opinion about the danger factor about getting on one of these planes?

Well we never thought it was any different to any other aircraft.

05:30 There was other aircraft operating and they were even more antiquated than the Wellington. So you know. The readiness for war was zero minus. All the stuff that... Compared to the Germans, they had up-to-date aircraft in the start but they lagged towards the end because they never put new types, they put few new types, fighters, but they never kept up with it. Our mob

06:00 brought the four-engine ones in with all the bits and pieces to go with it, you know. But the Wellington was just another aircraft that you took your luck in, that's all.

On those operations when you went through heavy flak and you were hit, and you had a couple of those, what was it like when you were coming home?

A bit of a euphoria I suppose. Being alive.

06:30 Great to be alive. That's all.

But how hard was it to manoeuvre those planes that had been riddled with bullets?

Well it depends if they were hit with the controls or anything, but the ones I happened in, just lucky enough didn't have anything major go wrong. We had half the stabiliser at the back blown off and we were just lucky to get away with it.

So when you landed after

07:00 **having experienced that, what would the crew do then? What would you do?**

Hop out and kiss the ground. I did that on several occasions.

You really physically got out and kissed the ground?

Oh yes. Just for fun.

Did all of you do that?

Oh some did, some didn't.

So it was a huge relief to get back?

Oh yeah.

Was there a particular moment in any of those operations when you really thought, "That's it, I'm not getting home"?

07:30 Oh yes. Over Hamburg. That was a real nest of flak. You could never survive if you stayed there.

And when you thought that, what did you think about? Were there other thoughts in your mind? If these were the last moments of your life, what were you thinking about?

"If it is going to happen, it is going to happen." I am a bit of a fatalist like that.

08:00 **So you didn't think about family or anything?**

Oh yes. You gave it a thought. You gave it a thought. Yeah.

Okay was there any talk at any time during those operations about LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre]?

Very little. We knew it was there but it was all very low key, and as far as I was concerned I didn't want to hear about anybody who had been branded that way.

08:30 It must have been there and there must have been some who were taken that way but that was their business as far as I was concerned. And the powers that be never made it very evident. You've got to remember that during these operations blokes would go missing all the time so you were never sure if a bloke wasn't there, whether he had gone missing or off with LMF.

09:00 So we never dwelt on it.

So you never heard of any specific cases?

No I hadn't.

And when you say you didn't really want to know about it, why was that?

Well from the point of view of the bloke himself. It might have been a mate of yours or something. Didn't want to hear that. A bit of a stigma. It was a stigma those days. LMF only meant no guts.

09:30 But I mean to say it is everybody's business, isn't it?

So can you tell me tell me how the day began which ended with your... the flight that would have been the worst operation of all?

Yeah, I can tell you about that.

How did that day begin?

Oh well it all begins that you were warned that you were going to be on operations.

10:00 They don't say where you are or what, but we weren't warned and we asked why and, "There wasn't enough aircraft serviceable so you're not on tonight." "Oh well, that's all right." We were going to Essen too. So anyhow at briefing they come and got us, they got the whole crew and reckon you were on.

10:30 That was the first thing we knew about it, going to Essen, and Essen is always a hotspot so take your chances. So away we go and it was all a carbon copy of most raids because Essen was always a hotspot. You had searchlight belts to fly through and you had black areas and fighter aircraft, and

11:00 we eventually bombed areas. It was no different to any other. We had a good bombing run. That's about the only bombing run... In those days was about the only straight and level stuff you did. All the way you were weaving like this. The idea was to make it harder for fighters to approach you. But that was it. So as we are going out

11:30 the German fighters were sitting over the coastline and they would get you silhouetted against the water. They would see you against the water. So we had orders to fly out low. Fly out low so that if they go to attack you they've got to fly out of range so they can pull out before they hit the water, you see. That's the thinking of it.

12:00 And they are coming out over the Dutch coast and I was in the front turret and I could see sandbanks and dinghies whizzing past me. We were down very, very low, aye. And we just got out to sea a bit and straight into the drink [sea]! I don't know what happened. Straight into the drink!

So you don't know what actually caused you to down?

I have got an idea, but just as we crossed the coast

12:30 our navigator gave the pilot a course to set and we were so low, you know. The pilot is sitting here and the compass is down here. You set the (UNCLEAR) reading on the compass so you could fly the course and we just went down like that. He might have pushed the stick forward or something - straight in!

So what is the next thing you remember?

Down in the water. Struggling to get out.

13:00 Tangled up with oxygen hoses and wires, my feet were jammed in the wreckage. And the turret must have been knocked off and I was tumbling over and over like this in the turret. And I forced my feet out of my flying boots and next thing I'm swinging up to the surface. How I got out of the turret I don't know. Up to the surface, lungs bursting, ay.

13:30 So I got up then and pulled my Mae West bottle and inflated, a great feeling of security, hey. And then I paddled around until I saw the pilot and observer. They still hadn't inflated their jackets so I inflated their jackets for them. I asked them how they felt, were they badly hurt? They didn't reckon they were badly hurt but the shock,

14:00 you don't know. You don't exactly know how badly hurt you are, you know. I was bashed around, cut and so forth and all types of things happened, but anyhow shock took over and I lay back on my Mae West and I decided that I had better get moving because the cold was getting to me, and I heard a bloke sing out a long way away so every man for himself. So I

14:30 started to swim towards the moon because I knew the moon was behind us as we came out. So I must have been in the water about three hours, I suppose, and I could hear a bell and I'd swim towards it and stop and hear it again. This went on for hours. I was swimming, just dog paddling and it was, dawn was just breaking

15:00 and it was a buoy with a bell on it, ding, ding with the waves. You know. That's... I just thought I would swim to this thing and sit on this thing. Before I got there a little launch pulled up with a couple of young German soldiers in it. They dragged me out of the water. But as they pulled me out of the water I had a

15:30 yard of silk stocking hanging off each foot. They thought it was a great joke. But they were a couple of good guys, hey. They were only young fellows. They dried me down, put a bit of warmth into me,

towelling, and put me in a bunk in the boat and gave me a big mug of cognac. They were good blokes, ay. And then I told them that we had another couple of blokes in the water

16:00 but I don't know whether they ever picked them up or not but they didn't survive. So that was that. Took me back to shore to a navy department. The navy were really good. You've got to be very lucky. If you are brought down in the target area you are liable to be lynched or killed by the civilians. I don't blame them.

16:30 And if you are caught by the army it is different, but if you are caught by the navy they were gentlemen, a big difference. I was lucky.

It is just the most extraordinary story. How long do you think you were down in the water?

About three hours I think.

How long do you think you were in the water before you escaped from the turret?

Oh I don't know how long I held my breath but it was well past my normal time I think. But I just swam up to the surface

17:00 and I had really had it before I got to the top so it must have been a while but I could feel myself rolling over and over and over while I was in the turret. I don't know how I got out of it.

Do you remember how long it seemed to be?

Oh I don't know. I suppose a couple of minutes.

And do you have any recollection of what was going through your mind?

Oh, "I've just got to get out of here. Get out of here and get up to the top."

17:30 **And could you see, did you see the actual aircraft?**

Oh no, no. It just sunk straight away. I would say the turret must have broken off the main body. The observer and the pilot and myself got out of the plane and the rear gunner and the wireless operator must have gone down with it. So I was the only survivor.

And when you surfaced and

18:00 **you got your Mae West on, what was that like?**

It was a great relief it still worked because if you were all mixed up with all the wreckage you could have been holed, you know. And no, they are great things.

And what could you see when you were there floating in the water when you first surfaced?

Oh just... All you could see... Luckily it was calm and there was only waves about that high, I suppose. What could I see?

18:30 These two blokes with blood streaming everywhere, you know, and I was likewise, that is the main thing, and just trying to calm the shock, you know. The shock does get to you to a certain extent, yeah. Four or five minutes I suppose I came out of it and started to do something to look after myself.

What did you say to each other?

Oh, I just went up to these guys and

19:00 released their air button and said, "How are you going? Are you badly hurt?" And they said they didn't think so. They didn't know. I didn't know how badly hurt I was and we were all lying back and the shock got to us, lying back and that's the last I saw of them. We just drifted apart.

And as you swam off, where did you think you were swimming to?

I knew the moon was behind us and I

19:30 knew we wouldn't be so very far away from the coast because of the time elapsed from the time we went over and so forth. Also hearing this bell ringing so I decided to swim towards the bell.

And as you were doing that, what further thoughts did you have then?

I don't know, just confidence in myself, that's all. "Hopefully I will get there."

20:00 **Did it cross your mind about the Germans capturing you? Was that something that you thought about?**

Oh yes, definitely. I didn't know what kind of reception I would get because we knew blokes had been killed by civilians and so forth, so, "Who's going to pick me up?"

And what time of year was it when that happened?

June. The night of June the second and third.

20:30 It was summer time. It was still cold. The North Sea is very cold.

How cold would it have been, do you think? Do you have any idea of the temperature of the water?

Not really. Really cold. I was shivering about six inches each way.

And what were the chances of people surviving? How long could people survive in the North Sea at that time?

Well it wasn't that cold I suppose, but to a bloke from sunny North Queensland it was cold.

21:00 Oh I don't know. A lot of blokes were brought down in the sea and in dinghies and things and they've got all sorts of stories to tell of course.

So if it had been winter, three hours, you wouldn't have survived?

No you wouldn't survive, no.

So you were sort of lucky that it was that time of year. So when these blokes picked you up what were your thoughts then?

Well I was surprised at how I was treated.

21:30 Really good, ay. You know. Did a roughie on my cuts and Gawd knows what and a big mug of cognac. This prisoner of war thing's pretty good, ay.

So you weren't expecting that sort of a reception?

Oh, no way. It even got better when I went ashore with the navy blokes. It was unreal. As soon as they

22:00 got me ashore, there must have been a couple of doctors there, they did a roughie on me. They cleaned me up and put me to bed. It was a two-storey place and I was on the top storey and they put me to bed, nice clean bed. Gave me some clothes to put on. Well I went to sleep and I woke up in the afternoon about three o'clock and there was a jug of coffee and breakfast.

22:30 I didn't believe it. So I had that and then they decided, they brought me back my uniform. It had been washed. It was all ripped and torn but it was washed and nicely folded up on the side of my bed. This is unreal, ay, this is the navy. So I got dressed and they took me downstairs and they started to interrogate me but they never pushed, they never shoved to get any information.

23:00 Just gave me a needle, I don't know what for. And that was it. I had a great reception. It was a change when the army took over.

What were your injuries?

I had whiplash in the neck and cuts all over my head, on the face here and so on. Ligaments torn and the knees were all bunged up.

23:30 I was pretty sore. I was black, blue and yellow all over, bruising.

So the pain must have been quite intense?

It wasn't too good. And then after all this treatment by the German navy a couple of army soldiers came along and they walked me five miles to the nearest train, the train station. So I was just flat out walking.

24:00 And five miles walk.

How soon after you actually were picked up was that?

Oh it'd be about nine hours.

So you really just had a very quick, only a few hours with the navy?

That's right, yes.

So where exactly were you? Do you know where that navy base was?

Flushing. I was at a place called Flushing. That's on one of the islands. Right out

24:30 near the edge of the islands. There's a whole heap of islands there and all low-lying country.

So these German navy officers had treated you so well, but as soon as they had finished interrogating you they handed you over to the army?

To the army, yeah.

So how did that happen? Did you understand what was going on?

Oh I knew that these blokes, you know, did the right thing by me for a start. I knew

25:00 that they were going to take me to a prisoner of war camp somewhere so I knew it was going to happen.

And they were obviously speaking with you in English but they would have been communicating amongst themselves in German?

Oh the guards couldn't talk to me.

But when they were interrogating you?

Oh one of the German officers had a smattering of English. Pretty good English actually.

And do you remember what sort of questions they asked you?

Oh they generally start asking you about squadrons and what kind of aircraft you were in. You just

25:30 say, "I can't tell you that. Sorry." They took it; they didn't push. They thought they might get a bit of information out of me but they didn't.

So you were in incredibly poor physical condition, how would you describe your mental condition?

Oh it was okay. I was just lucky to be alive, that's all. Lucky to be alive. I wasn't

26:00 real fussed about this POW business mind you. I wasn't real fussed at all.

So as soon as the navy blokes handed you over to the army, what was the change in terms of the way they treated you?

Oh I think the army is bred up to show no compassion whatsoever, the German army, you know. And there's no let up of those guys. And these two, they had the job of taking me to... Where were they were taking me? I don't

26:30 know where they were taking me, mind you, and I hopped on this train and went to Rotterdam. By the time we got to Amsterdam I couldn't go any further. They had to cart me off the train and take me to hospital in Amsterdam. German military hospital.

So prior to that did you receive any treatment for your wounds?

Oh the navy blokes just patched me up type of thing, you know.

27:00 I don't suppose it was anything terribly serious but it was serious enough for me, you know.

Any painkillers?

Oh no, no. Nothing. And so we went to this general military.

Just before we go there, on that walk, that five mile walk...

Oh I was staggering. Because of my knees and ligaments on my ankles, they were just gone.

27:30 Yeah.

And you were staggering and what were the army officers doing?

Trying to keep me moving.

How did they do that?

Oh they just kept on lugging me along.

What physically dragging you?

Physically. Yeah. I wasn't going quick enough for them. You know.

Were they armed?

Yeah, oh yeah.

And did they threaten you at all?

No.

But they physically dragged you a bit to get you going?

28:00 Yeah.

Five miles when you can barely walk, that is a long way. How did you keep going?

Oh I don't know. I just had to.

What were you thinking during that time?

Oh I was starting to get a bit brassed off with this POW business. It wasn't so good after all after my reception from the navy.

So you then took a train to Rotterdam

28:30 **and so forth and you ended up...**

Amsterdam.

You said you couldn't keep going. What happened then?

No. They carted me off on a stretcher up to the German military hospital.

Had you collapsed?

Oh I couldn't even sit up. They thought they'd get rid of me I think.

So where was the military hospital?

In Amsterdam.

What was that like?

29:00 Anything I had to do with German doctors was great, the hospital system. It was good, good treatment. There was German patients there as well.

Can you describe the hospital for us?

Yeah it was a pretty normal hospital. I would say it had been, it was in Amsterdam and I think it was an original hospital taken over by the Germans. Just no separate wards, all

29:30 one big ward, and both German and our blokes in it.

So did you meet other Australians?

No. No. The only bloke I met there was an English fighter pilot and he had been badly burned and you couldn't see his eyes. His face was just swollen and I don't think he would have survived.

30:00 **The night, where you actually crashed at Flushing, were there any other people there? There were no other survivors?**

No. Only our particular crew, only myself actually as a survivor.

So your plane was the only plane that went down?

At that particular place.

And so how long were you in the hospital in Amsterdam?

About two or three weeks I think.

30:30 **And what sort of treatment did you receive?**

First class medical treatment. Yeah. And some of the other Germans in there, they were quite good.

And what sort of injuries were they treating do you know? Why was it that you were unable to even sit up?

Oh it was all the whiplash and colossal bruising and stuff like that and knees knocked out.

31:00 Just couldn't keep going really.

And what about the food in the hospital? Do you remember that?

I can't remember what they had in there but I suppose it must have been reasonable. It still wasn't a POW situation and the food was quite reasonable.

And while you were there were you able to get any messages to your family about what had happened to you?

31:30 No. No.

And so do you know whether they had heard that you were missing?

I didn't know but I thought that nobody would know, really, because I hadn't been really interviewed or anything like that so I don't think there was any hope that they could have learned.

So after the three weeks in hospital, how fit were you when you left?

32:00 Oh I was pretty reasonable. Most of my cuts and abrasions were pretty well on the road to being right but I was still terribly bruised and still flat out walking with all my ligament damage and so forth.

And what did you know about what was going to happen to you?

Nothing. Not a thing. No.

32:30 **You must have had a lot of time to think, though, while you were in hospital?**

Yeah, but they never told you anything, hey.

But while you were lying there in a hospital bed, what were you thinking about?

Oh just thinking though the whole sequence of the thing. Still thinking mainly of your parents and not knowing, you know. That was one of the worst things.

And you must have been wondering about what was going to happen to you?

Yeah. I didn't have a clue.

33:00 I didn't have a clue.

Did you have any scenarios in your mind about...?

Not really, no. Not at all.

So what did happen when they released you from hospital?

On a train again and we pulled up at a little place, I don't know how long on the train but a little place called Lignitz. They put me in a building with a whole heap of young Luftwaffe cadets.

33:30 And some of them, one bloke could speak English and it was quite an interesting night. They could, would never believe that the Germans had bombed English cities and that's when I decided how naive I was and just wondered what our own media said, you know. Definitely naive and

34:00 those lads were fair dinkum about it. They reckoned, "Oh no, we wouldn't do that."

What was their position?

They were just trainees. Young blokes. I suppose a bit like our corps, young fellows here in the air force. I forget what you call them now but they would have been progressing to the Luftwaffe. And

34:30 that's the idea they had.

And how did you come to have that conversation?

I think they just put me in there, the two guards in there as well, just somewhere to keep me so I couldn't escape or anything, and naturally these blokes would be curious to see an English soldier in their midst. We started talking, we had a great old chinwag [chat] and the different ideas between different countries was unreal.

What do you remember about what

35:00 **was said that night?**

Oh how naive I was. Well you hear all these preconceived ideas and these young blokes, they would be the same. They were about my age, a bit younger than me, actually, and they would never believe that their people would do those things, bomb cities.

So they had no idea?

No.

What was their reaction when you

35:30 **told them?**

Oh they just wouldn't believe it. They wouldn't believe it.

So what happened after that?

I was taken, put on another train.

What were these trains like? What were these train trips like?

Yeah full of soldiers and full of civilians and so forth. There would be a guard on either side of me of course.

36:00 And yeah.

Were you handcuffed or...?

No, no.

You just had two guards next to you?

Want to go to the toilet, the bloke come and stood at the door with his gun. I couldn't slip by him.

Did it cross your mind to try?

Yeah it crossed my mind.

So these trains were full of German soldiers?

Yeah.

So you took another train trip.

That train

36:30 took me to Berlin and this is where it was quite different from other blokes. Other blokes who were shot down like that they went to an interrogation centre. Dulag Luft [Interrogation Centre] in Frankfurt am Maine where they put them through all kinds of things to try and get information out of them. I went straight to Berlin and I think I was the subject of a morale boosting exercise,

37:00 looking back on it because I've still got no shoes. I pulled my feet out of the flying boots when I was first underwater. I hadn't had any shoes all the time, since then. I walked out of one of the main stations in Berlin, no shoes, battle dress all torn, black, green and blue all over,

37:30 hair half cut off where they got my cuts and things and they marched me along this busy street. I'm sure it was a morale boosting exercise. And they put me in the category of... What's the name? German for it. Anyhow it doesn't matter. We will carry on.

38:00 I went into a hospital, another hospital. It was only a small place and there was mostly Russians in it and I was the only air force bloke. And there was Australian Army blokes, New Zealand Army blokes, only about a dozen or twenty of us and the rest were Russians, and that's when the reality of POW business came in.

38:30 The food was terrible and very little of it. The Russians had less than us so they were worse off. So I was there for about four or five weeks.

When you say you thought it was a PR [Public Relations] exercise, what makes you say that?

I was the only bloke I know who didn't pass through dulag luft, the interrogation centre. It is the only, I have never met anybody who didn't go to

39:00 dulag luft.

And why do you think they didn't? What was the purpose?

I don't know. But why this small number of people in this Berlin hospital who were so-called colonials - New Zealanders, Australians. If it was something to do with that I don't know.

It sounded as if you were sort of paraded in from of them?

Yes I was, definitely.

So what exactly happened there?

39:30 They just walked along the street and people had a good look at me. And the word I was trying to find was unter Menschen, that means subhuman. That's what they reckoned I'd be. The way I looked. I would have been good for a morale boosting target. I didn't look real good.

So you were sort of paraded in front of these people?

Yeah. Just ordinary civilians along a main street.

How did they react to you?

Oh they just had a good look at me. A stickybeak at me.

40:00 **Did they say anything or make any noise?**

Oh no. Not really. No.

How did, what sort of, how did that impact on you?

Oh I don't know. I tried to perk myself up and look as bloody aggressive as I could be. Not that it did much good.

Okay.

40:30 **We'll leave it there.**

Tape 6

00:31 **Just...**

...called Beesdorf and it was a low-key kind of hospital turnout. Most of us had minor injuries, or they had been previously to hospital and they were still recuperating. And the Russians, I don't know why they kept them alive because they hardly fed them or anything, you know,

01:00 a lot less than us – and we weren't getting much. You'd see them down near the incinerator chewing up bits of paper and all that caper, you know. It was a very grim place.

What sorts of things were you eating there?

Well there was a thing, they called it cheese but you could smell it coming a mile away. It's a bit of a thing. Couldn't eat it in the start but we had to eat it in the end, but after we got a bit more in the other camp we didn't eat it, shocking stuff.

01:30 And a lot of the stuff was half off. Of course we come from good food to bad food straight away and it took a while for us to get used to it, you know. But while we were there I had my first interrogation. They took us out one at a time and I knew what to expect. I could see 'jack' [police] stamped all over this guy. He presented himself as a Red Cross official

02:00 but he was a German interviewer. He brings out this big sheet of paper, name, rank, number, what squadron, what aircraft. I just wrote. Then he started talking generally and I had been all briefed up on this business. All hail fellow, well met, you know. He had English Player cigarettes and I suck it up, nicotine, big time, smoking these cigarettes.

02:30 He handed me this pen to fill in this thing so I just put name, rank and number and we went into a great rigmarole to say that if I didn't fill the lot in my next of kin would never hear about me and all this caper, and I said, "No, that's all I'm giving." He got very nasty then and shoed me off but they kept me away from the other blokes. Whether any of those spilled the beans or not I don't know but we were well versed on it, we'd been told what to do.

03:00 That just about covers that episode there. It was just a grim hole kind of thing. While I was there I had an outbreak of boils and carbuncles. It was from the bruising, I think. I had to get a few lanced on my neck and so forth. That about covers that area there.

Where were the boils? All over your body?

Yeah, on my neck mainly. I had a continuation afterwards of that too. But what else was there?

03:30 Nothing really.

Did you communicate much with the Russians?

No, we were more or less kept apart and what we did see of them we couldn't speak to them because of the language difficulty, you know. They were treated very badly.

Apart from the starvation?

Yeah. They never had much to do with them otherwise. They never got as much as we did to eat, that's for sure.

04:00 So I suppose I was there about three weeks or around about that area and then I was taken over to a main camp in Lamsdorf. It was way up near the Polish border, that area there. That started the main camp where I stayed the whole period.

Can you start from the beginning of that experience and just tell us what your first impressions were and how they organised you in that camp?

04:30 Yeah. Well as you walk in you see a very bare barbed wire looking place. I didn't expect much. I didn't really expect anything at all but the first impressions were pretty grim. It was just bare dirt and barbed wire, that's all. They had sentry boxes all round and machine gunners in the sentry boxes.

05:00 It was a double barbed wire fence, about as high as this, eight feet or nine feet. And in between these two fences there was dannert wire. The stuff that is sort of about, anything between one half and ten metres tall, dannert wire, when you leave it go it goes all crisscrossed.

05:30 So anybody who went out to that wire had to cross all this stuff. And the huts were pretty old dilapidated things and double huts with a so-called washroom in the middle. I don't know how many in a hut but there would have been over a hundred in each hut at stages.

06:00 There were triple-decker beds in our section and along the side there was tables, and that was all the furniture that was in it. The beds were pretty basic. They were just bed boards with palliasses, straw

06:30 palliasses, and a couple of woollen blankets. That was it. Food, that was the big issue – always hungry.

And in the morning the first thing was somebody would go and get a container of mint tea. It was hot and wet but nobody drank it because nobody liked it, so we used to take turns to wash our clothes in it.

07:00 Then about eleven o'clock there would be an issue of potatoes, boiled in their jackets and pretty old potatoes too. They were dished out to the tables and each table had ten blokes on it and it wouldn't be ten, it would be eight. They would put all these spuds in a line and there would be a pack of cards with your name on it because one might get something a bit more than the other bloke, you know.

07:30 It was the only fair way of doing it because there would always be somebody having a bit of a go about somebody getting better than them.

So can you explain that? You had cards?

We had cards with your name on it and we shuffled them up and dealt them out against the stack. So that was Butterworth's there. So there was no come-back to anybody. And then a bit after that there was, you might get a little bit of margarine and about a sixth of a loaf of bread.

08:00 And then about an hour later they would bring a soup up. It was a watery mangel-wurzel soup. What do you call it? I forget the name of the vegetable, a swede, a kind of a swede turnip. It was either that or... What's that German thing?

Sauerkraut.

Sauerkraut soup. It was

08:30 sauerkraut. That was horrible stuff too. But there was nothing much there. That was it for the day and no more.

When you first got there, what did they do with you?

Oh they just took us straight to air force compound. We were right in the middle of the whole show. We were the only ones locked up in our own compound. All the rest were free to roam around the camp but

09:00 we weren't, we were just put in this one compound. They thought we might escape and get a plane and go back to England or something like that. So anyone they wanted to punish they used to throw in that compound as well. They didn't like the air force very much at all. That's how it started for a long time before we got use of the camp.

So how big would the area have been

09:30 **in the compound?**

I don't know. It was very hard to... In the compound itself there'd be enough for four double huts with an alleyway between them. There wasn't a lot of room.

Was there an area for you to walk around?

No, there was a bit of a turnout. You could walk right round the wire. Inside the wire there was a warning wire.

10:00 I don't know. It might be ten metres away from the main wire. If you go there you could be shot and it was a little wire about that high.

How did the German soldiers treat you initially when you got there?

Oh you never saw a lot of them. We had one bloke who was the head in our particular compound and he was a real sadist, but

10:30 in general he was a bad-tempered man.

When you say a sadist, what were some of the sadistic things he did?

Oh just to make things hard for you, that's all. Just whatever it was he had to make it hard.

Can you think of some examples of that?

We used to, we had practically no fuel to cook anything - we used to have to make stoves out of jam tins and that type of thing - and to get the

11:00 fuel, we had no fuel, we used to cut up our bed boards. We'd go to another hut and get bed boards. And I remember one bloke reckoned these bed boards went missing and this Ukraine Joe, he was the Fuhrer of the place, and he wanted a culprit for it right or wrong and so he put our names in a hat and one bloke ended up with about fourteen days' solitary confinement for pinching the bed boards. He reckoned it was the

11:30 only lottery he ever won. But he used to hit blokes on the back with the butt of his pistol and all that sort of stuff and just generally be a nuisance, but generally they were pretty low key apart from him. He was a nuisance.

How often would he come around?

Oh every day. Every day. And there was always something wrong too. Well from their point of view it was wrong, that's for sure.

12:00 But no they kept a low key. See a German soldier wasn't supposed to fraternise in any way, which was normal I suppose. But a German soldier was very frightened of his officers, very, because the discipline was so strict. So if they had wanted to talk to you they'd go round the corner and have a bit of a talk to you, but generally speaking they would never be out in the open and

12:30 talk to you. It was strictly against their rules.

When you first got in there, how did the other men treat you?

Oh good. All they wanted to know is when the war was going to be over. You were just fresh from the thing and they'd ask all the news of what was happening because you don't know what's happening in there, right through the whole (UNCLEAR). You'd get all kinds of rumours but you don't get the actual facts, you know.

What did you know at that stage of what was happening in the war?

13:00 Well we...

It was still a long way off, wasn't it? It was still a long way off ending so you were there for a long time?

Yes. I was there for about three years. We knew about Alamein and all of those things. But it was garbled. You didn't know what was true. We had certain illegal radios in the place. There was one in our hut too which I never even knew about.

13:30 Well you'd occasionally get a bloke bring news round on a paper, and you didn't know where it came from but it was supposed to be the real good news. It was called Stimmt, which means 'correct' in German but you never knew where it came from. Half the time it wasn't true so all these furrphies used to go round the place and rumours, and as they went round the camp they would get more and more garbled as you can imagine with a couple of thousand

14:00 men.

Can you remember any instance where a rumour got out of control?

Well rumours weren't good for the men because when they found they were wrong a lot of them used to get very depressed. The rumours were all good, all about what's happening, you know: "The second front's started." "They are landing on France."

14:30 Twelve months we were getting those rumours. Of course we believed them at the time, ay. So you didn't get the truth. Occasionally a German newspaper would get into the place and somebody would read it, somebody who spoke German. Of course the news was all their way too so we didn't know where we were.

Can you tell us a little bit more about that first day and what happened when you went into that compound?

15:00 Yes, well first of all meet Ukraine Joe and then you had to get your palliasse full of straw and your bed boards and all that type of stuff and you were allotted to a certain table. We had a bloke in charge of us, one of our own blokes in charge of us, and he

15:30 ran the show and got all the kicks up the backside too from the Germans so it wasn't a very popular job. But yeah, he saw it. The existing prisoners were very good to us. They didn't have much to give away but they did give you a cup of tea or something. They were really good until you got into, you were by yourself once you settled in.

Who did you become friends with?

16:00 I had several friends. A bloke called John Webb. We were also split up. At that time we were getting Red Cross parcels once a week. We'd get half a Red Cross parcel and you had a partner for that. I had a bloke, Cliff Douglas from Western Australia, and we shared whatever we had along the track, you know.

What would come in a Red Cross parcel?

Well there was two lots. There was one

16:30 that was an English Red Cross parcel and the other was Canadian, and the Canadian ones were more popular because they had a better selection. There would be a bit of tinned meat and margarine and stuff like that and a few concentrated foods like Horlicks tablets and things like that, and yeah. Well the worst part about it was any perishables like

17:00 meat and stuff like that, they used to open the tin straight away and you couldn't leave them. You had to more or less have one good feed or a couple of feeds and you couldn't ration yourself out because of

that. You had to eat it before it went off.

The Germans would open them, would they?

Yeah, opened them in case you hoarded them up for escape purposes. That was the idea. Yeah. So you couldn't really get a stack of stuff

17:30 together. You couldn't allot it out yourself in a decent way. You just had to make one big feed of it.

How would a typical day unfold in that first few months?

A typical day. They would rouse you out of your beds at about six o'clock every morning and all out on the parade ground to be counted every morning

18:00 and every afternoon. We would be out in the cold, cold snow standing around while they checked you. Just counting you in columns of five. They would come along and count you. And sometimes it wouldn't tally and they'd count again and you'd be standing out there for hours in this cold, and what used to happen if anybody had made an

18:30 escape or hidden in the camp was you get a run from one end of the other, fill in his block at the end, but sometimes it didn't work, sometimes it did work. There was always someone running up and down the line at the back.

So after they would count you, what would happen then?

You'd just go back to the barracks and try and find some way to fill in your time. There was nothing to do.

19:00 We used to play a little bit of sport. Later on we did. We used to play cricket and stuff like that when we got the gear. Not much of it really. No.

How did you beat the boredom?

Blokes tried all kinds of things. Blokes used to play bridge. A lot of blokes used to play bridge. And play chess. There was always somebody playing chess. And then we

19:30 got a limited library later on. There wasn't much in it but you could always go and read something. Oh we always had something. Making stuff out of jam tins, all that kind of thing.

What did you personally do?

I was a jam tin fan. I made a little fireplace with a fan on it so that it would burn inferior fuels, and I also made a

20:00 still to make grog.

Fantastic! How did you do that?

Out of jam tins. But we used to get raisins in the Red Cross parcels and we used to hoard those up and ferment them and then distill it out of this still.

So how much would you have made then?

Oh we made a couple of brews over there. Yeah.

You must have been popular.

20:30 Not after they drank it, I wasn't.

Potent?

Oh yes. Really potent. It was quite a good brew. When we first started the guys used to just make a raisin wine. You could see them straining the raisins through a sock. It was a real beaut wine.

Strange smells through it?

It made them very sick.

21:00 **And what other things would you do then to beat that boredom?**

I don't know. We used to walk around the perimeter, a couple of blokes together just having a yak as we went around. A bit of exercise and a bit of a yak. We spent a lot of time walking.

Did anyone around you... In the early stages, did you notice anyone not really coping very well with the situation?

I occasionally saw it, yes.

What would happen?

21:30 **Can you remember an incident of that?**

Not in our particular mob but there was always a few blokes who were pretty odd. There was one bloke who used to, he was forever walking around with his arms up in the air, he was flying all the time. Another bloke used to play sport all day. He would go through the actions of playing sport and get on his hands and knees with the billiard cue and all that sort of caper, you know.

22:00 I didn't know whether they were mad or just... See there was a repat [repatriation] compound next to us. Men who were in such a state that they were going to be repatriated in exchange for German prisoners. There must have been about two hundred blokes in there, mostly from Greece and Crete. In late 1943 they were swapped over for a similar amount

22:30 of German prisoners from England. But whether these blokes were trying to get into this repat compound I don't know or whether they were really mad, but some of them were really mad.

What did you have to do to get into the repat compound?

Oh you had to have some incurable illness or something like that style of thing. There were all types of things they played. We used to get these Machorco [?] cigarettes and if you smoked

23:00 the whole packet at once your heart used to go, start thumping. So blokes used to do that when they were having a medical. How many of them got away with that I don't know.

To stimulate some kind of heart attack?

Yeah, somehow.

What did you do mentally to stay strong in that early stage?

Oh I don't know. You still had a fair bit of comradeship, which was the saving factor.

23:30 You always had an old larrikin bloke who kept you amused. You always had something like that. It used to get pretty boring, I know, but you always had these guys that kept you alive.

Who was the larrikin in your group?

Well we had several, quite a few actually. One bloke was Bob Hutchinson from Western Australia. Whenever things got grim he would always have something to say.

24:00 Just made light of the whole show. Good.

Can you remember instances of something funny, a funny experience that happened in there?

What can I remember? I will probably think of one along the track. Little things, of course they are only little things.

No, great.

Of course all those people in Europe and the continent are very keen chess players.

24:30 We had two of our guys playing chess at the table and the German sentry would be standing at the back with his rifle over his shoulder and the bloke would make a move and he'd go, "Tsk, tsk, tsk." He'd look around, "Piss off." He saw the move and it wasn't the right move.

What did you miss the most in those early stages?

25:00 Well first and foremost, freedom. Secondly, food. You had plenty of company. I suppose family and all that type of stuff. Yeah. You are more attached to your family I think than you were before, that type of thing.

25:30 Yeah. The whole thing about it is as a prisoner of war you didn't expect much and you were never disappointed because you didn't get much. Put it that way.

Did you get any word from home?

We got a, I think it was a letter form and a card that we could send each month I think it was.

26:00 And yes, I got a few letters from home. Not as many as were sent, I am sure of that. But we got a few.

Can you remember the first letter you got?

No I can't. No. I was, whatever it was it was good to hear from my family. Yes. And know that they knew you were still safe and so on. Yeah.

What sort of things would you write to them?

26:30 You couldn't write much, ay. It would be censored. "Dear Mum," you know, "I'm doing well. I'm healthy and fit and I hope you're fit at home." That's about all you could put on. There wasn't much in them.

Did you try any codes?

I did try once when I made an escape. I did try a code and apparently they wondered what it was all about. You know. They didn't know what it was all about. No.

27:00 There is nothing else much you can say about it. Food, food, it was forever on your mind. And the blokes in charge of dishing out food were in all the rackets and that made it worse - less food. They were in rackets and they were mainly blokes who were caught in Dunkirk and so forth.

27:30 Also we had, we could get very few cigarette parcels through from our folks. I got a couple but the Canadians were getting bags full of them, absolute bags. And when we were getting cigarettes you could buy a loaf of bread for fifty cigarettes from a guard. But after the Canadians got there, well they were paying five hundred to a thousand cigarettes

28:00 for a loaf of bread so they ate a lot better than we did. So, you know, we didn't have the cigarettes to buy. Cigarettes was the currency in the camp. They had swap shops. Blokes had swap shops; the currency was cigarettes.

Were there rules within the men?

Rules?

Did you have some kind of system of rules?

Well we never had the normal military

28:30 turnout like somebody above you or anything like that. We ruled that right out from the start. We were all equal. We were just down as a POW. We weren't anything else but a POW. There were a couple of blokes who were warrant officers in those days and the Dunkirk mob tried to put it on that they were in charge, but we were in charge of our own compound, we let them know straight away we weren't going to be,

29:00 particularly underneath the English warrant officers' rule, we weren't going to be in it. It never happened to us.

How did they try to put it on?

Oh they tried to tell us what to do and when to do it and so on and we said we'd look after ourselves, thank you. You know. Yeah. What else was there? There was a lot of things. I just can't think of them at the moment.

29:30 **What about sanitation?**

Very crude. Very crude. A forty holer toilet.

Just into the dirt?

Just into a big hole in the dirt. In a building. A big hole in the dirt. It used to be pumped out into a cart and it was a shocking turnout. They used to call it the honey wagon.

So what, there would be forty holes in the dirt?

30:00 They had proper seats.

That's right. We saw a photo and they did have a seat. What about showers?

None. In between the two huts that were together there was a section with cement tubs but the water was cut off at the floor level. It was just dribbling on the floor

30:30 so we never had enough water. We were always trying to collect water. It was about that high above the floor and you picked it up with a mug to get water and you had to wash and so forth. And all the Australians over there used to try and have a bath every couple of days. Nobody else bothered, ay, but we always. You would wash half of yourself one day and the other half the next day or a couple of days later on. It was cold water of course.

31:00 Occasionally they would, they were very frightened of typhus over there. Wherever men are confined in unhygienic conditions the lice seemed to collect. Well they carried the typhus so every now and again they used to take a party of us there

31:30 and put us into a shower. It might have happened about three or four times while I was there. A hot shower! And they would fumigate your clothes, make sure there was no lice in them. But generally speaking we were free of lice in the camp. We kept ourselves reasonably clean but that was on all the time because when you get a typhus plague it wipes them out by the thousand.

32:00 They had some experiences in the first part of the Second World War where the typhus had broken out and they were very particular about it, but the hygiene was pretty crude. Yeah. Even to the extent that we weren't allowed out at night. We had to have a big tub at the end of the barrack to relieve yourself in the middle of the night.

32:30 It was a smelly thing. Eventually they allowed us to go out of a night-time.

So what was the tub?

Just a tub. You know, just a timber tub. And we were walking around in clogs, too. Just those old-fashioned wooden clogs. They did keep your feet off the cold but they were very uncomfortable things to walk around in.

33:00 We eventually got parcels from home which had some shoes in it, which was a good thing.

How did you feel when that arrived?

Good. Yeah. What else was there? It's pretty hard to think of the things, hard to explain. You just more or less went downhill mentally and physically. You know. Just slow, slow business.

33:30 Gradually went downhill. Some more than others.

When did you feel most alone?

Most alone. I think it was pretty general all the way through. I seemed to be able to cope all right mostly. I mean I am used to my own company. I am a bit of a loner so it didn't worry me too much.

34:00 **But being a loner in a compound like that, there must have been times when you just wanted to be alone?**

Oh yeah. There is nothing worse than living with big masses of men under bad conditions. Yeah. To be alone would be great.

What about the lack of women? How did that affect the compound?

Oh it must have been a bit traumatic, I presume.

Really, a

34:30 **bunch of men together like that for such a long time?**

Oh yeah. I don't know if there were any deviants amongst them. There wasn't any amongst our lot, I am sure of it. There were deviants in the camp, I know. It would have to happen, I suppose.

Yeah, absolutely, and what do you mean by deviant?

Oh I mean transsexuals and so on.

Having sex with other men?

35:00 I'd say so, I think so.

And not in your camp?

Not to my knowledge. No.

How did men talk about women in that situation?

Oh they always talked about women.

What sort of things did they talk about?

Nothing derogatory. On the contrary it was very good.

Did many of them have girlfriends and wives? Did you know?

35:30 Some had girlfriends. Yeah. So it was I suppose about thirty per cent of them would have girlfriends, yeah. Mostly at home in Australia. I suppose there would be married men too, a few married men, not a lot of married men. They were mostly

36:00 twenty-one when we went there, something like that and there were a few older blokes there. They might have been twenty-eight or something like that. They would be the married ones.

We have heard of people getting 'Dear John letters' [letter informing that a relationship is over] in some of those situations. Did you have that experience?

I've seen one posted up. There was a big long rigmarole, this bloke gets a letter from his girlfriend and told him that

36:30 she had married someone else. She couldn't wait. 'But never mind, John, we'll buy you a motorcycle when you come home.' That's the only one I saw but there were a few of those things, yeah.

Did anybody die around that time?

Oh just one bloke shot in the compound. That's all.

What was that incident?

Oh a bloke who

37:00 was wanted for misdoing when he was out on working parties. He must have crossed into our compound somehow when he was trying to get away from the Germans. They just shot him on the spot. It was next to our hut there.

Did you actually witness that?

Yeah. It sent a message to the rest of us. Watch yourself.

37:30 **How did the men react to that?**

Oh very angry. What could you do? Nothing. You couldn't do anything. Yeah. There was always escapes going on. There were always tunnels being dug. We were right in the middle so too far for us to dig a tunnel. The only place for tunnels was on the Canadian

38:00 compound because they were right next to a tree line where they could dig a tunnel out underneath the tree line and get out unnoticed. A few people got away but not a lot.

How did you hear about those sorts of things?

You'd see the Germans bring in machinery to dig up the place to find the tunnels. Either somebody's let the cat out of the bag [revealed a secret] about them or they've had sonar to run over the ground to

38:30 pick it up. I don't know.

In your group, how did you discuss the possibility of escaping?

We were talking about it, always, and everyone had his own idea.

What were some of the plans that you hatched early on?

Oh well it was either go to Switzerland or Sweden were mainly the places we'd attack.

But if the tunnel digging wasn't

39:00 **an option for you, what other ideas did you have?**

Oh, going out on working parties. Swapping over with an army bloke and going out on working parties. You'd swap his name and all his details and change with him and go out on a working party where the supervision wasn't so strict and the wire wasn't so bad to escape, you know.

Did the blokes in your group want to get out on working parties

39:30 **aside from escaping?**

No. No. They just wanted to get out to escape. See they wouldn't let us out on working parties. And they couldn't force us because we were NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers]. I've seen escapes straight though the wire in the camp which are pretty hairy things, hey. They had the searchlights and everything on in the middle of the night.

40:00 **Can you tell us about an incident of seeing that happen?**

Yeah.

Actually I might just hold you there.

Tape 7

00:31 **Can you tell us about the escape that you saw through the barbed wire?**

Well for some reason, I forget what it was all about, they took us away from our particular compound and we were in an army compound right next to the wire and this mob made an escape that night. The blokes in the hut made a hell of a hullabaloo, they knew it was on.

01:00 They've got to cut their way through the wire and there are sentry boxes with searchlights on and machine guns. These blokes got though the wire and started to run on the other side and the machine guns opened up and wounded them both pretty badly so that was the end of their escape, and that was the only one I saw from the main place, the main area. So you had to have a ton of guts to go and cut that wire.

01:30 **What was it like to watch that happen?**

Oh a bit hairy, yeah. At that time I was considering escaping myself, but not under those conditions.

You said that you used to talk about escaping a lot. Was that important to you?

Oh yes. Yes. Get your freedom at any cost type of thing. You know.

02:00 It was so boring and you feel so useless, just sitting there, sitting there and vegetating. You felt you had to do something. And the funny part about it is when the early part of when you are there, that's about the only time you have the up and go [determination, energy] to do it. As you get along the will seems to go. It is just a gradual deterioration. The will

02:30 to do anything off your own bat goes type of things so you've got to get going pretty soon as a captive. Yeah.

So what sort of things kept your will to live going? What sort of things helped you?

You had the idea that the war has got to finish some time and with a bit of luck you might still be alive. That is all you could think of. There is nothing else to grab hold of.

03:00 That's all you could think of and if you can make an escape, all the better.

You said that gradually your physical and mental condition deteriorated?

It does, yeah.

So how did it change over time for you?

Just a gradual deterioration. As I said before, all your get up and go has gone type of thing.

03:30 You get to the stage when, "What's the use of trying to escape?" "The war will soon be over," and things like that. In the early days up till round about the end of '42 you were still pretty active in that way.

Did you observe other people whose will to live really deteriorated, or their general mental condition?

Well as far as escaping was concerned there wasn't a lot of them who wanted to escape. They thought, "It's too

04:00 risky, We'd rather wait." But others decided they would like to have a go.

Did you see people whose mental condition deteriorated a lot?

Yes. To the extent of depression. Some used to get really depressed, and I suppose we all did to a certain extent but you never let it get on top of you, but some blokes, it got right on top of them.

04:30 **And how could you tell they were depressed?**

Oh just their actions and their lack of get up and go, and even having a conversation you could tell there was something wrong with them.

So how would they spend their time if they were in that condition?

Oh probably camping in their bed or something like that.

05:00 **And was there an attempt by people who were feeling a bit better to help those people?**

Oh I think you were on your own, I think. There was a certain amount of compassion but not a lot. Not a lot. You'd help your immediate mates, put it that way, if you could.

Who were your closest mates there?

Oh one bloke was John Webb. He was from Barcaldine in Queensland here. Another bloke was Cliff Douglas from

05:30 Western Australia. We all used to get on pretty well.

And what did it mean to be mates in that situation?

It meant a lot. You had somebody to refer to all the time.

What did you talk about with one another?

Well everything. By the time we'd finished we had talked about every subject. You had to keep on talking. "What did you do before the war?" "What did you do this?"

06:00 "What are you going to do after the war?" All those type of things. There was always something to talk about.

So were you dreaming a lot about the future and the sorts of things you were deprived of then?

Oh yes. All the time.

Would you actually talk about food, for example?

Oh I never did, but every time anybody started talking about food I used to turn right off because I wanted it so badly that I didn't want to hear about it. Some blokes talked about it all the time -

06:30 what they were going to eat when they got out of it - but I couldn't stand it.

So it was actually too hard for you to?

Yeah, I didn't want to hear about it. Why tease yourself? You've just got to wake up to the fact that you've got to survive with what is there.

What was the hardest thing about being in that situation?

07:00 I think it's being cooped up with so many. They develop a mind, a whole crowd, hysteria can develop so quickly. Any untoward business by the Germans and a mob can go haywire so easily. That's what worried me a lot.

Were there any particular moments when you were worried about how the group was behaving as a group?

07:30 Yes.

Can you tell us about those?

The only one I can remember offhand is there was always trouble about the dishing out of rations. Stories would come back about the warrant officers down in one particular hut, army blokes that had been captured in Dunkirk, and they were living on steaks and Gawd knows what they were living on, you know. Anyhow the whole mob went down. Not only our compound

08:00 but the other compound and they got this bloke, the head surang [leader] and brought him up before the mob to try to explain himself. He put on a pretty good show too. There probably wasn't steaks there. I don't know. But at one stage of that there were some French Canadians there and they can go up and they start the whole place going because of their... What do you call it?

08:30 They are so easily stirred up and they wanted to cut his throat and all this business. They were trying to stir the mob up to do this bloke over. You could see the whole crowd getting worked up and that's the thing I didn't like. A crowd has a mind of its own. It just goes berserk.

And what happened in that?

No it fizzed out. The whole thing fizzed out.

Did anybody sort of take control to calm things

09:00 **down?**

Oh yes there was a few blokes there.

So were there any people who sort of officially lead the group if you like?

Oh there are bound to be. Bound to be some leaders in various areas. I suppose there would be but generally speaking you are on your own.

So there was no organised groups at all? No special organisation within the compound at all?

No.

09:30 Some other camps they had that. They were still under military rule.

But I've even heard stories of some people setting up a, not military, but their own internal government of sorts. There was nothing like that?

Oh no. Our particular mob was self governing. We were all individuals.

So it sounds like you were very much

10:00 **alone in many ways.**

Oh no. How do you mean alone?

Well you were saying that you really were out for yourself that you just looked after yourself.

Yeah you looked after yourself and your immediate mates and tried to be a good citizen amongst the others. You know. Which you can do and which some didn't.

Were there times when you had to look after your mates?

10:30 Later on. Yes. Later on. When we come to the nights later on. Yeah.

Tell us about the Palestinian?

What?

There was a Palestinian.

I swapped over with?

Can you tell us about that? That was before your attempted escape, wasn't it?

Well he was the bloke that I swapped over with.

So can you tell us that story? Can you tell us all about that from the beginning of that story?

Swapping over with him? Well the only reason

11:00 that I could get out of the camp was by swapping over with an army bloke, an army bloke who wanted to stay in the camp and didn't want to go out to work. So this Palestinian bloke, he decided to stay in the camp and I took over his identity. When the time to go arrived for me to go out to work with the working party there were eight air force swap-overs in that working party of about twenty men

11:30 to go out to escape, eight of us.

How did that come about? Can you tell us in detail a bit about how you met and how you came to that decision?

Well just talking over the fence to blokes and some of those army blokes didn't want to go out on working parties so they'd come up, and they knew this was on.

12:00 So the only bloke I could get hold of was this Palestinian bloke. He was wanting to take my name and I was wanting to take his name. Finished up cutting a hole in our compound wire and getting out in the middle of the night and swapping over like that.

So what was he like? What can you tell us about him?

He was a lot shorter than me. Oh I only saw him for a few moments. I wouldn't know what kind of a bloke

12:30 he was. I wouldn't know.

Do you remember his name?

No. We had to have the name and where he was born and all this stuff. We swapped that over and we had both prearranged to put it down on paper. As we swapped over had to grab a piece of paper and that's how I learned his name and when he was born, his date of birth and stuff. So you could answer the questions as you went out of the camp.

You met him by talking to him over the fence?

Yeah.

13:00 **So how did you start the conversation about swapping over?**

Oh I just asked, "Do any of you guys want to swap over?" He said, "Yeah." And that's how I got onto him.

And he spoke English?

He spoke English, yeah.

So you hatched a plan to do that, and how did you do the swap?

Just cut a hole in the wire

13:30 and just crawled through just on dusk and patched the wire up afterwards.

You make it sound like it was nothing but it was quite an extraordinary thing to do, really. Were you nervous about what you were doing?

Oh yeah, nervous all right. Yes. If you are going to do it you are going to do it and that's all there is to it. So I took his place and I went down to the barrack he was living

14:00 in and of course the other guys all looked at me, "Who is this bloke?" You know. So anyhow.

So did you have to explain yourself?

Oh I explained to them. Yeah.

How did they react?

Oh they were quite happy about it. Yeah. There was eight of us and we all got through the inspection before we went out without any trouble.

Who were the other seven people?

Air force blokes.

14:30 I don't think any of them were Australian. The rest of them were Englishmen and Canadians. I was the only Australian I think.

So how long did you have to spend in the barracks before you went out on a working party?

Oh only a couple of days. And we had complete strip search as we went out.

So can you tell me exactly what happened from the time you arrived in the army barracks

15:00 **till the time you...? Tell me really in some detail what happened?**

Well there's not much detail in it. You just left the barracks and there was twenty men or whatever it was and you go into this room where they inspect you. You strip off completely and they search you. I had a map tied up in cellophane up my backside. Took the map out like that.

15:30 **And they didn't find that?**

No, they didn't find that.

So when they did that inspection, what questioning or interrogating was there?

Oh they would just look up the details and ask you the date of birth or whatever.

So you had to memorise that?

Yeah .

But you don't remember it now?

No. I can't remember his name. Some time after the war there was a Palestinian asking after me but I just couldn't remember who he was.

16:00 But I didn't know what kind of a man he was so I told them not to worry about it.

How nerve racking was that inspection?

Oh you are always waiting to be caught out, of course.

And what would have happened if you had been caught?

You would have gone into the local clink [prison], of course, and had a few days of punishment.

16:30 **So it was worth the risk that you were taking? You felt it was worth it?**

Oh we thought it was. Yeah.

So when you swapped clothes and so forth, did you have any personal things that you exchanged?

No we just went out with a uniform, that's all. Nothing.

What about that bit of a lucky charm you had?

Oh that was all left back in the barracks. He had the stuff in the barracks there. His stuff was in the barracks too

17:00 but I didn't want anything on me as I went out.

You gave him your things, so did he end up with that stuff?

No. He just went in with his own gear too. He never had much gear either.

So you still had the mirror, was it a mirror?

Oh I don't know whether I had that with me or not. I probably left it back in camp I think.

So you had this inspection

17:30 **and did all of the eight air force blokes get through that okay?**

Yeah, that's right.

So what did the strip search really involve?

Oh just in case you were taking anything out. Just completely stripped and checked everywhere.

When you say checked everywhere, how did they do that?

Looking and feeling and carrying on. Yeah.

18:00 **But they didn't find your map?**

No.

It is amazing! It's like something out of a movie! For us it is hard to imagine being in that sort of a situation so I am trying to get a picture of what it was like. I mean how many guards would have been involved in that inspection?

Oh about four. They just took one bloke at a time. You know.

18:30 And after the inspection you get dressed and out the gate, with attendant guards of course.

And were they rough during the inspection?

No. No. Just doing their job.

So you got out the door and you got dressed again. What was it like getting out the door?

Out of the camp proper? Oh it was great. After seeing barbed wire and stuff you

19:00 could see some trees close and all that. It was great. They put us on a train to go down to Czechoslovakia and I don't know how long the train was. It was all-day sort of thing and we arrived at a little place in Czechoslovakia.

Can you describe that train trip for us a little bit?

It was all through the countryside and it was quite interesting after all the dirt of Lamsdorf

19:30 seeing trees and people and women and blokes and little towns. And one thing I do remember very well was arriving at a station somewhere in Czechoslovakia, and when we got there we were taken off the train and everyone on the station including us had their hands up in the air with these guards with their rifles on.

20:00 And what it turned out to be was the assassination of Heydrich, around about, not that particular area but in Czechoslovakia. That was the assassination of him. They were looking for culprits. But that was just moments and they put us back on the train and that's all I can remember about that lot.

And that must have been quite a...

Oh a frightening thing. Yeah.

20:30 All the guards were steamed up about it.

What was their demeanour like?

Oh they were very hostile. They were very hostile, yeah.

When you say hostile, what did they do or say?

Oh just it was their demeanour. They were really het up about it, one of their leaders being killed. Assassinated by Czechoslovakians.

So they were hostile in the way

21:00 **they spoke to you?**

And the civilians, yeah. Of course it is pretty hard to tell with the Germans with their harsh language and you don't know whether they are hostile or they're not. They make it sound hostile.

What had you been able to learn of the language?

Not a lot. Nicht Essen. Nicht Arbeit. No food, no work. That's about all.

21:30 No. I could understand a little bit but not much. I was never going to be there long enough to learn the language.

So they got you off the train there and then you got back on after that?

That's right, yeah. Finished up in a little forestry unit in amongst the mountains. Pretty little place it was, too. We only lived in a hut about the size of this here, about twenty of us and two guards.

22:00 And we were sent on a working party over to a farm about three miles away where they were digging a silo, and I think there were about five or six of us and we weren't showing much headway so they took us off. There are blokes shoving it in and blokes shoving it back again, mucking around like this. The guard couldn't care less. But the poor old farmer,

22:30 he never got his silo dug. We weren't keen on digging it.

And how long were you there?

Oh we were at the camp there for about a fortnight, I suppose. We were there for three or four days over at this farm.

So can you describe that camp for us?

Yeah. It was only a little hut and the whole idea was to be in a forestry unit felling trees and loading

23:00 trees up and so forth, but they were just dawdling around while they had all the tree cutting stuff ready and we were just put out with these little jobs to keep us interested. Bu the camp itself was, the food wasn't too bad. A lot better than it was in the main camp. We could look after our food a bit ourselves. It was quite good. The guards were not too bad. They were reasonable.

23:30 **How was it to be physically active again?**

Good. Real good. We didn't like working for the Germans. That's why we were shovelling it in and shovelling it out all the time. We didn't like doing that, but physically it was good.

You said earlier that one of the biggest difficulties of being in the camp was the boredom and not doing anything.

Yeah. That's right. We were seeing new things all the time there.

24:00 Not like a vista of barbed wire - we could see trees and a stream running behind the hut and all this stuff. It was a really pretty place.

And to be actually doing something. That must have been...?

Oh yeah. It got you out of your doldrums. Certainly. Like in the camp all you could do is look at yourself or look at one another

24:30 and out here we were doing a little bit in our own little way. We had a bit more freedom of what we could do.

So what was your plan then for getting away?

Well I was with a Canadian bloke, Johnny Camilo. He could, the guards were Romanians. They had been put into the German army. Not in the fighting army, but into this type of stuff, you know, guards.

25:00 He was Canadian but he had Polish parents. He could speak Polish. He could make himself understood with these Romanian blokes and he talked one of the guys into giving him a file to sharpen his kitchen knife. There was a little steel wire, steel window up the top there with bars on it so in the middle of the night filed these bars

25:30 and had them all ready to take out and stuck together with German ersatz soap so you just grabbed them and they'd fall out. We had that all ready. He had it all ready to escape one night. Five of us went out then.

So five of you were planning to escape?

No, eight of us.

How did you work out this plan between you?

26:00 We had been talking about it of course. One thing about it was right behind the hut there was a fast flowing creek. We couldn't go out that way. We had to walk across the road in front of the building. The guards were sitting out the front, moonlight night - they were having happy hour I think. They must have been blind or drunk I think because we climbed up and got out this window, eight of us, and we all went our separate ways.

26:30 Four of us stuck together, actually, our lot. The other blokes split up and we just walked straight over in front of the hut in the moonlight and they never saw us. I was expecting a bullet in the back all the time, of course.

At what point did you perhaps think, "Well actually we've got away"?

When we got up, there was a bit of a hill, when we got over the hill and there was nobody chasing us we were right.

What was that sensation like?

27:00 Great, except you are looking behind you all the time.

What was your physical condition by this stage? How long had you been in the camp in Germany?

Some time in 1942, late '42 so I hadn't been there that long.

But you had presumably lost some weight through malnutrition?

Yeah, not too bad by then. I was pretty reasonable. Yeah. I was pretty reasonable that time.

So you were fit enough to sort of run?

27:30 Oh yes.

So what happened?

Well that night we climbed a mountain, pretty rugged it was. We climbed up a valley and it was all fallen trees over it and we just kept on climbing that night. And we didn't want to be caught. If you were caught by armed guards you would get a good beat up, you know. So we went up there till late at night and then decided to have a camp. Well early morning, actually.

28:00 We decided to have a camp up there. It was only ever pretty cold up there on the mountain.

What did you have with you?

We didn't have any blankets and things. Just a greatcoat and things like that.

So you made a camp and then what?

Oh we had a sleep that night. Yeah.

How did you sleep that night?

Oh good. Really good.

28:30 Yeah.

What happened from there?

Next morning we got up and we decided not to... We spent most of the day in the camp. About three or four o'clock in the afternoon we got up and started walking compass course and then we struck a path right on top of the mountain with all pillars on it. It turned out to be the Czechoslovakian border.

29:00 And we were getting along this track and we heard organ music and so we stopped and went up later on, and it was a crowd from down below who had gone to a German grave on top of the mountain. We went and had a look at it and it was a cross with a German helmet on it and 'Here lies so-and-so who was killed in the struggle against the Czechoslovaks

29:30 in 1939', and the date. That was the date we were there. So they had taken this organ all the way up the hill and there were fresh flowers and everything. A silly business, hey. So from then on we just kept walking and we got out of the mountains. We were steering a compass course all the time. When I came down I had a couple of fly buttons

30:00 so compass buttons they were. Most of us had those and we used that plus the north star, your right shoulder and you're walking east and so on. We kept walking and then we started looking for trains. We wanted to jump a train but it was very hard because they are always going the wrong way. Hey.

Was that your original plan, that you would eventually get on a train?

Yeah.

30:30 We were hoping to. It would save a bit of walking. We weren't very successful but.

So can you tell us what happened?

Yeah. Well we started off at a little place called Mersdorf - it was only a little tin pot place - and we used to go up and check the cars in the rolling stock

31:00 to see where they were headed and wait for the train, and the train would come and pick them and take them the opposite way. We spent two nights there mucking around and we made a mistake. There was a big pumpkin growing in the railway yard and we couldn't resist it so we picked the pumpkin, took it away that night and cooked her up. The next night they must have known somebody was around there and there was a whole

31:30 squad of guards chasing us. So we went down the railway embankment and camped in the cold water for about two hours to dodge these people. Hey. So we got away with it there.

So you were in water?

Yeah. Lying in water.

To hide?

To hide, yeah.

And these blokes were looking for you?

Yes. They were on the main highway but they never came over to where the water was. Just kept on shining spotlights over there.

32:00 But they mustn't have been too adventurous to go off the track.

How many of them would there have been?

Oh I don't know. There was a whole squad of them there in cars going up and down the road.

They were in cars? A whole heap of them in trucks looking for you? That's just amazing! It sounds like a scene out of a movie! What do you think about

32:30 **when you look back on that time now?**

Well it was good fun while it lasted, ay. There were a lot of hairy moments of course, a lot of scary moments.

And so you hid in a creek?

Well just a gully at the bottom of the embankment there.

And how cold was it?

Oh cold enough, but after two hours you are nearly frozen.

33:00 **And it took that long before they left?**

Oh yeah. They were all over the place. Yeah. Walking on the railway line. But they never came down to where we were.

So you were sitting in this water for about two hours freezing to death waiting for a soldier to perhaps turn up with a gun. What were you thinking at that point?

Oh well, "We might get away with it or we mightn't get away with it." Luck of the draw.

So you are very much a fatalist, really?

Yeah. To a certain extent.

33:30 I'm not so much of a fatalist that I wasn't scared.

So you were scared?

Oh you had to be at times. Yeah.

And the four of you, were still together then?

Oh yeah. Yeah.

And the four of you hid in the water at that time. So when you emerged from that, what was your condition?

Wet, very wet. Cold.

34:00 Then we moved on, get away from the place. Next we finished up in the big city of Herschbach where we again attempted to catch trains. Getting under the arc lights in the middle of the night reading the cars on the rolling stock and so forth. We decided one night to go and camp

34:30 and we left it too late and we got on a bit of a hill and we went to sleep, and when we woke up the next morning there was people walking all around us, German people walking all around us. We were in a public park! So we decided we would walk with them and so we kept walking until we came to an intersection of two main highways. And where they veered up

35:00 there was some rough old glass and timber so we holed up there for the day. There's heavy traffic on both roads so we boiled the billy and had a bit of a picnic. We thought we'd be caught any time. So we spent the day there and then about four o'clock we decided we'd have a bit of a go, see if we could get away from it. So we went out. We were dressed in British battle dress.

35:30 We walked out on the main road. We walked along the main road and out of the town and nobody took any notice of us. Then as we got into the scrub we walked though a picnic party of German soldiers and their girlfriends! We walked straight down and they didn't take any notice of us! Unreal! What happened I think is the French were on parole and they had similar uniforms. And they were well known by all Germans.

36:00 They were always free to walk where they like. They probably thought we were Frenchmen, I think.

You must have been stunned by this incredible... When you woke up in the park and you said there were heaps of people walking around, were they civilians?

All civilians, yeah.

And did anybody speak to you or ask you...?

No. It was unreal.

So you walked past these Germans having a picnic with

36:30 **their girlfriends?**

Yeah. They all had a bit of a look at us. And then they put their eyes back on their girlfriends and didn't worry about us.

So what happened then?

Then we decided there was too many of us so we were going to split up. I wanted to get away by myself and that night we were going to split up. And just walking around the corner of a building and run into the pointy end of a bayonet.

37:00 That stopped our great escape. We walked straight into a guard around a building. So when he says, "Halt!" we halt.

So it was just a single guard?

Two of them. Two guards. Yeah.

And had they known you were there do you think?

No, we walked straight into them. You know. We were sneaking around the corner of a building and they must have been just standing there.

37:30 **So you'd had all this incredible journey to get there and then suddenly you walk into these guards?**

It was a matter of bad luck is all.

You laugh about it now but you couldn't have been laughing about it then.

No, but there was no use crying about it, was there? If you were caught you were caught and that's it.

So what did they do to you?

Put us in the local jug [gaol] for the night amongst the town drunks - lovely.

38:00 **And then what happened?**

The next day or the next night they put us on a train with guards and took us back to camp. Yeah. We arrived at the camp just as daylight was breaking, and the first bloke we ran into was Ukraine Joe and he recognised us straight away.

38:30 He and Johnny used to speak in one of the Slav languages together so he just pulled out his pistol and belted Johnny round the face and head with the butt of his pistol. You know. Yeah. Just didn't like some of his prisoners getting away. He wasn't a very nice man. But generally speaking the guards were pretty

39:00 good.

And what happened to you?

I got, was it fourteen days' solitary confinement? I was put in this little cell. It would be about eight foot long by six feet wide with a bed and one blanket. No pillow. That was it. And a bucket in the corner for your toilet.

39:30 It was just solitary confinement. You weren't allowed to lie down during the day. They had a little peephole and as soon as you lay down the bloke would stare through the peephole at you. And just the minimum food of course, same camp food really. And we used to have half an hour exercise every day. They would march us around a bit of a yard.

What sort of effect did it have on you? After having made that incredible

40:00 **escape and then being caught and put into that solitary confinement, what impact did it have on you?**

Not a lot. Not in my case. It's just we got caught out and it is only a fortnight. You put up with it until you get out. That's all you had to do. There is no use whipping the cat [becoming upset] about it.

So it didn't badly affect your morale?

No, I don't think so.

40:30 **And Joe was beaten a bit. Was anyone physical with you?**

No. Oh no. To a certain extent. Yeah. Later on. I'll probably tell you later on all about the business.

Okay. We'll leave it here for now.

Tape 8

00:30 **So what did you do to survive the confinement?**

Oh, look at all the scratches in the wall, look up, see if there were any scratches up there. Look at the scratches again.

Did you do anything mentally to try and stay sane?

I don't know whether I was sane or not. No actual thing I can remember. No.

01:00 Just sit and look at yourself. It was very boring. That is about all you could say about it. Yeah.

So what happened after that?

Well I did my fourteen days and I went back to camp. But in the meantime during this camp I was tied up with string, and the tying up happened before I went into solitary confinement.

01:30 I mentioned before about the Canadians. They were in the compound next to us and about these chaps who tied the Germans up. This was in retaliation for that. They decided to tie us all up, all the Canadians and the air force and they started

02:00 tying up with string, and that took too long and they got lengths of chain with padlocks. They had so many keys they didn't know what to do with them. They could never find the right key for the right lock. They used to put them on in the morning and then take them off just before lights out, and next they got those chains that you saw in the photo like that.

Just for the camera, can you explain those chains?

Oh, they were only a cheap thing.

02:30 The chain was about that long and it had these handcuffs on the end of them and they were just diecast things, they snapped on, and we soon learned how to undo them with a nail or a tin opener thing. Undo them, put them in your pocket and walk around until you see a guard and put them on again. And it started off very serious at the start but it developed into a big farce in the end.

03:00 **Explain again why that came in? Why did that happen?**

Because, well there was actually two incidents. There was the Canadians had a trial raid on Dieppe, that's on the French coast, and they were knocked back. But during the fighting some German prisoners were taken and as far as I can gather their hands were

03:30 tied and they were put on a boat and apparently the boat was sunk and they couldn't swim. They just drowned. Naturally they were very crooked about it. And also in the Channel Islands much the same thing happened. They were not too sure whether it was an actual order from the English people or not, War Command, they weren't too sure, but the Germans reacted very savagely to it.

04:00 It was serious at the start but it developed into a big joke.

When you say it was serious at the start, in what way?

Well they had a whole heap of new guards in to make sure we never interfered with our bonds and all this. If you go down to the toilet you've got to wipe your tail. It was a bit hard, ay.

How did you do that?

Oh there was a bit of yoga and you were pretty right then.

04:30 **And what was the punishment if they ever found you without those on?**

Oh I don't know. They never caught me so I don't know. They would probably put you back in the clink or something.

How did you react? How did the group react when that happened?

They weren't very happy about it but you couldn't do much about it.

05:00 And another thing happened there was in the air force compound we couldn't talk to anybody outside. And one day a new intake came in and in it was a medical orderly from the Berlin hospital that I knew well. He was good to me and I yelled out, "Hey Bluey!" And he said, "G'day Digger!" He called me Digger and that was my name ever since, Digger. And the German

05:30 guard says, "Komm mit," as soon as I talked to him, grabbed me and took me over to the Canadian compound and hands still tied, get your nose and toes against the wall for two hours, just like that. If you relaxed they'd hit a big smack of your bum with the flat of a bayonet. You know. Keep you honest. That's how I got my name Digger and they still call me Digger all the blokes now.

06:00 It is not the usual thing for an air force bloke to be called Digger.

Did you ever cry?

No. No.

Did you see other blokes breaking down?

Not actually crying but I seen them depressed. Yeah.

So what happened after that?

Oh I suppose things went from bad to worse. And the Russians were attacking.

06:30 There was no Red Cross parcels. Food was very, very scarce – worse than before. A lot of things must have happened I suppose, but there wasn't a lot to happen in a prisoner of war camp. But just waiting for whatever happened.

When you say things went from bad to worse, what sort of...?

Oh the food was less and you didn't know what was happening.

07:00 And the Germans were very edgy because they knew the Russians were on the road, I think.

How long did the chains stay on?

Round about nine months. Some say six, some say nine. I would say nine.

So every day you had to put the chains on?

Yes. We saved the problem for the Germans. We put them on ourselves and took them off ourselves.

07:30 Yeah, well apparently the commandant at the time was a navy bloke and he didn't like it at all. The German commandant didn't like it. He called it a Kinder War, a Kinder krieges, child war.

08:00 **And how did you know that?**

Oh we heard blokes talking to the guards. This particular commandant was a navy bloke with one arm. While he was there it was a really good camp. He did everything right but he came walking in one day with a civilian. He said to one of the blokes with the handcuffs on, "Show us how you take these handcuffs off."

08:30 So he got his nail out and he had a good laugh and walked on. But he still tells us his guards have got to watch us, so don't do it. So he was a good bloke.

Did you get sick in that time?

Oh I had the normal. Particularly with the weather and the atmosphere in the huts. I had flu and sinus trouble and all that.

09:00 It was brought on by... There was always smoke and poor fuel being burnt and stuff in the compound. It was all closed up to try to keep the cold out and we got quite a few bouts of flu and sinus trouble, but not too bad. Otherwise I was well.

What would happen if you got sick? Was there a medical thing?

Yeah there was one there, limited I think,

09:30 but the blokes who used the hospital system reckoned it was quite all right. I never had anything to do with it so I wouldn't know really.

Was there anybody who sang or did any entertaining in the group?

Yeah well there was not particularly in the hut but it was just they had certain mobs who used to do acting and so forth and put on shows, but I never went to any of the shows.

10:00 But at that stage we couldn't get out of the compound anyhow to go to a show.

You weren't interested in that?

Not particularly, no.

Why is that?

I don't know. Just more things to think about than that sort of thing.

What about the sports? How was that organised?

Well we used to organise a bit of sport ourselves. We used to play American basketball occasionally. That's after a while we got a few of those things.

10:30 And blokes used to play cricket and a bit of football and there wasn't a lot. Our own particular

compound would just organise basketball or something like that or netball. Just to keep active. You didn't have much food in your belly to be really good at sports but you tried. You know.

11:00 **What about fights within the men? Were there many fights?**

No. Disagreements but I never seen it come to blows. In our particular mob I have never seen it come to blows. Which is a strange thing.

In all that time, amazing.

We must have been very tame.

So how long did that go on then? How long were you there a second time?

Where?

Well after the solitary confinement you were back in the camp.

11:30 **How long were you there then?**

Oh I don't know. That would be the end of '42 when that happened and it was up to '45 before we left and went back to England. It was two and a half or three years.

So when you look back for that two and a half years that you were there, that additional time, what are some of the significant memories that stand out from that time,

12:00 **stories?**

Towards the end of it there was American air force was flying over. They were flying from Italy over and bombing oil plants along the road and they used to bomb a place called Blackhammer. It was about thirty to fifty Ks [kilometres] away from us.

12:30 Then they'd go on land in Russia and pick a load of bombs and go back to Italy and bomb on the way back. We used to be watching for these blokes coming over. They'd be way up and you'd just see a little silver thing in the sky and you'd see an aircraft come down, see parachutes come down, blokes that had been shot down. That went on for a while and all this

13:00 stuff used to drift into the camp, all this silver paper. This was something new to us, we didn't know what it was about. It was stuff to disrupt radar signals and they used to shovel it out by the basketful. I don't think it made much difference. There were so any aircraft there that they knew they were there. You know. They used to shove this out so they didn't know exactly which way you were heading type of thing. That's that. What else was there?

13:30 There used to be a German air force fighter-training unit not far from us. You would see the planes taking off and coming back, and they were using fuel made from coal and the planes weren't too happy with it, and you'd hear one crash and blow up and all us mob would start cheering. It was a terrible thing to do.

14:00 We used to start cheering. The Huns [Germans] hated us for it, hey. It wasn't a very nice thing to do but we weren't very nice people by this time. We were pretty callous.

When you look back now, did you become a really different person at that time?

Not in a lot of ways. I don't think so. No.

How did you... Did you celebrate birthdays in that time?

14:30 No. No. It was just another day.

What about Christmas?

Well we used to make a bit of an effort at Christmas and the Germans were a bit sympathetic towards Christmas and they'd give a tin of meat to us or something like that. It wasn't much, but it was a bit of a gesture. They used to love Christmas, the Germans, ay.

15:00 **And when you said you went to a bit of an effort, what sort of things could you do?**

Oh we arranged singsongs and things like that. Yeah. A bit of a party atmosphere. We made an effort to do it.

What sort of things did you look forward to receiving from home?

Oh mainly cigarettes if you could get them because that was the currency. I suppose I got about two or three parcels

15:30 while I was there and what was in there was some clothes, some tobacco and some shaving gear. It was always good to get.

What about, what news were you hearing from home?

What, in the letters? Nothing much because of censorship both ways.

16:00 You received letters and half of it was cut out and likewise at home, I presume, so there was nothing really relevant in it. Just purely personal stuff. Nothing about how society is going. Nothing at all. See you were completely devoid of news. And that was one of the worst parts.

Coming from the country, what sort of country things

16:30 **did you miss?**

Freedom. Freedom to do my own thing. That is the main one.

Did you develop a real hatred for the Germans?

Oh at certain times some things happened. At that age I did to a certain extent, but a lot of things I've thought about since that...

17:00 Well they had a job to do and looking after a mob of prisoners was a pretty hard thing to do because they are pretty cluey prisoners. They get up early in the morning and think about annoying Germans and escaping and all those kinds of things, ay. I suppose they had to be strict to do it.

What sort of plots did you have to annoy them?

Anything that would embarrass them. I can't think of any offhand

17:30 but there are always these weird characters who can think up things. You know. Make it difficult for them or not difficult but just to annoy them. You know. Mentally, annoy them.

Can you think of an example of...?

No I can't at the moment. Oh yeah. Just a minor one. Every now and again they would,

18:00 an officer would come on to the parade ground where we were all lined up getting counted to give us a pep talk about something, and he would be talking and carrying on and they would always make a big noise about it, a big noise, and the guttural language always sounded so crook in our ears. It would be, they really enjoyed a good tantrum, they would practically go purple in the face working themselves up into a temper and some of the mob would give him a cheer

18:30 and he would get worse, and then in the end after he had finished talking someone would give him a clap. He would go off his head. Hey. That type of thing. Yeah another thing I remember, they used to get us out, every now and again there would be a search. Search for stuff that you shouldn't have and a search for people that they are looking for.

19:00 And they'd get you out, daylight, and they'd get you out of your bunk and march you right out of the camp, out onto a big plain and surrounded by machine gunners. And they'd count you out and you'd stay there all day amongst the ice and snow and they'd count you back again in the afternoon. The idea

19:30 was to get the correct count of the camp and also looking for blokes who had done the wrong thing while they're out on working parties, looking for those blokes. The Gestapo used to be in to look for those guys. That happened three or four times. You were just surrounded by machine gunners. You know. And I always remember one of these searches, there was a German sentry. You all pushed way out of the barracks and

20:00 you were out on this little bit of field out the back, in the same compound, and at each end of the barracks is a German soldier to stop you from going back into the barracks. They were looking for escape equipment and radios and anything they could find. This little bloke was there, they have a strap on the rifle and they sling it over their shoulder and the bayonet sticks up in the air like this, and he was parading round the place and all the blokes were picking up paper and

20:30 putting it in the top of his bayonet and he finished up with about that much on the top of his bayonet. Eventually he put his rifle down and started to wheel it round the place and that stopped us a bit. That type of thing just to annoy them, you know. But we used to pay for it most of the time but it was good fun while it lasted.

What other sorts of things did you do to break the rules? Those tin

21:00 **stoves that you made? Were you allowed to make that stuff?**

No. No. We would make a stove and we used to have them kicked down all the time. They were the only thing we had to cook on so we had to cook on something if we had anything to cook. You know.

What were some other things that they could have found in a raid?

Oh stuff for escape, like

21:30 gear for making false permits and that type of thing and maps and all escape gear, plus weapons and things like that that blokes had made up, and all that kind of thing.

Did you ever plot another escape?

No, no. Particularly after the great escape when

22:00 those fifty blokes were shot. They put a notice up in the barracks that escaping is no longer a fun business, you know. Well we took note of it.

What did you hear of that escape?

Well we heard through the grapevine. We didn't hear about the fifty blokes being shot. We heard a lot of them escaped. That's all we heard. We didn't know until we got back to England.

22:30 **So how did it all come to an end for you in that camp? Just do a lead-up to that end?**

Well the next thing I can remember... Of course there's a lot of times when you are in limbo. Nothing was happening and the next thing we heard what we thought was thunder in the distance and

23:00 at night time you see lights. That was the Russians attacking, artillery firing and getting closer and closer, and you could hear them going off and see the flashes and you knew it was artillery fire. The Germans decided we had to march out and gave us two hours to get ready to go. We were marching west, that's all they told us. So

23:30 when two hours were up we were out of the camp. They gave us a Red Cross parcel each. That was the last of the decent tucker we saw, and we were on our way to march west. The air force were the first to go, about eight hundred men marching along the road and the middle of winter and it was a pretty

24:00 hard thing to do. A lot of blokes went out of camp with everything they owned and they had to throw it away because they couldn't cart it around. They'd pull up every night - it might be in a barn. We slept a couple of nights out in the open, trying to keep warm, a mob of blokes sleeping together. Mostly in barns or something like that.

24:30 They'd just force you in the middle of the night into these barns so we did that for five hundred miles.

How long would you walk in one day? How many hours?

We'd be up at daylight mostly and we'd generally walk to sometimes dark, sometimes before dark. It all depended on where they were going to put us for the night, I think.

25:00 **How long did that march take?**

Oh around about three or four months. Of course the winter did go off towards the end. It was reasonable weather towards the end.

What distinct memories do you have now of that march?

Oh trying to put one foot in front of the other. Trying to keep warm. Food some days, no food,

25:30 and the will to keep going. Yeah. We finished up marching, I don't know how long it took us. We finished up at a place called Gaulitz and there was only a small camp. I think there was about three thousand men in it. No decent toilets, no nothing.

26:00 And nearly everybody had dysentery. A terrible business, hey.

So how did people deal with the dysentery then in a situation like that?

Oh there was no medical stuff, nothing.

And what did you do for sanitation if there were no toilets?

Out in the yard. Terrible.

Just in front of everybody else?

Oh yeah. We were glad to get out of it. Dysentery was bad enough but anything could have happened there. You know.

26:30 We might have been there for about ten days. It was shocking.

How about on the march? Were there any sanitation facilities there?

No. You'd dip your bum in the snow.

No showers?

No. I finished up in the same clothes I started off. Three or four months in the same clothes.

You said earlier that that was one of the places where mateship became really important.

Oh yeah.

27:00 **In what way did you mean that?**

Oh you could help one another on the road and scrounge food if we could find it somewhere. Helped one another that way.

Was there a point where your mates really faltered or you did?

Yeah. There was one. My mate went really crook with dysentery.

On the march?

No. Later on on the march. Yeah. They took us away from Gaulits and we kept

27:30 marching and the marches seemed to split up around that area, they went different ways. I finished up at a little place called Duderstadt over near the Rhine River and we were quartered in a brickworks about four storeys high and there were small planks with big gaps in them for drying the bricks.

28:00 And we were caught in this place at different levels and nearly everybody had dysentery, couldn't control themselves, weren't allowed out at night so you'd be showered with faeces and urine in the middle of the night. Yeah. And the food issue was another thing. You got a cup of soup a day and

28:30 a tiny bit of bread - that's for the day. There would be three containers of soup with a machine gunner behind each container of soup. There would be a bloke up front ladling it out and they'd all be pushing and shoving behind you, about a thousand men waiting for this soup. They would be pushing and shoving. We were pretty good because we had a bit of discipline but the Yanks didn't have any discipline at all.

29:00 And you'd just be getting up to the containers and an air-raid siren would go so she was all off. So two o'clock in the morning, air-raid siren would go off, go and dish up the soup, but by the time you got there the other blokes would be back on a second helping - you get up there, there's no soup. That's all you had to eat for the day so it was pretty important.

Did the Aussies tend to stick together?

Oh yeah. Pretty good. Yeah.

29:30 There were times when a hungry stomach knows no conscience. It got a bit that way towards the end, where there is food around anyhow. But not too bad really. Really good.

How did civilians treat you on that march?

A lot of blokes were stoned. Some went through Frankfurt and they were stoned there.

30:00 But we mostly took back roads and small villages and they were different people. One I can remember is going past a little farming hamlet. There's two old girls out the front with the containers of hot water and they were dishing out this water. As soon as I got up there the guard kicked the water over and the old girls were

30:30 chasing him around with their ladles, belting him. Whether they were not in tune with the Nazis or what I don't know or just plain humanitarians. They were great people to do it. Yeah. Unreal.

So when you were in that camp where everybody got dysentery, how long were you in that?

31:00 That would be about two weeks, I suppose. At least two weeks. Two to three weeks.

It just seemed to be getting worse and worse. What did you do to...?

Yeah. There were blokes dying every day from dysentery. None of our blokes died but a lot of blokes did.

What do you think got you through that,

31:30 **because that just seemed to deteriorate so fast?**

It did deteriorate but you've got a will to live. It's amazing how you want to live, doesn't matter how miserable you are, you've got to live and it was miserable all right but we had to live.

Did people try and kill themselves?

I never saw it. There was in the main camp a bloke climbing the wire so that he would get shot but they didn't shoot him, they just pulled him down. He was a bit off his head. That type of thing.

Did

32:00 **anybody die on the march?**

Yeah. Only one of our blokes. He died from exposure and malnutrition. Other blokes were killed from strafing by our own planes. One of our blokes was killed there. A lot of other blokes from the army and navy were killed along the road by our own planes.

32:30 And particularly blokes who were in trains. Some of them fell out of the march and they were put into

trains. Well they were shooting at all the trains so a lot of them suffered there. It was very chaotic.

It is tragic. So what happened after that? How long were you in that camp for?

Oh about two or three weeks I suppose. Another thing worthwhile to mention was all the evacuees. The Russians were right on our heels, you know.

33:00 We marched along the road with all these civilians. Civilians pushing prams and pushing wheelbarrows, horsedrawn stuff and the German army coming in the opposite direction knocking all these things off the road, killing horses, just pushing them off the road. And civilians all mixed up. We was

33:30 mixed up with all these civilians. Pitiful, ay, to see these civilians. Old blokes and women and kids. That was an experience.

Absolutely. So what happened after the camp?

Oh well, the next thing is America is attacking the other side and

34:00 they decided to march us all off again. But there was about a dozen blokes who couldn't possibly go marching. One of my mates was John Webb, so I stayed with him. That's the instance I'm talking about, helping your mates. He had this dysentery really bad and what little bread he could hold I used to make a little fire in a jam tin and

34:30 really burn it to try and stop this. You needed the bread for something to eat but you needed this to stop the dysentery, charcoaled, and I used to do that for him. But I decided to stay on with this mob and the rest were taken away.

How did you manage to do that, stay with them?

Oh well I reckon I was crook too.

35:00 I wasn't anything like the other blokes. I was a lot better than most of those blokes there.

So what happened to the twelve of you then?

Oh well for a start all the Germans disappeared and we thought, "We must be right. The Yanks must be getting close." And then the next thing a German officer came along with a whole heap of guards and tried to get us moving and

35:30 nobody would move. They thought they were going to march them off somewhere. Nobody understood the language of course. I think they only wanted to shift us to better quarters so it looked better when the Yanks took us over. And I happened to be the only bloke moving around so his anger was funnelled through me to get the people moving. You know. We eventually got moving and they took us to a little barbed wire enclosure with decent huts in it and nice and clean.

36:00 A big change. Toilets. The whole lot.

Were there other people that, when you stayed with that twelve were there other people that you had to say goodbye to?

Oh there were blokes we knew that went on the march. Oh yes, a couple of blokes. See by that time we were fragmented. There was the army and the air force all mixed up together and

36:30 it was all higgledy-piggledy, just mixed up. There was only a couple of air force there in that particular group because we were split up all the way along the line.

Did you think your mate would die?

Well he looked very close to it. Yeah. It was a shocking thing. See dysentery when you've got nothing to eat and all your reserves are gone, you've got no strength in you.

37:00 And you know, it's a killer.

So how long were you in the huts for?

Oh not very long. Only about three or four days. The next thing we got bullets flying from both sides through our huts. Germans on one side and Yanks on the other side. We lay down on the floor and hoped not to get shot in the last bit, yeah, so

37:30 that wasn't a very nice experience - after going through three years and thinking you mightn't make it right at the last. Yes and a couple of Yanks turned up in a jeep and it was all over! Great!

What do you remember thinking when the Yanks turned up?

Oh relieved to say that we were going to be liberated, you know.

38:00 And straight away they brought up tucker for us and we let our heads go and ate everything we could catch hold of - made ourselves awfully sick.

What were the Americans like to you?

Good. Real good. Yes. We went up town. All we could think of was food, ay. We went around looking for food

38:30 and we went into a pub and we wanted to get a celebratory drink at least. A drink wouldn't have done us much good, I don't think, but we were going to have one anyhow. So there was a big Yank sergeant there and the publican brought out three little glasses - there was three of us - and the sergeant pushed him off and went behind and grabbed a whole big heap of bottles and handed it to us.

39:00 So we had a few beers. I don't know what it was. It was all schnapps and all that kind of stuff and it really got to us and we spent the night squatting down looking at the moon. But the Yanks were passing through in force - white sheets out all the windows, white flags, white sheets.

39:30 **How long did it take your mate to get well?**

Oh not so long. By the time we got back to England he was pretty right. He was coming good there. We were taken back to an American field hospital and there we were deloused with DDT [Dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane] and they'd blow this dust on you and give us a few odds and sods of clean clothing and put us to bed.

40:00 There were female nurses a day behind the front line there. It was great. Comfortable bed and clean sheets; it was lovely. We had only been there for three days, this hospital, and there was a pile of boots the size of a small house of people who had been wounded and so on.

40:30 The German army blokes, our blokes, civilians, they were all being treated there. This unit.

Tape 9

00:32 **So what happened from there?**

Well the Yanks took over. Well after a couple of days there they put us into trucks and took us to an airfield some distance back, and all the DC3s... They didn't call them Dakotas then, I think. I'm not too sure but the equivalent of our DC3. And they were flying in and out all the time.

01:00 So a bit of a wait there and we got into one of these DC3s and went straight back to England. In a very short time we were back to normality. It was a most amazing experience to get back and you didn't know what was going on, what people were talking about. You didn't know a thing what they were talking about and you felt right out of it, ay. That was an amazing thing.

That was back in England?

Back in England. Yeah.

01:30 **What sort of things were they talking about that you didn't understand?**

Oh the war effort and the general social things. What people are doing nowadays? Do they still go to pubs or what do they do? We just didn't know what happened during all these years. We heard a few little things but we didn't know how true they were.

How would you describe your physical condition at the end of that march?

02:00 I was eight stone nine. How many kilos is that? I will work it out shortly.

That's all right. And how much did you normally weigh?

Eleven stone five. Let me see. Eight stone nine, that is a hundred and twenty pounds, divide that by two point two, that's about fifty-odd kilos. And there were some

02:30 that were only five stone. They had beri beri, some of those blokes, through bad diet.

During that march when people were suffering from that kind of disease and malnutrition, you said earlier it was a question of putting your foot forward, just keep walking. People must have been collapsing along the way?

Oh they were. And

03:00 most of us thought if we'd collapse we'd be shot or something like that. But they picked a lot of the blokes up and put them into trains and sent them on to other camps. They weren't very pleasant trips. They were crammed into these wagons that were generally held for cattle, you know, horses, cattle. They were crammed into those things and they might be in there for three or four or five days.

03:30 Nothing to eat. All that type of thing.

So you didn't in fact witness people being shot because they collapsed?

Oh no. There were some shot along the road. I don't know what for. They were trying to escape or something.

Did you witness any of that?

No.

When people collapsed and just couldn't keep going, what would happen?

Oh they were just moved to the side of the road. None of us knew what would happen.

04:00 When blokes did that you just had to leave them, you couldn't do anything, you just had to keep marching because if you fell out too you were in big trouble, you know. Apparently they picked them up in a horsedrawn wagon and brought them to a railway station and put them on a train.

That was one of the worst winters at that time that you were marching though?

Yes.

Can you describe the physical climatic conditions that you were walking in?

04:30 I can remember times when quite apart from the cold you had the wind factor too, like a blizzard type of thing. And you couldn't see the next bloke in front of you, it's blowing so hard. You know. Just to keep walking in that. It was hell. See none of this stuff comes out into the Australian public. None of it ever did.

05:00 It has never been really known what people are ignorant about, completely. It is definitely low-key stuff. Most Australians were interested in what happened in Australia and not what happened over there.

And did you have your close mates, the mates that you had with you in the camp? Did you have them with you on the march?

Yeah.

How did you support one another?

The only way you could do it was

05:30 with company for a start. Someone who you clicked with and you'd have a bit of talk along the road and work out what you were going to do, and sometimes they'll give you an option and some mob is going this way and some mob going the other and who knows which is the best option to take, so you talk it over and so on. We will drag our heels a bit here or get ahead a bit there, you know. All that type of thing. And general support; mental support.

06:00 **So when you finished that and you were taken over to England, it must have been a bit of a culture shock really?**

Yes, it was. It was one of the main things I can remember. I can remember I had some friends in London - No, they weren't in London, they were out further beyond the [River] Thames -

06:30 from the home town. She used to play tennis with us and the husband was working in the war office, and I stayed at their place for a while. And I went down to the Thames and I hired a rowing boat to go up and down the Thames. Just a bit of therapy for myself. Just getting by myself and have a think. It was a strange feeling to come back into civilisation I can tell you. People

07:00 talk about things and what are they talking about? You know. It didn't take long.

What about food? When you started eating other food, what effect did that have on you?

Oh we took it a bit easy for a start. We were made to take it easy in the hospital we were in for a start. Then we were taken down to Brighton on the south coast and we were in two big hotels, one for the officers and one for the

07:30 NCOs, and the best of the food in England was put before us. And the WAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] used to sit by our shoulders with the vitamin pills to give us vitamin pills. Made sure we ate the vitamin pills.

It must have been something to have the WAAFs waiting on you?

Great, yeah.

So in some ways it just sounds like it

08:00 **would have been unreal. How long did it take you to adjust mentally?**

Oh, it didn't take all that long. By the time you got there and got moving around the public a bit you became almost human after a while. You know.

You said you were in hospital. How long were you in hospital?

Only about four or five days. They were just checking up on your physical condition. Some blokes went to other hospitals.

08:30 It was just a medical reception area.

And what sort of debriefing or interviews did you experience?

Oh well they took us right through it. They took us right through to give our story of our treatment and so forth. I still have records here of what I said. I don't know exactly what I said now.

How long did that go on for?

Oh we were only about a month or

09:00 two months in England before we were sent back to Australia.

How eager were you to get back to Australia?

Oh really eager.

What did your family know about? When did they find out what happened to you?

What, originally when I was taken prisoner? It took about a month I think before the Red Cross got through to my people to let them know that I was a prisoner.

09:30 **And then when you were finally released, when was the first contact that you had with them to let them know that you were coming home?**

I think the Red Cross informed them again that I had arrived in England I think. I couldn't be certain of that.

So how did you travel to Australia?

On a ship. The Stirling Castle was quite a big ship, left from Liverpool

10:00 and come back through the Panama Canal and then across the Pacific.

And what was that trip like?

Good. Good. Troop conditions of course. Pretty well down the bottom of the ship and we had to sleep in hammocks and all that kind of thing all crowded together.

Not like that first trip out?

No, no. Things went downhill quick, I can tell you.

So how was it

10:30 **to arrive back in Australia?**

Excellent. First of all we pulled into New Zealand, in Wellington, and we had a night out with the Kiwis there. And we arrived back in Sydney at about ten o'clock into the morning and they kept us aboard until four o'clock in the afternoon so the Duke of Gloucester could welcome us back home.

11:00 And we were getting pretty ferocious by this time. There was a couple of high ranking army blokes down below and they were getting bombed with pennies all day, and as soon as the Duke of Gloucester came he got a big shower of pennies and catcalls from up top. We were waiting all day for him to come and welcome us home.

How many blokes would have been on board, do you reckon?

Oh I don't know. Big mobs, ay.

11:30 Air force, navy, army. Heaps of blokes.

And all of you waiting to get off?

Get off, yeah.

So he didn't get much of a reception?

No, a very poor reception.

What was his reaction?

He got on the loudspeaker system and said his piece and off again, away he went.

And then finally you were allowed off?

Yeah.

What happened from there for you?

12:00 We had a big celebration that night in an army camp I think it was. They took us there for the night and we had a big night of celebration and the next day we were put on the train for our home. That particular time my people were living at Redcliffe. They got too sick to run the farm so they finished up buying a place down at Redcliffe and

12:30 from there I went to a debriefing unit down at Sandgate. And that was a very emotional time for my people. My mother come down there and just realised how lucky she was to have two sons who survived the war.

Can you describe that reunion with your parents?

Yeah. They were all lined up there to see our parents over there and we were still armed with our

13:00 air force drill and stuff, and in a short time I had put on from eight stone nine I was thirteen stone when I came back. I had a well-fed appearance. Much too well fed, really. I think they got a surprise to see me so fat. But it was very emotional for my mother, very emotional

13:30 for all of us.

So how did life progress for you? Well first of all can you tell me about VP [Victory in the Pacific] Day? That was a big day for you.

Yes. At that time I was up at Ayr and there were big celebrations going on of course and we started off at a café, I think that was where I first met Beryl. Yeah. At the café. There was a free-for-all

14:00 going round on the streets and everything. The next thing I am out on a parade going down the main street. That was the end of me.

Why was it the end of you?

Well that's as far as I've progressed since then. I'm still married to her.

What was it about her that attracted you?

Oh I don't know. How could anybody explain that? It just happens. It is one of those things that happens.

14:30 **So it was love at first sight, was it?**

Something like that, yeah.

You said it was a free-for-all in the streets, what do you mean?

Everybody is going crazy. You know. Throwing their hats up in the air and all that stuff.

That must have been a very exciting time for you?

Yeah it was.

And so you met and did you immediately start going out or what happened?

Yeah.

What happened with your relationship?

It just went along in the normal way and

15:00 I suppose it was, I don't know how long before we were married, some time. It just developed slowly like with all the rest of them.

How hard was it for you to adapt to living a civilian life and being back in Australia?

Yeah it was hard. For a start I just gadded about a bit. I went down to see the pilot's mother down in Sydney. I saw her and

15:30 back and forth from there and took a while to settle down. Once you're married you settle down.

Why do you think it was so hard?

I don't know. You are so used to service life. You are used to service life and being told what to do and when to do it. When you got out you had to do it yourself, think for yourself. Just took a while to get back into it. That's all.

16:00 **So hard to be able to make decisions?**

Yes, yes. I suppose it would be. Yeah. You actually didn't want to get moving for some reason. You were still in a service mode. Five years in a service mode must take effect.

So how long do you think it took for you to adjust?

Oh a couple of months I would say.

And then you got married and

16:30 **where did you go from there?**

Yeah. Oh we had our honeymoon over in South Molle Island, locally over here. We were living in Ayr at that time.

What sort of wedding did you have?

Oh a big one in Ayr. Yeah. I can always remember there was a flood in the Burdekin River and in those days there was only a low-lying bridge and Beryl was

17:00 getting her wedding dress or going away dress, I forget which now, on the other side of the river. I had to walk that railway bridge to go and get the wedding dress. A big panic was on.

But it all worked out all right?

Yeah. It worked out.

And you had your honeymoon on South Molle Island?

Yeah. Another thing that happened was we booked a train to go down to Proserpine,

17:30 that's where you go to South Molle, and when I got in the train I just had a normal tourist-class booking and they put me in the first-class compartment, Beryl and I. I didn't know what was going on. It turned out that it was reserved for a Reverend Butterworth. We had the first class. I don't know what happened to him, whether he didn't get on the train or he got the tourist class, I don't know.

So you didn't mind?

18:00 No.

So where did you end up living after getting married?

Living in Ayr. I went back to my job as a chemist in the sugar mill up in Ayr, and I worked at that as a chemist for some time and then I started work on scientific

18:30 instruments in the mill, control instruments and so forth. I had about five years at that and then I went back to chemistry as an assistant chief chemist. And when I did that I had to go and live out on the job. It was a staff job and I had to go and live out on the site. In the meantime I had built the house myself in town and had another house almost

19:00 done. A lot of hard work. And we had to leave it and go out to the sugar mill to live there.

And you started having children, I guess?

Yes, they happened.

You had a few of those?

Yeah. We had three eventually. There were two boys and a girl. I was building the first house as they were growing up. And

19:30 Beryl's father was a tradesman and a builder and Beryl made the kids an apron like their grandfather used and they had a hammer in the belt and the hammer handle was dragging along the ground, and they used to play around with all kinds of things. I would be up in the scaffold laying bricks and the next thing you'd look round and one of them would be climbing up the scaffold.

20:00 **How did you enjoy being a father?**

Oh great. We had a lot of fun with our family. We made a habit of going camping with them all the time and living our life with them, you know. It's shown great dividends over the years. We are still a very close family.

And you have several grandchildren, great grandchildren?

Oh yeah. We've got five

20:30 great grandchildren. Yeah.

That's quite an accomplishment?

I don't know.

Well from our point of view it is! We think you've done well. And how many years married now?

What's the date now?

We are in 2004.

Well in 1946 we were married. That's fifty-eight years. Not bad.

21:00 **Not bad at all. So when did you have your first reunion with any of your mates?**

About ten years after we got back to Australia. We had it in Sydney. And since then we have been all around the place - Perth, Hobart. We even had one at our own home, Airley Beach. We had a home practically in the town there, on top of the hill overlooking

21:30 the town so we had one there which was a great success.

And what happens at those reunions?

Oh a lot of laughs. No sad business about it. Just a lot of laughs.

Are these reunions with the POWs or with your squadron or what?

No just POWs this lot. Yeah.

So they are the POW reunions?

That's right.

That first one,

22:00 **the ten years after, had you had any contact with any of those blokes?**

Yes, I think Beryl and I went on long service leave - I think I've got my timing right - and we did a bit of a tour around and pulled into a few blokes' places.

What was it like though to get together with so many of them that first time?

You see a bloke walking in the door and, "Who the hell's that?" you know.

22:30 You just lose all track of them. And after you met them you thought, "Why the hell would I ever forget you?" It was real strange.

What did those reunions mean for you?

It was a great sense of comradeship. It was nothing to do with the incarceration over there, it was just the funny things that go on, anything that happened. They're very interesting

23:00 to listen to because some funny things come up.

You say you laugh together. What do you laugh about?

Different things that used to happen in the camp and how we'd try and embarrass the Huns and all this caper, you know. Some peculiar things happened.

Can you think of the most peculiar thing that happened?

The most

23:30 peculiar things are unmentionable.

They are not unmentionable for us. We would love to hear those stories.

Yeah. I don't know whether it should be on documentary, you know.

We've heard so many stories.

This one you probably won't believe. What do you do in a camp? What do you do for amusement? Nothing. And all kinds of things we tried and

24:00 we had a diet of potatoes and something like that and a lot of gas in your stomach and they used to have a fart lighting competition of a night-time. They used to burn too. I know it sounds vile but a lot of laughs, ay. A big blue flame.

Absolutely!

24:30 **So is it only the funny things that you generally remember?**

Yes. Yes. Sometimes we catch up on a bit of history. Each one had a different history in a lot of places. Even when they first go into the camp, when they were shot down, they had different experiences, and also on this march they had different experiences. Some had different tracks and so on and different sentries.

25:00 All different. You catch up on all that kind of stuff.

And you continue to meet today?

Oh last year they reckon they wouldn't come again because the people are getting a bit old, but we had a bit of a reunion this year. We went down to the opening of the POW memorial down at Ballarat.

25:30 I think there was about eight of us there and there was a good little reunion. We all stayed at the same motel and told lies and things and had a few beers.

Are the memories you have of the war the strongest memories that you have of your life?

I'd say they would be, yeah. Although the first part of my life was the freedom of it, there was that part and the other part was the lack of freedom.

26:00 That's about it, sums it up.

It was for you an incredible contrast because you had grown up with that amazing freedom.

Yeah. That irked a bit not to have the freedom. That's the thing really bugged me.

Do you think that there was anything about your growing up experience that helped you get through those years?

I think so. Because I did a lot of things on my own

26:30 and at that particular time we used to make our own fun, in the bush and so on. I think it helped me.

Did you have any special methods to keep yourself uplifted, if you like?

No. Not that I know of. No. Just I suppose it is only natural to get in the dumps at times. But generally speaking you kept yourself pretty well above that level.

27:00 You know. You try to anyhow. You just made up your mind that you are going to survive and that's it.

So how would you describe your character as a young man at that time?

Now you are asking hard questions, aren't you? Well I was a very shy type of bloke. Very shy. Possibly being a loner that's why I was shy. I got in with the gang

27:30 of course in town. It wasn't a very big town. I couldn't get into a lot of trouble. I got into enough I suppose. Character wise it is a bit hard to say.

So what aspects of your character do you think helped you during the war years?

Self reliance. That was one thing, self reliance. Do your own thing.

28:00 That's possibly the greatest one. And not too overly sensitive. That's the main thing. Not overly sensitive. You can take a fair bit of stuff if you are not sensitive.

When you look back on those years now, what is the overriding feeling that you have about your war years?

The absolute futility of it. It was absolutely futile.

28:30 That's one of the things that has come out of it. Like being on top of that mountain and seeing that grave and people coming up on your anniversary. It made you think how stupid all this business is. That's the main thing.

But at the time

29:00 **did you feel it was a just war?**

Yes we did. You've only got to look at history to see that it was a just war. Now a lot of people in Australia here who are very sour about us being over there, but if Hitler, if Germany wasn't

29:30 stopped the Japs [Japanese] would have had a lot more at their disposal to get rid of us here. It's all tied up together. But apparently it was very much against us over there.

So what effect does that have on you when you hear criticism of...?

Oh very bad. I still feel badly about it.

30:00 A lot of us do, hey. The thing that annoys you is the attitude of a lot of people of us being over there and... How can I put it? No sense of appreciation of what we did there. That hurts. You know.

30:30 It was all kept low key because they bombed cities and things like that. We were just doing our job and we had no say in where we went. We would stay home in Australia or go over there. We were just sent. And to hear all this stuff back here, it does put you off a bit.

What sort of reception did you get from the public when you returned from the war?

Oh good. Good. Yeah.

31:00 Fair enough. Ever since then there are little jibes have come in. Even in our squadron blokes got white feathers and have been called Jap dodgers. An envelope with a white feather and a Jap dodger in it. This caper. You know. So the feeling is pretty bad about that.

When did that happen? After the war?

31:30 No, round about 1942 it started.

People sent them?

Yeah.

Because they thought you should have been in the Pacific instead of in Europe?

Yeah. And sometimes those feathers were sent after the blokes had been killed over there. So it is a bad feeling amongst us.

Did you ever receive anything?

No.

Who used to send those feathers?

Oh God knows. Some deadbeats.

32:00 It wouldn't be the normal public. It would be just a few, that's all.

What about the squadron itself aside from the POWs? Do you have reunions with the...?

No.

What about the Goldfish Club? I've heard something about that. Can you tell us about that? What is that?

Well just like the Caterpillar Club -- that's when you jump with the parachute. It just symbolises the silk of the 'chute. The makers of Mae Wests

32:30 and rubber dinghies, they did the same thing. They gave this goldfish badge type of thing because you saved yourselves with their products. And there is still a Goldfish Club in Brisbane.

What does it do?

Nothing much.

Do you meet?

Well they do down in Brisbane but I've never been to one.

You've never been to one?

33:00 No. They've written a book I've got here about these various blokes and their experiences of coming down in the water, all different experiences. I've got that book here.

Have you written about your experiences?

A small book I've got there, and also in that blue book.

Who did you write about your experiences for?

For family, mainly, and friends. And it's gone everywhere.

And how did it feel for you to write

33:30 **about your experiences?**

Good. I thought I would never be able to write it because I thought my memory would not be good enough. And my daughter was the one who eventually got me moving. She was at me and at me all the time to write something and she brought me down a pad and pencil one day and said, "Get going," and I did. And it was amazing! Once I got going I enjoyed doing it and I think the family has got something out of it too.

34:00 **When your children were growing up did you talk to them about your war experiences?**

Not a lot. No. When they got older I did a little bit, but not a lot.

What sort of things have you told them about your war experiences?

It is all in the book.

So you have told them in detail then, in some detail?

Yes. Practically what I have told you.

Is there anything that you haven't told them and you haven't yet told us that you would like to tell us for future generations? Something that you think

34:30 **is important that people should know about your war experience?**

Oh just how stupid the whole show is. That's all I could understand, how stupid it all is. But, at the same time, if you got a similar circumstance I would do it the same again. But people going overseas

35:00 to these places like Iraq and things - a thankless task. You are not defending your own people or supposedly you are if you are the bureaucrats and things over there. You are not defending your own country and you get in all kinds of situations where it's just a thankless, sometimes useless task. And I feel for those blokes who

35:30 are over there. But it amazes me how there are no casualties yet. It has got me amazed. I don't understand it.

In fact your grandson is one of the people?

Yeah, that's right.

What did you think of him being over there?

Oh I was a bit reluctant for him to go over there because I knew what it was to be in a foreign country. And particularly the Iraqi people, they are not the same as us.

36:00 They are not the same as Christian people. Their way of life is entirely different, entirely different. I wasn't too pleased about it but he made the plunge and he went in. It was a distinction.

You spoke to us at the beginning of the day about your excitement about heading off to war and you were pretty eager to get there, how did your expectations and the reality compare?

36:30 Well you expected excitement and you got plenty of that. You never expect a lot of fear but you got that. Yeah, I suppose we were disillusioned in the end and certainly after the POW experience I was disillusioned with war, with the way I was expected of it.

I mean that whole thing about young men heading off to war eager for adventure

37:00 **and so forth. How does the reality change your attitude to war, if at all?**

Just the futility of it that's all. Nothing gained. Plenty lost. But as I say, I would do it again if it was necessary.

What did you lose?

What did I lose out of it? Well for

37:30 a start you lose your civilian life where you could have been more up the ladder. You had to start from the door when you got back. Other blokes had climbed up the ladder while you were away. That's work wise, salary wise and so on. I don't think I lost a lot. I learned a lot. I learned a lot about human nature, and that part of it I don't regret because

38:00 it really brought home to you how people can be so evil towards one another. It shouldn't be, but it broadens your outlook for sure.

Did you learn anything about human nature that was positive?

Yes. In a lot of places. Yes.

In what sense?

Oh mateship and blokes doing things for one another.

38:30 And of course there were negative parts too. I can't think of them all the time. I don't know what they were.

Is Anzac Day important for you?

Yes, it is.

In what way is it important to you?

Mainly to remember my mates who didn't come back, mainly. It is important.

And what do you do on Anzac Day?

Oh I got driven in style last time. I reckon I was. Beryl and I went in a

39:00 a vintage car. We were first of the rank. We did well. We did fine. I used to march before that. They must think I'm starting to look a bit rickety or something.

Do you ever dream about the war?

No, never. Never have.

So do you have any final comments that you would like to make. I think you made a summing up comment before, but anything at all that you would like to say before we finish?

39:30 No. I can't think of anything at the moment offhand. There's a lot of things that I've missed but still, you do your best and that's all you can think of, hey. When I first heard of this I thought I'd have a bit of a study up, but I gave it away. It is better off being straight off the hip, isn't it?

Absolutely. It has been a great privilege to speak with you today. Thank you very much.

Thank you for

40:00 all your patience.

INTERVIEW ENDS