Australians at War Film Archive

John Ulm (Panda) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:42 **Can you give us a summary of your career and life?**

01:00 Well I was born in Sydney at the women's hospital in Paddington, I'm told, at the height of a storm. I lived with my mother and her mother and her sister over in Dennison Street, Waverley, a little house that is still there. There was a break up in the family when I was quite young. And I moved to Chatswood with my brand new stepfather

01:30 and my mother. I didn't know much about my father at that stage. And then of to school and later on Sydney Grammar School which was my formative years, when you think of the people who really form your life, your interests. Then as a cadet on the old Sydney Sun. Cadet journalist, then cometh the war and into the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] and I was away

02:00 overseas in service for about 4 years, most of that is training but finishing up with 6 or 7 months in operations in Italy. And after the war came back and went back to the old Sun was almost immediately sent off to cover the occupation in Japan for 7 months. Came back as aviation correspondent of the Sun and then back to Korea to cover the Korean War for a while, then after that I was

02:30 joined Qantas [commercial airline] in the very best way, the rising chief executive, Cedric Turner, invited me to come and join his management team, saying we are weak on the writing side, we no journalist could have a better brief than that. So I was press chief for Qantas then for about 20 something years. And the last, my last 3 years at Qantas, my retiring years, I was manager in Wellington, New Zealand. And after that went back to The [Australian] Financial Review

03:00 for a while to develop the information service, and then went into a glorious retirement. In the course of that time we managed to produce, Valerie is also a journalist, 5 kids, 3 boys and a girl. Its not the going away in the airline business, it's the coming home that gives you a good family. So here we are after that.

A little bit more detail on your wartime service? Where did you train?

03:30 Well I enlisted in Sydney, the recruiting office was down in Woolloomooloo, when I said I wanted to be a pilot. They asked me did you ever ride a horse, that's going back to the [Australian] Flying Corps in the First World War they looked for the dashing young men, people who had ridden horses. I'd never ridden a horse, I had hardly even seen one. And then off to initial training school at Bradfield Park, where the film school now is.

04:00 Up to Narromine to learn to fly actually to learn to fly the Tiger Moths. Then across in the [SS] Ile de France, the great French liner across the Pacific, then to Canada, then quite a few months there training and doing an navigation course up in Prince Edward Island. Across the Atlantic in the [HMS] Queen Elizabeth and months of training in the United Kingdom. Then posted out

04:30 via fast convoy over to Algiers and out to Italy. Naples was the base, and from then I joined the squadron in northern Italy just south of Lapio. I was smashing up a train or trying to and they took a dim view of that, and knocked me with flak and I had my 10 weeks of the war, and the last 10 weeks of war in Germany. Back to England to you know, recuperate and eventually home on the SS Stratheden towards the end of '45.

05:00 And there you go.

It was 145 Squadron?

145 RAF [Royal Air Force]. Which was a good, it was very enjoyable, yeah it was enjoyable, it had you had a range of guys, you know. One of the flight commanders Harry Brown Gaylord was an Aussie. And he used to grab, 5 Squadron is on the wing, and he would grab

05:30 as many Aussie replacements as he could. So we had half a dozen Aussies on an RAF squadron with

New Zealanders and a Canadian or two, assorted Brits.

Can you tell us about your early memories of Waverley?

Well the little old house is still there in Dennison Street, Waverley, little tiny, tiny house. I don't have many memories of it. If I have one clear memory

06:00 we had trams then, and before I could read, I knew the signs on the rolling signs on the front, they changed the colour codes. And we got the Bondi tram you know, shoot through on the Bondi tram, and it was a red dot on a white background. So my mother would I would be waiting at a tram stop somewhere and when the Bondi tram came along I knew what the Bondi tram

06:30 looked like.

Can you describe those trams?

Yes, well of course I used them a lot as a I started to grow up you know nobody had cars. They went through a period of development, but the trams that I mainly remember ones where they had a running board down the side. They had two open areas at the end and

07:00 there were doors in the middle and you got rather adept, particularly when you are young, at jumping on and jumping off which is a bad thing to do, people lost their legs from time to time. Particularly gentlemen got up and gave seats to ladies automatically and ladies tended to travel inside, whereas the gentlemen got out in the open. Bench seats running

07:30 across.

How old were you when you left there?

I was late, six and a half.

What are your memories of your mother and father together?

I have none. No the divorce was quite early. They were married I think in 1919 and I was born in June '21, and I have no recollection of him

08:00 until after the Pacific flight, when he came up to where I was living in Lewisville house in Chatswood which is now disappeared under the grace of a car park. Where by arrangement he would come up and he bought me a Hornby train and a great Western Railway goods train. Which cost about 5 pound, which in those days was about

08:30 2 weeks basic wage, something of that order. So I don't recall them together at all, except on the odd occasion like that. I got to know more about him of course.

Tell us more about your mother?

Yes we were, my mother and I were not only you know mother and son, we became great friends, great, great, friends.

09:00 She was an extraordinarily energetic woman. A wonderfully kind woman, she was a counter hop in what used to Farmers in the fancy linen department of Farmers in Market Street, fancy linens was imported lace work and that sort of thing. Run by a dear old Frenchman called Louis Zepler who was absolutely bald, real billiard bald.

09:30 In those days of course people they worked, what, 5 and a half days, worked Saturday morning. So Mother would work there then come home and do what ever you did when you came home. We'd go away for the weekend on a tram, down to Circular Quay, onto the old ferries, the Sydney ferries. Manly ferries, then across to Manly

10:00 then on another tram because she and her gang, her friends, they had what they called the Ranch. Well the Ranch was a one-bedroom shack up on a hill overlooking almost, Freshwater Beach, and of course we knew it as Freshie then. Were we all learnt to swim, its Harbord now, although there is an argument whether it should be Freshwater or Harbord. I think it should be Freshwater.

10:30 And so that's where we spent weekends, that was quite an operation. Everybody, all the gang was there. There was one main room, one sort of almost a sleep out bedroom, and at the end of that was a kitchen. one of my contemporaries, one Jackie Smith, we would be put to bed. I was only 5 or 6, 7 and the deal to get us to go to bed, was we'll put the

11:00 Mintie tin under the bed. So they put the Mintie tin under the bed and boys would go to bed. But one of my mother's friends was an English woman. Lucy Ulna who had come out and she came from Nottingham, and even to her dying day, she used, Nottingham, Nots accent, she came from Nottingham, you know. And

11:30 so Lucy arrives from a genteel background in England. Iris, my mother Iris, said, "You must come down to the ranch." So down to the ranch, a hell of a hot summer, and they left all the doors open. There was so many of them there they slept on the floor, alongside each other. Lucy was lying on her back and about 4 o'clock in the morning, she heard this movement. She looked

12:00 up and she was looking at a horse, a horse had walked in and it got its head and neck through the door and was looking at her, and I have never forgotten that, the juxtaposition of this woman from you know Nottingham which is a fair way from Freshwater in Australia with the horse. She and I remained friends too, long after my mother died. My mother was a wonderful woman and she and I

12:30 had this incredible sense of humour where you know, people, things, the group if you like, somehow it revolved around our house. She was the centre of it. We'll meet at Iris's place, George and Iris, which was my stepfather, he was a good guy. But they gathered together and there would be talk and yakking yak going on. My mother would look at me and I would catch, without even a word

13:00 something had been said and we got it together and we would go into hysterics of laughter and nobody knew what we were laughing about. We had that sort of wonderful relationship, you know.

What sort of things would she and her friends get up to?

Maybe I shouldn't answer that. I don't know, what they got up to. But we all went down to the beach, everyone walked of course. It was up on the cliff, it's all built over now with high rises

13:30 but you had to get up there first of all. So they just walked, we went down to the beach for the weekend. You walked down to the beach and time, you took time today, 30 seconds in the car. Mind you today you can't get near it in a car. And we all got horribly, horribly sunburnt and sandy but you learnt to surf, got used to the

14:00 water. They yarned and then had a meal, and yakked on and on and on. No doubt they drank and then they put the Mintie tin under the boys beds and we went to bed and what happened inside apart from horses coming in at 4 o'clock in the morning I don't really know. But it was a pretty straightforward and easy, very relaxed time. It worked very well.

You obviously had a loving relationship with your parents. What about discipline in your family?

14:30 Well in terms of an applied discipline in the word discipline, there wasn't any. But my mother had a phrase about, well almost anything. Like, oh quite small and innocent things, like, say coming into the house and not taking your hat off, it's not done.

15:00 and there was never any debate about that, it was manners if you like. But there was no laid down, you must do this or you must do that. I mean, standard things, you had to be clean, wear clean underwear, particularly if you were going to the doctor, which I never did because at that age. But no there was a

15:30 what shall we say? There was a cultural thing; it was just understood. You know, you got up in trams or anyway, and you opened the door for ladies, you weren't told you must open the door, they were ladies, you just did, you know. Its was that sort of, if that's discipline, you can say it's ingrained or bred or what have you. But it was a very standard thing.

16:00 **What was your relationship with your stepfather like?**

Pretty good. It was strange at first because I hardly knew who he was, you know. So he was a stranger, we didn't have much in common as I grew up, you know. Old enough to start thinking about, but my mother when George, they all wanted cars, and he bought the very first car, which I think was a

16:30 1926 second hand Essex. He had come from the Hunter Valley, his relatives were up there. And they had a place at Belmont, on the, so we would go up to the lake. That was an exercise. The things he used to get packed into the is car, to go and make your contribution to the weekend food and chickens and God knows what, and it would stagger up the hills,

17:00 no freeways then. So then if you like, I always knew he wasn't my father, not that I knew my father very well because he was lost when I was what 13, and I hadn't seen that much of him. But I knew George was not my father. So I would think it was, it might have been difficult for him, particularly when my mother died. How that happened, she got cancer. I was in Korea

17:30 and George wrote to me and said that she had cancer and it was going to be fatal. I finished my tour, I was a journalist in Korea and came home for the last few months. By then, I had my first post war car, Peugeot, and he bought one too. He drove okay, but his nieces were out at Penrith. On a rather rainy night he skidded out

18:00 near Prospect and went into a ditch. And they called me that my mother had been killed and I was to go to the hospital at Parramatta and identify her. But she had reached the stage then, it wasn't the accident that killed her, she was just about at the end of it. But always with a smile and you know, so I always remember her wonderfully. So George and I

18:30 then lived together for quiet a long while. She was killed in '52 and George and I lived, by that time I was 30. So we lived together and people came go, came and went from the house and his relatives, with whom I got on very well. But you talk about cultural style and habits and things. My mother and I had agreed long before, we used to talk about this occasionally. She said,

19:00 “If I am ever killed,” long before she knew she was ill, “No black and me too, I won’t have that.” And the relatives arrived, all in black, and we had the funeral and stuff. They pulled all the blinds down in the house, knowing my mother wouldn’t want that, and I didn’t want it either, I pulled the blinds up.

19:30 But George himself had been hurt a little bit, not seriously, and he was in the house and I used to get very annoyed over this. But so that I wouldn’t offend him, he was going along with that, that was the era that he came from. So I then would hurtle off to Castlecrag where I had some wartime friends and we would play, and I would get out of the house.

20:00 But you, the question was how did I get along with my stepfather. Well when, if you like it settled down, and George had never boiled an egg in his life. So we agreed that, we all have dishwashers now, we didn’t have then. We agreed that whoever did the cooking wouldn’t have to do the washing up, so that we could cook our heads off. It was a warm relationship, warm relationship, it was two people

20:30 who intellectually had nothing in common at all, but he was a thoroughly decent person. Absolutely honest persona and he was very good to me. They sent me to Sydney Grammar [School] which wasn’t quite as expensive then as it is today but. And so there you go.

What did he do for a living?

Well George was

21:00 had started off, he was born in Jerrys Plains up in the Hunter Valley and he joined the post office as a clerk. He was born in ’95 I think. He didn’t serve in the First World War I think he was too young. And then he came up through the civil service and he finished up with about number 2 in the customs department in the city.

Your father was involved in a very famous event when you were a young man, what did you know about that at the time?

21:30 Well that was 1928 when I was, I was born in June, they came here in June so I had turned 7. About that time. No I thought about that over the years and people have asked me that question. I wasn’t excited, I wasn’t involved. It was, I knew it was happening of course. It

22:00 was way out there somewhere, it was way out there. But what touched me later on, particularly when I was at school, in my early school days in Chatswood. When he was lost in ’34, walking home from school and we were only 5 minutes from the school, its still there on the highway. Walking home from school after my father was lost in the first few days, people would come up

22:30 in the street and touch me, and I didn’t know who they were, but they knew who I was. I was Charles Ulm’s son, you know.

Although you didn’t have much contact with your father you bear his name, was that a blessing or a burden for you?

Well it was not a burden I would say. Nobody talked about it very much in my own circle.

23:00 But of course as I moved into aviation, people knew who I was, and it had, there was a moment in Canada when I was flying, because I had done well in navigation, they wanted coastal command pilots, and I was training to be a fighter pilot, I went onto a navigation course, then onto transferred onto a larger aircraft, twin engine aircraft.

23:30 I was falling behind in the training program. The wing commander flying sent for me. And he said, “You are falling behind, what do you want to do?” He said, “We are not washing you out, if you stay.” And I said, "Well sir, if you order me to go on I will persevere with training on these heavy airplanes, I will probably break one and kill

24:00 a few people including myself, but if you ask me what I want to do, I will follow up want I want to do and get on and become a fighter pilot.” And he posted me to a fighter command. Now this arises out of your question was it a burden or otherwise. His name was Wing Commander Norman Berry Littlejohn. Now I didn’t know until years after that he was the cousin of my father’s pilot, George Littlejohn

24:30 on his last flight. Now Wing Commander Littlejohn would have known who I was, maybe the old boy network was working behind the scenes because he gave me what I wanted, whereas normally if you have difficulty and you weren’t quite making it, in that situation, I had my wings of course. They would post you to the prairie, used to fly the prairie battle was dragging targets around for people to shoot at. Which is pretty boring. So Berry

25:00 Littlejohn gave me what I wanted. And he was a connection through George Littlejohn who was my father’s pilot.

When you were growing up, what sort of contact did you have with your father?

Well fortuitously, just around, we lived in Victor Street, Chatswood.

25:30 Just around the corner was where my father’s secretary lived, Helen Rogers. So by arrangement, we still call her Rog, she’s dead now, but Rog would come around and pick up little Johnnie. We’d go to

Chatswood station and get a train and go down to what, McMahon's Point, get on the ferry, the bridge was still being built, down at Circular Quay, either walk up to Martin Place or catch a tram. My father's

26:00 office as managing director of Australian National Airways was in Challis House were the senate now is. I would go down there by arrangement and then go out with him. His new wife, Jo, Jo Callahan, she was terrific too. Out to their house in Dover Heights, the house is still there up on Mercury Road, Dover Heights, and spend a weekend there. That was interesting.

26:30 He had by then, I was reasonably, well not adult, but I knew what was going on, and in his study, the sort of thing that you remember he had a model of a flying wing with about 6 or 8 engines. This was the going to be the aircraft of the future. But up on the wall he had a framed obituary of himself; you know from The Sydney Sun's morgue, all the papers do that,

27:00 people of substance, they write up the obituary for when they are going to knock off. He had his obituary up on the wall, that sort of sense of humour. He had a yacht, a 22 footer called, Kawai, I think. The aircraft they used in Honolulu, coming out. And Chick Golding looked after it, Chick Golding was the son

27:30 of one of the master at Sydney Grammar. And I recall going out on this on the odd occasion. Only a little 22 footer. We came back earlyish and the captain used to keep it at Double Bay. And the southerly was coming up, a real southerly buster. Charles decided that, there was Jo I think Helen Rogers was on it, and then Chick and Charles

28:00 and we said, "Oh we'll nip across, we've got time to go across the harbour and back again." So we headed out toward Taylors Bay where it later on, my wife and I built a house. And coming back this southerly buster had really burst and the whole weekend fleet was rushing for cover, heading up harbour. Mr Oldman and his ship were crossing this lot, I think its

28:30 the first time I actually heard really raw language, raw, raw language. But he always had a little, his car was little black Triumph, two seater. With a red stripe along the side, not that long ago, I forget where in some magazine there was a picture of it, going along with the history of Triumph cars. And it had a lovely little winking ignition light.

29:00 I thoroughly enjoyed and Jo his wife, drove it, she really drove it pretty well. I remember her steaming up to Military Road in that, the house then had nothing in front of it, it was on Military Road and you could see right down the harbour from the veranda.

29:30 And he had a very powerful Zeiss binoculars understandably he had probably given it. And I could sit on the veranda and 6 miles away I could see individual men working on the harbour bridge, its all covered up now. But you know things like that. So we would go down to the drome, it was then called the drome, which is now the airport.

30:00 And the aircraft were used during the weekend, not on regular service to do joy flights, which was quite profitable. 5 bob or 10 bob [shillings], and they were 8 seater, Southern Cross type tri motor aircraft. And he would put me in, with the chair, usually sitting behind the pilot and people would climb on, then they would get their 15 minutes and climb off.

30:30 And they would be asking this, who is this child who is still in the airplane, then it would be explained, its Ulm's son. And so.

What do you remember of your fist flight in an airplane?

Well I'm told that I made a flight as a passenger when ii was 6 weeks old. I don't remember that. My first flight, that's when he had a post war, 1921, I was 6 months old at the end of '21

31:00 my first flight was probably yes, it was with CTP [Charles Thomas Philippe]. We still called him CTP, anyone did, it was CTP. CTP would fly sports aircraft, an Avro 8 usually a communications airplane now to get down to Melbourne. I went up with Jo, sitting on her lap. With a the

31:30 straps to hold you in. Which were the same straps that they use in Spitfires later on, they were affective. Then he started to through her around. And Jo apparently called through the tube, "Johnny is getting a bit frightened we better land." I do remember that because that was probably my first flight I would think, it must have been, yeah, at the ANA [Australian National Airlines] time, so that would

32:00 be '30, '31 something of that order.

Being exposed to aircraft so early, what inspired your imagination?

Yes well I thought, let's come at it this way. In joining the air force there was never any debate. First of all, there was no debate there was

32:30 going to be a war. You know and that part of my education had to do with that and I can get onto that at Sydney Grammar. But it was a British era and my father and others gave me wonder books which were about this thick. There was wonder book about ships, trains, planes, and I had one of each, so I was pretty up on ships, mainly battleships of course.

33:00 And not so much on trains, although I knew my London north eastern, the north south line, southern railways and great northern, they were amalgamated after into British Rail. And with the wonder book of planes, so knew my airplanes pretty well. But when I came to actually enlisting there was never any debate in my mind. I didn't say, well shall I…

33:30 I knew there was going to be a war and we would all be in it, would I join the army or will I join the navy. Actually my father, I learned later on, my mother told me, he said to her that as it comes on if John's looking to the services, navy, he said, no future in aviation. Well for him, you know. But there was never any debate in my mind; it was just a natural thing to do.

34:00 So in terms of being, your question, what impressed me about them, well I don't suppose I really thought about it. I was a intelligent well educated person, I was up with the technology, I knew that the Spitfire was being developed and that came out of the Supermarine [Spitfire] record breaking airplane that the British, there was a thing

34:30 called the Schneider trophy then, where the Europeans, the French, the British, the Italians, not the Germans of course, they would compete for the fastest, they would put them on floats. The engines for that matter, they were developing an extremely powerful engine. And they put them on, they were sea planes, and it actually was from the Schneider trophy winners that the Spitfire and the Hurricane and others were

35:00 developed. So I was up with the technology and I was interested in it. I was never, well I knew my battleships and things like that, backwards just from reading and constant reading. And I was up with aviation, I didn't say to myself, and nor did anybody else it think, not to me anyway, well he's Charles Ulm's son, no doubt he will go into the air force. May they thought that way, it was just a natural thing to do.

35:30 **What other things did interest you as a boy?**

Well I suppose that gets me to school. At Sydney Grammar we had, which was a great school, we had, you think of the people who affect your life, there were two headmasters there.

36:00 One was Frank Holloway and he was a young Oxford man, he was a Welshman, and I did French honours with him. We remained very good friends after the war, in fact I had joined The Sun, as a copy boy, and he'd gone off to the war, he was fluent in French and German, particularly German. I knew he had gone so I sent him a little note on little butcher's paper you know, copy

36:30 paper that you bashed out, typed on to his last known address. A long time went by it might have been a year or something like that went by. I got an answer from him. And the letter had followed him up to he was at Bathurst I think they used to assemble, but he'd gone to the Middle East, and he received my letter in a dugout at the

37:00 desert, and replied to me, I got a reply back, "John, I received your so and so." But Frank, we called him Taffy of course Taffy Holloway. And as I say he was quite a young, he could have been headmaster later on at Grammar when it became available he didn't want to do it. He was unmarried but he had, you remember the people of that stage of your life who really did affect your life.

37:30 Frank if you like introduced me to style, he wore a grey suit, he had lovely pink cheeks you know of a Welshman, and we called him Taffy. He wore a pork pie hat and a green, green pork pie hat, and we used to write doggerel for the magazine, about various people, well they still do.

38:00 And he wore, he always had a handkerchief in his sleeve, he wore a gown. At the end of school, when we finished our, about to leave, he used to take his honours people, only half a dozen of us, up to a French meal in Kings Cross, there weren't many of those around but the Claremont restaurant downstairs in Darlinghurst Road, I remember ordering

38:30 veal paprika Parisienne au jour. We ordered in French. He , we kept in touch, he died not that long ago, about 5 or 6, he finished up as second to the head of German department in the University of New England. And Frank always used to send me a Christmas card, year by year by year. It always finished up he signed it, Taffy as was. All called him Taffy Holloway.

39:00 The other one was Edgar Bonwick, now Edgar Bonwick was an economic master and I want into his class. But I was very good at history and in my exams I would write at great length, and did Crocker who was my history master for the top people who, in the exam in tests, he would put 3 pluses on the bottom

39:30 of your piece of paper. But with mine he used to run the pluses right across the page. Because I was interested in history and I wrote, you see, so John its fine but you won't have time in a real exam to do this. So what I'm coming to, that in the common room this must have got around because Cheese Bonwick, and Bonwick, we called him Cheese because of his hair. He had been a

40:00 mining engineer in the Balkans in the First World War. Now bearing in mind that when I was at school, the school was starting to get a bit hot. Hitler, the Anschluss, Czechoslovakia, Bosnia Herzegovina and so on. He, the Cheese, on Thursday night would have a chosen group of who I was on, and I still keep in touch with one, Bevan Mitchell in Canberra, up to his house at Warrawee where he lived with his sister.

He was unmarried

40:30 now at school Cheese Bonwick looked like the Rock of Gibraltar. He had a strong face, this cheese hair which gave him his nickname. Dark blue pinstripe, double-breasted suit. He just looked you know like the rock of Gibraltar. Well the first night that we were invited up to his house, after dinner on the Thursday night, his sister answered the door, and we went in and here he was in his study with a big table with a green you know beige top and one, the one lamp you know in wood, sitting behind his desk with his teeth out. Of course with his teeth out he had all slumped and no pinstripes, an old silk shirt, smoking, which of course you couldn't do at all in Grammar you could do it no doubt in the common room. He was just wonderful and he talked and talked and talked about the Balkans you know. More recent times when the Kosovo Bosnian thing was on, people were starting to refer you know in television and commentary, to Bosnia Herzegovina.

Tape 2

00:40 **How did your school master influence you as role models?**

Well I wouldn't say they were role models as such. But they found, and it's a strength of schooling, not just there elsewhere, but Grammar had a strong

01:00 you know, tradition or policy really of history and culture and if you are doing Latin honours, Roman history and Greek history. So that's you know, your interests emerge, there were people whose interest weren't the slightest and they became great scientists and lawyers by interests, my interests emerged. So when school ended,

01:30 what is John going to do. My mother and stepfather decided that well vocational guidance was coming on then, so they took me to a vocational guidance guy. He concluded that well he can write, and he's interested in history, journalism follows, you know. If those two people brought that about

02:00 they did, that's… But the general atmosphere, particularly the general history of the period and history is still my continuing interest. I read geo political biographies, I'm reading a study of the Weimar Republic at its… The great thing, it's been said generation after generation and generation we always fail to do it, for God sake remember your history. In my

02:30 view you can't really have a any sort of in depth examination of the world today, you've got to go back as far as the French revolution, I mean you can go, but the French revolution, the great movements in history and they are essentially the movements, if you like, not so much the masses, below, those who emerged from the masses, the masses never really brought about revolution. But on behalf

03:00 of the masses to kick off the land owners, right across. So you get the American revolution, the French revolution and you get to the, the Napoleonic Wars. I'm a bit of a Napoleon buff. Actually I know him left right and centre. You where, having feared Napoleon, the great powers all of whom were monarchies of course, absolute monarchies.

03:30 Well the English were developing, they thought they'd won, they might have won the war, but they did not win the essential growing social system which arises out of education. You get into what happened in England during the 19th century, because of the industrial revolution, they found that they had to have lots of people who could add up and write.

04:00 You know, then that then leads to an educated class and so on and so on. Gosh, you find, even as late as the First World War after the initial crush where they stoped the Germans and the British Regular Army was virtually destroyed, and there was this long period, Kitchener's army. You find the British officers in the field, as these people coming on they are preparing for the great battles

04:30 Writing home and you know their records and letters were available. The British officers beginning to say, we've got ordinary, ordinary people coming in to the battalion and they can read and some of them can write. In other words from there they write questions. Well all that arises out of that history, doesn't happen over night, you know.

05:00 **What other entertainments did you have as a boy growing up?**

Well I got interested in music, the Sydney Symphony they were home then, but it played in the town hall. Bernard Heinz who was a great figure, he was knighted when knighthoods meant something. He used to have children's concerts once a year

05:30 I think, and we would go into the town hall and he'd take the children to the orchestra, what the violins do, what the cellos do and so on. They actually have some good fairly straight forward music which always culminated in Land of Hope and Glory. That brought tears to our eyes, we were all British, so that gave me a basic interest in music.

06:00 And then in reading, when, I'd leave Grammar which was on Collins Street go straight across to the city library in what was then the QE [Queen Elizabeth] building, the building where the City of Sydney

[council] was, or still is. And I can smell it now, it was musty and old and I would spend hours there reading Napoleonic history, Austerlitz and Waterloo and all that.

06:30 And then that gets me to a moment of music in Italy during the war.

You were obviously a studious intellectual boy, was that how you would describe yourself?

I don't think we had the word in those days, not

07:00 within terms of general discourse. I'm a definition man, what do you mean by 'intellect'? And the dictionary you go to a dictionary on words like that and you tend to get lost.

I'll ask the question a different way?

Well let's say that well to try and find a definition, okay your question

07:30 I wasn't very interested in mundane things you know. I liked quality in things, I didn't know it at the time, fussy if you like. That's pretty good thing when you start flying, you better get it right, because there is no alternative you either get it right or you are dead. But then I'm interested in like today, which is then of course all arises out of the past.

08:00 I am interested in policy and thinking, in politics or any policy. Geopolitics, I use the word earlier on because when you look at what happens in any field, any large field, particularly historical political field, what were the leaders thinking of at the time. I came across this phrase the other day in what ever I was reading, and I forget what I was reading because I am reading all the time on

08:30 actually history. There are two sorts of historians, there are those who say well this is what happened at 4 o'clock and blah, blah, blah. But looking at it long after, much more important is what was the commanding officer or the Prime Minister, what were they thinking? And so therefore why did they do it. You know, this is some huge lessons in this. As information, technology is spread and we can

09:00 press the button now, and know what's happening over there where the leaders should not be wondering what the other people are saying, are thinking, who are opposed to them. They ought to know. By the way, have you seen the McNamara documentary, make sure you see that, The Fog of War. Where McNamara, on Vietnam you know, he said, we didn't know what the Russians were thinking,

09:30 the Russians didn't know what we were thinking, and you know, we established that Khrushchev was a rational person, from his point of view, Castro was from his point of view. So its terribly important that you know. So Kennedy and Khrushchev, after the Cuban crisis which is McNamara demonstrates he came as close this, to a nuclear confrontation which would have destroyed the whole bloody thing.

10:00 They put in a hot line between Washington and Moscow. So at least, and if you look at history, prior if you like, that sort of communications, it was all done in third hand by experienced ambassadors but it took months for information to get through. You didn't really know what the people were thinking, so you know, you are making decisions, not properly informed. If you like, that's an intellectual area,

10:30 thinking in large. I would say intellectual is somebody who thinks in 5 dimensions, length breadth, depth, time and you might say taste or grace or, it's a dimension.

Back to who you were growing up. Who were your best mates?

Well Bruce Coombs, still is my best mate. His, they live near us, nearby.

11:00 And when we went to Grammar, we were both at school together at Chatswood public. The parents had got together and decided that each of us would not want to go to leave school and go to Sydney Grammar, but they'd work it that we'd both go, so we went together. So we have known each other since we were about 6. Then across the way from us in Victor Street

11:30 Chatswood where we had the first telephone, this was 1928. There was a family of 4 children, two boys and two girls. And the father was shell shocked from the First World War and was virtually helpless and their mother. They were very poor.

12:00 I mean when I went to school I came home and I said, "Look Mummy, there's people there they are not wearing shoes," and they weren't wearing shoes of course, because they only had one pair which they kept for church, you know. This family across the way were Catholics. We grew up together and where great friends. They are all gone now. Leo the elder one, he was a bit older than me

12:30 he had flat feet or something and couldn't go to the war. But he was very, very good with my mother, very, very good with my mother, all through the war when I was lost and so. There were a couple like that we used to play together.

What impact did the Depression have your own family?

Well on my personal life I was aware of it, only through speech, conversation

13:00 and of course later on as I got educated I heard a lot about it. But I wasn't personally affected, but I was aware of. We always had butter on the table. Now these friends of mine across the way, I had them in

for tea, we said come in for tea, so they asked me over for tea, and I came back and my mother said,

13:30 “What did you have for tea?” And I said, “Mummy it was wonderful we had bread and dripping with pepper and salt on it.” Why? They couldn’t afford butter. Well we weren’t like that. We didn’t have a car, very few people did. My stepfather was a middle level Commonwealth pubic servant. So at least he had a permanent job, and in those days jobs were permanent. All their salaries were cut of course.

14:00 But we would go to the movies on Saturday afternoon, I was a little guy and there was a group, the gang, half a dozen of us. It was sixpence to go in, my mother used to give me threepence to by an ice cream but because I was small, lets say there was 6 of us, they would, the other 5 they would buy 5 tickets at sixpence each.

14:30 And put me together in the middle and push though, and in we’d go. So I had my sixpence plus threepence so we would all have ice cream. All have ice cream, you know. But we were not desperately poor, by today’s standards we probably were. No I was always well dressed, but you thought about thing, I mean my mother made most of her own clothes. And with the war developing and even before the war there was an opportunity shop,

15:00 you know, St Vincent [de Paul’s] and all that sort of thing, which she used to run, which is essentially selling cheap clothing to people who couldn’t afford it. And people selling clothes props, clothes prop and here’s a guy with a horse and dray selling clothes props, clothes props were just fairly straight branch of a tree that he had cut down, all the forest were nearby, selling it for sixpence or something.

15:30 And with that the clothesline spread from one pole to another in the backyard and you held the, long before the hills hoist, well or the clothes dryer was invented, that sort of thing. And people saved, and they saved old clothing and they knitted socks. You know, I haven’t seen or even thought of a knitted sock since I left

16:00 school. Get a hole in the sock throw it away, but you didn’t throw things away then, people saved, even rolled up pieces of string and old tins and things. You had a fibro garage, it had been built in the backyard, gosh, when my stepfather finally sold the house, many, many years later in 1960 or thereabouts. He had to clean out the old garage and it included

16:30 a cocky’s cage! Of course, and this is say 1960 and Cocky had been dead, or the Galah, had been dead since what 1936 or whatever. But Cocky’s cage, nothing was thrown away, we were conscious of that. But we didn’t have any money to go and spend, I would go to school with practically probably no money in my pocket at all.

17:00 **How did the loss of your father affect you as a 13 year old?**

Yeah, well it was, interesting really. I knew of it of course, because I was 13, read the paper, and we of course had a radio, a superheterodyne radio in the house. And I mentioned that walking home from school, people would touch me,

17:30 that was quite touching. But when he was lost and we were actually told, I heard it from my mother. Of course his wife, Jo, they mounted a search much of which she, long after the US Navy had done a tremendous search. They stopped that, Jo hired a lugger to go to the outer islands, just in case. Which finally reached the stage when we had to accept that he was gone.

18:00 And my mother told me, I broke down in her arms in the bathroom, I remember that. But we were a bit, I’m reluctant to use the phrase, we were a bit stiff upper lip. You know you didn’t show emotion, not that you set out, I am not going to show emotion. Its like we are talking about manners and things aren’t done. Its not

18:30 done. You know but it’s so built in that I’ve never cried in public, I’ve cried in a move occasionally and still do. And I can get emotion, that’s why I don’t go to marches and what have you, one year ago, I said to Val, “Look I will go to the dawn service,” and we had been married for 50 years this year. So this

19:00 must have been say, we would have been married a few years, we were married in ’54, so this might have been the ‘60s and I just decided to go to the dawn service. And I got quite emotional about that. And so I don’t do that, it’s in here somewhere.

Were there any other financial or other legacies from your father after he was gone?

Well my

19:30 stepmother. Well all his money, and of course he started off with literally nothing, but when the Southern Cross flight, they became very wealthy, overnight. Very, very wealthy, in the terms of the day. When he founded ANA, Australian National Airways, I think his salary was 1,000 pounds a year. Well in 1930 that was enormous, and they had a car and a maid

20:00 and all that. But he put all his money into the last flight. He’d gone to the banks, and of course he was a very substantial person, well recognised, the name was Charles Ulm, the strength, in the board rooms and the political chiefs and prime ministers of the world. He went to the banks to finance his last flight, they said, “Well Mr Ulm,

20:30 we understand what you've done and what you want to do, but this is a commercial bank, we don't think it's a commercial proposition." So Joe Lyons got cabinet endorsement for, to guarantee his overdraft, and I think it was 8,000 pounds or something, that not only did they pay when he was lost, but, he put everything in it, the house the car, the little boat, everything of his own money to finance the

21:00 1934 flight, which was to establish, surveying a route for what is now the regular service across the Pacific. But the Commonwealth government also made a grant to his widow, of 5,000 pounds. When she died in '39, she left me 1,000 pounds. The interest of which I still get. Well you know, its peanuts in today's terms but

21:30 she left me 1,000 pounds in trust.

You mentioned that it was obvious to everyone that was a war coming in your later school years. How was it obvious to you and how did you follow it?

Well, let's, looking at it, from all of us personally as children. We were surrounded by it.

22:00 you know you went to somebody's place, your uncles place, there are photographs of the war and German souvenirs and old bombs. You know, and bayonets and polished brass, 25 pound shell cases, you know. So physically, and bearing in mind we are talking about the war ended in 1918, the boys came home and we are only talking about 10 years after and less. So

22:30 physically it was everywhere, the Anzac marches and, the depression, the guys in what used to be army clothing, great coats dyed black, the only heavy clothing they had in winter time and so on. The RSL [Returned and Services League], that developed. And then the War Memorial in Hyde Park, that was opened

23:00 I think in 1925. So in terms of being familiar that there had been a war, and we had won it, with these dreadful German people, we'd beaten them. So that was never far away. Now in terms of what was in the newspapers and the crisis developed with Hitler, it was in the news quite a lot, a great deal.

23:30 And of course we bought some new warships and they were on display. So people, if you like, in my area had an interest, everybody had to be involved in the war, every single family had been involved in the war, either directly somebody had gone and been lost, or had an uncle or they had come home with a leg blow off or like these friends across the road, he was shell shocked.

24:00 Lovely, lovely gentle man, so we were not as far away from the Great War, it was called. As we are now far away from my war WW2. But for those of us historians, not only us historians, reading the thing it was obvious. The Germans felt very badly about and the French behaved abominably to the Germans after the

24:30 First World War. And why? Because the Germans behaved abominably towards the French in the Franco Prussian war. I mean there was no German empire you know after the Franco-Prussian War. And having beaten the French, where did they proclaim the German empire? In the Palace of Versailles. And the German General staff then said, well you know the French aren't going to take this they are going to

25:00 prepare for 'le revenge' and so the Germans then prepared, as the French did for, we are going to have another go at this. So if you in with that it was inevitable, there was going to be a war and we would be in it.

Its sounds like when you bring in all that hindsight, when you go back to the time was it that obvious even then?

25:30 Well it was to me. It was to me, once again it was what in the word I want, it wasn't as thought we said, "Oh yes there is going to be a war we must do this and that." It was part of life, there was going to be, and I suppose all of us, particularly my sort of people and those who had been in it,

26:00 after all our fathers and uncles were only still then, that, they are 30, many of them went back into it again as you know. So the war was never, the war had not gone far away for us to forget about it.

Was there a particular uncle or someone you would talk about the First World War with?

Nobody talked about it very much. I think it was so horrible

26:30 so just awful for those that were involved they wouldn't talk about it. I mean you would have difficulty at that time, like if you have the technology of doing what you are doing with me today, talking about it. Not that they said, I'm not going to talk about it. But there were one or two people I asked about it. Now, I mentioned Lucy Eleanor, our lovely English friend with the horse, well she married

27:00 quite late, an Ozzie, Harrowsmith, and she became a Harrowsmith. Now Ozzie was one of my mother's circle, a lovely, lovely guy, I remember his saying to me when the Munich Crisis was developing or what have you, and he said, "John, if it happens I will go down into Martin Place and they can throw me into jail, but until they do I will say to every young person passing by, don't go

27:30 don't go." He had suffered so much in the trenches you see. My uncle, I didn't see much of my uncle, my mother's eldest brother, he live in Brisbane he was a manufacturing jeweller, in fact he made my wife's

engagement ring, wedding ring for us. Jack, Jack Maxwell, he had been a Light Horseman

28:00 I think he was in the Beersheba charge in Palestine or what ever it was called, Mesopotamia. And the light horse used to operate in three, so that they were mounted in there, they would go charging in and one of them would dismount and look after the horses, while the other dismounted and went on to the fighting. Jack had been shot through the throat, he had a clasped throat. But no we didn't have many

28:30 detailed discussions. What's going on now and it's a good thing to, in the press, there is a lot of lot of reminiscing of history, and of course they are discovering why we did this and why we did that, mistakes and blah, blah. But wonderful recollection, its very important, it's the formative era of most of my generations' lives, things flow from that.

29:00 **You left school and became a cadet, can you talk about how that happened?**

Well we got on tape that the vocational guidance…

You talked about that?

So, my mother went to Frank Ashton who was the editor of The Sydney Sun. The Sydney Sun was very, they were the old ex servicemen, all of them. The old Sydney Sun then was the old broadsheet, and it was an afternoon paper. It was a major

29:30 organ of influence and opinion, so they took young Johnnie on as a copy boy in the shipping room. On 25 shillings a week, of course you did the traditional thing, you gave that to your mother. For the first week, and oh boy, tremendous. So that's how I started there. And that was, we immediately thought we were newspaper men, after the first couple

30:00 of months. We got hold of a typewriter and taught ourselves to type. Of course we followed the news, that was the essential thing with a newspaper man, is be right up with the news. Later on when I built the news paper department in Qantas, and I was recruiting young journalists to be on my staff, I used to say to them, "When you come in in the morning and I start talking about something that's been going on

30:30 in Bosnia Herzegovina or Alabama or what have you, you better know what I am taking about." In other words, listen to the morning news. A newspaper man, has got to, as to what is news you've got to know the news of the day, you've got to be right up.

What did a copy boy do on The Sun?

Well a copy, I wasn't a copy boy in what was called the big room, it wasn't that big, the old Sydney Sun was in

31:00 Elizabeth Street, almost on the corner of Martin Place, it was a vertical building, its still got the, what used to be a golden ball up on the top of it. Well it's painted grey because of the war and they left it there, after the war the newspaper office moved up town. I was in the shipping room where the shipping editor was Bill Adams, a lovely guy. He had a cadet, an actual cadet Ken Murchison who was a good friend, we still communicate, he is up

31:30 near Lake Macquarie now, in retirement. We still talk. And myself, and my job was to check the shipping arrivals and departures on the phone. We had candlestick phones, we'd ring the, South Head signal station, what ships had just come through, of course they ran the shipping list, the SS Balranald or the

32:00 [SS] Oronsay arrived at 10 o'clock and so on, that sort of thing. Then go down to the Royal Exchange Building which is down in, gosh what is it now, its down on Bridge and Pitt, Castlereagh, down there, where all the shipping stuff was. Then go down to the Maritime Service Board, which is

32:30 where Goldfields House now is, that was then on the way to being moved, now the Museum of Contemporary Art. Go in there and see what is happening in the news world. But in the shipping room which was about so big, there were three, a desk, three chairs and there was a cabinet with 2 glass doors in which were hundreds and hundreds of photographs of ships. But they'd been taken for

33:00 god knows when and they were dusty and filthy and so on. So I just decided, nobody told me to do it, but I suppose I had this sort of mind, well we ought to know what photos we've got. So I actually listed them all, and because I knew my ships. When the war broke out one of the first enemy activities was the sinking of the liner [SS] Athenia. Quite early, near the Irish coast, big

33:30 news, German submarine sinks British liner. So the question was, have we got a picture of the Athenia? And I said no but we have got a picture of [SS] Letitia, her sister ship. We had a, what was it called, it was a shipping, the world shipping thing, just about this depression, which had all the lists of ships and the sister ships. So I knew that we had a picture of her sister ship.

34:00 So, boy I went to the top of the class that day, because we were the only newspaper in Sydney you didn't have this push button and transmit by radio and microwave the way you do now. So the Sydney Sun had a picture of Letitia, the sister ship of the Athenia, which was sunk last night. I remember the, there was a German, just before the war started, we were running up to it. There was a German

34:30 ship about a 6,000 tonner in Walsh Bay, the [NL] Lahn, and I was sent down to just watch it, to just

watch it because it was getting towards the ultimatum, Chamberlain ultimatum in England. Bill Adams being close to the navy you know, the navy was getting alert for this, and I was to watch it, to see whether it moved away suddenly.

35:00 And I saw the German consulate cars come down, the people well dressed going onboard and not coming off, you know. They were getting onboard ready to go. Well next morning I wasn't watching in the night, she was gone. It's quite a story, they did a film about it later on. She slipped the mooring and without lights went down the harbour and buzzed off, and got back to Germany. There was a film with Robert Mitchum and

35:30 Kurt Jurgens, not, The Enemy Below or The Enemy Within or something, based, it was quite a remarkable exercise. There were things like that, of course being one of the 3 shipping staff, I had defence clearance pass to get onto the wharves. Which meant that I was in the shipping department for longer than a cadet would normally be. So we knew about the loss of the HMAS Sydney and all that.

36:00 **Can you think of any other news stories that broke during you time as a cadet? Not necessarily to do with the war, but just news in Sydney?**

The shark arm murder I think. The shark arm, yeah I am pretty sure that happened then. It was a murder taken place, are you familiar with it? No the shark arm

36:30 murder and a long time after, a shark was caught and they opened it up and an arm was in it. And it was the arm of the victim, and it's a historical police case, that went on for yonks and yonks [long time]. Murder of course was, crime was a big thing, and it was all the standard things, sport and so on. Now off hand, we were getting into the war period and then it became, so I remember the

37:00 war incidents, they were major news. Before that, before I went there, there was the Greycliffe disaster. I was still at school then, the Greycliffe was a ferry and it was run down by the [RMS] Tahiti liner. That, its, the bits of it were dug up from Taylors Bay. Actually she used to, its was a Watson's Bay ferry, a Manly ferry and it used to go

37:30 to Darling Point, Rose Bay and Watson's Bay. And crossing the harbour I think to go to Clifton Gardens the skipper of the ferry made wrong judgement and tried to cross the Tahiti's bows, instead of going astern of her, and because you can't stop a, a liner would only be doing 8 or 9 knots but she was a, for what we then called a liner about a 9,000 tonner, she cut the Greycliffe down, I remember that very clearly.

38:00 That was very big story, but that's a pre war. Most of the stories were as I recall was the beginning of the war, there was nothing else happening.

What do you recall of the night that war was announced? Where were you?

Yeah, well my stepfather had become head or number two of the customs department in Newcastle. And so we, and my mother was up there with him

38:30 of course, and I boarded with friends in Sydney. So on a Friday evening I would leave school and catch the [train: Newcastle] Flyer, which would get from Central to Newcastle in less than two hours I think, the express service. And the war emergency was developing, the ultimatum and so on. I

39:00 remember this, I would come home on Sunday night to go to school, Grammar on Monday. And so it was like travelling, the last train from Berlin through the nights through Europe. I left Newcastle, I think it used to leave at 5 o'clock, I left Newcastle at peace, I got to Hornsby, and I used to change trains then at Hornsby to come down to Chatswood where I lived because the train came on down to central.

39:30 I left Newcastle at peace, night fell, I got off at Hornsby and the fudge was in the paper, the red stop press, in the newspaper it is called fudge, in the stop press. The ultimatum was the story, and the fudge was, war is declared. So I left Newcastle at peace and I arrived at Hornsby in war. When

40:00 I got down to Chatswood, the fudge had moved to the main, the major story.

Did you get called into work that night?

No.

Tape 3

00:39 **War has been declared, when did you decide to joint the war effort?**

Yeah, well one I knew the war was going to last for quite a while, it wasn't going to happen overnight.

01:00 And I was getting myself established and I actually enlisted, I decided that the right time for me I would enlist. So I enlisted in the air force in September '41 just before Pearl Harbour. I was called up in April '42.

01:30 **In the time before you enlisted what were you doing?**

Well what I was doing was establishing my career and I decided the war was going on for quite a while, you know. And I'd give it a year or so to get more experience as a newspaperman, particularly being in the shipping department of the Sydney Sun where I had to deal with the war.

02:00 **During that year and a half what news was coming in about the war effort and what you were reporting on?**

Well there was nothing but the war and of course it was all in Europe. It was all in Europe, things like the sinking of [HMAS] Sydney, which you know was what, just before Japan wasn't it, the Sydney was sunk while I was

02:30 still at the paper. And you know we went interviewing servicemen coming home from the desert, and they mainly came home by ship. And you'd meet them down on the wharf and they would talk about their experiences and so on.

What sort of stories were told to you?

Well they were laconic Australian stories, we did our job

03:00 and I knocked off here and there, and the desert is a nasty place. It's good to be home that sort of thing, but nothing you know, glory. I did interview, Roden Cutler as you know, was the first, was he first VC [Victoria Cross]? I think he was, in Syria. When Ro came home without his leg I was one of the people who interviewed him.

03:30 **What did he share during your interview?**

Oh I really can't recall in detail other than what the official history. Once again straightforward, up and down, lovely guy, I knew him later on when he was governor I was invited a couple of times with my wife to government house and so on.

Did the atmosphere of the paper change before and during the war?

04:00 I would say no. They were all of course professional journalists. It was a large substantial established paper, it had a sense of its standing in the community, its importance in getting the story over. All the people in it were ex servicemen,

04:30 particularly the editor Frank Ashton. He'd been a corporal in the trenches in the First World War so we were very pro service, very pro service, above all they were doing a newspaperman's job. Which okay, there is s trifle, or there is a war, what's the story of the day, what's the story. Of course the war became the story. Or a big accident down in Martin Place somewhere, they were essentially

05:00 newspapermen. So that's what I would say the impression I got. The place wasn't turned upside down, oh my god suddenly there is a war, that's the story of the day, you know.

Did the paper take a political line in respect to labour and liberal in the decisions?

No not in the, it was not what you would call, they called investigative journalism, there was no time. There was no time, and also more and more

05:30 there was less and less newsprint. Because all the newsprint was imported and then you get shipping quotas and newsprint was reduced. I remember it had an important affect on our writing. When I see today, and I am not being nostalgic as a newspaperman, and I see the length of stories which now include opinion, you know. The Herald today you rarely got a by line, in those days I had a few, but you rarely got a by line because it was The Herald speak

06:00 or The Sun reports, might be reported by Reuters or AAP [Australian Associated Press] overseas or our representative in London. You seldom actually got a by line, so there was no opinion in there it was just the hard facts. But because of the shortage of newsprint, you didn't have space. So whereas you might think oh boy this is a 20 paragraph story, the chief sub editor Willy Hamilton who was a great guy

06:30 he's dead, they are all dead now. Wally Hamilton who established after the war the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] news service, Wally and his son Wally, he they said, well you might think it's 20 paragraph story but I've only got room for 5. Of course that's the chief sub editor making the decision on the lead story. So it continued to be a first class professional newspaper. And that's important with

07:00 newspapers, the editor and the reporters, whatever they might think of it personally, what are the facts, what are the facts.

Where did you career go during that time?

Not very far, other than in terms of experience. I was going to say that I was in the shipping room most of the time because there was only a limited, only a few people were allowed the military clearance to get onto

07:30 the wharf. I was one of them. So that sort of held you in the shipping I was involved. But there came a moment where George Hawks was the police roundsman, he said, “John, the Southern Cross is laying, falling to bits out at Mascot, why don’t you write a piece on it?” So I wrote a oh about, I’ve still got it somewhere, it’s my first published by-line, about so long, by John Ulm.

08:00 The Southern Cross is lying there, can’t remember the word, falling to bits, isn’t it a pity all the history that’s involved, it’s a pity. They gave me a by-line and a cadetship. And I moved into the police rounds room. And George Hawks had a two door Ford V8 car with a police radio in it and we thought that was really something. The on The Sydney Sun was right up with all that,

08:30 radio in cars to communicate with the office and communicating, particularly with the police. They got, the thing was to get in, really get in first. Whereas now there is a limitless newsprint and the systems of producing rapidly. You know they write at great length. My wife and I, we were both on the paper together, although she came across from Adelaide after the war

09:00 and did very, very well, Val became actually the highest paid daily woman journalist in Sydney. Then she went off to do other round the world stuff. But we both still read a paper very rapidly. We are up we are listening to news all day, I have the radio on all day, I have radio national, radio thing the one with the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] and German news and stuff, I live with it.

09:30 That’s how you keep up with it.

Your war time clearance, what censorship did you have on anything you reported on?

Well I didn’t but we generally knew what censorship was. The censors were there, so if you like, that probably arrived, they probably looked at all the war, all material, it was all done in copy, typed out, we call them sixes, six pieces of paper you know with

10:00 carbon copies, and they were distributed, and the censors would intrude. But the papers were well briefed on what was and what wasn’t. Take the HMAS Sydney, when the Sydney was sunk, that wasn’t published immediately. I was published fairly soon because it was such a huge story and so many people were lost, you know. Then of course you would have the other side, the Germans would say oh we got this British warship and blah, blah, blah. So that was released

10:30 fairly soon. But most things like that were held while you know, while they worked out whether it was desirable or not. Curtin is very good to read on that.

So did you know about information before the censors actually got to anything?

Sometimes yes, sometimes, but and we all did, I don’t know that I, we were swore to an official secrecy act. But one’s if you like,

11:00 mine certainly was and it certainly applied to everybody else that I was aware of. If we knew about something we wouldn’t even talk about it at home. I can’t recall a colleague other than to me, you know within the tight walls, speaking outside about a matter that, if you like, was censorable.

Some have said that when Japan entered the war and started bombing Darwin that a lot of the reports didn’t get out or were slow to get out because of that censorship?

11:30 Well if you, this is where history comes into it. The performance of the Australian navy on the ground and others in Darwin, was quite disgraceful. Bugging, an American term that came up in Korea, bugging out, getting off south, just abandon the whole bloody lot.

Was this is respect to the paper?

That was never reported. At the time.

12:00 **But was information coming through to the paper at the time?**

I wasn’t aware of it. I want aware of it. You see you didn’t have, The Sun had its own representative, not that it would need one because there would be some representation, see they used, the papers usually used the local newspaper to be their stringer as to what was going on.

12:30 **At what stage did you decide to enlist?**

Well I told you I enlisted in September.

What was the catalyst for that?

Well there want any particular catalyst, I knew I was going to go to the war, and I decided, okay I will go now.

Why the air force?

There was no other, I didn’t say to myself will I go to the navy or will I go to the army? Will I go to the air force, I just, there was really no debate,

13:00 either within my mind or anybody else, I just went to the air force, I was certainly interested in

airplanes and I knew my airplanes too, very well. Very well, so much so that when I actually went into the initial training school, Leon Quilkey was the instructor on aircraft, teacher, flying officer Quilkey, and he had a lisp, we used to call him pistols. Leon Quilkey, lovely guy,

13:30 but he had his exam for the course that had come in and they had all these little model airplanes hanging from the roof, and photographs and things, they were flashed up, we were to identify the airplanes. When he marked them all he said, “Now, Aircraftman Ulm, please stand up.” And he said to everybody else, “Now John Ulm has got it 99 and a half percent right, he got them all right.”

14:00 And I remember I was talking about this the other day, I was furious with myself for not getting 100 percent. And the reason I didn’t get 100 percent was the Spitfire Mark 5 that was hanging down, was a Mark 5B. Now it was a mark 5B because when they took them to the desert they put a little air scoop just up behind the propeller in the engine, for a clean out

14:30 to keep sand out you see. I kicked myself, and I said, oh it’s a 5B instead of looking at it and saying, oh it’s a, I wrote down Mark 5, I should have looked closer and said it was a 5B because I knew it was a 5B. I didn’t get 100 percent. So Quilkey, ‘Pistols’ as we called him, was holding me up as the guy who, 99 and a half is not bad, but the guy, I myself was mad that I didn’t get 100 percent. I actually knew what it was

15:00 and got it wrong.

Coming back to your enlistment, you said you were asked if you could ride a horse?

Yeah, well the RAAF recruiting centre was down in Woolloomooloo just about down where all the freeway stuff is starting down now. So I walked down through the gardens and down to Woolloomooloo down, it was the air force recruiting

15:30 area. I said I want to join the air force, and they said, “What do you want to be?” And I said, “I want to be a pilot.” “Can you ride a horse?” And good God no, the only horses I know are at the racetrack and I haven’t had much success with them. But the background of all that, these were all older generation people and if you go back to World War I where the flying machines started. It was the flying corps for dashing young men. They wanted people who had a sense

16:00 of balance and dash, and of course those were horsemen. So you find the Australian Light Horse in the First World War most of the Australian Flying Corps were Light Horsemen because they had balance you know.

Given that you answered the question, no. What was his response?

They said, well all right

16:30 the test was, I won’t try and do it now because I will fall over. But you stood up on one foot held your arms out and closed your eyes. If you could stand there for, they probably had a number X seconds, that was part of it. Then, did you have two eyes, and they looked both the same way at much the same time. Then the usually the groin and cough and look right and left and what have you. Okay

17:00 you are reasonably fit, which I was. I was a tiny guy, when I actually got to uniforms, I couldn’t keep my pants up with a belt. I went in at 8 stone, 10 pounds, and I don’t know whether I had a 21-inch waist but I was a little guy. And I came out of the air force, what 4 years later, 10 stone, 2 pounds. When I went in first of all I had to have braces to hold up my trousers.

17:30 **Can you tell me about going to Bradfield Park for training?**

Yes, well in due course you, it took some time of course, I enlisted September ’41, because the pipeline, so we get a letter and say righto, report to Bradfield Park, and that was in late April ’42, the war of course was on then. Late April ’42. Bradfield Park was in

18:00 in Lindfield is, where the film and television school is, is it still there? I think it is. Anyway there is an education establishment there. I knew the area because in my Chatswood school days we used to go down as a wolf cub [junior scout] on our weekend excursions and so on. So in we go and there is a collection of wooden huts all with number on, and we were in hut 99. And you go in and you get checked for

18:30 uniforms and, not that we had much uniform to start with, they started you off with blue overalls which we called goon skins. Floppy blue overalls and I went to my first meal, and what the American, I later sorted out it had a lot to do with the American stuff, use American terms, but chow lines. We went through the, and there was a wicket and an arm came through with a big

19:00 long spoon with a bunch of stew in the end of it, and dumped it onto my plate. It was the arm of Jim Osmond. Now Jim, I’d been an editorial cadet at The Sun and Jim was an advertising cadet at The Sun, so we knew each other. He later became general manager of Channel 7, so he may still be around, although I heard that he was pretty ill. So I got my first meal from Jim Osmond. Then you go and, everything is done, regularly

19:30 orderly way. Of course you would expect the service to do things in an orderly way. Get allocated you go through a line, you get your shoes, and we had boots? We might have, no we had shoes. And you had

your own underwear and you usually brought in a suitcase, well you got rid of that. Then down into your hut, and our was hut 99. We were, I was in C Flight

20:00 in the air force did things in flights, going back to the origins of air forces, the Royal Air Force where there was an army and a navy, well what did they call them, well they wouldn't call the air force platoons, so they named them flights. So they put you together in flights, 30 [people], and it was mostly done in alphabetical order. So being U, I was down in amongst the Whites and the Whitehursts and Youngs, and the Thomases and the Smiths

20:30 and so on. Then you were given beds, I don't think we had sheets, we had blankets, grey military blankets. one of the first things we had to do was make the bed properly, and that was done in a competitive way. What was interesting was the way they developed this sense of team, unit, and competition, A flight, B flight, you know. The

21:00 commanding officer I will come to him, Roby Manuel, would come around and you would stand by your bed and he would go through, and I still make my bed the air force taught me to make it. You know, Valda likes her fitted sheets, and I hate them. I don't need fitted sheets I can do it this way. You know, and of course you fronted, was great if you went through and he gave you top marks. But talk about Roby Manuel, Roby Manuel was a World War I ace.

21:30 He had an MC [Military Cross], you didn't have DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] in those days. He had quite a glare and he also had a glass throat from being shot flying in the First World War, heavy smoker. He used to smoke with the cigarette here, not like so, in between his second and third finger, and put it into his mouth and close it over

22:00 to get the smoke in because his throat was shot. And he was, he flew, much later, he wasn't an operational pilot then. But we had, on the parade ground was an ancient Gypsy Moth, which is a predecessor of the Tiger Moths. But it was there, air force, and Roby used to say, if they tidied up I'd fly it. God, he was

22:30 a great guy. So these were the people that you remember. Drill, we had a drill sergeant, Sergeant Nathaniel Leatherborrow, wonderful, Sergeant Nathaniel Leatherborrow. We did PT [Physical Training] and marching, some of us, we were all fairly well educated. I think we had to be leaving certificate, I think we did, I certainly, we were all, so if you like, above average, most of the people left school

23:00 at what intermediate certificate. And so we would, we'd say, what are the hell are we doing marching, we are supposed to be flying airplanes. But you do the competitive marching, and A flights doing it, and B flights doing it, and you really competing, its installed very early this sense of personal discipline personal discipline. You are not told do this and don't think about it, you know. But we had some good times. We

23:30 had some hilarious incidents. There was a Federal MP [Member of Parliament] Max Wolfstein, he's dead, well at least I hope he is because I am going to talk about him now. I'm pretty sure he is, but Max Wolfstein being an MP could have had the exemption, but he chose to join the air force and he was in our flight. Now Max was a thoroughly objectionable individual. I didn't know him very well, but some of the boys said, when he is talking about fascists and this and that

24:00 and the other, and I'm an MP. But he had a not a, bigger than a Hitler moustache, but that sort of black moustache, beautifully kept. Just like so. And it was decided I can't recall who decided but I was involved. That, well we had Wolfstein, so he was set upon in the hut one night and put down on the floor, kicking like buggery, you know.

24:30 And I held his head, Rob O'Dell was I think had one of his legs, and I think it might have been Dick Higgins, had the other and Vince Thurston sat across him, and Max was shouting and screaming and Vince produced a cut throat razor. Instantly Max Wolfstein was very, very still.

25:00 So Vince took off half his moustache. So the next morning, we were out of parade, you went on parade every morning, Roby Manuel came along the ranks, walked right past Wolfstein and who of course had taken off the other half. When he got to the end of the line, Roby Manuel asked Leatherborrow, "Aircraftman Wolfstein, is he not on parade today?"

25:30 Ha, ha. Well Wolfstein I don't think, I'm pretty sure Wolfstein did not go onto operations he took his exercised his exemption of something. But we have never forgotten that. Well Vince Thurston and I became very T, you know, we became very, very great friends, and I can get a bit sad about this.

26:00 Vince he was the sort of guy, that today if we were both alive we'd be great friends, and we went across the Pacific together, with all the others. And he went onto multi engine aircraft and we met again in England and pretty hilarious reunion in England and I went off to the Middle East, but I was flying in north of England, and I learnt later on in the invasion he was killed. Similarly Rob O'Dell who was one of the two that took care of

26:30 well my contribution, little Johnny, how brave, they were all powerful goes and I was holding Wolfsteins head. But Robbo he was, he was already becoming a great radio star, you might not know the name. But he was a great radio star and he was killed in bomber command too.

At Bradfield Park what were some other hilarious moments?

Oh

27:00 yes, not long after we were in, was the Japanese navy invaded Sydney. So we are sleeping away calmly at midnight or thereabouts and, “Everybody out, everybody out, the war’s on, the war’s on.” Bugger, its cold May out there. So I got out and pulled my air force great coat, “Take cover,” and our, we were previously told the take cover part

27:30 was down in the gulch you see. So we went down and I went under a rock a rocky overhang, and we were there, maybe for about an hour and then, “It’s all right, its all right chaps, come on back to bed, all clear.” I couldn’t get any guns or anything. It was a perfectly clear night, beautiful May night, clear every single star was shining, you know. So

28:00 I stepped out from under the rock and I got wet and it wasn’t raining, it was Owen Weingott who you might know, well Owen Weingott was on the rock above reliving himself onto me. You know, and Owen and I became good friends, he became quite a guy after, do you know the name? Owen Weingott went into theatre and then

28:30 I came into contact with him again, when the communications school was established at Bathurst, number 3 son went up to his course and Owen did the theatre course up there. So you know, Shakespeare and swords and all this sort of thing. So I kept in touch with Owen, he died not, only quite recently, a couple of years ago. But that’s an hilarious moment. That’s the sort of thing that one remembers.

29:00 **Did you get him back?**

Get back at him? Well I pulled his bloody leg if not his pisser, you know. Well I certainly reminded him of it, and when Ben our number 3 son went up I said, “You tell Owen that he knows your Dad.” I was delighted that we, after many years, on the telephone together. He was a lovely, lovely happy guy.

29:30 Thank god he survived the war. No I made quite a contribution to the theatre arts.

In respect to the squadron leader, the glass throat, was that just a throw away phrase?

Oh he had one, he was shot through the throat.

How did that affect his vocal chords and speaking?

Oh he could speak all right. I’m told that he had a property in northern Victoria and

30:00 see Roby, he was getting on then, he want that old but years and years later when I started to professionally get into aviation, long after the war, Roby was still flying. I think he had reached the stage where he should really be disqualified, but because he was Roby Manuel and he had been flying successfully for a long while they probably you know, fudged his papers. Because you see the

30:30 once again I said the we weren’t far away from the First World War. Everyone had come into a senior level in the Second World War they had all been juniors in the first war. As I went, I didn’t know them as an airman myself, I want quite up at the air marshal level. But after the war when I became the aviation editor of The Sun well then I did and of course they all knew who I was you know. So that was, if you like was an entrée and

31:00 if I wanted to talk to the chief of the air staff I could usually ring him up, you can’t any more, and I would talk to him.

All of you fellows had just started at Bradfield Park and discipline was new, what sort of discipline was there at Bradfield Park?

It was a discipline, what you learn was, you worked together, you would never say for instance, well I am not going on a parade this morning, you bloody well would or your

31:30 sergeant would report that he is sick, you know. Well then of course you had a procedure for that the doctor would go and blah, blah, blah. So there were, if you like the normal organisation of the day. Things were done at certain times and why not, you know. And much of it of course at Bradfield Park was going to school, all these people coming in from young men, they were all from varying from 19, I was

32:00 I wasn’t 21, I had my 21st birthday there. And my mother got her brother jack, the goldsmith to do my cufflinks, with a wing on them and my initials, gold cuff links, which I’ve given to my son to give to his new son, he’s only one, and down the line. So it was, what it was not to answer the question quickly is you will do this and you will do it now.

32:30 It was simply parade at 8 o'clock, well you went to parade at 8 o'clock, the movie would be on at 8:30 if you wanted to go to the movie, the reaction, you did or you didn’t you know. So it wasn’t the discipline that I think, because I wasn’t in the army, but because the army had larger numbers of people from a all armies I guess, but even from a wider range and strata

33:00 of society or community, they probably had forced them together and pretty rigorously you know. But it

was, it was nothing like, you see the American films, just stupid, boot camp and all that garbage, they do carry on to some point, that would get me into a discussion on the difference between people, Germans and Italians

33:30 and British and Americans.

What sorts of things were they trying to teach you at Bradfield Park?

Kings Rules and aircraft, Air Council Instructions, KR s and ACI s, Kings Regulations and Air Council Instructions. Air force law. Well that makes sense, just like road law does. The thing you can do and the things you don't do. And if there was ever are of digression there was always a KR and ACI

34:00 that you shouldn't do it that way. One of which later on was low flying. KR and ACI said you shall not low fly lower than 200 feet unless somebody is shooting at you, in other words in our side of the line you stayed above, in peace time, in training you stayed about 200 feet. You didn't of course, what you do in wartime of course that was something else, that's the beauty of being on your own. But things like that and ranks, what the ranks were. I already

34:30 knew them because I was interested in it, the lowest form of commissioned rank well lets go even further. We went in as aircraftmen, the lowest form in the air force. Then when we got, learnt our Tiger Moths we were leading aircraftmen. By the way we went in, because we were chosen air crew, there is the RAAF blue, it was a dark blue then, not the lighter blue that it is now, it wasn't RAF, it was almost a navy blue.

35:00 And the forage caps which we called cunt caps, that's the way they were shaped I think. We had a white flash in them, so moving around in the streets and things it wasn't a badge of rank, this is air crew you know. Then when we learnt to fly, first, Tiger Moths, then we felt we really knew about flying, we became leading aircraftmen. Then when you got your wings, you either became

35:30 a sergeant pilot or you were a commissioned officer. Then you go up through the ranks, so you know your ranks. So if somebody, an officer came in with lots of bars on you bloody well stood up and said, "Good morning, sir," and so on. So air force law, aircraft recognition was a pretty obvious one, basic navigation which I can still do, basic navigation.

36:00 Not much about history, oh the enemy, the enemy, yeah the enemy, that was Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulfs, and of course the Japanese, very few of us wanted to go. Some of us did but most of us wanted to go to Europe and get in involved over there. The Japanese had only just started, what Darwin was bombed in February '42.

36:30 **So why Europe?**

I think we were probably education wise, there we go education wise, very wise, in terms of education we were generally European educated. And of course once again it was a British environment, we were all English, we were all British. We didn't say we are British, and you people, oh some times we did, I mean if you ever

37:00 bumped into an Englishman that was rare out here. We would say to Englishmen, you reckon you are British but we are more British than you are, we are 98 percent British, you area Welshman. And of course you never saw, I don't think I ever saw an Aboriginal when I was a child. Maybe once. Never went as far as Burke or anything like that, and never in the city. And an Italian and people like that, well the early pre war migration was starting. You know

37:30 people were migrating from the Middle East who, well there weren't any, but Italians oh Ities [Italians] and wogs so we were naturally British, and all our history books, there were no Australian history books. I don't remember ever reading book that was specifically about Australian history. These wonder books that I mentioned, ships, trains, planes, they were about this thick and it was all British ships.

38:00 About the last 3 pages you might find an American ship, you know. you might discover, good heavens, the Germans had a liner that, crossed the Atlantic faster than the [SS] Aquitania or something. It was, the era was British and everything around us was British. Everything we bought was British if we wanted things, well if its British well its good.

38:30 So to answer your question, why did we think that way? The war hadn't reached a stage here where I, because I had gone anyway, but I can't recall anyone busting to get into the Pacific War, they did of course in a big way, in a big way.

Tape 4

00:40 **Can you tell me about Narromine?**

Its flat, which is why its used as a training airfield. Okay off we got to Narromine. Having had a short leave here

01:00 off we go to Narromine, which from memory was number 11 EFTS [Elementary Flight] Training School. Ostensibly and well they couldn't do anything else, the airfield which were just fields, were in the flat country. So you know, you had plenty of places to force land. There was school, you marched around, as you did Bradfield Park, you didn't walk around the place from A to B, the flight

01:30 and of course you were selected to go to various places. So that all the people you went in with didn't necessarily to into Narromine. Some of them went here some of them went there. Anyway, we, and this central group who I talked about and became close friends, we went to Narromine. You get theory of flight well we had done theory of flight which was essentially how an airplane flies.

02:00 How it stalls and how you go right and left and bank and stuff. Come the great day that you re actually getting into an airplane, well I had been in an airplane before, not that much. The DH 82 the Tiger Moth, that's real flying, it is a fundamental airplane, fundamental. Good airplane to. My instructor was a South Australian called Don Flavell, you like names in this as much as you can?

02:30 I've spotted it through various people, I can't recall the commanding officer's name. But you get into the airplane, the instructor sits in the command seat, the front seat, and the trainee is the second one. In you go and no parachutes, no parachutes I don't think, parachutes came later.

03:00 But you had the harness which was two leather straps with holes in it and it came through and it was very effective when you tightened that. Then you had a throttle and a yes you had a flap control. The flaps were manually, yeah the Tiger Moth had flaps but the Gypsy [Moth] hadn't developed flaps, so the Tiger Moth had flaps. Flaps are essentially row, used to raise and get a bit more air lift and

03:30 to slow your landing speed. Not that the Tiger Moth landed that fast. And swinging the propeller you had chocks under the wheel, no brakes, two ignitions, magneto switches, that's right, everything was done in twos, a good thing too, if one failed you had another on. So the switch is on the switch is off, when the switch is off they would then turn

04:00 you did this yourself, you shared the work around so you know how it worked. Suck in the fuel into the lines or something, and then switches on and then actually throw the propeller and catch it with the throttle. So the instructor takes her out first of all and faces you off into wind and of you go, take off in this lovely airplane. And the rule is

04:30 everything is done on a circuit, and once again, and ostensibly you climbed for 500 feet, then you turn left for 500 feet, then you at 1,000 feet and you should be. It took you ages to get to 5,000 feet and you seldom did that because it took to damn long, after you start to do aerobatics, then its not a bad idea to have more air between you and the ground. And off you go, and you progressively work up your hours.

05:00 Most people went solo about 9 to 10 hours, and I went about 10 1/2 or something. It's a wonderful moment where Don had taken me around and we came around and I landed the airplane, you'd be flying it all the time now, he'd be satisfied that you can fly the airplane. He gets out and he says, "Okay away you go, away you go," marvellous, your first take off.

05:30 Its one of, its probably the second great orgasm of a young mans life, second great first one, and so off you go, the Tiger Moth had two numbers that I remember. It climbed at 66 miles an hour within miles now, we had a speedo, and it glided at 66 miles an hour. Cruised at about 90 or 85. You did

06:00 a loop I think you did, you pushed the nose down, literally 90 miles an hour and get to 90 miles an hour and pull the stick back hard over you go and if you do it well you will hit your own slip stream. The last time I flew, in '55, I was there is an aviation writer out Bankstown and Keith Robey of the Illawarra flying school, he said, "John would you like to take a Tiger up?" "Oh yeah," you know. Well

06:30 I wasn't licensed to then, so he came up with me but I flew the airplane and to my great delight in 1955 I took a Tiger off and I climbed to 66 miles an hour and I glue it at 66 miles an hour. I did three loops in a row and hit the slip stream each time. 15 years later or something. Anyway off you went and the thing was to go up turn right

07:00 come down the down wind leg, turn again, come back to 66 miles, glide in, come in and land. And there was longish grass on Narromine airfield, huge airfield. Blow me down I'm coming into land and somebody stood up in front of me, in the grass. It wasn't Don Flavell, maybe it was, no it couldn't have been he would have told me. A person, God knows what he was doing in the grass

07:30 but anyway he suddenly stood up in front of me. So open the throttle climb up, 66 miles an hour, turn left, come down the down wind leg, and he had gone by now, I made a landing so it was my first solo.

What emotions are running through as you are sitting at take off ready to go?

Oh, you see this is the beauty of the training programs anywhere in the armed services, doing the most extraordinary, fancy for instance training to drive a bloody tank, or something, oh Jesus.

08:00 But you are trained to do it and you know it's going to happen. You know, if you are by that time you had discovered or the system had discovered you were scared stiff of flying, well you wouldn't get that far, you wouldn't get that far. I won't say we were young and bold, we were certainly young and we all wanted to drive cars, and airplanes were beginning to come on them. Most of us had read about them, I

read

08:30 about them a great deal, so it was a natural thing to do. But it was great, oh boy my first solo, that's the only one, you see, only one first solo to do. Until you get onto heavier aircraft. Like later on you get to a, you are flying a Spitfire and that's you really think you are there then. From having gone solo you then start to do more advanced flying aerobatics and forced landing and KR and ACI, not at 200 feet, but oh yeah?

09:00 Don Flavell had his own favourite forced landing ground, which was a smallish paddock, quite smallish paddock, with trees on all, quite tall well organised trees on this rectangle, you know. What you did to force land, to really get in close if you had not much space, not much running space, you side slipped

09:30 Now that meant that you, and you generally looked out the left hand side because you had your right hand on the stick and most of us were right handed so you tended to look out the left side. So to sideslip you would bank to the left but you'd push the rudder to turn to the right. So the airplane instead of gliding down like this, would go

10:00 like this, right, and so you would lose height but you would still be under control. But the thing was, in all airplanes, the thing was to make sure you straighten up before you reach the ground. He liked to do forced landings in the field, because it was so small, I can't say what it measured, it was certainly not as long as a football field, no where near as long as a football filed. Maybe

10:30 half as long as a football field, something of that order. You had to, if you are going to get in, assuming you, of course you don't force land, you throttle on and come away, but you'd have to go very close to the fence which was just a line of bloody trees, side stepping down, and then just before you got to say probably 20 feet, kick it straight and open up the throttle and take off again. He used to

11:00 test us out on, you see I survived.

Were there any accidents?

I don't get the point?

What sort of accidents happened?

Oh accidents, I don't recall while I was there anybody actually having an accident. There were some bad landings where you get your judgement, you know

11:30 and of course the Tiger Moth is so light, you go like this. Wings and wires are going to fall to bits, no I don't recall, engine failure, and the Gypsy was a very reliable thing thank God. I don't recall anybody ever having an accident or damaging things. If there was a very strong wind, guys would come out onto the wing tips to touch you in because

12:00 airplane was not much more than a powered glider, but it was a damn good airplane, ideal for elementary flying and training.

Who had right of way in respect to a plan coming into land versus one that's about to take off?

I don't know from memory, no the guy coming in to land would, but I don't recall a situation where aircraft were close enough where you have to decide. But if

12:30 other aircraft on the field, but they would be waiting, well it wasn't a strip, but they'd be waiting ready to turn into wind, wind side, the guy coming into land, of course he would have the right of way then.

Were you and your mates still playing pranks on one another?

We had some hilarious moments.

13:00 We had two in, I think we were there for 11 weeks, and we had two Saturday nights off. Well there is not much to do, or event to do to at Narromine. But Dubbo was not far away; Dubbo was about half an hour's drive. One of our guys was Ross Stuff, S, T, U, Ross Stuff and he looked like it, he was a tubby guy, went on to fly Catalina's later on.

13:30 And Ross Stuff worked, well his father did, he had access to I think, Western Stores, all over the western New South Wales. So Ross Stuff said, "Come on guys, I've got a car." And he had acquired, obtained, anyway he had for the night, it was an A model Ford tourer. So Ross drove and there was Vince, and Dick Higgins, and Don Flavell, and

14:00 Robin O'Dell, no Robin O'Dell had gone somewhere else. Charles Palmer, myself, more people than Henry Ford had designed for this machine. And off we would go at the end of the day, end of work, to Dubbo. We would drive like bats out of, he would be driving

14:30 crashing along, I don't think it was even amain road, anyway into Dubbo. Where of course, where do you head? You head to the pub. Now I wasn't a beer drinker, I could drink it but I wasn't like most of the guys who could drink a schooner and a schooner, I still can't. It knocked me over, so I would drink spirits you see. And Vince had this phrase, there'd be around of drinks, and I was drinking rum and

raspberry

15:00 you know, while they were drinking beers, and it was ninepence. And we'd finished the round, and Vince would say, "Come on, come on make a noise like ninepence, come on, Panda." And he gave me my nickname apparently which I had painted on my airplane much later on. "Make a noise like ninepence." So we'd put another ninepence in and really go really, absolutely rotten. But then

15:30 you've got to be home by midnight. We are flying tomorrow. So pile into this Ford, cold cold! Had the great coat on, and somebody was on top of me and Ross, or whoever it was that was driving, through the darkness of night. I realised I could see fire, red iron, and the thing had wooden floor boards and

16:00 the manifold was red hot, because Ross only had one speed, maybe the A model Ford didn't have any alternative speed. Anyway we got to Narromine, and when we got there I said, "I'm wet." Oh no, whoever it was, I don't know who was sitting on me, ooh no. It wasn't him either. When we clambered out

16:30 I had a crushed orange in my hand. I like orange juice still. We did that twice I think. But the night that if you like, non operational that I remember particularly, there was a of course a drill hall, where everything was done. And the movies were on, and this particular night Camille was on.

17:00 Robert Taylor and Greta Garbo and all that. And you know, we cleaned up and had our meal and we went in and sat down. I don't think we had ever seen Camille. But at the end of the film, bearing in mind it was a late 1930s film, Robert Taylor was one of the top stars and here he is, he's dying, Camille is dying of tuberculosis or whatever they died of then, in his arms, Garbo, you know. And of course he's in a magnificent white tie and tails

17:30 with ruffles and he had a widows peak, and he was a very handsome buy and he had his hair, Brylcream-ed or lacquered, what ever they put on. Camille, Greta Garbo was in his arms, dying. She had flounces and things in her hair and it was perfectly made up and their

18:00 faces got closer and closer and he was looking at her, she finally, ah, expired. And from the back of the hall, "Go on mate, fuck her while she's warm." And I haven't been able to see Camille or Greta Garbo since. I mean isn't that wonderful, oh dear. Now I cut this, if you want to put this on as well.

18:30 When I'm giving a talk, I do it occasionally I don't do a lot of it, but for air force associations I do. I got to this point with ladies that I didn't know, my wife of course has heard this. And I said he said, "Go on mate, do it while she is warm." But he used a more agricultural phrase. Dear Vince, but that was it, oh boy, that's Shakespearean.

19:00 Wonderful, wonderful

You caught the Ile de France to Canada, can you share with me the events leading up to that?

Yes. Well we passed out, we passed out in other ways, but passing out is when you graduate. So we passed out and we became aircraftmen one I think, we then had a little bronze propeller it think the indicated, we still had the white flashes in our hats. Went home

19:30 and had, not much leave. Now there must have been a submarine scare because they wouldn't bring the Ile de France into Sydney Harbour, she was in Hobart. So we piled on at Central onto a train at the appropriate time. Sadly, I remember Vince was with me, and the S, T, U were with me. And his girlfriend Peg came up to see him off, and she was a bit teary eyed. I said, "It's all right Peg, we'll be back." But of course we didn't…

20:00 And off we went and of course you change trains at Albury and god knows how long it took us to get to Hobart. Then we went across Bass Strait. Incidentally my wife and I went on the new ship the other day, and Bass Strait was bloody great, it was incredible, like a clam day in Sydney Harbour. On this occasion, in 1942, where am I, '42 about

20:30 October or something. We went from Melbourne on the [SS] Nairana which is about a 3,000 tonner to Launceston. The Nairana had been a troop ship in the First World War. And Bass Strait was, oh God, stood the thing on its end and we did slow rolls in it. Well I'm all right as long as I am out on the rail, you know. But you had to be careful where you were on the rail, we were best to be right up foreword, because what was sliding down the rail was other people's dinners.

21:00 It was hideous. Then into a train and down to Hobart. When the, remember when Kosovo was on, where they Kosovo refugees, anyway Bosnian refugees recently in the last couple of years. They stayed in the same camp that we stayed and I've forgotten the name of it now, it is still there. And then we went onto the Ile de France well she was about a 45,000 ton French trans Atlantic liner. And off we went to Auckland to pick up,

21:30 we were 400 of us I think, we went to pick up another 100 Kiwis [New Zealanders] from Auckland and then steam off to Honolulu and the west coast. And the ship stank. It had big ships, it had been stripped, and they had tiers of bunks. She could probably carry 2,000 or more troops. And it stank, and there were bed bugs and oh God it was awful. So

22:00 most of us went and slept up on the deck, the weather was good. Hurtling across the Pacific about 25 knots, a lovely south Pacific night, with the moon and the stars and practically nothing on, and the breeze, not a bad way to do it. But also on the ship were about 400 Afrika Korps POWs [Prisoners of War] from the desert. And in the

22:30 mess hall which no longer the main dining room, just a vast space, we lot were kept on this starboard side. The Huns [Germans] were over on the port side, we would have loved to have talked to them, you know. We were never allowed to and the British guard never took their eyes off them, they had guns on them all the time. And they were exercised down on the after deck, on the quarterdeck, once again with machine guns on them. But what interested us, they were all so tiny, they were even

23:00 smaller than me, they looked like boys, and they all had extremely short shorts, the lederhosen. Were right up here. They were tough and fit. So they were the only other passengers onboard. Oh yes, the OC [Officer Commanding] troops was an English colonel from the First World War. And I used to play the piano, by ear, I had started off, I had done a year or so and the conservatorium, but I

23:30 gone onto playing, I've got a good ear, I still do. And there had been a concert and I with another guy we played a duet and played jazz music and what have you. Sunday was coming up and the colonel sent for me. He said, "You will play the music at the church service on Sunday." And gave me some music. I said, "Sir, I do not read music." Quite apart from that I don't go to church. But he

24:00 said, "You will play the music." So the colonel dismissed Aircraftman Ulm you know, to get ready to go and play the music, oh my God. There was no way, I couldn't even, I knew basically, but I wouldn't, if they sung the tune and 'Onward Christian Soldiers' or something I could do that, by ear. And fortunately somebody in the system could play by music, so I was saved

24:30 out of that embarrassment or court martial or grounds or whatever you do, if you disobey the commanding officer on the ship. Anyway we passed through Honolulu, we weren't allowed ashore there. Pearl Harbour, and people came alongside with leis and all that stuff. And then onto San Francisco where once again off we went and we heard later on that the Americans had lost about 6 of their Huns. It might be a pocket full. But at San Francisco

25:00 we had one, we had a couple of hours off, and we had a our first civilian American meal. Now this was about what October '42, and there was not much sign the United States was at war. We, half a dozen of us, the gang, we went and had a nice lunch. The American waiters and things, they brought us a pile of plates and huge salad, the difference in, see we had all ordered steaks and things, you see.

25:30 And the difference in the cultures was e just sat there, whereas the Americans system is you eat your salad first, and then you get onto your main. So we just sat there and the waiters were coming along, and we were just sitting there. Anyway we managed to get over that. Then into a ferry across to Oakland to catch a train up to Vancouver the Southern Pacific train. Which was still

26:00 of course peace time. All the waiters in the dining car were, you don't call them Negroes any more, they are black American. And that's all right they are lovely fellows. So I ordered soup, we were in the dining car, 30 or 40 of us. I ordered soup and it was rather nice soup. The waiter came along to take my plate back to the galley

26:30 and I said, "Oh George, can I have another bowl of soup, please." And he looked at me, and shook his head, and he took the thing away and I saw him down in the galley looking back and talking to his other steward, galley people, looking out to me and shaking his head. Finally he came back with second bowl of soup. He put it down on the table and he said, "How do you know my name was George?"

27:00 Now Vince Thurston, my dear friend, the sort of slang that you develop, anybody, and I still use it, Val picks me up on this, we, like yesterday say, we driving along and the guy in front is too slow getting away from the lights and I say, "Oh come on George." And I'll never forget that, back he came, "How do you know my name was George?" So into

27:30 Vancouver and of course you want a drink, we had few out before we got the truck to go to Montreal. Montreal was the main station place for the air training scheme [EATS – Empire Air Training Scheme]. We go find a restaurant and we go up to the bar. In those days you couldn't drink standing up you had to, it was tavern, didn't have pubs as we know them, they had taverns you see. If you wanted a drink you had to go and sit down.

28:00 And order it and maybe have a sandwich or something. So you are learning the culture as you go. Then onto the train which was, here we are, boy oh boy, free trip through the Rockies, very spectacular. Very spectacular, pausing here and there. And the cold, we were in, then moved into RAF winter uniforms. Now RAF winter uniforms were about the lighter than the Royal Canadian Air Force summer

28:30 uniforms. This was getting into the Canadian winter. So when we got through to Lachine which was the manning depot, you learnt the language, the manning depot, for the Canadian navy, while you wait, there is a lot of waiting in the services. You wait in your queue and get sent here and stuff. So there we are, but we had parades, each flight of 30

29:00 and this flight of 30 Aussies were looked after by a Canadian navy corporal, ground staff guy. Ours was a French Canadian, he was sweet, I don't remember what his name was. There was s blizzard blowing

this morning for parade and the parade ground and the various buildings, of course the parade is supposed to be out on the parade ground, but our thoughtful corporal put us in a little side

29:30 street just off the parade ground, partly sheltered by the building you see, apparently he was called on by his superior officer. “You are supposed to be on parade.” “But, sir, my Aussies will die, my Aussies will die.” Well we didn’t die, he looked after us and Christmas came and we had all been invited out by a local Canadians to go and have Christmas with them. We’d been, we met, we used to go out at night of course, on the town.

30:00 What was the name of the place, a brothel down in St Catherine’s Street. Oh the boys reminded me of it recently. And our first strip club, boy. But Christmas came and us Aussies, but Christmas came and we had met a guy called Busby. And he had invited two of us, Doug Whitehurst and I, was killed later on too, to go and have Christmas with them, and then some silly bugger

30:30 went and caught, measles or scarlet fever or something, and we were all quarantined. So the Canadians did it very well, they turned on a Christmas dinner for us, including ham with raisins and maple syrup over it, all that stuff. Montreal. Then you get divided up to go to your various stations.

Did you make it to the brothels to have a look?

31:00 My dear chap, I was a very virtuous chap, some did. I think in general terms, the sex thing was talked about a lot, but there wasn’t much action.

What was said from the air force point of view with respect to VD [venereal disease]?

From memory I don’t think anything, I think we knew about it, but as for the First World War you know, you remember Mel Gibson’s film, Gallipoli, have you ever sent that, you know

31:30 that woman’s things, the parts of, and this does that and this does that and you know, no we, I think we all knew about that. But most of us remained virginal. Except Vince, Vince I know wasn’t. Vince was real pants man he was terrific. Vince Thurston and I met up, I’m sorry we lost him, if we were both still alive we would be great friends. Vince was a real, real pants man. I

32:00 can recall later on when we were in Brighton in England, which was where we collected the air force, the Australian and New Zealand navy was at their personnel base. We were waiting to go somewhere and we decided to go down to Hove, the summer time then, nice sunny day, and Hove was just down the way from Brighton. We were in the hotel, I’ll get to this later in Brighton, the Grand where Maggie Thatcher was nearly blown up.

32:30 And half of dozen of us went down in the bus, we get out the bus stop outside the hotel and there is a little group of shrubs, it was little island of island standing there, youngish woman. We had say 5 minutes to catch the bus. And Vince looked at her, and we said, “Come on 5 minutes,” and he said, “Come on you watch.” And Vince just went over and said, “Do you or don’t you?” And behind the bushes and back he came and we caught the bus.

33:00 Vince, he was real pants man, and he looked like it, very, very good looking, handsome. Of course in England then, most of the young men were somewhere else, you know. What was, he’s in Singapore was the phrase. No I think just generally speaking, particularly in the film, there was lots and lots, lets get laid, that’s this dreadful American expression. But there was more

33:30 theory than practical, there was practical but not as much as there appeared to be.

What planes were you training on in Canada?

Yes, well the, we then moved to a service flying training school. Initial flying, service, elementary flying training Tiger Moths, service flying we were flying heavier, that was the Harvard. The Harvard was the forerunner of the Australian Wirraway.

34:00 It was the North American T33 or something, it was a two seater, winged engine, radial engine, wasp engine, and fortunately the push button and wheels came up and so on. It cruised at oh 150 or something. So compared to the Tiger Moth, big airplane, you know. So we trained

34:30 on those, did all the same sorts of things only rather more advanced. So during that you got onto, you started to do more operational flying, close formation flying and dive bombing and stuff. Night flying of course, we didn’t do any night flying in Tiger Moths and damn good thing too, because everything would be black out there without a damn light. But on night flying we went down to our, I was posted to Aylmer Ontario which is about and hour and a half from

35:00 Detroit, dirty nights in Detroit, but we will come to that. But its now the police academy, not many years ago, Charles my number one son drove down that way and its now the police academy with a big airfield. And of course the beauty compared with the Australian conditions, we had sheets on the bed. The buildings were heated, well of course it bloody well had to be, because most of the

35:30 year you froze to death. Oh boy, but night flying, okay you do some night flying, do some night flying. You do circuits and bumps. Of course you got to get the hours in, and everybody, you don’t do the circuit for yourself, you say righto. So you are taking off and there is a guy ahead of you at night, you did your circuit, you followed watched his taillight, when he turned you watched when to turn, and come around

and land.

36:00 I remember this particular night, I was saying to myself, why doesn't he bloody well turn, I was solo. I was following this bright light, following, what the hell, and it wasn't an airplane, it was a train. So I was heading off to western, following a train off to western Ontario somewhere, you know. Well as you see, once again I survived. Another thing that they had in Canada that they didn't have in England, if you got

36:30 lost you went down and had a look at the railway station to get the name of it, you see you couldn't do that in England because all the names had been removed. Snow, we flew in snow, in heavy snow, they had put snow ploughs on the runway, they were formal runways, it wasn't a grass field, proper triangular runways, you would land in almost like a gulch of snow bank as high as

37:00 so and so. And you were forgiven if you, if there was an icy runway you see. The Harvard had, it braked, you had your rudders, your brakes were on the rudder, you pushed the top of the brake, to brake the airplane. You only need to slide, and most of us did, I ground looped one, you ground looper it and it would go up on its nose and smash up the

37:30 air screw [propeller], which I think was a triple bladed, anyway smashed up the air screw. And in the hangar, the whole line was, a whole line of bent metal, bent air screws, which you were forgiven, it wasn't your fault that was the weather.

So that happened to you?

Yes, yes, I did ground it. Felt great, oh I've done a grounder, but I am not going to suffer for it discipline wise you know. I don't remember anyone was hurt there particularly either. We

38:00 started dog fighting each other then too. Could actually fire guns, they had a little pop gun to go and fire targets, and drop little targets, dummy bombs on dive bombing and that sort of thin, close formation flying we loved that.

Share with me the rule of engagement for dog fighting?

On training?

Yes?

Well I think the essential thing is you

38:30 don't bump into the other guy. Essentially dog fighting is you want to turn side, its deflection shooting. After all its, you don't attack somebody like this and keep on going, they would turn. And they usually turn left because most of us were right handed. And so there is no use shooting at his tail, you've got to shoot ahead of him, deflection shooting. So you find the great aces, and I remember Buzz Burling was a Canadian ace.

39:00 Who'd comeback from the Battle of Britain with gongs and stuff. He was doing a moral tour, we all wanted to meet, we all wanted to do that. We all wanted to meet Buzz Burling. I remember him saying, and of course eyesight was the key to it, and what he did, he would go out onto a hill or something and look at a distant tree. And then he'd look at one of the branches of the tree and then he'd

39:30 concentrate until he could catch quite a distance off, just a leaf. The discipline of the eye, but what the great aces had, of course was speed. You know, when you got the Spitfires and Messerschmitts you were fighting each other at say 350 miles an hour, didn't happen to me fortunately they had all gone home. And I was dive bombing mostly. But you really

40:00 didn't have time, although you in theory get 30 degrees ahead depending on your speed and all this. You didn't have those instincts, like crap shooting, we used to do that as part of our training in England, go out crap shooting. And I want bad at that of course that's largely, its like Bradman, Bradman didn't, the balls coming here and there I will, he just did it, instantly. The top athletes in that area of precision, its

40:30 how do you work out what it is. But the great aces they could do it instinctively. I just read a book, I don't read this sort of thing much.

Tape 5

00:40 **Tell us about the close formation flying you were trained on in Canada?**

Well its all part, it's no doubt its part of your, its fairly precise business. You know,

01:00 and somebody leads, people are formatting on him. Well there were various patterns for forming, depending on what you were particularly doing, like we got into operations we used to fly in sixes. There, one two, three, each one with a number two. There was systems of if the leader

01:30 calls 90 degrees port, if there are 6 of you, how do you do that and still remain information. Well how you do that, you do what we call a fighter turn. I remember doing it in Italy, it's the same thing we were talking about in ordinary training. But if he's got time, if you are in combat of course that's something else. If he got time and he says port left, he keeps going for a while, and you are on the inside, which in the instance I am coming to

02:00 I was on the inside and the guy on the outside goes up top. So you roll like this, so when you come out you are still in formation, got it, you don't just wheel around otherwise it meant this guy had got to throttle back, this guy's got to speed up, well you don't do that, you do what they call a fighter turn. And I was doing this, looking ahead a bit, but we were flying over Lake

02:30 Trasimeno in Italy, a very still day. We were very low and I was on the inside and he called a port left and I was to go under him you see. You are watching him all the time, you are not that far away. Only a few length of airplane away and I was watching him and I just suddenly, just caught out of my left eye that I was under water, glass, and I pulled up like hell to get out of it. I reckon I was pretty close to it then, because if you touch the water you are gone, you know.

03:00 But so tis, all your training and if you like precision, precision flying. Also its rather nice, the RAF had a phrase, "Hendon or nothing." We would come back from operation in Italy, maybe all broken up, we might have gone out, and I can remember one particularly wing went out and there were 60 of us, and we were doing whatever, we were trying to disturb somebody.

03:30 and when we were forming up again at 10,000 feet which is above light flak, you normally cruise at about 10,000 feet, because the light flak couldn't get at you, heavy flak could, no matter how high you were. And you would circle around, whoever was leading if he was still there would waggle his wings, and our call sign was dumpling in the RAF in my squadron, it varied, okay

04:00 dumpling two circuits, and I had taken over on this occasion because the others had gone somewhere else. and the there were 3 or 4 of us and I just called out on radio, "Dumpling Red 3 I will do 2 orbits at angels 10, if anybody wants to join me we will go home together." So two of the guys joined me and of course coming back to our own airfield, back behind the old allied lines, we closed in. To come over the airfield, and the phrase was

04:30 "Hendon or nothing," you know, close in over the airfield. Hendon was the airfield outside London where the RAF used to have its air displays. Later they became the Farnborough air show, 'Hendon or nothing.'

The idea of the slang used is important for the archive.

I thought we would do something on slang, maybe if you come to squadron time.

05:00 **Lets keep to chronology.**

…and Val says, "Oh jolly good show," you know,

You mentioned you fell behind a bit when training?

Yes, well I graduated and got my wings. Now, you do ground, lot of classroom work. And

05:30 although I was lousy at maths at school, maybe all the people on this particular course were even lousier because I came top with Frank Pogson, a friend of mine who just died a couple of months ago. In maths, so the strategy of the war had then developed the main battle was the battle of the Atlantic to get on top of the submarine. You had this gap in the middle of the Atlantic where you couldn't get

06:00 at them, the wolf packs [German submarines] would assemble. So everybody was working on that and they needed more coastal command pilots. So coastal command pilots need to be navigators as well. So because Frank and I had done well at maths to our great displeasure because we wanted to get onto single engines, because we had trained on singles and wanted to go onto signals. We were posted to Prince Edward Island to do a navigation course. Now

06:30 Prince Edward Island is up at the Gulf of St Lawrence, and you know, the figures at you remember and I can remember them in a minute, our instructor there, anyway off we went to very quick leave down to Detroit or New York. Up to Prince Edward Island which was a Canadian navy base where they flew on training Ansons. You know the old twin engine Ansons. But they were very early model Ansons where you had to wind the

07:00 wheels up so you had a pilot and then all we did, and that was a couple of weeks to, navigation training, navigation, the final exercise was to fly over to Sydney, there is another Sydney, Sydney, Nova Scotia. Do a reconnaissance and when we got there, Hurricanes would come up and attack us

07:30 as part of their training and we were going to, plot Sydney Harbour Nova Scotia and then fly out to an imaginary point. And they would give you the imaginary point, no islands, it was just X. A point out in the Atlantic, fly out to it, navigate, we were navigating, navigate the airplane tell the pilot what course to do and stuff. And fly, so do Sydney Harbour, then go out to point X

08:00 and then navigate your way home. As you can see I survived that too. So I bet you the gut that was

there, two things about Prince Edward Island, 3 things actually. First of all with their great enthusiasm, the Canadians had put a compass swinging installation down the end of the air, way away from the building. In concrete so you take

08:30 the airplane down in what you call swing the compass because the compass doesn't get, placed north all the time because the earths magnetic field, and also depending where you are on the earth there is a thing called deviation. So you adjust that so that you r compass is working the right way. Apparently long before we got there, fortunately before we got there, they found that the compasses were playing up. Well the engineers who were told to go and put this concrete thing, hadn't been told to

09:00 reinforcing your concrete with steel bars is not very good for swinging compasses over. They had to do something else. The other thing about Prince Edward Island was it was dry, or there is the station, Summerside, Summerside was the second town of Prince Edward Island and it was dry. But the air force station wasn't, so the locals at night were almost bashing their way in and all sorts of deals being done by people in the station to sell them liquor because liquor

09:30 for the poor deprived citizens outside. And the other, individual I remember was flight Lieutenant Capstick Dale, he was RAF and he was a delightful fellow but I think quite mad. And I think he had done, he looked as thought he had started back before the war so that he was our chief navigation instructor. He had an RAF uniform and his RAF cap was flattened, you could hardly see the eagle, and it was green

10:00 with you know sea spray, he had probably been in early flying boats or something. So I did, I passed that successfully. Well from there you get posted to an operational flying unit, on heavy aircraft. And that was Debert, Nova Scotia where it was equipped with Lockheed Hudsons. Now, okay, it's a big airplane, practically bearing in mind, we, its part of the progression, and

10:30 you know, you do that. a crew of Aussies had picked me to be their captain, they are training, gunners and navigation themselves. But I was to be a captain, but first of all I got to fly the damn thing. Now the Lockheed Hudson which is a tail wheel airplane, powerful, they use them later in the war, Lockheed electors. It had a nasty habit that if you

11:00 swung at all, if you over brake landing, because you are going quite fast, so you have got to slow the thing down. You put a bit too much brake on, it will swing and of course your centre of gravity passes and it can't swing back again. And what it will then do, is it will then ground loop, and the undercarriage, main undercarriage strut will come up through the wing, which had

11:30 been carefully designed so that it would rupture the fuel tank while the engine was going and you burn the whole bloody lot. That had happened while I was there. So I was doing it, but I was falling behind. You know, you are supposed to graduate by about X hours. It reached this point where the others, including my mate Frank, they were getting to the end of course, where the wing commander flying sent for me

12:00 Norman Berry Littlejohn. And he said, "Well you know you are falling behind a bit what do you reckon?" And I said, "Well if you direct me to go on I will do my best, but the likelihood is I will break something and maybe kill people including myself. As you asked me what I would like to do, I would like to, please sir, I want to go onto fighter command, which is what I always intended to do." So he gave me a posting onto fighter command.

12:30 Normally if you sort of washed out of a course like that, you'll be likely to be posted to the prairies on the old single engine ferry battle which are bloody death threats in themselves. Death traps in themselves, dragging a drogue around for training gunners to shoot at. I think I realised or at least I suspect, many years later it occurred to me his name was Littlejohn and I

13:00 did establish that Norman Berry Littlejohn was the cousin of George Littlejohn who was my father's last pilot on the last flight. So he would have known, I didn't know who he was, but he wouldn't have known because of my name, he would have known. So maybe the old boy networked worked. And I was posted onto fighters and went down to Halifax to join the [HMS] Queen Elizabeth.

13:30 **What was it about the bigger airplanes that you didn't like?**

Well, you are a driver and we all are, and you are pretty good at driving your car, but you wouldn't be comfortable suddenly getting into an old no, manually operating, no gears Leyland bus, you know. I probably would have got there

14:00 but I was not comfortable with the airplane. Now at that stage, after I am a qualified pilot, if you are not comfortable, and as I say I was quite small. And short legged, I mean you can adjust things up to a point, but I was just not comfortable in the airplane. Whereas when I moved from the Tiger Moths to the Harvard's I was comfortable in the airplane right away, as I was later on in the other aircraft I flew.

14:30 **How did you get on with the Canadians?**

Oh fine, we felt that they, we felt they were too well dressed. All their accoutrement, their uniforms and standards were generally almost infinitely better that ours. But okay in those days they were a suburb of the United States and they were wealthier. But

15:00 they weren't American boy they hated to be taken, and still do. You know, we've been to Canada from time to time and my wife actually worked there for about 3 years. If you say you are an American, Canadians don't like that at all. We do have a lot in common with them, particularly vis a vis the Americans, we don't bullshit so much. You know, we tend to say, oh for Christ's sake, whereas the Americans got to, we use the word bullshits, its all part of their background you know,

15:30 display and stuff. They are all right and thank god there are lots of Americans, whatever one's politics might be, thank God that they are on our side, generally. We can come to that, because I met a couple of very interesting Americans, particularly when I was a prisoner in Europe.

You mentioned trips down to Detroit, can you tell us about that?

Yes, boy did we, just as we

16:00 went to Dubbo, we wanted to get to Detroit because from Ontario London, which was the main town, London was not far away. Then there was a quick train down to Detroit. And I think we had two weekends off which would be Friday night Saturday night and you know back. So we finished flying on the Friday and then beeline for the train and down to Detroit. Now this is what, late '42

16:30 well there were plenty of Americans at war then but you wouldn't have noticed, because they were wonderfully generous. I remember one of them said to us, "Look you guys, I would like to take you for a drive but we're terribly sorry we are not going to take you very far, I've only got 100 gallons of gas left." And he had a huge brand new V8 Buick

17:00 Detroit of course, the auto capital of the world. But we first of all would head to, we stayed at, we'll get in sequence. We stayed at the Port Shelby Hotel, and the Port Shelby Hotel had special arrangements, they were so kind to ex servicemen. Like they'd strip the single bedroom and put 4 bunks in it for which you got, I've forgotten what the price was, but for much less, they got much more money out of

17:30 4 of us, and others. But that was all right. But hen we would head off for the strip shows, and the first time we had actually seen, I saw Gypsy Rose Lee, does the name mean anything to you? Gypsy Rose getting in and out of the bath, too decorous. But the ones we really enjoyed, and of course by this time we were half rotten. Of course their beer was awful, I could drink their beer because it had no strength, but get onto the spirits. But the longest bar in Michigan. They

18:00 claimed it was the longest bar in Michigan, it ran from Detroit to Chicago somewhere. Well we used to skite about the long bar at the Hotel Australian which was were we always used to meet in Sydney, that was the meeting point in Sydney. Its the MLC [insurance company] centre now, I'll meet you at the long bar, everyone knew where that was in Sydney. This was the longest bar in Michigan, we would beat it up there, and then head off to the

18:30 no the Gaiety was in Montreal, whatever the theatre was. Off to the strip shows and see the variations of strip shows, my goodness, including you know trained pigeons to come and remove the final bits of garments and what have you. We didn't have zips in those days but he buttons popping all over the place. No we had some, we had some, and then stagger back.

19:00 One thing, I don't know what else the war did for, I certainly did know that one thing the war did for me. I was never drunk after the war, not once. I get a bit under a bit. My mother and stepfather used to, "Oh been having a bit, because he wants to go to bed." Go to sleep. Oh we used to get absolutely rotten. Fall, literally fall, a couple of that in England, on a week we were doing night flying and the whole of

19:30 England was under fog, so we couldn't night fly and we couldn't fly by day. What did we do?

Halifax, what was going on there?

Oh yes, naked in Halifax. Halifax had, in the first was, had a gigantic explosion, an ammunition ship blew up or something. And you could still feel it, Halifax was a terribly drab place. This was now getting

20:00 onto a north American winter, it was getting pretty cold. And you know a parade of course, there were thousands, thousands of us there. One day we were ordered to go to the hangar in 4s and 5s and strip naked and stand up against the wall and be photographed. So you know, we are dutiful people, what do they want to do this

20:30 for, I don't know, so what. So and I had a guy from Redding England standing next to me and I've forgotten the others, I never saw him since but I remember he came from England. So we went over to the hangar and stripped stark naked and stood to attention, and the guy took a photograph and we dressed and off we went again. Now I don't know to this day whether it was some anthropological research going on or some guy developing a perve

21:00 album. But okay, naked in Halifax. And then to the Queen Elizabeth which as you know is a what, 83,000 tonner. You know, I never seen so much ship in my life. Going back to Sydney Sun days, with the war, I was actually out on a motor boat, we knew that the two Queens were passing. One was coming in and one was going out with troops.

21:30 And we got this historic picture in Sydney Harbour of the [HMS] Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth passing, going in and out of Sydney Heads, which of course couldn't be used until way, way after the

war. But onto Halifax, and marching and going alongside it, she was alongside. The whole world was a sheet of steel but it was a remarkable exercise, the OC troops was a Canadian navy group captain. So

22:00 the ship domestically was run by the Canadian navy and we had a complete American division on it. This was the build up to the invasion, you see, this was '43 now. Actually while we were on parade one day it was announced that the Italians had surrendered. So that was the time, September '43 I think. Anyway we got onboard and it was a complete American division which was about

22:30 22,000 troops. There were about 2 or 3,000 air force and you couldn't even see them, there was so many army you know. And it was all American chow line and American utensils and there only two, they were hardly sittings, you just chose what time of the day. I liked sleeping in so you only had two meals a day. I used to choose the last one. Which from memory which was about 9:30 or 10.

23:00 And then another one later on. The food was okay there was plenty of it. It just went on and on and on. We were given, we could have hammocks, which I, we were so close. The guy who was next to me who was English, English air force he had, he slept with his boots on and he slept head to my feet. So his boots in this sway of the ship, coming, bang

23:30 banging my cheek. So a lot of the time we spent up on deck. And of course she cruised at nearly 30 knots. That was very, very impressive performance. She had massive anti aircraft guns.

How much mixing did you have with the Americans on board?

None. I don't think, no it wasn't, the thing was so, you were so involved in the actual

24:00 routine of the day. When we say, okay I went to the 10 o'clock setting, well it would take you half an hour to get there because there was no, the queue was running all over the ship. You didn't and there were 25,000 people onboard the thing. Wherever the Americans were, which was everywhere, we never actually went and chummed up with them, we just, the decks of course, lots and lots of decks, the decks were half the decks were beds.

24:30 **What happened when you arrived in England?**

Well we arrived in Garroch, the Clyde, in the dark. Once again, lots of queuing, you do everything by numbers. That's all right there is no other way. Onto a train to get us down to Brighton. I lost 14 pounds, I used to play cards, gamble, poker,

25:00 and I lost 14 quid going down on the train and I haven't gambled seriously since either. To get down to Brighton, we were all the other Thurston and the Stuffs and the numbers, many of us were still there together. Brian White, he and I, he is up at Wahroonga, as a matter of fact, I'm having lunch with him the week after next.

Brighton was a holding depot?

Yes they called

25:30 it a personnel depot. It was the, the whole of the south coast of England was denuded of civilians, you know the invasion which was to have come but it didn't So we, there were the two main hotels in Brighton. There was the Metropole and the Grand. As I mentioned the Grand was the one where the conservatives were having their party and they tried to blow up Maggie Thatcher, well we were in the Grand. And this is now of course, we've got wings now, we are waiting

26:00 posting to an advanced flying school, before going onto an operational unit, which is then getting onto actual operational airplanes. So we had a lot of spare time and I, you could do a bit of interesting work around the place and what interested me, I went down to the intelligence section, working with the guy, Bob Marshall who I think is still around. We became very good friends, as a matter of fact we, chummed up in

26:30 Halifax and he went onto bomber command and he fortunately for him he survived bomber command and got a DFC. So we had a lot of time, we'd go up to London, of course immediately we want to go down to the East End. Which had been cleaned up then, but you realised that, we have been to London in more recent years, all the buildings around London are modern buildings, why because they were all flat. When you went to the East End the streets had been cleared up but the buildings hadn't been

27:00 build, and there were holes and drains open and so on. But London was still London and you really, and I still do enjoy England. I don't want to live there, but it's a great place to visit. You know, its connections and your interests, it was great London. I remember we went I think its, yes it's St Paul's or Westminster, but in the crypt

27:30 in Wellington's Crypt, because my interest in history, particularly the Napoleonic history, from my point of view Wellington was on the other side. But Wellington is there, its huge red marble sarcophagus. In a crypt not much bigger than this room because it takes a bit of space, twice as big as this room. But then all set around the brick in the walls the remains. This one I remember I have forgotten his name. But it was Flight Lieutenant

28:00 so and so, an American who died for England, in Eagle squadron, the Yanks went over to the RAF. And you know, there he was with Wellington. Nelson of course, Nelson was still in the, they hadn't put him

under St Paul, maybe under St Paul was too jammed up. But he was all bricked in, heard of St Paul, Nelson was there you know.

28:30 So that sort of thing and going on leave and going to the theatre. And down in Brighton going to the theatre, little Brighton theatre was the old you know, several balconies. On the top balcony there was a bar. The bar was run by, a woman, not Maisie,

29:00 by then we would go, and of course there were not many men around, not many young men. But we were there and of course being dominions people relatively English, we were very well off, I mean, they paid the Brits of our rank practically nothing. Where as we were getting almost a pound a day then. You know, with nothing to do with it. What the hell was her name, it might come to me. But

29:30 you'd go into the bar and she had two rows of liquor, whiskey and liqueurs and what have you. And she said, "You can have a mixture of all the top that's a bus buster, or a mixture of all the bottom and that's a breast caresser." One was I think a opaque green, the other one was

30:00 opaque mauve, puce and what have you. Then she would toss you double or nothing. So we spent a bit of time in there. Then she would do the can-can, with no underwear you know. The war, the war.

How were the English population faring?

Well they were basically good humoured. They were

30:30 relieved, they really did go through it you know, the 30,000 of them were actually killed in London and 30,000 elsewhere. We did more of, did something about that. I'll just digress for a moment, I read a book, I'm still reading, but a wonderful book called The London Perspective by Colonel James Healy, not Robert Healy. He was a military attaché in the beginning

31:00 of the war and he was there all the way through. Of course, with the developing of the American liaison, he had access to everybody, US military attaché. His driver had been bombed out in the blitz, the whole lot, an English working class driver and had his house blown to bits out in the suburbs somewhere. So colonel went down to see if he could give him a hand and commiserate with him, condolences and what have you.

31:30 And he says in his book, and his driver, whatever his name is, his driver said to me, "It's all right, sir, nothing to what we will do to them." And so they, that kept, I don't want to digress too much on that sort of thing, I could of course because it was the English people. The English upper classes they were quite ambivalent about it. As you well know. They got into it of course when Hitler behaved, finally. But

32:00 it was the, it became the people's war. They, the Germans behaved so badly, well we are just not going to have this, and so the whole population got behind it. So they went through it very badly during the blitz. But by and large you could go to the theatre in London. I was interested in music and I went to the Wigmore Hall with one of my air force friends to hear

32:30 Milanovic play. What's his name, Barbirolli had started there, I don't think he had got it going. But Barbirolli got all, he only, musicians he could find were old ones, but he got them, and they became the Halle Orchestra. We enjoyed England, the atmosphere we felt that, we really did feel we were part of it, we were us, it wasn't the Brits and us,

33:00 I mean we would throw off at them and they would throw off at us for being colonials, but we were it, we were all us.

Where was your advanced flying school?

Yes okay, I think I've done enough with Brighton, yeah, you couldn't go down on the beach because it was all barbed wire. And we went out and found a place were you could have steak, it probably wasn't, it was probably horse. Down the way was the

33:30 Black Swan. Around at Rottingham, with 15 or 12 and so we would go and have a nice afternoon tea. So from there I was posted up to Ternhill in Shropshire to AFU, advanced flying unit. Now this is getting to be heavier aircraft. And it was the Miles Master which was quite a powerful radial engine airplane, where you are really starting to do training on operational flying.

34:00 And you know you do that, and you go up with an instructor first of all. You do a lot of ground work, because we know how to fly an aircraft but you have got to go through the manual, which lever does this and which lever does that and when does the, if it gets too hot, when does it blow up and when does the light show that the wheels are down, how much fuel have we got. All that sort of thing. But the airplane is still the Tiger Moth, it does things the same way. But this English

34:30 sergeant I think he was, he took me. He must have been in a bad mood, instead of letting me fly he flew it and he threw it, he was determined to make me sick. He didn't. He didn't make me sick. So you know, we did that and we then go to a satellite, mind you the whole of England was airfields, it was an aircraft carrier, the airfields

35:00 overlapped. Which brings me to this moment, talking about drinking. I must see whether, I am going to Adelaide shortly with my wife, see her family or what's left of them, and I must see whether Lyle

Thicker is still alive. Lyle Thicker was a South Australian we became very pally with. He didn't drink. He was a very well educated guy and later after the war became head of the Commonwealth department of education. Wish I had kept in touch with him. But on this particular night, I mentioned that we

35:30 you had a week of training, navigation and air to air gunnery and dive bombing and all that. You had a week of night flying, we were rostered to do a week of night flying. England was clamped, every night, every night, so we couldn't fly. And then were weren't scheduled to fly by day. So what did we do? Now it so happened that Lyle turned 21.

36:00 So we were senior NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and we were in the mess, now Ternhill had been an original Royal Flying Corps station in 1912. The painting were on the wall with chaps with beards and balloons and swords and all that sort of thing. And it was interesting because we being commonwealth airmen, relative to even senior RAF NCOs, well we

36:30 were wealthy men. You know, now the senior RAF NCOs were in the permanent air force, that was their career. It would probably take them years to become even sergeant, slight sergeants and warrant officers, whereas we came in and you know, we could buy the house. Well Lyle turned 21. So we said, Lyle you know, and he said, "Well you know, I don't drink but." And he had a scientific research turn of mind which lead to education I guess. And he said, "Well I guess I have got to do it some time." So

37:00 we did it scientifically. We put two card tables, they were small, like card tables together and the spirits glasses were very heavy glass about his thick. They weren't exactly Waterfords [crystal] but they were about this thick. Would you believe it I rank gin and orange. So we covered each one of them, there were several of us, and we covered each one over and we had rows and rows and rows of alcohol, on these things on these two tables.

37:30 And after each drink, after his first drink, Lyle knocked it back, stood up and did the balance test. Arms out one leg, closed his eyes. Well this went on for about oh 3, 3 drinks. It was suddenly, and we were matching him . It was suddenly as though somebody had a rope on his ankle and pulled him, and he went thwack on his face.

38:00 Well the following day, his nose was out here and this was purple and something else was yellow. Now nearby there was a lady of an estate. Also nearby there was a Women's Royal Naval Air Service training establishment. So this lady would call up our orderly room and say she was having tea

38:30 for the ladies Royal Naval College and she would be delighted to have any young men from the self governing dominions, you see. They had gone through the phrases, no mustn't call them colonials any more, the chaps from the self governing dominions. We said, "Oh Lyle will come." So we straightened out Lyle and in the afternoon he was still like this and sent him off to represent the dominions. But I crawled home.

39:00 We were as I say, I don't think we had ever been in an English fog, but you really can't see from here to there. And we were accommodated, there was only about 8 or 9 of us, in a small, it wasn't a manor house but it was a nice house. But it had been a WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] maternity hospital. But the WAAFs had gone somewhere else or maybe the chaps hadn't been doing their job and there weren't any maternity, pregnant WAAFs any more.

39:30 But we were billeted in that. I found myself, did I? Well I must have been because I remember it, and I was wearing RAF battle dress which was very heavy duty battle dress. I was crawling in the smog, and I was getting scratched and I was in a rose garden with the rose down to the ground, and I was getting scratched. What do you do? You keep going so I and blow me down, I emerged from the other side and here's

40:00 this step, so the navigation worked. I don't think I ever got really drunk after that either. That was about it.

Tape 6

00:40 **Coming onto the Spitfires at the ATU?**

After the advanced flying unit and various experiences. We went up to Northumberland to an airfield called Eshott, near the coast, which was an operation training unit from which you finally go on operations, and from which

01:00 sometimes you fly some operations out towards Norway. And you come to the glorious moment that at last, after what a couple of years, I am going to fly a Spitfire. So you do, and of course there is no geo control, its you and nobody else. So you do your bookwork, how the undercarriage works, what the fuel pressures and boost pressures and flap setting and all that.

01:30 You are pretty clued up by then and out you go. These were the early training airplane, they had them on operations but they were single bladed. They were not yet pneumatically, the undercarriage was still operated manually. So its an airplane with a long nose, if you are driving a Spitfire on the ground you

can’t see where you are going you have to constantly weave to see

02:00 where you are on the runway, this great long Merlin engine. Our later models we had were even longer. Anyway so in you get and taxi out. It was a grass airfield and you got radio of course they’d be talking to you. To make your first take off. So the undercarriage was operated manually and on your, near your right hand there was a large black phallic bakelite thing with a knob on it

02:30 appropriate knob on the top of it. So what you are doing is you are holding the control column with your right hand, you are opening the throttle with your left hand, your controlling the swing, as she, as the power takes off you know, you work the swing. Then you reach the moment where you ease back an the airplane takes off. So what you do, you’ve got to get the undercarriage up pretty quick, so you leave

03:00 the throttle alone, grab the control column with your left hand, move and grab the lever, undercarriage lever with your right hand, and you pump like this. But of course as you are doing this, naturally you start doing this, and you could always tell when somebody was, you’d see it going off the first time, the airplane going like this. But you soon get used to that, you know. That was the Spit [Spitfire]. You are doing now very advanced stuff, you are an established fighter pilot and you are

03:30 changing onto the latest types. So there is a lot of exercising, air to air gunnery, you go up with another guy and dog fight each other with cameras and so on. Height climb up to 32,000 feet. That’s where I found the glory, you are on your own, you are just over the coast over the North Sea up near the Scottish border, you can see the further fort in glorious sunshine, however glum it is down below

04:00 once you break through the clouds, its glorious, glorious sunshine and huge cumin [cumulonimbus] clouds, you know. So you play with those you do your height climbing, you gotta come down so, and when I see the cumin now I think of it, you get on top of one of those and spiral around it and dive through it. That’s just tremendous. So on this particular when I did my height climb I was heading back and after hurtling around a bit and I heard, brup, brup, brup, it’s the

04:30 balloon barrage over Newcastle, Newcastle on Tyne. But if you stay with that for very long, people start shooting at you so you got to get out of that. And low flying, ground attack, reconnaissances, then we did a navigation I think it was down to Durham Cathedral, you had to navigate yourself down to Durham Cathedral and turn back there and come back, and so on, and so on. So all that goes pretty well.

05:00 People get hurt of course, one of the guys who wasn’t with me on that station. But Bob Morrison who would be one of the early ones, we were football of trouble, lovely happy guy. I’ve got something, I won’t say against Bob, but what I remember about Bob. When we were in Canada, and I think I might have mentioned I was a little guy, and I had gone into the bathroom just before going to bed, and suddenly a bear hug. Bob grabs me from behind picks me up, no pants

05:30 and takes me out to display me to the community, and I’ve always felt very sorry that nobody was impressed. Anyway Bob was killed going just this training stuff, he was low flying and you know, too low. clipped a tree or whatever. Things like that happen, that was at Eshott. And it was a huge, all the air fields were large and everything

06:00 was dispersed. So we were up at a bit of a hill where we were actually living and in the barrack, our particular hut and our ablutions, I word I had never even heard of but in the air force they were ablutions. Well they were down the bottom of the hill, and its cold. So in the morning, 2 or 3 of us would get into great coats and rug ourselves up and stagger down with the towel going down to the showers, to the ablutions. I heard this scream

06:30 with a French accent. This stark naked Frenchman came rushing down the hill with his towel waving and soap and, that’s the way he got warm in the morning. Oh boy, and bikes, you had to have bikes to get around it was so big you know. I had never ridden a bicycle so I bought one from somebody. There were lots of bikes because people bought them or left them there or they got killed and

07:00 left them, everywhere there was bicycles. He re was I you know, a trainee fighter pilot, sheepishly going around the corner of some big building where I would be seen where there was a curb to work out how to drive a bicycle. Well I did I drove a bicycle and finally left it behind, gave it to somebody. So that was operational training from which you go back to the personnel depot and await your posting. We were then,

07:30 half a dozen of us to the Mediterranean.

Can you tell me about the start up procedure of the Spitfire?

Right. One, assume that the ground staff know what they are doing. And they do, so that the airplane that you can’t see, all the bits inside are working. They are. And I used to do this with my car, the first time I get into my car

08:00 I walk around it and see that all the tires are up, are okay. Now in all aircraft had what we call a peto head which was a small metal tube set out from one of the wings which took the air pressure which worked your air speed indicator, that gave you your air speed inside. Now because of the weather and ice and what have you, and dust in the desert, you put a cloth folder over it, little sleeve, when its on the

08:30 ground. So what you do is you went around looked at the airplane, you made sure that had been taken

off, if somebody had been late or in a hurry or half asleep and hadn't taken it off, and you took off with it, you couldn't read your air speed. So first of all you looked at the airplane. The Spitfire had a, what do you do to get in, there is a sort of

09:00 abrasive insert close to the fuselage where you can get a foot grip and get yourself into the, the ground crew have opened the door, which is only about so big, slide, opens down. They pull you, your harness out, you have got your parachute with you, you get in take your parachute with you, make yourself comfortable.

09:30 Fasten the Sutton harness it was called, that held you in when you did all this sort of thing. Above all got comfortable because your seat's adjustable. Then turn on the electrics to see that all your clocks that should be working are working, gages are okay. The early model Spitfires had lousy fuel gages, you never knew how much fuel you had, not til the end, you had a clock like this, and when it got down to the last quarter

10:00 you really weren't quite sure whether you had 5 minutes or 10 minutes. Later on, on the Mark 8s they had a very similar fuel gage with two little clocks and you knew exactly where you are. Then your people were talking to you and if you were under command and you would be anyway from control, you'd stay, starting, you didn't do anything without asking for clearance or being told what to do. After all you are not the only airplane on the field

10:30 and see that the throttle was in the right place, and that the trim. Now the power comes on and it's a 1500 depending on the size of the engine, 1500, 1600 horsepower engine, got bigger later on. When you open the throttle it really kicks you in the back of the neck. As soon as the power turns on, the swirls from the propeller you know, accelerates, so it puts a pressure

11:00 on the tail plane. Any airplane, any single engine airplane has a natural swing, to starboard or port depending on which particular one. From memory the Mark 8s we flew on the squadron swung to swung to port, I've been corrected on this. But whatever it is you adjust the trim which is alongside your throttle so it would

11:30 take care of the, when it gets up to full power. But when you get airborne you pull the throttle off, adjust the trim back again, otherwise you are pulling against you all the time. Then you, you taxi out, get your clearance to take off, probably a green light from the tower. Open the throttle, make sure your flaps are up of course, open the throttle, away she goes,

12:00 accelerates very rapidly, take off, pull the throttle back because you don't want to stay at full power for very long. you've got no study, you know what, you have got a rev counter, you know how many revs you want and how many pounds of boost you want, all of that is on your gages. So you get yourself to a cruising position pretty quick. Settings, close the door very soon and close the hood.

12:30 The Spitfire has a, well ours did, they all did, a sliding hood. Which to take off you put back here, but as soon as you are airborne you shut the door and close the hood, and then you are nice and snug. And you've got an easy airflow over it. To get rid of that hood in an emergency, which I had some experience of later on, you pull two toggles up here and kick the hood with your elbows and it's supposed to leave

13:00 your, the plane. In my final spectacular landing I think it didn't, but we will get to that later on. And then you climb, I've forgotten what the speeds were on the early ones but taking the Mark 8 which was just about the latest of the Spitfires that we were flying then, I think we used to climb at something like, we cruised at 260 miles and, we are still in miles an hour, cruised at about 260 miles an hour.

13:30 Getting into battle of course you put the thing up to full power and then you can hurtle along. The Mark 8 had a registered straight and level top speed of 405 miles an hour, what's that, 650 k, something like that. And boom, and coming back you do the thing in reverse, you put your hood back, when you are approaching the airfield, you leave the door closed, bring the speeds back to get the

14:00 trims right. Make sure your wheels are down, but here is a light and a bell will tell you, it will go, bark, bark, bark. You know we had a marvellous case we really enjoyed this. On the squadron on the wing actually in Italy, we had a new wing commander flying who had come out from England, and he was from 2nd Tactical Air Force. Desert air force was 1st Tactical Air Force. But we weren't, we'd been in the desert, I never was but the squadron was.

14:30 These new chums, because they knew everything because they came from 2nd Tac which had the best of everything. This new wing commander came in and landed belly, wheels up, and we thought that was great, just great, we just wondered how much he had to spend on drinks in the mess that night, you know. And so you bought a battery, the Spitfire handled beautifully, you could fly it with a finger, as long as you trimmed it and you did the right, it could kill you too if

15:00 you did the wrong thing, but you can do that in a Volkswagen. If you insist, trim her back and we liked to do a three pointer, that was the thing, or greaser, when you got into the ops trailer with any of the boys watching, if you did one of those, the boys would say, "Oh yes, fair."

What's a 3 pointer?

15:30 Well the airplane has two landing wheels and a tail wheel, today they are of course all tricycle wheels

floating on 3 wheels. But the 3 pointer, the airplane was designed, if you didn't land this way you would be landing too fast. So you brought it back like so. The idea was the land at the landing speed. Which from memory in a spit was oh flaps down which give you a bit more lift, flaps down was

16:00 about 65 miles an hour. But the thing was you, not even bounce you know, a 3 pointer was good enough, but to grease it on, a greaser. You said, okay drinks on me fellows. It was a wonderful, beautiful, beautiful airplane to fly.

You were going to share a story leading to your posting?

Oh yes, we

16:30 got, you finished, and when I say we, you don't all stay together you meet up with guys and you become we, half a dozen or so. We were heading off by train of course down to London then Brighton. It was at Wolverhampton I think we said, "Oh it's not a bad night, let's travel outside." So we went outside and got in front of the engine and arrived down at Kings Cross or Paddington or somewhere on the front of the engine. Well people did that you know and as long as you

17:00 were still safe, bobbies didn't rush up to you and throw you into prison because that didn't help the war effort that much. And then down to Brighton to wait for a posting. Now I was posted to the Mediterranean and I left Brighton alone and I had to go up to London and get the train through to Blackpool, to join the convoy. I stayed at Euston station because the next day

17:30 I was catching a train at Euston station. Now I don't know if you know Euston station but its got great big columns like this out in front of it. The hotel that I picked, so that it would be convenient was the service base. I was in about the 3rd floor on my own, in the black out and all that. I think I just rested but

18:00 at 2 o'clock, let's say 2 o'clock in the morning, there was the most god awful explosion I have ever heard in my life, from then to this, including later on hearing an ammunition dump go up in Japan. But it, I thought, I don't know if you have ever been in a really big one, where the whole of existence is noise, and not for long, reverberation you know. And so what do you do? What do you do, you pull the blanket over your head.

18:30 Because if the, am I still alive, the building is shot but I am still here, I am still here. Next thing you think, oh great Euston station has been blown up so I will have another day's leave in London or I can get up to Blackpool. So in the morning I opened the curtain, there was Euston station. I didn't know until a long time after the war when I saw the map of where the V1s and V2s dropped. You know it was about 2 miles away.

19:00 And it felt like just outside, the whole of existence was just a gigantic explosion. So I jumped on a train and up to, its amazing how the system works, millions of people moving around, you got a piece of paper and it worked, you arrived somewhere and there is a vehicle, not only but other who were arriving as well. We weren't in Blackpool very long, over night I think, and then we boarded the [SS] Empress of Australia, which we were told, I don't know

19:30 if this is right, but it was a largish ship, not as big as the Queens, I would say about 15, 20,000 tons, a lot of stacks, and not a cruiser stern, that old sort of stern on liners. She was to be part of a fast convoy. We were told she had been one of the Kaiser's yachts in the, she was a triple screw, so fairly old.

20:00 So on we went, we then were, Reg Nevitt who is not too well up in Dubbo right now, Joe Moffett a Kiwi who was the son of a New Zealand member of parliament, Ross Harding. Dear Ross he was killed in tragic circumstances, we were together. Ross Harding and two guys whose surnames I have forgotten, Pud and Paddy. Paddy of course was an Irishman, the place was swarming with Irish, you were busting to get rid of the empire but they were going

20:30 to fight for it and get rid of the Huns first, lovely guy. Pud because he's, his nickname suggested, not a big guy but rather padded guy. We were all rather slim, surfie type Aussies. So off we went in the Empress of Australia, and it was a fast convoy. It was a big one, ships which, particularly I was familiar with had been on the Australian run, things like the [SS] Lavina Onze and [SS] Strathnaver and [SS] Empress of Canada and Canadian Pacific

21:00 liners, a convoy of probably, I think there were 4 lines of 6 or 6 lines, about 2 dozen liners, all of cruising speeds about 20 knots at least. We were escorted by flocks of

21:30 they wouldn't be corvettes they wouldn't be fast enough, destroyers and a felt, an escort carrier. So off we hurtled to the Mediterranean and what's impressive, during the day, all this tremendous fleet of say 40 ships, they are all hurtling along the Atlantic zigzagging, then night falls and during the night they are zigzagging, dawn arises and they are all still there, all in the same

22:00 relationship to each other. We were delayed out, there must have been a submarine scare, U boats scare because they delayed us out so we mucked around out in the Atlantic before going through you know, Gibraltar Straits where narrowing the sea comfortable, one side to the other. And as we, jobs, as we were fighter pilots all with brilliant eyesight, we were all assigned the anti aircraft guns, freezing to death.

22:30 And we, take it in shifts of course a couple of hours at a time. And 20 mm oerlikan guns in case the Luftwaffe made itself awkward, which happily it didn't. Because one of my mates who died on the south coast only a year or so ago, he'd been, he was an airman, he'd been torpedoes three times. Moving around the world, 3 times. When the sea wall was at height, awfully

23:00 damn close. And so then we landed, we peeled off, the convoy went on but we must have been, the Algiers contingent, not just us, we weren't the only people onboard, there were 100s of people onboard. So we peeled off in Algiers and we had several days there. Went in looking for the kasbah. And we were billeted in tents, in the sand dunes

23:30 just behind the beach and of course having been in England and in North American in the winter, we hadn't done much surfing and here we are in the Mediterranean sun. So we stripped off and into the Mediterranean and while we, we were naked of course, nobody worried about, I think Jantzens were the swimsuits then, but we just striped off, nobody else around, not a another single soul in sight. These two British military police came pounding along. Large

24:00 people with pipe clay white webbing and their red hats and guns and huge boots, pounding along, "Out, out, out, its too dangerous, your too valuable, you are too valuable, out, out." And of course we were you know Australian surfers and we told them, "Fuck off". If necessary to say we will pull rank on you because we were superior anyway. So off they went, so that was Algiers. We went to Naples by, we were picked up by an American

24:30 DC 3 and flown to Naples, which then was the main allied base in Italy. Fortunately in the middle of warm weather.

In respect to the Red Caps, what was the danger?

Oh they wouldn't know, after all they had probably never been in the water in their life. But their orders will say, you will patrol the beach and you will see that no personnel, no allied personnel will be in the water

25:00 so they were just, they were just doing their, given their orders, they I don't know that they expected to run into half a dozen Sydney surfies. Anyway we flew off, that was uneventful in a DC3. No seats of course sitting on the bloody floor. Into Naples and Naples was particularly interesting. Interesting place anyway, and it hadn't suffered from the war, the

25:30 surrender was actually before that, they didn't have to fight for Naples. So it was in reasonable condition, but vastly overcrowded, all with allied troops. British, French, American and Poles and not what. The Germans with their typical, well there is no public transport because the Germans with their typical efficiency said well, we don't want the allies to have transport, take all the wheels away. So all the railway stock wheels had gone

26:00 with no wheels. So we, it was lovely weather and we were given the roof of about a 4 or 5 storey hotel so we put the blanket roll out on the roof and sun, wonderful sun, and I was a classical scholar I said to the guys, well we've got to go down to Pompeii. And so we, what you did you went out onto the street and you just hitched a ride. Transport everywhere,

26:30 no bus service you just put out your thumb, the army would stop for you unless they were full up, I think it was 4 or 5 of us, off we went down to Pompeii. And went into the ruins, and I don't know if you have ever been there, it was quite fascinating, it was very quiet. Pompeii went in 69 AD somewhere around about there, but there is nothing in it but you could hear, you could feel it.

27:00 The populous you could almost feel people talking and scurrying and the streets are narrow with stepping stones but they are designed to take the wing spread, the axle spread of a chariot. There are that size and they are up off the dust. Of course we are heading for the study of the art work, all the positions around the wall. I don't want to go again because they have prettied it all up

27:30 and got it full of tourist stuff. So we went down the Pompeii and hitched a ride back, and we are getting pretty hot. So we decided we'd have a swim, and we jumped off this particular vehicle we were in and went down, right alongside the bay of Naples and commandeered a row boat, and went over a fisherman to say we couldn't borrow his row boat. rowed out into h bay and striped off. Showing leadership

28:00 I dived in first, into raw sewage outlet, the guys said, "Well Johnny you are a reasonable swimmer." And they rowed back to bloody shore and here am I swimming in shall we say human evidence. Oh dear, the other thing I remember particularly about Naples once again, cultural guy. The allies very sensibly got the Naples opera going again in the San Carlo theatre.

28:30 With a typical classical, so we went and we had seats, half a dozen of us, right in the front row. Looking down, the orchestra pit was right here and up in the royal box, scarlet and gold and great boots, of American GIs and things. So come, it was fast and they did it very well, but the, they had to play three national anthems you see, the French national anthem

29:00 the British national anthem, the American national anthem. Which of course we all dutifully stood up for

this, and the drummer I can see him now, was just near me down in the pit. He was unshaven, he was a maybe an old man, a dirty pair of pants, no tie, a waist coat, and a pork pie hat. And he was all connected up to drums, he could do this but he could also do this and

29:30 at the appropriate, “God save our gracious King,” he was picking his nose. I thought well you know the Italians have got it made, they have you know. Today, the Italians are just marvellous, my number 3 son just come back from surveying a TV show in Tuscany, incidentally it was scrubbed, so he had 3 weeks on the firm for nothing, Tuscany, what’s wrong with that. But you know,

30:00 the Italians are really got it made. Incidentally when we got to the squadron we had a cook in the mess, we called him Gino, what his name was I don’t know, and the story was that he had been picked up in he desert by the army or by the, not by the army, captured in the desert or gave himself up to a squadron. So, it was our squadron 145 and said to him well, “Gino we are short of a cook, would you like to go to prison or would you like to come with us and we

30:30 will take you back to Italy, but you have go to cook for us.” And he was, and what he could do with spam was amazing. So I loved the Italians and still do the Italians, years ago after the war, for years and years they had a new government every couple of weeks, the economy was in total collapse and they were the happiest, happiest people.

So you finally made it to the squadron?

Yeah, we went off in what

31:00 amounted to a cattle train. I was sleeping on a pile of kit bags including my own with my leg under like this, and I slept must have been very tired. I woke up in the morning with A, a cramp, and B with a run of the shits. The two I don’t recommend to go together. Anyway we arrived at the squadron and were told okay, the commanding officer will receive you at such and such a time and was Ross Harding

31:30 Reg Nevitt, Joe Moffatt, the Kiwi, he was a Kiwi, and Pud and Paddy . So we went around to Steven Daniels, he was the new commanding officer Scot squadron leader, and Tut Sands with the great Neville Youth who was leaving that night. Oh we did some preliminary flying in between, just final touching up, I think I nearly killed myself flying

32:00 into the still water.

So this before you arrived?

Yes a quick, you are now a qualified guy, but the various areas of squadron and, they have little touches of this and that. They do things their own particular way slightly so you, familiarisation, it was called familiarisation.

Were they with the Spitfire eights?

When we got to the squadron yes,

32:30 there was a wing of 5 squadrons and two of us had eights. The 417, the Canadians I think had eights, and we had eights and the others had nines. The story eight and nine is really quite interesting. Because in fact the 9 was a later model than the 8. See the designers would be working on designs and the people that were going to use will say, well production wise all this, we won’t have the 3, 4, 5 we’ll have the 6 you know.

33:00 But how the 9 came about, the supreme fighter before that was the mark 5 which was used in the desert. In the battle of Britain it was the ones and twos, but then as it developed, the 5, well when I say number one, it was better than the best of the opposition, better then the Messerschmitts and better than the Focke-Wulf 190s too. And its essentially the new engine, more powerful engine. How fast it gets up, its manoeuvrability, turning circle and stuff. So

33:30 the 8 was being developed to be the replacement for the 5. Then the Germans introduced a new model, the Focke-Wulf 190, they put a new engine in it, a Daimler Benz 603 engine I think it was into the Focke-Wulf 190 and momentarily it was superior to the mark 5. So they looked, crickey, they were getting on top of us.

34:00 Now the 9 was in full production, the 8 wasn’t, but the 8’s engine, Merlin 63 and 66, my boys if they are still around will see this and correct me, they were coming on so they quickly shifted the new engines into the mark 5 and called it the mark 9, and it was extremely successful. It got on top of even the Focke-Wulf 190, you know. But what we got were the mark 8s which were pretty, they

34:30 were a later model airplane and they had this lovely gas gauge you could rely on and they also had the tactical tail wheel. One of which I tore off in a bad landing once.

So was the 8s and 9s better fighters?

Well they both were pretty much the same, the nine, of course they designed them for various heights. Some were designed to be high altitude fighters, take on other fighters you know. Others were designed to be middle level

35:00 and so on, and if anything the 8, because of the way the war had developed, were the Luftwaffe wasn't in Italy it was rather shrinking somewhat. There was much more low level work which was defending the army against incursions against them, or doing army cooperation ground attack work yourself. So the 8 was not designed, as I recall, as a high altitude fighter. What do you mean by altitude, I mean 25,000 feet is not high. 35, the highest I

35:30 ever flew was 32 I think and that was in a mark 2, oh way back. So it depended on its role, but it also, what the 8s also had another 30 gallons and it gave it a longer range. The 30 gallons somehow would, 30 gallons tanks into the wings right along the fuselage so it had a longer range than the spits. It think the piece I wrote about

36:00 that I decided, I'd write it as soon as I came down, was an hour 50 which is pretty good for a Spitfire.

How far would you get?

An hour and a half, or less. You see our work, its work, was to support the army, now to support the army, they wanted fighters close up to the front. We were only 5 minutes flying away from the front. As the army advanced

36:30 we would leap frog the, and each airfield had a wing, of say 5 squadron Spitfires, operational strength of about 60 aircraft. As the army advanced, well okay, we'd, this airfield would be put on trucks and moved forward and so, the wings would leapfrog and be close up to the front. So you could get to the front in 5 minutes or so.

37:00 **What guns and cannons did you have on 8s?**

They had two 20 millimetre canon, and 4 303 browning machine guns. And the guns, the cannons had 130 rounds each I think. The F1-11 boys asked me to come and visit them once some time ago at Amberley, and they've got a, they've got all sorts of thing of course, including nuclear stuff, although they don't talk about that, the, they have a some gun arrangement which has a rate of 5, 6,000

37:30 rounds a minute. Well you can't fry from it. I said, "What do you do with this?" And what they do of course is if they fire them all in a couple of seconds maybe they will hit something. They have got more shells going now. We had 130 rounds a gun.

How would fire it, long bursts, short bursts?

Depends what you were doing. When you go, well

38:00 okay my first operation which is, you don't forget. My first operation, the CO [Commanding Officer] always takes you. So I flew behind Steven Daniel, as his number two, there were 6 of us. They army saying what they want attacked. There was half a dozen German tanks were assembling behind the German lines, which our army weren't very happy about. So our job was to go and

38:30 do them over. They were carrying a 500 pound bomb. So we didn't use guns on this, it was a 500 pound bomb. So you go over in the 6, three leaders, a leader, one and his number two, in which case was me, 3 and 4, 5 and 6. So you can talk to each other dumpling red 3, you, mind you when you start flying, you start doing it, you know each other, you say, "Hey Bill, Johnny how about this?" So you'd go over it,

39:00 you'd fly over, across the line at about 9,000 feet. At which height their light flak, that's up to 40 mm Beaufighters couldn't reach you. So you could fly along more or less peacefully there. But above that, it didn't matter how high you went the 88 mil could get you, that's the best middle sized gun of the whole war, that was a magnificent piece of machinery. So once you moved across the line you would start you weave a bit,

39:30 they would use their directive, of course our propaganda had told us that Germans didn't know anything about radar, but boy, the theory was if you flew straight and level for 30 seconds they'd get almost a direct hit on you. My rule was if I could see the red, the flashes are too damn close, you would start weaving then. You'd weave a bit. Neville Duke, and I didn't fly with him, Neville Duke used to, in approaching the front, he'd get up a bit higher

40:00 and then not fly straight and level he would do a very shallow dive because the altitude changing all the time would affect their direction from down below, you know. We, I don't recall we ever had a direct hit but we had people killed by flak. The first guy I saw killed Dick Brian, he, we didn't hear him, and we were flying on quite a height, and I was the first to see him, I see he was going down from bout say 12,000 feet in a 45 degree

40:30 angle and not weaving or doing anything. So I think he had been killed in the airplane, lovely guy. But going back to, you are probably going back to ask me.

Tape 7

00:37 **Can you describe the control panel inside a Spitfire?**

Well the fundamentals that all aircraft have is a compass which is about here, and that's whatever it is a liquid compass and mind you we seldom used it because we

01:00 weren't very far, we were doing almost all our flying from the coast line, or the railway line, or whatever. So there was a compass, and the compass had a grid on it you can fix that. The ting to do if you really need a compass is to make sure you put red on red. Because if you put red on blue you might plan to go north but you are in fact going south. So there is a compass, then there is the normal turn and bank indicators so that if you are flying

01:30 blind in cloud and what have you, you have got a little airplane against a device, a gyroscopic thing. So you can see what your angel is and it's also up and down like so. So that's an early turn and bank indicator. You had them in Tiger Moths too but much more primitive than that. No, the Tiger Moth didn't have a compass but Tiger Moth had, and going back to day one in airplanes you had to know where your airplane is

02:00 in relation to the air around it . So you had that. Then you had a boost indicator, they are all in clocks. A boost indicator which essentially the boost is the power you are turning on, the boost could be pushed up and there is a setting for that. And I've forgotten what the figure was it wasn't 3000, boost was in pounds, that's right. So if you had, you cruise at X

02:30 you had full power at Y, and if you were in real trouble you had, went through the gate, there was gate for maximum, you just went right through the whole let, you'd then, you'd blow the engine up but at least for a minute to two you might get more power. Then you had the rev counter and that was a good thing. A rev counter you took off at full power then you came back from, oh you cruised at about 2000 revs. Then I probably got my figures wrong, then you

03:00 knew what your cruising speed was, you get there in a reasonable time, without burning the engine up, without using too much fuel. If you were running out of fuel of course you could thin the fuel out and get the revs right down, just about falling out of the sky, stretch it out. That happened to me in England flying a master where I had done a gunnery exercise and dusk was coming on and there was mist everywhere and I didn't have the faintest idea where I was. Back to the air field

03:30 and landed the airplane and it cut out, it ran out of gas as I taxied onto the landing strip. So a Spitfire, so you had a rev counter, and of course you had a speedometer. You know what speed you were flying. A couple of lights, or a light anyway, most things were done in duplicate which was sensible, if one plays up. So you knew whether your undercarriage was down or not. You might think it's down, on once occasion I thought

04:00 mine was down but I wasn't getting the indications so I flew over the control panel and they said, you are not you have only got your port undercarriage down. And I then had to judge whether I would take it up and go and bail out, you don't land, you don't belly land with one bloody wheel down. But they said no it's about a third of the way down. So I belly landed that on the air field.

04:30 Quite well actually and of course if you landed it came right up on its side but it didn't go like that. What else did you have, oh a radio, of course, right at your left hand there was a 4 channel radio. There was commander, call sign, still have it in code, commander was the area control, Goxhill was our own airfield control, now ours

05:00 was Goxhill, and then, one of them was just general operations, probably commander control, where you could talk to each other, just like telephone, or four of them, and I've forgotten what the other one was for, but I don't know there they were. There was an IFF, IFF was identification friend or foe. I think that was automatic

05:30 it was listening to other people airplanes and if they didn't signal well it was, if they were approaching you it was an enemy, IFF . The toggle for the flaps were just up or down and they were pneumatically operated, without flaps, your flaps up landing speed was about 75 miles per hour and flaps down would give you more lift at

06:00 about 65, you know. The undercarriage control was still on the starboard side so you flew, changed over, but you did that very quickly, it was just a lever, like going from there to there in a gate, and up came the undercarriage, that was, they did that quite early on, the Mark 1s didn't have it but later on they did. Clock, I don't know if we had a clock, I don't think so because, I

06:30 going back to Narromine, it was one of my early pays I bought a 30 bob watch and I left it in Narromine. So I thought, I'm going to America there'll be, I'll buy one over there. So in Montreal I bought an 80 dollar Rolex, 80 dollars in 1942, '3, 1942. You know got to have the best. So I bought a Rolex and took that right through with me and when I was packed, shot down, they took it and anything else that I had on with me. do you know after,

07:00 I'll come to this later on, after a period of wandering around Germany with it, they actually came and gave it back to me, German organisation. There is a story behind that, beyond that, the Rolex. So I don't think there was a clock in the airplane, you didn't have to worry about it very much because what decided you was what gas was left you see. But we all wore watches.

What about gun controls?

07:30 Well the gun control is in the control column. Its just a button you know in a housing, there is a loop with a strong piece of whatever, there's a, it's a control column which used to be a stick going way back, and we had a bit of joy with it, but the, so it was thumbs, thumb operated and it also, I'm pretty sure you could select guns or cannon or both. Then

08:00 most of the time we were picking, for the cannon.

How comfortable was the cockpit in side the Spitfire?

Well you were sitting on your parachute, on top of a dinghy which is already in it, you don't put it in, it had already been put in. atht6, you linked up to all that, and if you had to bail out the idea was, okay you bailed out with the whole bloody lot, as you are getting down towards the sea, at the last moment

08:30 you would get rid of your, by, the parachute had a very simple twist lock. It was locked but to get rid of it you twisted it and banged it and the four straps would come away, so if you bailed out successfully and were getting in the water and you needed the dinghy, but then as you got rid of the parachute you would still have the dinghy hanging onto you. And then you dropped into the sea and pull things and it would open

09:00 itself up. We did all of that, of course in training so you knew how it would work.

Was there anything else you carried with you inside that cockpit?

No I don't recall that we took anything. I was surprised when I went down in Germany I in fact had my fountain pen, which I usually took everything off. You didn't take anything in case you become valuable to the enemy. No we didn't, I didn't I don't even recall any suck sweets or you know.

09:30 **What about lucky charms? Did anyone of your squadron?**

Maybe some of them did, I wasn't into that.

Your first operation? What was the squadron mainly involved in when you first arrived?

Yes, well its, the, it was essentially ground attack with occasional air support for air raids, because the Luftwaffe

10:00 I sometimes said, in our chats sardonically, that as Kesselring, he was the German commander and chief and he was an airman, as Kesselring, when he came to hear that I was approaching the Italian theatre he took the air force away which I took something of a compliment. Of course he did take it away, but no doubt for strategic reasons, so there wasn't much in the way of Luftwaffe. So we were fighters designed to air to air fighting, but we had been converted in the desert

10:30 to ground attack, hence the cannon and one 500 pound bomb. So we, there were two sorts of work, we would either support the army directly, you know the army would say look, the, we want to take this town, the Germans have got artillery observations up in the church spire, I am thinking of a particular case, when I had my first crash landing. So will you please knock and get rid of it. So we are going, dive bomb it,

11:00 then swing around and strafe it, which is all very exciting. The other thing we would do was interdiction. We'd go roving over northern Italy looking for transport and trains, and finally that's when I had my interesting day. We caught up with a train in the early morning which was on the move, which means probably somewhat, some where, so essentially we were doing ground damage.

What sort of formations or numbers would fly in these operations?

Yeah, well on a normal

11:30 ground operation, and there were various sorts of those, you either went lie the one we did with the tanks, a specific operation or you'd go onto the cab rank. Now the army had right up the front, usually in a tank, they had a pilot squadron leader and he'd be with the army commander, the army tanks might be trying to you know take this particular place. You went on a cab rank, it was called rover something, rover

12:00 pig, rover David I think, my friends if they are still around will correct me, rover David I think, you went on it with cab rank. So 6 of you would go, each with a 500 pounder. you would go to the given area and you would call up rover David, rover David we're here, and he'd say yes, and working on your maps, he would give you the coordinates, the coordinates that he wanted you to attack, where X number of Germans were hiding

12:30 or doing something, they were being objectionable and we would first of all establish that we had the coordinates right. To do that as I did on this train that morning, we, you say to your other people, look you stay up there I will go down, so you go down low, so you make sure you actually have found the target. Because after all the Germans don't put their tanks out in the Middle of the road and leave them there, so you can have a crack at them, they do sometimes but that's not intentionally. So you are

13:00 satisfied, or it might be a farmhouse, and they would fortify farm houses, and it's not the farm house to the left at the top of the paddock, it's the one of the right near the river, so you know, you would, whoever is running the particular operation would satisfy himself that that, that he in fact knew what

we were having a go at. Then he would come back up and then maybe talk to you, because we had all been listening and watching our own maps and trying to satisfy ourselves that we knew where the target was.

13:30 Then he would call line astern, we'd fly in sixes, in formation flying, then call line, then we'd get close up and he'd peel off, and we would peel off one after the other very quickly, after him dive down, put your nose, it was very crude arrangement, it amazed me we ever hit anything, you put your, aim your nose at it and pull through and then it was about there, it was about judgement. We'd practice you know on dummy targets. And then you put the bomb release, the bomb release

14:00 yes the bomb release was in the throttle, yes the left thumb, over there, yeah bomb release was in the left thumb, just push button. And then the bomb would, and you'd pull up, because you'd have flak around you, you'd get out of the flak as soon as you could. all being well the bomb would, go and do some damage. Like when I'm on this first operation behind the CO, we had some tanks.

14:30 **Take us to the start of that first operation?**

Yes well we were, Steven Daniels and I was, in the operations, is in a trailer and there was an RAF flight lieutenant, David Carr with the intelligence officer, he was a non flying man, he kept the maps and all that. The headquarters would ring and say this is the target and so on. Then your turn would come up on the order of battle

15:00 your name would be up there, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and who was flying where and as it was my first op, you would go up with the CO. So you all join up in the ops trailer, the jeep comes in and gets on, you know that you are on, you know from the night before

15:30 you are flying in the morning. So you go easy on the drink that night, not that we, I certainly wasn't, I'd have a party all right, but I never, there was only one person I'll come back, who actually flew when he was drunk, we were not too happy about that, but as it killed it, it solved the problem. But so in the, you would all gather in the ops trailer, and David Carr, the IO [Intelligence Officer], would say, "This is the target," and maps would be issued

16:00 we would all satisfy ourselves that we knew where the target was. Then walk down or drive down, be driven down to your aircraft where the aircraft were all standing ready for you to go. All armed and fuelled and stuff. Then all aboard, strap yourself in, wait until the CO starts his engine and then you follow him out. So we arrived out over the, this target, and I was flying very close, you know not that close, you don't do Hendon or nothing on that, you get back a bit, but flying line astern of the CO

16:30 3, 2, the CO and myself and 4 others. Then he calls line, and then goes down and has a look, come back, yes he knows where he is going, line astern, we line up behind him, and he leads over the target and peels off, peel off like so, left, because most of us were right handed, peel off left, you are over on your back and when you straighten up, there's the target. Okay

17:00 so I was watching the CO of course and he was ahead of me and he started pulling out, so okay he must have dropped his bomb, so I dropped my bomb and followed him up, and then you all line up again, and go home and in formation and return to the squadron. I, to this day, I don't know whether we ever hit anything. But that afternoon the army rang up absolutely ecstatic, absolutely ecstatic, so it must have at least frightened these people in the tanks

17:30 you know, we might have even knocked a couple of them off, after a while of course you start to get used to it and although a bit later on, because I am starting to lead operations off, you see and d you've got new chums flying up behind you.

Was there anyway to judge the effectiveness? Photographs or anything like that?

Well close ups, close support of course the army could see it. You know they might have only been 300 yards away, you know. Or 4 or 500 yards, and watching with glasses anyway.

18:00 No we didn't we had camera guns of course but we didn't use those on ground attack, not it was all visual. But you could like for instance, I think I say in that piece that I wrote, that we were setting out to cut a railway line, and I pulled up and pulled away, and actually you pull up fast enough and turn fast enough you can see your bomb hit. My bomb on that final period I talked about was just aside from the railway line. So you can

18:30 envisage, you know actually have a look at it. If the flak's hurtling around a lot which most of the time it was, you are not going to spend too much time down there. You just get out of it pretty quick smart.

What flak did you come up against on that first operation?

From what I recall, I don't think any. Nothing you could see, lets describe it this way, I recall another occasion which will deal with flak. You then get into if you like almost a psychological discussion of how you handle that

19:00 and that's worth spending a little time on. But the army was about or trying to take a town called Buoncalvalo which is very clear in my mind. Quite a big town, not a city, but you know a substantial town, like most European towns its certainly southern European towns, they have all got church

steeples. It was a Sunday, and I had been flying for some time now so I more or less knew what I was doing.

19:30 And 6 of us were given the target which was to be this church steeple in the Middle of the town, because the enemy gun spotters, artillery spotters were in it. And that was our job to go and knock this off because the 8th Army, it was the British 8th Army we were supporting. Which including the Maori battalion, I'll come to that later on, because we used to have a Maori and we used to go and visit them. So that was our job, so we arrived at 10,000 feet and you see the church steeple, it didn't

20:00 take you very long to spot that. Now it's a defended town, so god knows how many German troops were around, probably 10,000 or more, they have all got guns quite apart from those who were only the flak gunners, you know. Now with flak, that is medium flak, which below 9,000 feet will get you, above that only heavy flak. But with medium flak you only see the tracer, and I forget whether it was one per five, but lets say one for 5 so you

20:30 might have a 40 mm flak coming at you and you see the, you see it, but between that one that you can see there and that one you can see there, there is another 5, and that is one gun. So that all shooting at you because they don't you being disturbed like this. also I used to think there is all these thousands of German troops down there taking their Lucas and just tyring firing blindly into the air you know like Arabs. So you've got, as they want to defend the place they are

21:00 working at it, the German army, bloody wonderful. Army for army, the best of the lot, thank god they were so lousily lead politically. But if they were well lead politically they never would have got into it. But that's another, a geopolitical story. So in we went on this attack. I dive bombed the church steeple, I think I was number 3, and we wanted to get in and get out pretty quick so I

21:30 dive bombed and swung around to strafe it, with cannon. I was really quite low I was 50 100 feet above it and I could see the cannon shells bursting on the, on the church steeple, then I got hit, with a bloody thump, oil and muck everywhere. You know thank God it didn't catch fire. Now I was too flow down to have time to go up and bail out.

22:00 I was only 5 minutes from the air field anyway, so I headed off home. You know I said, whoever was the CO I said, Steven or whatever, I said, "I'm hit. I'm going home." Called Goxhill, our airfield, for an emergency landing. I flew home at about 1000 feet, I made quite a reasonably landing with oil and muck all over the place. Because I couldn't see you know I had to let the door down and look out the side, and taxied in quite normally into the dispersal and as I

22:30 got out of the strip the CO, Steven Daniel came down and he had a look at the airplane and he walked back and said, "Oh you've had a swa double." And of course swa is desert slang for a 'little', you had a little swa double, and the boys gave me a piece of shrapnel about as big as my, I wish I had kept it actually, which had actually gone into the spinner, you know the big spinner on the front of the propeller and that had damaged the

23:00 glycol control, not oil, gasoline, not gasoline either, and so she, the airplane stayed with me and fortunately for 5 minutes, and had it, I was not far from the coast only 100 yards I guess. Had the engine, I had made my mind up on this, I couldn't bail out, I had the engine failed I would have eased her over and tried to put her down onto the beach, standing on the beach. But

23:30 the flak thing, its interesting the, nobody ever said, I'm not going to do that. They might have thought they rather not do, but this gets you into if you like the psychology of war and the people and anything else I guess but we are all going the same way and you don't let the people down, you might have, I'm sure people have varying degrees of emotion fear, reaction and what have you, and

24:00 I hope I am being dispassionate about what I ma about to say, I'm not going to say that I wasn't frightened, we all know that, we are up with that, so you put it over there. I was very cold, calculate what the job was, now you know there is masses of flak there well you just ignore it. If you get hit of course your priority changes immediately, draws your, gathers your attention rather

24:30 smartly and then you put your training and your mind to that. Almost of the stage of, when I say ignore I mean really ignore, mind you if there was a sudden burst close to you well you, it would disturb you somewhat. But when I used to get myself deliberately into a state of boredom of anything of what I was doing at that particular moment,

25:00 **What about adrenalines? What role does that have on your psyche at that stage?**

Well first of all I don't think we ever heard the word. We all liked flying, we all wanted to fly Spitfires and we flying Spitfires, therefore we must have been pretty bloody shit hot. Of course you the Messerschmitt pilot said exactly the same bloody thing but in a different language. And the Japanese did too, in their Zeros they were pretty, bloody good.

25:30 Although according to our propaganda the Japanese couldn't fly because their eyes went this way, you know. It was a, you were doing a job, it sounds terribly trite you know, its been said before I guess, but we were trained to do this job. We were prepared to, we had a lot of training, we knew the story, we knew the history. I don't think I ever heard anyone say, lets go and get these

26:00 bloody Huns, I talk about that occasionally, particularly when I lost a couple of good friends. But that was the job to do and you went and did it. It required a high degree of training. We took for granted, I'll go back to something I think I said before, if you were not inclined to do that, well then you wouldn't be there. You know, the system would have sorted you out long before that. So everybody was doing the job which they chose to do and they were trained

26:30 to do, and they were pretty bloody good doing, it was a professional, and I am talking bout both sides, both sides, believe the Luftwaffe they were pretty damn good too.

What if any surprises were there in the way you reacted after so long in training?

Surprises. I think in the terms that I think you are asking, Chris [interviewer], nothing really.

27:00 Nothing happened routinely that I didn't expect. When you get hit and you get flak and damage, well okay, but then you know what you can do with the airplane and you do it, you know. Take the case where I say I got hit over Buoncavalo, had I been high enough with the aircraft in that condition with oil and muck coming out of the side, well I would have certainly have bailed out. Because obviously the engine was going to conk out sometime. Wouldn't last me very long

27:30 but one, I was too close, I was only about 1000 feet anyway. So I couldn't get up, no point in trying to get out under say 5, 6, 7000 feet you are likely to get into the ground a bit early. So that's out of your mind, I'm not going to bail out. Five minutes away, what do you do, of course you head for home. If the engine ceased up, okay there's the beach I will go and crash land

28:00 on the beach, and you were trained to do all that. You might not succeed of course you might hit something on the beach. Which you didn't allow for. In terms of the system as distinct from the enemy, no I don't recall that I was particularly surprised about anything.

What about death and being exposed to people around you? The reality?

Didn't like that very much. Its, of course you are not surprised, as I say I saw Dick Brian go. He and I were becoming quite good friends in the mess

28:30 and he was a more experienced pilot, he had been on the squadron longer than I. And we saw him go, and I reported it when we landed, I said, we've lost Dick. And then we each exchanged views as how that might have happened and we didn't know, dawn patrol here, the last man to next man to die and all that stuff. We just went to the mess in the normal way, well me might have said, well this one's for Dick. Then you just went on

29:00 with it. But we had, there were 4 of us in the tent, Ross Harding, Joe Moffatt the Kiwi and Reg Nevitt and myself. Two of us were killed, I nearly was and I was particularly touched by Ross Harding. We called him junior, he was a typical, if you wanted to draw a picture of a surfie, he was a surfie. He was from

29:30 Oaks Avenue, Dee Why, Ross Harding, we called him junior. Quite young, he had his 21st birthday on the squadron I had mine a couple of years before. We knocked him around a bit and he didn't drink, he was a one pot screamer. But everybody loved junior. He was almost a mascot, he was a born flyer, a born flyer. And his bleached, sun bleached hair from surfing as a kid at Dee Why

30:00 and he was one of the gang. I think he came down that day we went to Perugia, to Pompeii. So we were a group within a group we were good friends. And of course we were in the same tent. I wasn't flying but we heard this explosion, quite a load one, and we knew it was a 500 pounder had gone off somewhere. We started running down to the air field to the grass tents, and the squadron engineer

30:30 Brownie, I think, anyway the squadron engineer, name like that Brown, or an Englishman. H's coming towards us saying, "No fellows, no, there's nothing for you." And what had happened, Ross in taking off he had engine trouble right at the critical moment. Now to get rid of your bomb, you flicked with a well a plunger between your legs to get rid of it. Because the bomb

31:00 was armed you see, it was ready, it took him. So we buried him that afternoon or the following morning, wrapped in blood stained hessian in the mud. I remember we made a point, because we had a little… saluted him and all that, and painted the rocks white. He's at rest now, he's in Ancona, the war cemetery in Ancona. And I've sometimes thought, we go abroad from time to time

31:30 although I am not going to go again, and I've thought, but I, I can't, sorry. I can't bring myself to do that. So Reg and I came home, we came home and went down to his family in Dee Why. He was a

32:00 lovely guy. We were all lovely guys I suppose. That one really hurt me, but a lot of others, actually on the squadron, a mate yesterday to remind me, there was Dick Brian was the first and then Johnny Hayward an Englishman, and Don Byce, a South African, they'd gone up to

32:30 this practice, air to air gunnery, there wasn't many enemy fighters. actually Johnny Hayward got one, got a 109 somewhere and they'd gone up and said, oh no we'll do some air to air, and they collided, and we lost the two of them. Then after I had gone, after I was down, I didn't know about this until a long time after the war, of course. For obvious reasons, but Joe Moffatt, our Kiwi, he was one of the gang, he is on that picture of the motorbike. Joe

33:00 had been in a strafing run and he pulled out too late and clipped the edge of a house, so we lost him. Newton, well you know, you regret Newton, but he drank, and we weren't that worried about that. And who else? But of the guys I went away with, oh about 15 or 18 or so.

33:30 Vince Thurston was, about a week or so after D Day he was in medium bombers and they were doing a big raid on Idafehn I think. And he, I heard later on that a Lucas 88 got him. They had mounted 4 20 millimetre cannons in the roof of a, gunners 88, and they come up and, so he went. Rob O'Dell went in bomber command, the radio guy, Rob O'Dell went.

34:00 Bob Morrison who displayed me in Canada, a lot of people were killed in training, he was killed in training. Probably, I knew, and you talk about one's best friend, because he was an old cadet journalist with me on The Sydney Sun, John Brown, I met up with him a couple of times, he was a little bit behind me, I don't think we ever, we might have met but, occasionally knew that we were around, from parents letters.

34:30 Well he was, he'd gone training on bomber command and he was in an operational training unit, he was a pilot, Oxford, which is a twin engine trainer. Training, search light evasion, and he got trapped in training searchlights, and went into a spin and couldn't get out so he was killed. Doug Whitehurst, he and I became great friends. of course his father, well a lot of their fathers had been in the First World War, and I think he might have been in

35:00 flying corps too because he was very keen on me, being an Ulm. He and I became very good friends, Ulm, White, Whitehurst. He was killed in India. Baden White, Baden White was the son of E.K. White, who was Menzies' principal political support in Sydney, big business man. Son of a very wealthy man, lovely, wild young man,

35:30 "play your money" and he was killed by Beaufighters in the Mediterranean.

What happened on the squadron when some one didn't come back?

Well you might come back from where you were and say, oh Dick bought it today. Nice guy Dick, and blah, blah, and then get on with it. No there was no, there was no Hollywood stuff on that and people weeping in graves

36:00 and all that, none of that at all.

To whom did the responsibility fall to pack up their gear?

Oh the people that were with them, when Ross Harding was killed, there was 4 of us in the tent. And we packed up his gear and give it, all his gear, and give it to the system and the system gets it home, just as I did. Mine reached me at home finally including my writing case and all that stuff, all the boys had put my gear together and sent

36:30 it home.

You were able to go and see Ross's parents? What was that experience like?

Pretty tough. Reg Nevitt and I went down together, Reg Nevitt then lived in Roseville, in fact I was best man at his wedding after the war. And so we went down and saw them in Oaks Avenue, Dee Why. They were just wonderful. Then when I was shot down, and long, they wrote to my mother, and I've got all the letters that

37:00 not only that I wrote home to my mother, and she to me, but when in the incident arising out of my holiday, shall we say, they all wrote in, isn't it terrible, dear John, and blah, blah. Then the delight when John is, John Ulm, shall we say, I'll put it that way, on the paper, I've even got, they allowed me enough newspaper to pen that John Ulm was missing in action. Then later John was liberated, so they all then, and it was on the news.

37:30 Charles Ulm's son. And one of the letters was from Ross Harding's mother, you know.

Would there be a difference if a man was missing? What would happen then?

I don't know whether, when I was there, whether anyone went missing. I did. I did, but we were pretty sure, well certainly in my own experience

38:00 we were never any doubt that the guy was dead. I mean Dick Brian, we were well up then, we were at 12,000 feet say, we were certainly above light flak. Going home, we had done whatever we were going to do and I saw him, I didn't see any explosions or what have you, but he went, nobody would do that, off course, away from home, going in a 45 degree dive until he went into the ground.

38:30 So he clearly was, damaged or out of, he was certainly out of control, he might have been dead in the cockpit, although we, none of us, and we'd all could see it, but none of us recalled actually seeing him. If he had been wounded, and could talk, well he would have rung up and said so, but he didn't he just went.

Did the dangers of your job, the stress involved ever get to people's nerves on the squadron?

39:00 Not visibly. Unless Newton, who as I say drank, he was the only one that drank, to our knowledge went flying, we took a dim view of that. We would knock it around a bit at night, but not keep it going all night, you are a bloody idiot if you reduce yourself below 2100 percent, flying. Newton might have, I mean what's the reason, I mean, you never know.

39:30 Because you don't really know what's going on if you are questioned, in people's mind. Nobody, A, I didn't see anybody who was so stressed, it was called lack of moral fibre. If you were found to be in that condition, I have no experience of it, I never saw it happen to anybody, nor did anyone say to me, look Bill Bloggs, he's LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre]. But LMF was were you would be assessed psychologically that

40:00 you've gone beyond it. So you were withdrawn. There was a place, actually the RAF, of course there was lots and lots of them, bomber command was the place. I mean bomber command was really went through it, as I mentioned earlier on, statistically you couldn't survive, if you survived a tour or ops it was luck. And of course you would have people break, none of us can go on forever, in infinite stress. There was place called Sheffield, and you would

40:30 be sent to Sheffield and that was pretty rough. What happened, you would be withdrawn from the air force, your wings stripped from you and you'd be going, and turned into an infantryman, really bashed around. And so that was a deterrent, like the death penalty in the First World War which as you know the Australian government wouldn't buy. Well this government were shooting people, Haig, of course they had lots more people, Haig was very, the British high commander was very annoyed that the

41:00 Australian government would not accept the death penalty, the ultimate, so and so.

Tape 8

00:36 **Can you tell us more about Newton? Who he was and what happened to him?**

Well he was a pilot, he a non commissioned pilot. Pretty good pilot or he would be there. And I think I flew with him a couple of times, but I never saw him, I actually, never actually saw him drunk. But

01:00 I was aware and so were we, because we talked about it a bit quietly, that he really should get on the, shouldn't get on the turps like that, we didn't like that very much. Not much more I can say about that, I don't know,

The story on the squadron when he went down? What was the attitude there?

He bought it. I can't recall the details, I might not even know.

01:30 I don't recall him not being in the mess, It might have happened at a time that I was not there. But I knew that he was killed.

Can you describe the conditions you were living under in Italy?

We had a, the squadron commander was a Scotch mink farmer. That was his, I think he was on his third tour of operations, he had about 17 kills in the desert

02:00 DFC and Barts, Steven Daniel. I seemed to like tents, and tents were reliable, and of course the beauty of being a pilot, you don't have to put the bloody things up yourself. All you've got to do when you are moving is move the airplane. Like from your place to somewhere else when you get there, your tent's up and your gear is there and so on. And the tents were 4 man tents, and you know, we made them pretty comfortable, and of course you do.

02:30 I mean today, I wouldn't live in a tent by choice, thank you very much, but if I had to, no doubt I could. When we were buying this place, Valda and I, I said, "Darling you decide where we live because I can live anywhere, and as long as your happy I can live there." So we lived in tents and there was mud in winter and ice, and there was heat in summer. We did a bit of swimming in the Adriatic

03:00 when it was, we were right alongside it you know. Or we lived in houses, requisitioned houses. Some of which were damaged you know, from the war. You know, well we lived in various of those, and you've be in a little tiny room with somebody, one of the boys, a pilot, you know common interests.

03:30 to my horror, because we were always issued with 38 calibre pistols, and all of us, well I certainly said, what am I going to do with this, if there is a problem. But it was, I used to sleep with it under my pillow. Because the squadrons, fighter squadrons were air strip, road, beach. There were saboteurs around, Italians who were still

04:00 on the other side. And they'd get on, come onto the airfield and maybe you know put sand in the filters and that sort of thing, so you had to be aware. We had a big explosion one night, because this day or night, I don't know what it was, we ate quite well, not luxuriously, but we ate. of course none of us were gourmet food people then, as long as we were well fed, we had plenty of beer, plenty of beer, we would

04:30 send off a 3 tonne truck. people going on leave would be sent off in a 3 tonne truck to take themselves across to Florence, as a matter of fact I was about to go when I was shot down. We would contribute to the truck, not money because money was, there was no Italian money, there was allied military currency. But things, like blankets. a blanket would produce 80 dozen eggs. So the truck would

05:00 go off and take the boys, who's ever going on leave, to Florence. going there and coming back you'd go around the countryside and collect goodies, you know. So we always had eggs, and it was, well meat was spam which was a sort of manufactured ham, potatoes, and canned things, canned things were disastrous. I remember when I was flying on one occasion in Perugia and I had gone out and come back

05:30 and had to go out again, and while I was waiting for the aircraft to be refuelled I hacked open a can of sausages. Wolfed them down, and of course of which I took a bit of the can with me, this one over here, it tore it right open. So I went and flew with it and went to a Canadian army doctor the following day and he rebuilt the thing. You know I had it in that

06:00 rebuilt condition for years and years and years, 20 years probably, its all gold now. But if that's a hazard. We had some delicious moments, we had some delicious moments, where okay it looked as though we'd get to get the weekend off. On one occasion Ross Harding, my gang, 4 or 5 of us, we went off to

06:30 Assisi I think it was, the old historic place. And oh that was just wonderful. We just stayed somewhere at a pension, but the, we had loganberry wine. normally, when the Germans retreated, they took what they hadn't drunk, then our army arrived and drank the rest so what was

07:00 left for the bloody air force coming on was sort of opaque pink muck, you know. But they must have stored this stuff away so it was, it was, I've never found it since, loganberry wine, beautiful liqueur sort of wine. And virginal sheets, that was.

What did you think of the Italian population, and what did they think of you?

Well the Italians had been there for a while. You know they are friendly people with anybody as long as you are

07:30 reasonably kind to them. The extreme fascists, the solo people had gone. So anybody that was left were farmers trying to make their living. of course they did all our washing for us. You know which helped them and we would go and call on them, just go around and call in, I remember a particular farm house where they invited us in.

08:00 But they apologised that they couldn't take us out it the backyard because they couldn't get the door opened. The reason they couldn't get the door open, that a German tiger tank had been knocked out right alongside their back door and was progressively, because they are huge things, was sinking outside in mother earth. So it blocked their back door. No they were all right, we liked them, we never had any fear of them or anything like that.

08:30 We didn't fraternise with them that much, we never had time. of course they were not allowed within the squadron lines, that was all, they were all kept out. But we, the, we the commanding officer, we had ground transport was very short, for a fighter squadron. You know, mostly the commanding officer didn't even have his own jeep. But

09:00 we had one, but it was for general use. But then they liberated a Fiat car. Without wheels, the Germans did the usual thing and took it away, took the wheels away. So Steven Daniel decided he would do something about this and reconstruct it, so the engineers were put to work to get some wheels adapted so it could go onto this Fiat car, which was painted wartime grey, green thing. But then

09:30 military law would you believe caught up with them, because who had ever originally owned it, maybe the local mayor of the local banker of this particular Italian town had reported to the military government that his, your people have stole my car, you know. And good heavens, the system worked, and the military police arrived on the squadron, we believe you have a stolen Italian vehicle. Kings regulations and ACI say you mustn't do that. So it was

10:00 spirited away and hid under some camouflage somewhere so, I don't think it ever actually worked, was made to work.

You said you would tell us some of the slang you used in the squadron?

Yes well if you did something right, that was bang on, Gino might come in bringing in the latest arrangement of spam and if it was particularly good we would say, "Gino, that's bang on" But

10:30 local things like jolly good, and prang and wizard show. The war had been on long enough we had largely gone though that, that was a bit affected, we didn't talk about wizard show very much unless you did it tongue in cheek. But the thing that I picked up you know I might say to you, oh look Chris come and help shift the furniture, and you'd say, oh well if you insist

11:00 or you know you were flying and you might go okay I have found the tanks now, there they are at such and such, and somebody would say, well oh yes, lets do that little thing. But the, lets do that little thing, and they stay with you, you know. My friend Bill Bezzick, Grant Bezzick in Wiltshire and I talk to him

quite often on the phone and visit him every couple of years,

11:30 we still this awful bloody lingo. But the one that we actually invented, in the mess to keep it warm, we had a 40 gallon drum. A hole had been punched, by the engineers, through the wall to take a fuel line, and outside there was another 40 gallon drum of 100 octave aviation fuel. We had plenty of aviation fuel but we didn't have much 80 octane

12:00 motor spirits. So we had this fuel. What happened was you turned on the little tap, you brought that in, all aviation, you know aluminium, bronze and brass fittings. Then we'd cut a hole in, above the floor of the 44 gallon drum and knocked a few holes in the side. Then you put some

12:30 sand and little pile of rocks, small rocks, on the sand, then you had the drip tap and you turned it on and dripped it and lit it. of course it got red bloody hot, 100 octane fuel, and it really kept the mess nice and warm. Now to make toast, because we didn't have, Hoover's toasters, we would take a piece of bread and throw it on top of this red hot 44 gallon drum

13:00 now, its like, well I'll tell you, there is a heap of stones, so it became, oh yes, "Chris throw some bread on the heap." Then somebody said, "Oh yes, Uriah Heep [character in Charles Dickens' David Copperfield], throw it on the uriah, put it on the uriah." So 'heap' disappeared and that became the thing, I remember just to illustrate it particularly. We were on a major operation to support the army

13:30 the whole wing, that's 60 Spitfires, and there was this thing called rover pig where the army wanted to cross a river at X time, and they would lay smoke down, say on a 2,000 yard front and a 1,000 yards deep. you couldn't even us simple fighter pilots could see that, and you went in at given time and you could dive bomb and strafe everything, whether it was moving or not, the thing was to keep the

14:00 enemy's heads down. If the enemy had had any sense they would have already gone of course, and while you are making all this noise, the artillery, your own artillery had stopped, the army would then get into what ever it got into to get across rivers and stuff, and that was called rover pig. But then when we finished you would all run out of ammunition, this 65 squadrons of airplanes were milling around and about, 1,000 feet and nobody knew where anybody was, and this plaintiff voice, and English voice,

14:30 from one of the new chums called up and he said, "I've still got my bomb on, what shall I do with it?" And there was all silence, then in came the drawl, it might have been Barry Ware, it was an Australian voice, "Ah, put it on the Uriah." Otherwise it would have been, "Stick it up your fucking arse," you know so, put it on the Uriah, it became

15:00 our slang. It spread right through desert air force which we would go and visit other wings, and have parties with them, and they'd, put it on the Uriah had reached them. Talking about going and visiting people I mentioned that we had a Maori, Joe Moffatt, and now his brother was driver for the commander of the Maori battalion, Colonel Atiri, they were in front of us, so on two occasions I think, well certainly

15:30 one, Joe, we had the time to do it, Joe said, "Lets go up and visit Alan." So Harding and myself and maybe one other, we went up with Joe Moffatt to visit Alan Moffatt, the colonel's driver. Oh boy did we drink all night that night, and there was the old Italian, or the remains of an Italian house, and in the large room

16:00 was where we slept and ate and drank. But in the corner was a great pile of piano accordions, and Atiri himself, the colonel came in and his favourite and I think his only song was, 'Its all over my jealousy'. He would pick up a piano accordion, drinking with us and starting squeezing it, "All over my jealousy…" And if you say you didn't like the piano accordion, he hurled it

16:30 across the room, and Alan Moffatt would bring him another one, and he worked his way through the piano accordions. Well we all got pretty under, I think we collapsed about 2 o'clock in the morning. Well around about dawn I awoke to go out and have a pee, and here is Atiri, the colonel in the yard, stripped to the waist, shaving. And I thought, oh he's just got up and he's shaving, and I said good morning.

17:00 He hadn't got up, he had just got back from patrol. He'd gone out after playing all the accordions, taken out a patrol, the patrol work was pretty vicious between the two sides, you'd have occasions of creep, creep, creep, and it might have been this occasion where Atiri himself, the colonel was in the upstairs room and the German patrol was in the bottom room, you know. They were the Panzer Guineveres I think, they

17:30 were historic enemy, the New Zealand division all the way from the desert, and they didn't take any prisoners. Atiri, oh my God, keep that. Then Atiri had a quite a horrible future actually he came home, and he got involved in, he might have been responsible, so I won't say that he was, because I'm not absolutely sure, but it was very wild bad sexual murder in

18:00 New Zealand and he went to jail for life, and he was one of the top you know military commanders.

Who was the Maori in your squadron?

Joe Moffatt. And Joe rests, he's in Bologna, the war cemetery in Bologna. As a matter of fact, war graves are very good on this, well a long time ago

18:30 I rang them up and they sent me, I told them where I was, and they sent me, I've got it here somewhere, all the details of where the graves are and all the names and who's there. They have got a chart of how many Australians and what have you. It's the one air force New Zealander, and that must be Joe, because there was very few of them.

19:00 **Tell us the story of your shooting down, beginning with the outline of your operation?**

Okay, we were in the order of battle, there were 4 of us. Bill Hughes an Englishman, Harry Clifford, an Aussie, Alan Stacey who was my number two. And we were, the target was a train, up in northern Italy, roughly north west of Venice, not far from

19:30 Venice. Not the exact spot but around where it was. A village called Monchio di Sarzano, but I know that part of Italy backwards, it's all in my head, for obvious reasons. But it had been moving in daylight so that suggests it was of some consequence, you know. So our job was to go over and interfere with it.

20:00 So, Bill Hughes, there was the 4 of us, Bill Hughes was leading the starboard section, I was leading the port section and Stacey too, Harry Clifton, an Aussie he was, so we went over, and it was a lovely, lovely day, about 11 o'clock in the morning and it was now stationary, so Bill Hughes and I said to the others, look stay here and we will go and have a look at it. So he and I, Bill Hughes and I went down closer

20:30 to see the layout of the thing, and A, it was stationary, B, they had brought up 5 flat cars, flat tops, each of which has a 120 millimetre cannon on it. So they had 15 20 millimetre cannons, so the train must have been of some substance. Or they were just acting as bait, I don't think so, it must have been of some substance to be moving, and somebody else had stopped it, maybe they had broken a railway line, but anyway there it was. So Bill and I went up again, and

21:00 I said, you know we talked together, I said, "Well Bill, how about one of take the flak and one of us take the loco and we'll come in this way" and he said, "Okay." So we went up and attacked the thing. I dive bombed it and pulled away and swung around to strafe it and thing was still there, none of us had actually hit it with a bomb, as I came into strafe the loco at about 30 feet, 30 or 40 feet

21:30 at 350 miles an hour, and I can today see my cannon flashes on the locomotive, I was right on top of it and I got hit. A terrific thump on the starboard side, the guns were down there. Well of course your order of priority changes right away. First thing, duck, duck the flak, down and hurtle on a bit and get down behind

22:00 some trees, which I did. Then everything was going, all the clocks were right, all the clocks were right, but the engine was absolutely full power, flat out full power, and that won't last very long. Sort of thing the next thing, get to height. You know, get as high as you can, and of course I had called up the boys to, and I said, "Bill I've been hit, I'm going home" you know and I said to Alan, my number two, "Alan, stay with me if you can." And I got up to 9,000 feet and

22:30 as expected the cut, no fire thank god, it just cut, you know. So here I am at 9,000 feet with a perfectly glide-able Spitfire. Now I was over the Adriatic, not that far from shore, so I had two options. I could bail out and probably drown, well certainly get wet. And I thought well maybe I'm too far north for air sea rescue to actually come a pick me up, we had, war was aircraft down at base, they could you know,

23:00 and that happened on one occasion, they would come and pick you up. Anyway I, the ground, the land just in a bit from the beach was more or less flat, just farm country, and it was also, we knew where the partisan areas were, it was friendly territory. Didn't mean it was under our control but there were partisan people on our side down there. So I decided that I would go and put it down. And I did all the right things, I picked, and I remembered

23:30 Canada, my lousy wings test, I picked the field and did steep turns to make sure, well you have got to get in your haven't got any engine, spare engine to pick you up if you are too short, you must get in the field. So I came I in flaps up. The Spitfire glides, the engine off at about 155 miles an hour, so I came in fast, over the edge, over the fence, put her down and up came the trees, and

24:00 a line of trees. So I kicked the flaps down which gave me the extra lift, and I went through the top of the trees, I've often, I must go back there because there must be 32 feet of trees there that are a bit fatter out there than they are in the Middle you know. And that broke the speed and I landed very heavily. Now I mentioned that the Spitfire canopy, you pull the toggle kick it with your elbows to get rid of it. So

24:30 you don't want that around when you are in trouble. But it hadn't come it had jammed against he radio mast, the radio mast is down towards the tail, you can see it in those photographs. It hadn't left the airplane. So when I hit the ground, it flew forward and hit me on the, cracked the back of my head. Oh by the way, the other thing you do coming in, when you finally not going to be able to control it you almost grab the gun sight, there is a gun sight about here, and if you don't hang onto that you are likely to

25:00 get it through your skull. So I grabbed the gun sight and landed, crash landed with a great thump, didn't turn or, just almost dead, and that hit and brought forward the thingo, which cut me across the, I've still got the bump, can feel it now if you wanted to, there we were. Now I immediately rang up Harry, I said, "Harry

25:30 I'm all right I'm leaving the aircraft," because I had always had in mind that I would do that and I would get back to my mother, I was in fact still alive. If I was dead, well that's that. But I don't remember getting out of the airplane, I obviously was stunned you know. The next thing I remember I was in fact out of the airplane standing alongside it and I had a two star red cartridge in my hand, we carried two of those in our may west, the may west, and the idea was Errol Flynn, you land your airplane open your parachute

26:00 and the thing, fire this into it and it will burn and the Germans won't be able to use it, they, at that stage there was not much they could have done with a Spitfire anyway. So up three, but I was looking at this thing and trying to bring myself together, obviously I was stunned you see. Then these Italian farmers about a dozen of them came clumping across the farmland. They grabbed me and took me away

26:30 in a friendly manner. To the side, through the bushes and out into the Middle of the road. They brought a three legged wooden stool, sat me down on it and brought me a glass of water. They were farmers, you can tell by their boots and their clothing and the dirt on their hands. Then a city type, they were all very bedraggled, this thin grey suited guy with a pork pie hat pushed his way through and he said,

27:00 "Tedeschi, tedeschi," which is Italian for Germans, and grabbed me by the hand and, ah good he's a partisan you see, and just as he did that, rouse, and these two German soldiers put their heads over the brush fence and that was the beginning of it. All good fighter pilots smoked in those days including me, I had in my, I was wearing RAF battle dress and my breast pocket I had the remains of

27:30 a pack of Dunhill cigarettes, remember Dunhill, and I always think of it when I used to go to London, the Rolls Royce just outside Duke Street, I used to stay there later on, this glorious red Rolls Royce, Dunhill and what have you. I had these two Dunhill cigarettes and I was becoming conscious now and I said, they are not going to get my Dunhills. So I gave one to this guy whom I think was out to rescue me and he

28:00 went off with it and I smoked the other one. So that was that, at that point. They didn't frisk me or anything like that, I then, led me, I was prepared to be lead, I wasn't going anywhere, out onto the road and we started walking. They were from a unit a mile or so down, an army unit to, may have been a Luftwaffe unit. They weren't Luftwaffe, they were green uniforms, Luftwaffe was blue. Then I

28:30 started to come to shall we say, and get fever, you know. I then, I realised then I was bleeding, I was bleeding, I had a blue silk, blue silk, as fighter pilots do, blue silk you know scarf. So I said, "Mala testa, mala testa," Italian for sore head, mala testa.

29:00 And I just sat down by the side of the road. So one of them stayed with me and the other went and roused up an Italian doctor, and they took me to this Italian doctor, in his place and he dressed it up and drove 2 or 3 metal staples into my skull, and gave me some, a glass of brandy full of wood chips. It was the last alcohol I had for some time.

29:30 And I said, "Mala testa," and would you believe it, they went and got a donkey and a truck, a dray, and I got in it and they walked me off, and it was like, the tundra going to the guillotine, of to this village of Campo Santo where I was lodged with this Luftwaffe unit, Luftwaffe ground unit. In the little room adjoining to the orderly room and I thought

30:00 gosh its just like our side, there was an office and papers and a coupe of telephones, and I couldn't speak German but of course I could speak dog Italian. In, they put me in the, none of them spoke English either, and they put me in this little side room with two bunks, whether they locked it or not, nothing I could do about it anyway. But I could hear them through the door, and he had one of these crank phones you know, and it was quite clear

30:30 what he was saying, although it was all in German. He was a, it was a Vermark unit, that's right, he was a Vermark army, and I was air force, and he was ringing up the nearby air command at Maestri, the Luftwaffe unit. clearly he was saying, "Look I've got a bloody airman here, that's not my business, you've got to look after him, I've got a war to run, you come and pick him up, take him away, I don't him I'm busy."

31:00 So I was there for two nights and maybe that day or the next day a little German officer came in and he was tubby, short, thick rimmed, thick glasses, type with a certificate. Now the Germans to save cloth, they always wore a very short tunic, we used to call them bum freezers where as our cloth was reasonable, the backs of theirs came down to here. And very few of them wore shirts either, they had vests on,

31:30 but no shirts. So he came into me and he put this piece of paper and started gabbling at me in German and I had a look at it, it was all in German, what I worked out that he was the artillery commander who had shot me down and he wanted me to certify, yes he had done this, and whether he'd get an iron cross or more rations or 10 days leave at home or what have you. I got onto this and said, "Fuck off," you know

32:00 and of course he did. Now you wouldn't do that with an Australian, if it was the other way around, but off he went and, well, about the next day the Luftwaffe arrived. It was my first experience with a Volkswagen, it was a wartime one of course, it wasn't; a beetle lie that, but the sound of the engine, I

had a string of VWs [Volkswagens] after the war, I knew the sound of the things. What was interesting, particularly a fighter pilot who would roam over Italy

32:30 you know northern Italy tyring to look for targets, moving targes, cars and things, bicycles. We got into the Volkswagen, it was a junior Lieutenant I think, it was him and there was a guard, they were armed of course for me. He and I sat in the back seat and, no the other guard sat in the front seat, next to me was I would call the spotter

33:00 and his job was to listen to aircraft and of course we heard a couple and as soon as we heard an aircraft the driver would dive under a tree and stop. So I then had this mental image that all over northern Italy were these Germans hiding, only for a few minutes, you know while the airplane, where as we were out spending millions and millions of pounds on gasoline and stuff chasing after them during the day. So then to Pedara

33:30 what is it, that was only for a couple of hours. Again they put you in the orderly room, I was just sitting there, they hadn't taken anything from me, they hadn't taken my may west, they hadn't frisked me or anything. I held up my hands of course so they knew I wasn't going to be difficult. Not then anyway, I'll try later on perhaps. I was in the orderly room there was very senior German officer I think

34:00 he must have been a general because the Germans generals' staff, they have a red, very wide big red stripe, and they are very beautifully dressed you know. all sort of braid, no metal not silver but it looks like silver and high hat, this officer came over towards me so I respectfully stood up, I didn't say anything, and he came right up to me like this and just looked at me, and walked away, I wish I had said good morning sir or something, but I didn't.

34:30 Then I think, I didn't stay overnight there, and off to similarly off to Verona which was Luftwaffe headquarters. In Verona, we got used to this phrase, oh for you the war is over which we always wondered well its will be over for all of us, they look at you. Solitary confinement, well I didn't mind that I was getting a bit tired, tired by then, solitary confinement.

35:00 solitary confinement was underground in just a room, but it had sort of almost papier mache, not even gyprock, very thin cavity walls you know. Only small room, oh about as big as this, say. I heard this, I was just laying down resting and I heard this tap, tap, tap, tap, that's interesting. So I located the tap

35:30 and tap, tap, tap, it was a fingernail. So I started to scratch as well, and in due course, this stuff was so poor, you can put a hole in it. So I put a hole in it and put my eye to it and it was an eye the other end. It was the eye of Sigmund E Housner from Lyndon, New Jersey, of course we were put together to go to Germany. Now Eddie, Eddie Housner, he was a Czech origin, very chunky

36:00 very short, they crop their hair short, little moustache, and he had been flying a thunderbolt on 5th armies front, north of Florence. And although there wasn't much Luftwaffe around there were still occasionally nuisance raids at dusk. Bring a Focke-Wulf over just at dusk, make a nuisance with themselves, with a big bomb, they carried a 1,000 pound bomb. And they would go and make a nuisance of themselves, knock off some transport or

36:30 blow up whatever, big nuisance of themselves and make us spend a lot of money trying to keep them away. He had to sneak up on this Focke-Wulf and this Thunderbolt had eight 0.5's which were magnificent gun, 8.5 and he snook up behind this Focke-Wulf and blew it out of the sky. In doing so he blew up the Luftwaffe's bomb which

37:00 blew him up. So you know one for one, he and I were put together, that night we heard the thunder, there was raid on, a heavy bomber raid on Verona, last night you know, oh great you know. Anyway we were two interrogation, not, in comes a young officer, right out of a movie, with hats like this, And of course an Alsatian

37:30 dog, German Shepherd dog, out into the street, down to his office and I'm still in all my flying gear, I didn't, I think I still had my may west on. Anyway off we go down through beautiful, Verona, beautiful, beautiful Verona, historic Verona, down into an office, dog and all, he said, "Pilot do sit down, would you care for a cigarette?" "Certainly." Most awful cigarette, but I thought I won't have many of these so I had his cigarette.

38:00 And he said, "Now." He puts his form in front of him, number, name and rank, and so on and I did all that, and he said, "And your squadron?" And I said, "Well I can't tell you that." And he said, "And your aircraft?" And I said, "I can't tell you that." And he looked at me, he said, "Your squadron number?" "I can't tell you that." So he pulled a draw open alongside him and brought out a book which is the Geneva convention.

38:30 And he had done this so many times, he didn't have to open the book, it just fell open at the page which said, you will answer all questions asked. And he said, "But the Geneva convention, you must answer all the questions." He was speaking English of course, and I said, "Well our edition is different to yours." And he wasn't annoyed or anything, he had done it over and over again.

39:00 They then write, ein guten soldar, good solider, if you start telling them things, they think ah, and of course I wasn't a senior officer, senior officers many of them, conceivably they were, need to go to Arnhem for that, both brigadiers were captured and pretended they were corporals, and they were

British brigadiers, and why not. But anyway, so then back we go to solitary confinement, all right. A couple of nights later, 4 of us were put together, two South African pilots

39:30 Palmer and Whittaker, Ted Whittaker. He'd been in the brewery business, anyway the 4 of us were put together, and we are still in our flying gear, and by this time I think they had taken my may west, they were interested in my may west because it had Vanderlin on it, the name Vanderlin, and then the airplane I shared on the squadron was a south African, and he had written the name Vanderlin on the Mae West,

40:00 and I was using his Mae West. And of course they, some how they were not interested in my name which was fairly Germany sort of name. So they put us together with 3 Luftwaffe ground staff escorts. Now Luftwaffe ground staff, this was what, the first week of March '45, Luftwaffe was just about at the bottom of the line for manpower, they had all been sent to the Russian front. One of them was an idiot

40:30 the junior, I think h was a junior sergeant major, sergeant in charge, he was all right, and the other one was just an ordinary Luftwaffe guy. They couldn't speak English, and we couldn't speak German or not much. But of course we spoke dog Italian we communicated with each other. So there is 7 of us, we 4 plus the 3 Huns, the 3 Germans. And out into the street late in the afternoon, it was like let's say that we were in a building.

Tape 9

00:43 **So there are four prisoners and three Germans minding you?**

Imagine for instance the building was up Macquarie Street. And we walked down Martin Place to

01:00 George Street. Now it was going dark, it was dark. At the corner of George and Martin Place or whatever it was there was the 7 of us. Now the 3 Germans had authority, they were ordered to take us to Germany, they would probably go on leave and that sort of thing and they were armed. They simply held up 7 fingers, and the German transport was nose to tail

01:30 and as fighters pilots we were trying to find this stuff during the day, we were drooling. Truck after, hundreds of them, all the way, miles and miles of motor transport. Which our propaganda said you know, we had brought to a hold and stuff. With hooded lights and the first truck that arrived which had 7 seats in it, had to take us so that 7 of us got on. We get in the back of a 3 tonner, in the back of a 3 ton truck, in the dark.

02:00 We were bumping into people, there were stools and benches across wise, people were jammed in, we couldn't see each other it was pitch black. And they lowered the back flap, and of we go, trundling off. The smell the human smell, and then on the way through the night, there were knees bumping into me. And you know what could you do. And then I felt

02:30 somebody standing up and there was a scratching sort of noise and somebody struck a match and this Italian, they were probably, they weren't prisoners of war because they were in civilian clothes, so they are probably conscripted labour or what have you. But he was delousing his pubics into my lap, the things we do for England. We were bombed by Boston, American bombers

03:00 in the early, in the morning, while it was still dark, didn't hit us. And then progressively worked our way up through the Brenner Pass and variously got to Frankfurt, which was the main collection centre. You didn't go all in trucks, it took us I think it was 16 days you know, it was a lesson in moving people in war.

03:30 Each, when you are in a bad way, each German solider carried a yellowish manila envelope, full of rice, thousands of them were taking rice from Italy back to feed the folks at home. So some interesting moments, we would get off and wait, lots of waiting. For a train, and it wasn't you know, we'll catch the 8:15, they heard, they were told that the train was coming so they

04:00 just wait till it came. In the train there was open carriages, would be German civilians and so on. All of whom they were, they were all right nobody swore, not yet, one of them did later on. They, we just, shuffled aside and made room for them, sit down, we just sat there. What I noticed they, suddenly a woman, from her bosom would produce, it looked like a black brick, but of course black

04:30 bread, they all had a short sharp knife and they would carve off, they were all made of wood and stuff, and eat it. So that was trains, we would get off and wait. And on one occasion I suppose it was if you like, authorised hitch hiking, they would hold up their order if a vehicle was coming along. This particular one was a half track, we were given by, wood fuel ships.

05:00 whereas in our part of the world, in England, we had a system for that, and the gas came in tanks and put on the vehicle. With German system, you just put the wood chips in the top and they worked there way down and they turned themselves into fuel, into gas fuel at the bottom, very low powered stuff. So this half track would go bowling along, but as soon as you came to the hill, we all had to get out of the hill and push, push, but in Augsburg

05:30 Munich, Nurem [Nuremberg], and Augsburg, we went to prison in Nurem, to look after us they put us into a nasty prison on wet, wet and cold, not very good, but they didn't ill treat us as such. But in Augsburg we were standing by the side of the road, waiting because the marvellous thing is you don't have to make any decisions, they do all that.

06:00 And this German, he was an executive type, tall, dressed totally in black, suit, long black coat, black homburg or something like that down, and black briefcase . He came along and he stopped on the side walk, put his briefcase down and walked over and spat at us. "Schweinhund, schweinhund," and he kept walking up and down, "Schweinhund." Now there

06:30 had been rumours about the teller figure, bomber command, mass bombing and all this, I don't now if I have ever seen a record where that actually happened, but the rumour was that some people, bomber command people had been lynched and hung on lamp posts and stuff. I've never seen any records that that actually happened. But he was going up and down like this, and he probably lost the lot, maybe he was just politically minded.

07:00 But our Germans, interesting, they were from Italy and we of course, the four of us stood with our back against he wall, stood with our backs against the wall, but our 3 Germans stood right in front of us and cocked their guns. They had beautiful small arms with lovely Smith, automatic pistols, beautiful. So and then in due course he picked up his briefcase and went on his way. So this took quite a while.

07:30 We got off one train in Schweinfurt.

The Germans cocked their guns at you or at him?

Him, they had orders, they were to look after us. And I'll touch on, I mentioned that they were from Italy, Italy was the only German front where they were holding the allies, the Russian front was collapsing, the European front was collapsing. But the German army was holding, so the Germans

08:00 we heard them in their, in talking to others, well we are not giving in Italy, they had this proud sort of feeling. They had that sort of loose snobbery, well we are from Italy, these British airmen and ourselves, we are all good soldiers, and of course the phrase they used was ein guten soldar. So they were quite good. But as I was saying

08:30 we got off at Schweinfurt to get to another train, but there was no Middle, the whole of central Schweinfurt was just rubble and it was still smoking. They had had a raid that night or the night before. So we picked our way through duck boards, and you know, the wreckage of, I mean a lot of it, Schweinfurt was a biggish city, where some of the major ball bearing factories were, and the Americans had done it over.

09:00 So we got out of this train, and were lead through, one at the front and one at the back, walking through this mess and our Sergeant got uncomfortable, they all wore rucksacks and he wanted to adjust my rucksack and you know, he wanted to take it off, and he gave this Smith pistol to a kid of about 12 who looked at me

09:30 and he put the gun about here, you know. I never stood so still for so long in all my life. But he didn't pull the trigger, hopefully he didn't know how to. But anyway he then had his rucksack in place and put the thing back on again. Took his gun back and off we went, and boarded the other train. Eventually got to Frankfurt am Main, the main Frankfurt, there is another one up in the east. But we

10:00 could hear, and once again, for you the war if over, for you solitary confinement. Well we didn't mind that at all, we were getting a bit tired. Eddy and I had worked out, we were going to be so clever, because you know, the Swiss Alps, we were going up through the Brenner, and we had, we said to each other on our own, that if we have an opportunity to get away, we will start talking about having a coke. Not a bad, probably have a coke somewhere to day. We never had one opportunity to have a coke; they never took their eyes off us.

10:30 They were very efficient, and bloody goo thing too. At that stage of the war, actually when I got into he first major camp, I took them the news that Eisenhower had just announced, because I heard it before I left that allied prisoners were absolved of their traditional duty of trying to escape. Because there were tens of thousands of allied prisoners and they were swarming, mucking around in country side.

11:00 And getting in the way of our advancing army, it was a bit of a mess, so I was able to tell these people in the camp. So we could smell their papers burning, they were burning their papers, and we could hear the American guns, Patch with 6th Army I think was coming through from the south of France. You know around the corner of Switzerland on the drive towards Bavaria and we were only there for what, three days.

11:30 Then we did a night march of, all night, it would be about 15 miles I guess to Vetschau which was the actual POW re equipment area. Where all these thousands of allied prisoners and the Americans of course, and a lot of American air force, lots of American air force, US Air Force.

12:00 They were given boots, and I was wearing Canadian battle boots which I had been given, or swiped from the Canadian army somewhere. Which actually was a very, I shouldn't have done it, I wished afterwards I bought South African velchen, its veldt shoes, for walking across the veldt, all the South Africans had them, they lived for ever, they worked for ever, they were waterproof, very comfortable. I

wish I had bought those in England before I left but I didn't.

12:30 So I had Canadian battle, and they were sort of a rubber boot, rather, not much good marching around in those. So I swapped those for a pair of new GI American boots. They were new so they were either from some dead guy, I think they were, probably just captured stores, you know. So I put a pair of those on because we were all going to march off down to Bavaria, 100 and something miles away. I had those for

13:00 years, they were very, very useful, I took those home. But I was also wearing an Australian comforts fun, greasy wool sweater under my battle dress jacket. Very warm for flying you know, and the bastards took it away from me. I remember complaining, you can't do this, but its not official military gear, they were taking it away to give it to their own people, and understandably in the conditions. I had

13:30 no, nothing to carry anything with, I got a shirt, I was wearing of course an RAF shirt, RAF blue. Not unlike this and all the RAF was good heavy duty stuff. And I took another shirt which I eventually turned into a carry bag for the very few things that I had acquired along the way. That was an overnight march to Vetschau, within a day, or the next day, we headed off on the march down

14:00 to Bavaria. And there were 7,000 of us in columns of 1,000. We were at about the middle of all that. So there was the two South Africans, and Eddy Houser and myself. And I met up with a couple of Aussies, Gordon somebody and somebody else, we were about of about 5 to get to know each other. We thought, we are going to be smart,

14:30 we'll do a bludge, here we are in the middle we'll just bludge our way, and we will finish up right at the end of the line, and then we'll duck under a tree somewhere and the Yanks would come along and rescue us, pick us up. Well within about 48 hours we had done that, we were right down at the back of the 7,000 we had done a really efficient bludge. But then there is a line of

15:00 SS and they had no sense of humour at all. So we stayed with the march which went on for 100 miles, something, maybe over two or three weeks. Glorious weather fortunately, and the Black Forest, beautiful. We were strafed for a moment by a Thunderbolt who saw us all straggle, I won't call us the march, the straggle, with the guards all along the side, along the autobahn. He pulled away because he realised we were friend, we were prisoners, he waggled his wings. I ran

15:30 pretty fast on that one. And get into the undergrowth, being strafed by, we then for the first time realised, having done it ourselves, what it was like to be on the receiving end, you know.

Did he hit anyone?

No, no. I wasn't aware that he was, I didn't see anybody. He only made a pass, we heard the guns go then he stopped, so he must have

16:00 cottoned on that they weren't Germans, it wasn't the German army. The German army wouldn't be marching like that anyway in daylight. Anyway so we got out of that. We paused somewhere for about 5 or 6 days which was an actual Kriegesgefangenen, a stalag, you get to know a bit of German. Because the German language add all these syllables, its so long and then they abbreviate it.

16:30 You know that, Kriegesgefangenen which is war prisoner, is KGF. Just as a flakshif started of fuchsoy afrech canonashif. Well by the time you say that, the airplane gone away so that's flak, flakshif. Flugsoy, flying thing, afrech is the action thing and canona, cannon.

17:00 And we were getting a bit hungry, as a matter of fact 3 or 4 of us passing nearby a village we saw these things looked like turnips growing in a field. So we broke off and dashed into the field and grabbing and chewing these raw, and it wasn't, it was manger, very bitter cattle food. So we stoped that, this is before the Red Cross arrived, this was further down the line.

17:30 When we stopped at this camp that I talked about, they dragged in a dead horse, that was the be our rations for the day, and our medico said, no he won't have it, took it away. I was sitting down in what I suppose was a mess, if you can call it that. I was with this senior British officer who was a wing commander, older guy, I think

18:00 he might have been ground staff guy. We were eating or consuming a sort of grassy, grassy water and you know, he was so sweet, he drank about half this and he said, "Would you like the rest of it?" And I said, "Thank you sir." And I had the rest of it. But it was very interesting. We paused to, we'd pause everywhere of course, and just by people running it, pause. What I noticed

18:30 in the villages, there were no young men of course, all the young men were somewhere else. Or gone altogether, but the villagers were all healthy, they had pink cheeks and they were fat and they were old. very I won't say blasé, we heard Goebbles last speech, and I knew it was Goebbles and although we didn't speak German you could tell it was, the Russians, the Siegfried myth, all this, he was a brilliant

19:00 hideous creature. He was one of the most brilliant, and I give Goebbles something, he stuck it, he stayed there, even if he did murder his children which is pretty bloody awful. But he didn't bug out like Goering you know with 26 truck loads of furniture and paintings and stuff, Goering, from Berlin. At least Goebbles stayed with it, and he was tremendous in, from that side in keeping the German people,

sticking with it.

19:30 Anyway we heard his last speech. Early on and I have read biographies and things of the era and Goebbles in particular, in the early days of the nazi party, brilliantly organised, nobody had radios or very few people did so they put a radio in each village square. of course what they got was the official thing all the time. So he was communicating you know, on TV of course and popular radio. So we heard his

20:00 last speech. I, nobody was standing around listening, you know they were all walking around, they weren't listless, they were healthy, and I would say, they were all saying, to hell with it, they were all resigned, no they were all right. We went in, we paused in one of these villages and went into a farm house to rest ourselves the 4 of us. In came some American air force officers, they still had their

20:30 wonderful fur lined flying gear, they had American air force hats. And they were arguing, where do we go, and what do we do, do this, and arguing, arguing, arguing. We 3 or 4, we were resting you know, we had been walking for several hours. We were just lying, taking it easy you know, and one of them was a Lieutenant colonel and his eye was half out, he had been wounded and his eye was down here somewhere.

21:00 And he looked at me and us and the said, "Oh, you limeys have got it made," you know and then he said to his guys or something, "Lets all settle down and rest." And they were rushing around, they couldn't do anything of course. All this yak, yak was going on. Interesting and I think I might have touched earlier on, maybe off camera, but, the different characteristics of people.

21:30 You'd never get Australians arguing like that. But if you, and you see it come through in the movies, if you see a British war movie, it's the same war, the same incident, but the way the two countries handle it. Americans always arguing with each other and demonstrating, Joe is going to do this, and Pete is going to do this, and colonel, why don't we do that. Whereas the Aussies say, what do you want us to do? Yeah, just leave it with us, well be all right. But did you see Edo Devade in his last interview, he was talking about the various orchestras that he had conducted

22:00 And he was asked, but you never conducted opera in Italy, why don't you conduct opera in, and he said, "Look I will not ever conduct opera in Italy." This is pertinent to what I am saying, although a preamble, he said, "If you go down to conduct opera, you get about 3 bars out and they all stop, and they all start arguing, and they come up and argue with you, and say that's not the way its done, Mozart didn't mean that or, he says, whereas with the Australian orchestra they are very good." He said, "You tell the Australian orchestra what to do

22:30 and they might ask you a couple of questions and then they say, oh she'll be right, mate." And they go and do it, the difference, the difference. Things like that.

On the SS [Schutzstaffel] officer that spoke to you in English, during your walk through the Black Forest?

Nobody, you didn't need to be told. That was the end of the line, you could see

23:00 nobody got through, and they were making sure that everybody, and you have a bit of a feel for this, you don't wait until you get pushed. No, nobody, talked to us and said get on with it. Actually the German guards, they were all right. They were doing a job, they were soldiers we were soldiers. When we on the way up to Germany, at night, on one occasion particularly, it was cold

23:30 we were up north of the Alps somewhere. To get out of the cold, it was good of them really, they were cold too, but they took us into a soldatenheim, the soldiers home, which is in the British thing it's the NAAFI [Navy Army Air Force Institute], navy, army air force, its the same thing, canteen, run by the locals women's group, women's auxiliary corps or whatever. So when we go into this place and everything is closed and smoke and fog, oh we were just there and having a beer with them.

24:00 Nobody came up and swore at us, they were all soldiers, we were soldiers, you know. And on the march, if you can call it a march, they were, they did their job. But as the march was getting further on, obviously the war was going to be over pretty soon. They'd started to pre-sell their guns. We all wanted Lugers, they are wonderful side arms, and they all carried Lugers. Some of them of course

24:30 had rifles, but they all carried Lugers. So much so that one guy, I forget his name, an Australian, he brought home, the only thing he brought home was his officer's truck full of guns and ammunition. God, machine guns and God knows what. So they were selling their guns, some of them, pre the end. What they were also doing, the corporal who was in

25:00 our area, a large happy go, happy appearing sort of guy, had a, they all had good cameras, we liked the idea of their cameras, they would group people together and get us to take a picture of a group of prisoners of war, which all being happy with this German corporal, because they were worried about what was going to happen to them when they got captured, with all the horror stories and stuff. Dachau was just down the road, we didn't know it was there when we got to

25:30 the Moosburg which is just outside, like Hornsby in Sydney. No they were, they were soldiers doing their job. Mind you if you got out of line badly, you had, rightly so, you would know it. But they were

very, very, unbelievably conscious of rank. I was lying down on the side of the road, we'd all pause and it came the time to move on. The corporal, people come up, "Rouse, rouse, rouse," you know, come on get up, rouse. I

26:00 just lay there I wasn't ready to get up. This German came over to me and he said, "Rouse, rouse." And I said to him, "You stand to attention when you are talking to me." He bloody well did. Then, I got up. Ah, I'm sure they weren't all like that. But the essential thing is that they, they had no hate

26:30 for us, man for man. The German is Augsburg, who knows what had happened to him, his whole family or what have you. He wasn't a Nazi otherwise he would have had the badge on. He would have been in uniform instead of civvies.

How were you fed when there was just the 7 of you?

We didn't do too well, we didn't do too well, so you realise that you live on your own fat, not that we were particularly fat. We were getting to the stage of

27:00 being hungry. But we never starved, we go to this awful black bread stuff. But then came this wonderful moment where his convoy of white vehicles with the Red Cross, it was the Swiss Red Cross passed us on the way, truckload, and truckload, and truckload. The Red Cross parcels they were very good. They came in a, most of them were made in American of course, they came like so

27:30 in a carton and they contained Spam, oleo, margarine w all called it oleo then, no butter of course. Hard biscuits and dried milk and what we now call Nescafe, little cans, coffee. So that kept us alive, you kept them going for a while of course.

28:00 Made it, spread out. So I forget how long the march took, and the whole thing, I went in the first week of March and came out a couple of days after the war ended, early to mid May. So I was there for 10 weeks or something of that order. I was never starving, I got hungry all right. But never to that extent, nor did I find anyone who got hungry to that extent. Nor did I see

28:30 anybody who was badly wounded or even, they took them off to the hospital. Somehow, this American had a damaged eye which was, wasn't very pretty. We think, in doing our bludge, we think our particular group, we thought we were the last across the Danube at Ingolstadt, and there were two tiger tanks dug into the ground as, they were fixed, artillery with 88 millimetre guns.

29:00 To protect the bridge, and after we had crossed they blew the bridge, we were there when it actually happened. But we could hear the American guns, going, oh crickey they are only 15 miles away.

AT that point you crossed the bridge, you were lead to . . ?

We finished up I think it was 7A, stalag 7A which was a proper you know, proper prisoner of war camp with wire

29:30 and towers and all that. Which was just outside Munich, Moosburg, you can see it on a map, its almost an outer suburb of Moosburg, its expanded. So we were in, we were there for, not long, a few days. And it was almost liking going through, your course one, here's somebody from course two following, and somebody from course three. When I was in there

30:00 Graham Friis, another New Zealander I hadn't met before, F R I I S, we came up and of course we fell into each other's arms, Australian and New Zealand, he had come from a neighbouring wing. He had been shot down a week or so after me. It was like you know the course was moving through. We used to have a parade every morning, where they would count and make sure everybody was there. People would report whatever they had to report and our own NCO s our own people would report pending they had to report.

30:30 And they said, we are here, there is going to be a negotiation, we didn't want, the Germans didn't want and nor did we want, the camp to be fought over, the camp of course was defended. And we heard that the German officers had gone out at night, had a discussion with the American local commander and it was agreed that they wouldn't flight for it, but they couldn't surrender.

31:00 They couldn't surrender, so guns had to be fired. So in the morning, it was a beautiful morning, beautiful as I say it was May, well May 1 somewhere, oh Hitler suicided on the 30th I think, I think he had gone, no maybe later than that, we were a couple of days before the end of the war which is, what, the 7th, never mind. Anyway, and in the morning we could hear the honey lighter small arms cannons, no

31:30 tank fire, we could hear, it was just like a wave of small arms fire going over the camp. It went over and then there was brief pause, and then the American tanks came through the wire. So the Germans were able to say, I'm sure they did too, there was plenty of history on this, with other Germans too, have you read, Is Paris Burning, with the German general who did that in Paris. Marvellous. But

32:00 came over the wire and the Germans obviously were able to say, we didn't surrender, they fired at us and we had to give in because we were in a impossible position. Heydrich did that too, Heydrich was a demolition man, and Hitler brought him from the Russian front, huge gun, and he was to destroy Paris. But he also said, "Ja mein fuhrer," when he got there, the war was going to end, I am going to destroy

this wonderful city, but he had to go through the motions. So when

32:30 the French, when the allies arrived and the French underground were the first people in, all armed and what have you and he was in the hotel which was his headquarters, he was in the basement with his gun. And they went in, and he said, he fired one shot into the ceiling, and then he surrendered, he hadn't just surrendered. So that makes sense too.

33:00 **Can you tell us about the command structure of the allied troops in the camp?**

Well whoever was the senior officer from wherever was called the senior officer, in our case the senior British officer. So in camp, whoever was the most senior officer, like this guy who shared his soup with me, he was a British wing commander. And so he was the senior British officer in the camp. So it was run, administratively like that

33:30 he had a staff, it was all broken up into sections. There were lots of people, and in the morning the staff would meet and they'd go out and talk to their sections and then the parade would, apel would be called, and they passed on whatever they wanted to pass down to the troops. So it was an administrative, military functions still.

You mentioned there were about 7,000 on the road marching,

34:00 **where were they from? A particular stalag camp or?**

No, I think some of them must have been from somewhere else, because that gets me to the coming home. On the march I met an RAF pilot officer, who had no wings, he was an administrative man, the air force is divided into two branches. GD, general duties, that's all the flying people who of course runs the air force

34:30 that's what the air force is for. all the others are A and SD, administrative and special duties, non flying people. And you know this, we regarded him as an old man, and his name was John Bond Jones. Pilot Officer John Jones and he must have been well into his 30s and maybe 40s. We young, we were saying to ourselves, what the hell is he doing here? Well John Jones had been in India

35:00 before the war, in an administrative job with the RAF and the war, he finished his tour and he was on his way home, by ship, for a long leave, his family and stuff. The war broke out and a U boat surfaced in the Bay of Biscay and stopped the ship and took all the officers off. So Jones spent the whole war in Germany, and he was in the Sagan march. The Germans put a lot of prisoners of war up in northern Germany, Lubeck up towards the Baltic. As

35:30 the Russians came, they started to withdraw them. The march from Sagan down was pretty bloody rough. So there was one who wasn't shot down. When we were flown out, the Yanks that flew us out to Reims, when the bomber command came and picked us up in Lancasters, and we piled onto a, where I was, we piled onto this Lancaster, and

36:00 John Jones was with us. And I was so touched because as we approached the white cliffs, the boys up the front had him up the front, to see the white cliffs.

There was also a British captain who had been there since Dunkirk?

Oh yes, you are wasting fuel. Well okay the tanks came through and Graham and I said, we better

36:30 have some sort of celebration so we got a few twigs together and started, really quite a small fire on the side of the road, in the camp. I think it was a captain, British army captain came over in full walking out dress, immaculate uniform with all his pips shining, absolutely immaculate, as though he just stepped out to parade at Sandhurst. He came over

37:00 to us and he said, "Put it out, you are wasting fuel, you are wasting fuel." He'd been in since Dunkirk, he was half nuts, and who wouldn't be. God knows how he went, anyway he'd been in since Dunkirk. Oh it was a thing. We arrived, so bomber command, be lovely home with the boys. And of course I had hair up like this

37:30 you know 10 or 12 weeks of it. We arrived at Waddington which was a bomber command air field in the midlands, we landed at Waddington, we fell out of the Lancaster and started headed off, where's the mess? Where's the bar? You know, and there is a line of WAAFs, Women's Auxiliary Air Force, and many of them quite beefy, and they said, "Come on you lot

38:00 pants open." Because they had dust guns, insecticide, "Open your pants, open your shirt." Okay you are in the clear, disinfecting us all, and why not. I don't think I had any bugs, even despite the guy in the truck in Italy, I was all right. But, then you were really felt you were at home, you were in England, but you were with the air force. They were, with us, we were altogether again.

38:30 Into the mess, I don't think we drank very much, but a cup of tea in great heavy mugs, tea plenty of sugar, and bun or something. The following day, did we? I must have slept overnight, no documentation at all, they gave me, as they did everybody, to go to your various places. Like we had to get back to Brighton you see,

39:00 Aussies and New Zealanders, so they give you a chip to go down to the station and catch a train and go down to Brighton, and report into Australian navy headquarters. I, its interesting that I found that I've got a chip, but what do I do? I was waiting for somebody to tell me to do this, do that, a truck, a vehicle would come, and all they said was, "Oh if you hurry you can catch

39:30 the 11:15," say. You know in other words we were almost back to a wonderful normal existence. So you'd just go on military transport down to the station at Waddington, I got onto the train to go to Liverpool street and I was still in my torn battle dress and the blood stained scarf and my hair out like this, and it was almost Basil Radford and Norton Wayne compartment, nobody said anything to anybody, mainly civilians.

40:00 Reading the paper, nobody said, "Oh gosh where have you been?" Nice, you had the Australian flashes on, you know it great that you Australians, blah, blah. They didn't say anything. We just sat on the train, got off at Liverpool Station got a number 11 bus, I still use it as a matter of fact its the number 11 to Victoria to get across town, and get across to Victoria, and get across to Brighton. Down to Brighton, check in at the

40:30 Metropol, I think I was in, checked in, number 7, they knew who I was there, I got to have a hair cut. Now before I went away to the Mediterranean I though I better have a hair cut before I go. I used to get my haircut at the top of the high street near the clock tower in Brighton. And the guy who cut my hair, he couldn't go to the war, he was a youngish man, with flat feet, or whatever the reason was. So he was a barber, it was a nice barber shop, take the sheet, and throw the sheet and put it around your neck. So up I go and here I am like this with hair like this, it was marvellous being by the time that I had my last haircut there, mind you I had some haircuts while I was away. But I came in and sat down and he said, "Oh hello sir, you've been away for a while?" Wonderful, it was this wonderful normalcy, you know.

Tape 10

00:41 Okay, I was in England for some months and my hosts who were very wonderful, had a farm and they were stock brokers, they had a very lovely estate. They had there first post war Sunday afternoon, new grandchild's birthday party.

01:00 Buns and cream and ice cream and butter and strawberries, with which you were from and I came down with acute infectious hepatitis or yellow jaundice. The RAF came and picked me up and took me to Hendon isolation hospital where I was the only other inmate was a Jamaican airman with a monkey face, opposite me. Anyway I came home on the [SS] Stratheden on the last major draft, the Stratheden was all Aussie RAAF coming home.

01:30 In October, November, and she was, in '45, and she was doing virtually a dummy run for the resumption of service and being an officer and a prisoner of war, I didn't have a cabin to myself, but at least I did have a cabin with another Aussie. And the, you know, it was a virtually a peace time operation.

02:00 In the main dining room, in the officers saloon there was the head waiter looked like Sydney Greenstreet remember Sydney Greenstreet the actor? Very big man. All the cabin crew, all the stewards were Lascars, paid practically nothing like P and O did, but they did their job. And you know, proper menu, I think I'm might even have the menu somewhere over there. And the chief

02:30 steward passed by and he asked me, "Are you happy with the meal?" And I said, "Oh, yes, but as you've mentioned it..." And I've forgotten it was just a minor thing, I would not have mentioned hadn't he asked me. But whatever it was, I might have said, it could have been hotter or something, but our particular Lascar disappeared, we never saw him again, whether he had been thrown to the sharks, I don't know. So home we came and that was very pleasant. I had bought

03:00 with one, the only swim suit you could buy, because I had no clothes of my own, and I wanted a pair of swimmers, and I bought a one, with one clothing coupon, not on air force issue, a pair of black swim briefs. When I got home the first thing I wanted to do was get down to Freshwater, with family and get into the surf, I went in and changed and got into these things, they were fairly brief. They

03:30 had no comfortship, we all know what that is, and my mother said to me, "Get inside, you'll be thrown into jail." They were so brief and so transparent. So I got a tan with those, wearing those coming home. But the sight, coming up the coast in the sunlight in the morning, turning into Sydney Harbour, that was pretty bloody good. And pulling into the historic

04:00 wharf down in Woolloomooloo in buses, getting into buses. I remember bowling down to Martin Place, and I was standing on the conductor's area, you know on the back of the double-decker buses, that used to be, we don't have them any more do we? And I almost had an impulse at Elizabeth to jump off and go into The Sydney Sun because my office was around the corner. But I didn't, I went up to Bradfield Park and of course we disembarked and, Bradfield Park and my mother and friends of friends where there to meet me. And you had

04:30 a, I found you were very impatient, maybe I am a naturally impatient person, my wife will probably confirm that. But very impatient with what were the civilian inefficiencies and inadequacies, you were

so used to wanting something to be done and wanting it to be done properly and it wasn't done properly and done on time. I should have warned my people, don't come to Bradfield Park because they'll be milling

05:00 around you know, but I didn't and so everyone was milling around. All the boys were milling around in the parade ground, trying to find their loved ones. I was wearing an officers air force hat and sunglasses, American sunglasses that I had pinched I think, from an American bomber crew. And I was wearing those, so nobody recognised me and I started getting very annoyed and I went up into the mess and stood on the deck and

05:30 had a beer or something and finally somebody recognised me. What I should have said to them, "Stay home I will get to you." You know, which of course we did. Friends were already in my stepfather's little house and they were preparing lunch and so on. So that was rather good.

Was it an emotional reunion for you with your family?

Well I fell into my mother's arms, sure. But that was all, we didn't burst into tears or anything like that, but we undoubtedly

06:00 gave ourselves pretty long hug, you know. She was my, my mother, was my greatest friend, by far. Nobody like her.

Did it occur to you how difficult it must have been for her to hear that you were missing?

Well it's interesting that, I mentioned earlier on this family across the way and Leo didn't go to the war, and I mentioned that he was very good to my mother when I was gone. Because what happened the post master, normally they

06:30 send a boy down and the telegram gets delivered, but the post master, I suppose because who I was, he knew who I was, he walked down the house and brought the telegram down. So you can imagine him opening the door and getting a telegram. Now I never asked my mother, "What did he say to you?" He might have said, "It's all right Mrs Ulm, he's, John's alive." But anyway, Leo my friend across the street, I asked him a long time later how my mother took it, and he said very badly,

07:00 very badly indeed. But that's why my first message from the ground, I'm leaving the aircraft, they knew I was alive, at least, at that stage, and in the letter that came back from the commanding officer and the guy who was flying with me, Harry Clifton, each of them said, "Well we knew John has survived the crash. He is either with friendly forces or a prisoner of war." So that worked out all right.

07:30 **How much longer did you stay in the air force?**

Oh the, I think my discharge date was November '45, I think. You went up to Bradfield Park, you went in and, or did we go to the showground? No disembarkation or rather demobbing, but disembarking was it the showground with lots and lots of news and clerical arrangements

08:00 and you went through, got your pay, your pay book and your deferred money in your pay book. Signed it, what have you and then your discharge certificate was singed, and that's in there somewhere. And then the next thing was the RSL and so you automatically joined the RSL. I gave them away after a while because I got sick of them. When I say I got sick of them, they always, all my friends, said, "You must come to the Imperial services club on a Saturday

08:30 morning and have a drink." You know, and to go into the Imperial services club is lovely, it was in Barrack Street, its now the combined services club where I still have lunch with a couple of the boys now and again. But the bar was full of faded brigadiers hiding from the Boer War and oh God, I couldn't stand that. Then when the RSL particularly started to take a political view, I took a dim view of that too. I, of course the Australian military tradition, with

09:00 so many of us being in he forces, the retired, returned service league particularly had very considerable political cut. But I didn't necessarily agree with their political attitudes. So I got out of that but I did stay as a member of the RAAF officers club for a while.

Where were you when the war with Japan ended?

Where was I? Oh I know.

09:30 I didn't back to London in time for VE [Victory in Europe] Day. But of course I was back for the J [Japan] Day. I think they first started out calling it VP [Victory in the Pacific] Day out here, of course we are in the Pacific, but it became known worldwide as VJ [Victory over Japan] Day. So Bob Marshall and I, we were in Brighton at the time waiting eventually to come home and that was August wasn't it? August, the two bombs. And so well come on we better go up to London, so we did and we were there all amongst the 100,000 or so outside the palace and saw the

10:00 Royal family and Churchill and stuff outside the palace, Victoria memorial there. We did all that. We thought, we better do that. So I was in London.

Was it an anti climax to be home in some ways?

It was Chris, in this sense. You have joined up quite youngish, you do grow up, you learn a lot

10:30 about life, and more importantly, I think you learn about your life. you get used to a system and, lets use a work word, bonding, you become, and the word mate is used a lot too, but its true. You, it's a family.

11:00 And you know, you miss that. You miss that for a while after you go out. But I had the good fortune if you like, that within a month of going back to the old Sydney Sun I was back in uniform again, they sent me up to cover the occupation. So I flew up. I went so rapidly I didn't have time to get a war correspondence uniform. So I put on my air force uniform, I still had my wings and my fruit salad on my chest. I wore the air force hat and I put a couple of corespondents flashes

11:30 to identify me, on my epilates. I flew up to Morotai and then joined a troop ship, the [SS] Turfs Victory, the commanding officer of which was, somebody Kibby, and he was the cousin of the old American comedian actor, Guy Kibby. And so we, I produced the ships newspaper for him. This was the first major contingent of Australians,

12:00 3 RAR [Royal Australian Regiment] and so on, I think we had 3 battalions up there. Went up to Kerang. So I, if you like, very soon after going back, I probably, to answer your question, I probably didn't have time to get disillusioned, I was back in the military environment, and environment which I absolutely loved. I was talking to a few people and we all about the same age, of course, interested in the subject and as my education subject grew, I was exposed to it.

12:30 In Tokyo, we lived in the, I'd like to spend a bit of time on this, you say if you don't want me to, but in Tokyo we lived in the foreign correspondents' club. Now the Americans in burning Tokyo, very carefully didn't burn that great line of buildings, the Dai Ichi building in front of the palace. The Dai Ichi building became MacArthur's headquarters . Just behind it was what had been a Japanese officers' club and we took that over, it became the foreign correspondents' club.

13:00 And it was staffed and serviced at the equivalent of an American full colonels' mess. From the American correspondents, so we were looked after very well indeed. Now I don't think I shared a rumour with you but next door to me was a Newsweek representative, Compton Pakenham. Now Pakenham was a generation older than me. Pakenham's name, it's an Irish seat, it goes back in history, there was one in at Wellington, and there was one at Waterloo

13:30 and one with Nelson and you know. He had been a cold stream guardsman in the Russo-Japanese war. He was with the Japanese army you know, '45 on exchange, so they could observe each other. So he grew up with Togo you know who became the commander and chief. So he was really right up with it, and he and I happen to get on very, very well, In fact, I used to, I didn't have a vehicle, so he used to take me, let me do the driving. We'd

14:00 go off to press occasions and interviews with the prime minister and so on. But Pakenham really knew his job and that's why I really learned a lot, about contacts in journalism. Now News week was very independent and not at all aligned with any administration in Washington, and in fact was largely owned by the Astor family in England, you know. So Pak, Pak went on leave, and you couldn't then get into Japan. Unless you had

14:30 the supreme commander's staff authorised, I've still got the badge somewhere, supreme commander allied powers, correspondent, something or another, authorised, not by MacArthur himself, but in Pakenham's case. So Pakenham was back home and finished his leave and wanted to come back to Japan. No press pass, I think it was called an AGO card, American government official card, no press pass, he couldn't go back, couldn't go back without it.

15:00 So you know, he is a News week representative, nothing come through, so he waited, in due course, some time later a message came, now the commander and chief of the British fleet, based in Hong Kong, in HMS Belfast, she is in the Thames now, she's the museum, the cruiser near the Embankment, been there for years. The admiral, whoever he was would be very happy to have Pakenham come

15:30 on holiday with him, they are going through an exercise cruise and knew who Pakenham was and so on. So Pak flew off to Hong Kong and went aboard the flag ship and had a couple of weeks with the British Pacific fleet and came back to Hong Kong and then in came an envelope addressed to Mr Pakenham, care of Newsweek and so on. In it was his authority; the card signed Harry S. Truman.

16:00 MacArthur couldn't get over that. How 'bout that for contacts? But Pak, you think, there are some people over life who really stand out, I mentioned my two school mates. But Pak stands out in my mind, wonderful sense of humour, very board, you know. Of course he really was a Japan authority, he spoke Japanese fluently. So much so that the imperial household ministry, the cultural ministry

16:30 they had discovered some old Japanese, ancient Japanese scrolls, and they couldn't find any Japanese to translate them. So they got Pakenham to do it, he did it. He was wonderful. Now that was a marvellous period. I remember going to a press conference with Yoshida who was the prime minister, but as you know there had been a military coup way back in, knocked of the traditional upcoming peaceful prime ministers.

17:00 They were all very conservative in an English sense. But Yoshida was the prime minister and we went to this press conference and I was sitting next to a Bob somebody, Bob Smith I think, an American correspondent, a very experienced one, much more experienced than I. And Yoshida had an interpreter,

and we'd be asking questions in English and the interpreter would translate it for Yoshida who would them translate it in Japanese and the interpreter would translate it back into English for us.

17:30 But this particular question came along, and Bob Smith, I think his name was Smith, sitting next to me had this, and he said, "Yes Mr. Prime Minister but that's not the question I asked you is it?" And Yoshida, said, "No its not." Yoshida spoke English too. But of course he was using an interpreter to give himself time, you know. Little incidents like that.

You hadn't been a correspondent before? You were learning on the job?

No, I had only just become a cadet before.

18:00 **How did you get that job to begin with?**

I told you about the vocational guidance and I am good at writing in English and history.

Not the cadet job so much but the correspondent position in Japan?

Well when I, well when I came back from the war, I saw the editor and the editor in chief and I said these are my developing interests. As a matter of fact I came up with the idea that Wally Brooks, I don't know if he is still around, he became the head of news and information

18:30 later on, he was a navigator and also was a newspaper man. Said, "If Wally, if the company newspaper chain buys a little twin engine airplane, Wally and I can fly around Europe together, and we will report what's going on." And I got a letter back for Eric Kennedy, the managing editor, "It's a very nice idea but what we are looking for now is first class on the ground reporters," you see. So that's how I was, I probably established my interests, because

19:00 it was within 2 or 3 of that and they said, would you like to go to Japan and cover the occupation, well I didn't take long to answer that. So I actually went to Japan as a cadet. But as it was financed by the afternoon group of papers, The Brisbane Telegraph, The Sydney Sun, the Melbourne, Adelaide and WAs [West Australians], I suddenly found myself on 2000 pounds a year, of course you save all that, I did that and I did it

19:30 again in Korea, got then, I reached the stage where I came to, with Valda that we get married, and I said, "What I have been thinking, I now have enough cash. I can have a new Bentley or I can get married." I thought well, I better get married instead, because a Bentley cost 6000 pounds in those days. We all wanted to do that.

The correspondence job in Korea is valuable to the archive as well. But before that

20:00 **did you in your air force career have any contact with the media during World War II?**

Not in that direct sense. But after the war Peter Kingsford Smith, Wallo's brother, he'd been in bomber command and he'd been a prisoner of war. He had a bit of a rough time actually he was there longer than I was. And as we were both

20:30 Kingsford Smith and Ulm, had been liberated, this is the only media contact that I recall. The Australian news and information bureau thought they could do something with this. They invited us down to Kingsway where their office was and I remember Peter was very shy, I wasn't being a newspaper man, or the beginning of a newspaper man. And the photographer took us out into the street to look for, as you would understand, for a setting, a place

21:00 and Peter was very diffident, and so I spotted a Daimler, and I said, come on lets use the Daimler. So we stood in front of the Daimler and I put one foot up on the bumper bar, the lovely shiny polished bumper bar of the Daimler and was laughing to get Peter to give a bit. That picture is in the official news and information, Australians at War or something book. No, that's about

21:30 as for this thing as I became a newspaper man, but during the war, no I don't recall, no in fact I didn't have any fortunately nobody knew me apart from the Australian context.

Jumping forward to Korea, what was the presence of the media like there of that conflict?

Oh yes, well that was pretty interesting. Right, we'll talk about the Korean War. Most of us

22:00 were based in Tokyo, we'd go to Korea for 3 or 4 weeks, and then came back to have a break and also to work on the desk, all the bureau desks were in Tokyo. For the truce talks which was the period I was there, I was there 6 or 7 months in '52. The talks were going on, the active war, the coming and going war had stopped, it was the static war, but each side was trying to gain a high ground in case the truce came about, and then the war

22:30 would break out again, so you needed to hold high ground, you know. Sort of thing the war was pretty fierce on the ground. So I was, the headquarters, the press camp was in Seoul was a building in Seoul. I was representing Reuters, and of course the Australian associated press Reuters, I was up there with them and we lived there and we had two Koreans. An older one

23:00 Song who was a driver and Young Lee who was a general hand, then one of us would stay there in the, usually two of us in Korea at the same time, one would stay in Seoul which was the main desk, because the army headquarters you'd give them briefings and so on, and then you had the front, briefings from the front. you either go to the front, take a jeep, the driver would take me up, mainly to the Australian battalions. That's where I got to know Frank Hasserton, General Hasserton, he's pretty sick now.

23:30 and I kept in touch with him we became great friends. I used to paly soccer with him in his bunker. also go into the truce talks. Now the truce talks really were the most interesting. Because you had a situation where neither side had militarily won the war, each side, was going to hold on if the war broke out again. But the talks were going on. Now the Americans had positioned a train

24:00 at Munsan which was the base town for the American negotiators, Admiral Joy, Admiral Turner Joy when I was there. But they had their camp. but he press camp was on the train. So we had two or three sleeping cars, we had a working car with teleprinters or whatever we used. I don't think, anyway we had communications and typewriters. So there was a working car and a dining car. And

24:30 Panwood John was in this depression about a mile or so wide. Not unlike a shallow crater between Munsan, which was the allied headquarters and Kosong which was the Chinese Korean headquarters. So both press teams came in from each, opposite sides. We would go in, in convoys of jeeps, or occasionally, and we almost always took it in turns, the chief briefing officer who

25:00 was an American brigadier general air force, Bill Knuckles, he was an officer who flies in in his helicopter, which I did a couple of times. So you would go in and in those days you didn't have the great tourist thing they've got organised there now. You know there were tents alongside of a rough road and destroyed houses and things. So we would just you know, talk and we didn't go into the tents, we just talked, talked out in the street, not only amongst ourselves but with the correspondents from

25:30 the other side. Did I mention Chu Fi Ping, I've pictures of this by the way. The people who came in from the other side, some of them were Europeans, there was Alan Winnington, Winnington was a Daily Express man but he worked on that was then called the communist side. But he was a properly established journalist and of course our own Walford Burcher you know who works at Waz, Walford worked on the other side.

26:00 So we used to talk in there, in the middle of the street. Waiting for the talks to finish, and it took ages, not that we stayed there for ages. But it took about half a day to get though a thousand words. Because they would read, they'd have a document typed, and it had to be typed and translated into English, Chinese and Korean, Chinese were virtually running it, we, I've got a picture of him

26:30 Kim Il Sung the first great leader, he led the Korean delegation, became the great leader, Chu Tae Pae was the Chinese general. After they left they'd get into their cars and hurtle off. And the brigadier would come out and give us a briefing. If you can call it that, as to what was decided, which usually was, nothing much has happened today. But each side would try to make the most of the words that were said, you know.

27:00 And the correspondents, a whole range of American correspondents, English correspondents, Argent France press and of course ourselves. Probably the most interesting assignment that I have ever done.

The big question about foreign correspondent in a war zone today is access. How much access did you have to things?

27:30 Yeah, you could go anywhere you liked. Coming to the war side, the, there were 5 allied corps protecting Seoul, and it was really armoured front, well dug in, there was no way the other side could break through that, they might come around the side but then we'd fix that. Then within that allied front, which was an American armoured division and a US 1st Cavalry and a couple of Korean divisions

28:00 was the British commonwealth division, within the commonwealth division of 3 brigades, there was the Australian brigade, and under, no Australian battalion in a British brigade. Then there was an all British brigade, then there was a Canadian brigade. And Frank was colonel of the RAR and the neighbouring regiments were Kings Own Scottish Borderers and the Kings Shropshire Light Infantry.

28:30 Now you say, how close can you, I had complete freedom to go anywhere you liked. But the particular action which I remember, which was descriptive of what was going on and your access and so on. The American corps commander who was Mike Daniels, he later became commander and chief Pacific, a very tough type American. He wanted to push through the enemy line and

29:00 smash up an ammunition dump, a big one. Which was there, of course you obey orders, but this is the strength, of the alliance. Because Frank Hasserton was the senior Australian, he was also the Australian government senior representative with the army so he had another view. He didn't just say, "Yes sir I am only a colonel, you're a general." So if, and his directive was, as it is today with you know

29:30 what do you call it, rules of engagement. If the senior Australian officer believes that it was against Australia's interest to do whatever was being proposed, first of all he said so to his commander and then reported it to his seniors. his senior was Bill Bridgeford an Australian general based in Tokyo. And so there we were and on this, I'll come back to that, the Kua raid. On this particular day, maybe I will better deal with the Kua raid so

30:00 we are in the right order. Frank had argued that, okay we can do that, because the Australian battalion, what was going to happen. Our guns and armour would punch a hole in the Chinese and Korean line. And our people, I think the Australians were either going to hold open the thing and one of the British regiments was going to drive in on the tanks or vice versa. Smash up

30:30 the ammunition dump, and then come out. But as Colin Powell of all people said, as a general, "What do you do then?" What was going to happen then of course was the Chinese would have built another ammunition dump you know. Because what we were not going to do was break through and start driving up to the Yalu [River]. That thing had gone, it was a static war and we were trying to, militarily hull the heights against the coming armistice and of course it's not peace yet

31:00 as you know its still, only an armistice. So the decision was made by Van Fleet, he was the commander in chief of the UN command, he was a 4 star general. So at the conference it was Bridgeford that told me this Frank wouldn't tell me. At the conference and of course the British with the battalion commanders advice had said, yes we can do this, but we want this considered. Frank was

31:30 the British General Jim Castle who later gave, became chief of the imperial staff, and I met him he was a lovely guy, and he made a great decision on another matter, which I might come to or not. But he designated Frank Hasserton to make the case, with all these generals, Lieutenant Colonel Hasserton commanding officer of 3 [R]AR, made the case, we can do that, and of course with all the

32:00 military detail you know, we can do that. We can suffer causalities and then we'll pull out but what will we have achieved, that's of importance, we'll have killed a few Chinese and blown up a few bombs, really what's it all about. So Van Fleet, it was a place called Kua, and it was called, it was in technical terms, military terms was called a raid. And Van Fleet squashed it. But in squashing it

32:30 he said, I'm quoting Bridgeford on this because he told me, our own General Bridgeford, he said, "If Colonel Hasserton would like to command one of my army corps he can have one at any time." Frank was just so professional, and of course he became chief for CDF [Chief of the Defence Force] for as you know. So it was an interesting matter. Now coming onto the other thing I was going to talk about, this attack on the hill. The Chinese held this hill,

33:00 there were no trees, they had been shelled for ages, just literally matchwood, all over the trees. I'd flown over, you asked about access, I said I would go up in an observation plane, a little single engine, British Auster. So I went to the observation people and they took me for a ride over the enemy lines, looking down, trench, and from the air they looked like little

33:30 white grubs, you know. They were Chinese in their padded uniforms, only 3 or 4 of them wandering around. So came this exercise to be, I use a wonderful phrase, exercise, we would go and tear this place apart. So alt the action in the morning, and once again a beautiful day, and I went right up front to watch it, everyone was invited, come and see this.

34:00 Was designed to keep the Chinese heads down while the KSLI [The King's Shropshire Light Infantry], this Shropshire Light Infantry put a platoon, a platoon that's all, what a dozen, 15 men, close to the bottom of the hill. And then our bombardment would cease, they would charge up the last hundred yards and you know, shoot up any choonks, as we called them, who were there. Well it went

34:30 on for quite a while, even our own ack-ack [anti-aircraft] guns they had gone up to enjoy, and they stitched the trenches, boom, boom because a higher rate of fire, 40 millimetre guns, bing, bing, bing, the whole thing was designed and god know how many millions of dollars this cost. Even the corps artillery were involved, 8 inch guns were involved and all the divisions guns, 72 25 pounders were all pounding this thing and smoke, and napalm jets coming down.

35:00 And it was quite Wagnerian, it could have been one of the writers of Akari or something. But it comes the time, the final moment, they are out there and of course we are talking later on, on the phones back to where they are, comes the moment the barrage lifts, and there are only about 100 yards or so below the top. We were watching them through the glasses. They stood up to charge, and the moment they did, up came the Chinese and started to shoot them. So they were pulled out. They never, with all that tremendous

35:30 military effort, they were not able to make it. Now when I came home I wrote a series, and this is, I came home at the end of '52. I wrote a series of feature articles for papers I was working for, a series of 5 articles, the whole theme was, and I didn't use these words, look if we in the west with all our technological weight think we are going to beat this lot we've got another thing coming, and I quoted that as an example. You know, because the Chinese were organised to do it their way,

36:00 they believed in what they were doing. The idea that we were just so strong we could do anything, you might start saying that about Iraq today, you know. So that was a pretty interesting exercise.

That's a very good point. From your experience as a war correspondent and your experience in fighting a war, is there a point to it?

36:30 I suppose the answer is, does there have to be. Is there a point to it? Well, I got to know Max Aitkin after the war, Beaver Brooks son, and Beaver himself had died but Max was the chairman of Daily Express, and in my Qantas capacity, he asked me to lunch in The Daily Express boardroom which was only in Fleet Street, and his office is upstairs, and he deliberately had a

37:00 window built in towards the East End, big glass window and we were talking, and of course he's a battle of Britain man. people were chatting and were saying, what about, and he said, "Look, out there, its them or us." So if you decide, whoever it is, whether you are German or you are, if you decide well, well if we don't kill them, they are going to kill us. So you bloody well go out and kill them, you know.

37:30 So if that's a point, but history moves on, or does it. But all past wars, and I think including the Iraq, Iraq will go down as an aberration because it so unprofessional in the fundamental thinking, if it is thinking behind it. The people who started it off, of course the American army never would have done it. You want to read Colin Powell is worth reading if you want to read his own book, before he became a politician when he was

38:00 chief of the whatever, joint chiefs. The soldier does his job and he has got to be trained and he is professional, but finally he says, as we did over the Kua raid, okay we can get in there, what do you do then. So the same as now, it really is quite easy for the American army with its size and strength without allies to go in and beat up the Iraqi army

38:30 the propaganda tells you all, the republican guard to be tough and all the rest of it. It was perfectly obvious that we could go busting through Baghdad as quick as we bloody well liked. I think they were clever in waiting, you get the impression its just being down to build up, but I think they were all waiting for to see whether there would be a coup to have Saddam collapse. But militarily for us to get to Baghdad that was easy. But what do you do them, and we now know, as you know, from just what's been said, they had,

39:00 the Americans, and its not Bush, who is essentially an ignorant man. You know he really is, in terms of what you look for in the qualities and experience or whatever, the equipment of an American president, I cannot think, I've read a lot about all of them, I cannot think of an American president who was as little equipped as this guy, his father was very well equipped. And the way his father worked the telephone to get the allies, set the limited objective. After all

39:30 Saddam had got into Kuwait, get him out of Kuwait, there was nothing about going and knocking him off. So its silly to say they should have continued on and knocked him off, they would have had the whole Middle East collapse you know.

The last question, is there anything from your experience that you want to say as your last words if you like?

40:00 About me personally?

About you or about war?

About anything. What a wonderfully peaceful world it would be if there were no humans. But I think the essential story and I was coming to it in saying, history goes on. If you look at all the wars in history, and I suggest including this one, we haven't know, and that's why go see McNamara, what was in the other guys mind. What was in the other guys mind.

40:30 Because then you can work out whether you are going to defuse, if you look at the First World War, what was in their mind, and of course the First World War was very much about property. You know British and French property in Africa and behaviour too, the Germans behaved abysmally. They go in and win the Franco Prussian war, declare the empire in the palace of Versailles, all French history. Of the French said we are not going to have this. The first war then starts and the French behave abysmally in Germany and don't allow a modification of the Versailles treaty which made the Germans destitute and kept them that way, thus made, they couldn't survive and that then lead to Nazism and all that. I would like to think, and you say 50 years hence, if I was still around, I would like to be able to say, at last at the beginning of the 21st century, people at the top, after all they make the decisions, although of course there are conditioned by what's going on beneath them, the really learn to talk to each other before they threw any punches, you know.

INTERVIEW ENDS