

Australians at War Film Archive

Brian O'Connell (Snow) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1686>

Tape 1

00:54 **Alright. Well, thank you very much to begin with Brian for doing this. We couldn't**

01:00 **do it without your generous time and support so...**

No problem at all.

Thank you very much. The first thing we need is a summary of your life and career so maybe starting with where you were born, just take me through in point form if you like?

OK well, I was born in Sydney in Glebe and in those days it was a working class suburb not gentrified as today. I lived there for a couple of years

01:30 with my parents and grandmother. Finally, not finally, eventually we moved to Kogarah, spent about a year there then to Rockdale another year and then we went to Maroubra and I did all my schooling from Maroubra. I went to a convent school in Maroubra and in 5th grade I went to the Marist

02:00 Brothers at Randwick and stayed there until I got my leaving certificate. After I got my leaving I went to work in the New South Wales Department of Agriculture and also attended Sydney University as a part time student in economics. That was in 1941, I started work and

02:30 I applied to join the air force towards the end of '41. I actually was interviewed for the air force in April '42 but wasn't called up till October '42. It was strange with a war going on. But in the meantime I was grabbed by the army and

03:00 24 of us from Sydney Uni [University] and Teachers College were sent off to the 1st Australian Survey Regiment. No training, we just went there and we were there to defend Warwick Farm Racecourse. It was quite a pleasant experience. We learnt the rudiments of survey work and like most army units we

03:30 were out in the field all day and proving conclusively by maps and so forth our survey work that the post office at Camden hadn't moved over the last week or so. So the war got serious and the our regiment was disbanded. Some of the guys went to the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and some including myself went to the

04:00 1st Australian Heavy Regiment. I was with that regiment until I was called up to go into the air force in October '44 I'm sorry '42. I started off in Bradfield, did training there. Canberra, sorry Canada and having got wings in Canada we went to the UK

04:30 where we did further training until eventually our crew we crewed up at Operational Training Unit. Our crew went to 436 RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Squadron at Waddington. From Waddington we operated Lancasters [bombers] and on our 28th sortie [operational flight] we were shot down

05:00 over Holland. This was on what was termed an easy target. There really is no such thing. Fortunately, I was picked up by the underground. I'd been slightly wounded and in a nutshell they looked after me for a couple of weeks and the Brits and the Canadians invaded the island of Walcheren

05:30 which is the target area and I went back to the UK [United Kingdom] and spent some time there and I was in hospital for a while. And when I eventually got to RAAF headquarters I was asked, I was told that this was my big opportunity I could select my next

06:00 posting. So I was thinking about it and one guy wisely piped up and said you can go home if you like. So that was a pretty safe option. So I came back to Australia and went to Bradfield Park and the place was absolutely jam packed with aircrew because the war was coming to an end the losses were light. So apart from every second

06:30 Thursday when I went to collect my pay at Bradfield I could do what I liked and eventually I was discharged in I think it was October '45. October or November so I went back to Department of Ag

[Agriculture] and also resumed by studies.

- 07:00 It was a bit of a let down going back to the Department of Agriculture because after a somewhat hectic war my first job was to conduct a census of fruit trees. It was really an exciting job. Then in '49 I saw an advertisement for the Fleet Air Arm, they wanted ex-navigators.
- 07:30 So I applied was accepted and with 8 or 7 other guys we were the first navigators to go into the Fleet Air Arm from Australian sources. I served in the HMAS Sydney in Korea. Did 62 trips there without much many problems
- 08:00 at all. Came back to Australia then did a series of postings in aviation until in, I'm trying to remember the date now. About '64 that's right, '64 I came to Canberra and was one of the initial guys into electronic data processing.
- 08:30 So I stayed there till '68 when I retired. I went straight into the Commonwealth Public Service into the Attorney General's Department where I spent about 18 months. I then got promoted into Foreign Affairs
- 09:00 where I first of all started off in International Training Section and from there I went to, pardon me what was called projects, overseeing aid projects in various third world countries. This was very interesting. My last job was particularly interesting. There were
- 09:30 six Australians and two New Zealanders sent round the Pacific the South West Pacific trying to work out how these small developing nations could protect their fishing industries from I s'pose you'd call them predators from other countries. That involved going to some places that are really off the map and were
- 10:00 most interesting. That was the last major job I did and then I retired or I was invalid out at age 59 and since then I've been living quite a comfortable life and doing a fair bit of traveling. And that's my life in a nutshell.

One question I have just to get my timing right is how long did you spend with the resistance after you'd be shot down?

Just over 2 weeks.

OK, alright. We'll go back to the beginning now and we'll talk from your childhood on. Do you have any early memories of Glebe or is that too young?

No, I do have memories. Not so much of the surrounds of the place.

- 11:00 But we lived in a 2 storey house the old 2 storey type and there was my grandmother my parents and a younger brother of my fathers my uncle. My only memories of there were falling down the stairs from the first floor down I mean to say somewhat traumatic and also I don't know why this stands out in my memory
- 11:30 dropping a glass and breaking it. that was Glebe. So I really don't know much about the history of Glebe or what it was like except that it was well a quiet place.

It was a working class area as you said?

That's right.

Was your family described as a working class family?

My father by profession or trade I should say was a

- 12:00 French polisher. Unfortunately, during his war service in World War I he'd been gassed and eventually he had to give up the French polishing because of the fumes etc etc. But basically he was a working class guy and during the Depression years he was occasionally out of work but we managed
- 12:30 to survive and that was it.

What sort of a father was he?

Very caring father. I s'pose that's all I can say about him. He was always solicitous to what I required. Tried to get me what I wanted or needed. I always got what I needed but anything above that he would try

- 13:00 and produce. Being an only child I think that helped quite a lot.

How did his war service affect him physically and mentally?

Well, physically it affected him badly because eventually he came a TPI, Totally and Permanently Incapacitated. I wouldn't say he was bitter

- 13:30 at all. He very rarely talked about his wartime activities. The only thing he ever talked on about his war time activities was being captain of his Battery football team so that seems to be the highlight of his service career. The only time he ever sort of reacted

- 14:00 badly to war was when I told him I wanted to join the air force and he you know said I was absolutely nuts and you know and he described how he'd seen people blown and so forth. But that didn't last very long and that was that.

What did you know about World War I growing up?

Very little.

- 14:30 I've just mentioned my father's experience. His brother was killed in France and he's buried in Elbeuf. I visited the grave quite a few years back. But basically war you didn't see the horror of war growing up. You read Boys Own papers and Chums and magazines like that and
- 15:00 our side was always winning. I never really saw the dark side of war as I say when I was going to enlist and my father was against it. But I had seen him suffering you know from he spent a lot of time in hospital and the hospital was reasonably close to where we lived. So we used to see lots of poor old Digs [Diggers -Australian Soldiers] in various stages
- 15:30 of discomfort and with the what shall we say shrug of the shoulders mentality of youth you just think oh well tough. That's the price you have to pay or the country has to pay. So not a very good explanation but that's the best I can do.

Obviously there were Diggers around at that time it was possible to see them in the street or?

Yes, yes.

- 16:00 old Diggers that is, yes. And my father had quite a few friends and relatives who had been Diggers. Brother-in- law, cousins, etc and these were guys that they never talked about the war at all. It was something that had happened and had past them and I think they were hoping that none of their descendants would ever
- 16:30 be required to go into action.

What happened on Anzac Days in your household?

Generally, my father and I, not every Anzac Day, would go into Sydney and watch the parade and that was all gung-ho sort of stuff you know bands and marching troops and so forth. He never marched

- 17:00 he never felt really up to doing it was a long distance in those days not the short ones they do and I remember as a young kid and there were flags everywhere and some of the lots a guys in uniforms and that was it.

What about your mother what can you tell me about her?

My mother

- 17:30 would say was the matriarch of the family. Because my father spent a fair amount of time in hospital she was very what shall we say? Almost covetous at looking after her little boy
- 18:00 and trying to do so growing up and she was rather strict. A loving caring mother but a strict mother. She would say something and you would do it. So that's about all I can say about my mother.
- 18:30 She was a terrible cook but apart from that I have no criticism. I remember my father saying that if my mother made a... there was a cake called a plain cake and my Dad saying if my mother made that cake it wasn't plain it was ugly. I, digestion survived all those years anyway.

You said your mother was strict,

- 19:00 **how was the discipline enforced?**

Well, I went to a school where there was strict discipline the Marist Brothers were the best throwers of chalk I've ever encountered and there was discipline in the home and discipline in the school and as a result you just accepted what was said. I can't remember ever being

- 19:30 physically punished by any of my family. Slightly different from the canings I used to get at school. Discipline was enforced by I s'pose willpower more than anything else you know. Don't do this. This is at home. If you do well it was never if you do this such and such will happen. It was if you're going out somewhere you
- 20:00 have to be home by a certain time that sort of thing. It really wasn't physical I s'pose as mental and you wanted to please your parents so that was that.

What incidents during your boyhood do you remember getting in trouble for?

Do you want a litany or just?

Any that stand out?

Not really. I

20:30 can't think of anything. Lots of minor scrapes but I remember staying with my uncle and aunt just visiting they lived the fire station at Newtown and I was playing in the yard in the fire station, they had quarters there, playing

21:00 cricket with a magnificent stroke I put a ball straight through the bedroom window and that caused a certain amount of hoo-ha to say the least. But apart from that I could almost say mundane. But enjoyably mundane existence. I'm sure after you've gone I'll think of some of the more horrific things that.

If they come back to you we'd love to hear

21:30 **about them.**

Alright.

How would you describe your personality as a boy?

Well, I once saw it written down I went to the Vocational Guidance Bureau you go towards the end of your school and I noticed the interviewer had written, "Quiet, alert. A little bit shy." So I think that's a reasonably fair

22:00 assessment. I certainly wasn't an extrovert by any means but I was a stubborn kid and if I wanted well not wanted something but on various matters I'd dig my heels in and refuse to move. So that's a very quick Freudian response.

22:30 **What sort of things would you be stubborn about?**

Now that's. Generally I would say in sport or something like that that people would say you can't do this or you've been given out. "I'm not out," you know. They're very minor things but I was reasonably despite being a

23:00 shy perhaps introverted person if I thought I was in the right I would stick there and say that. Generally nothing physical just mental games.

Were you a mixer or a bit of a loner?

Initially I was a bit of a loner being an only child and none of the

23:30 places we lived in or not many neighborhood kids but as I grew old or when I got to about 16 or so forth playing sport at school and playing tennis at the weekend you get to mix with people and enjoy being in other peoples company. But basically I started off

24:00 being a loner. Perhaps I matured or something but that's it.

What were your major interests?

Do you mean my school days or?

As a school kid, yeah?

As a school kid I think playing sport keeping up with studies

24:30 with the minimum of activity and the minimum of homework if it could be avoided. I never had any real hobbies as such because my mechanical dexterity was virtually nil. But I did enjoy reading. I did a lot of reading so I spent a lot of time doing that.

25:00 Living at Maroubra surfing and swimming were pretty primary activities. In the summer months spent a lot of time doing that. Generally going for a swim before school which enabled you to sleep during lessons in the afternoon. But I'd say that sounds pretty dull but I enjoyed life.

25:30 That's it.

What kind of books did you read?

Fiction mainly. I was also a bit into history. I enjoyed various history books. Not so much history but well yeah history more in the documentary style

26:00 not saying 1812 was the Battle of Waterloo or anything like that. Just a general overview of what was going on in the world. But strangely enough I was interested in history but geography turned me off completely. I couldn't get onto that at all. I enjoyed my sport at school. That took up a fair amount

26:30 and when I was at university I was into sport there. So I'm coming out as quite a sort of gadabout who didn't like lessons that like the activities associated with lessons physical.

What were your dreams or ambitions?

I really had no

- 27:00 great ambitions. As I said, my mother was the matriarch and she was always into me to study, work hard, study hard, and in the I s'pose the Irish Catholic tradition wanted me to get a job in the Public Service. Nice 9 to 5 job. Well, I achieved that but working for the Department of
- 27:30 Agriculture was at the city markets in Sydney fruit and vegetable markets which meant I had to get up at 4:30 in the morning to get a tram to be there when the markets opened. So much for the 9 to 5 ethic. But when I started at university I just wanted to complete that degree and I had a promising career
- 28:00 in the Department of Agriculture and I was anxious to pursue that. Outside of that I didn't have any major ambitions.

What contact if any did you have with aeroplanes growing up?

Well, growing up my first. Well, first of all in our brief stay at Rockdale a year there we could

- 28:30 walk down to Mascot Aerodrome of a Sunday and in those days it was just a grass strip and there were people running round offering you joy flights for 5 shillings a time. I never managed to persuade my parents to let me go off. But that was my first sort of thing. And I remember seeing the first my first parachute
- 29:00 jump. That was done over Brighton-le-Sands. Exhibition, a guy jumped out of an aircraft and he didn't quite control his parachute properly and he drifted into the suburb of Brighton and up towards Rockdale and this large crowd all wanting to see him
- 29:30 land and people's front yards were they were just disregarded. People just trampled through everything to see where this guy was landing or would land. And the next thing I can recall is living at Maroubra there's a policeman lived down the road and they had no children excuse me and he took me
- 30:00 to an exhibition of model aircraft flying. So that was my first sort of contact all at a very young age. So I didn't have any ambitions to leap into the air or anything at that stage.

How did the Depression affect your life and family life?

- 30:30 My family naturally battled to survive those years. Although my father wasn't out of work for long periods of time. Simultaneously he was also going into hospital for his war time injuries for an ulcerated
- 31:00 stomach. There was always food on the table. Generally plain fare. Nothing elaborate. We didn't go out very much occasional visit to the movies. But basically my parents shielded me from any dramatic trauma. So
- 31:30 I s'pose I just accepted it as a way of life. I was growing up in that era. All my friends were very much the same the kids I knew so it sounds incongruous to be in the middle of a Depression and not being deeply affected but realising there were people out of work and money was short.

- 32:00 **You mentioned your mother was a bad cook. Typically what kind of food was on your table during that time?**

Generally chops. I can cook chops so it's not overly difficult. Rice puddings. That generally had you know reasonable supply of vegetables

- 32:30 and so forth and the inevitable eggs for breakfast. 'Plain fare' I s'pose is the best description.

Was there any particular things that were used to make ends meet that you didn't like or?

No, I can't recall anything except that outings were rare because of

- 33:00 paying to go somewhere. So I s'pose we lived was it stringent circumstances you know but not unpleasant. Nothing dramatic or drastic at all.

What did the British Empire mean to Australians growing up in that era?

I think you accepted that you were part of the British Empire and

- 33:30 at school there was Empire Day every year and lots of flag waving and so forth. It I think it's best described by the pretty hackney phrase of people going to England going home. You were didn't have any great feelings of loyalty but you were part of using the word loosely of an establishment.
- 34:00 You were part of it and you grew up and the King or Queen was a remote figure almost approaching God like status. Your reactions to the Empire were somewhat well or your liking
- 34:30 was diminished during the Bodyline Series [Cricket tour]. Apart from that it was a far away I'd say benevolent not dictatorship. Benevolent despot, well that's much the same anyway. It the Boys Own paper and Chums annual and so forth they were always drumming up support for the British Empire
- 35:00 or the hero was always somebody from the UK or therefore thereabouts.

Was there ever any conflict between that identity and what you mentioned was your Irish Catholic background?

No, not at all. I knew some Irish Catholic who were bitterly opposed. A very close friend of mine

35:30 when he said he was going to enlist in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] his father said you couldn't go away and fight for an English King you see. But it never sort of degenerated to that in our household. No there was no sort of rampant hostility at all. Subsequently, this is racing on

36:00 a bit, I served in Northern Ireland a couple of times in the navy and that was. Well, that was in the fifties and it was pretty bad then but not as bad as it is now. That's a digression I'm afraid.

Well, the sectarian divide in Australian was much more prominent back then, how did that affect you?

It didn't affect me personally at all.

36:30 It was what shall we say? You might have an occasional shouting match in primary school with the kids from the public school on the way home but it never came to fisticuffs or anything like that. I'm not sure quite what we were complaining about or shouting about except because I went to a Catholic school and the guy down the road went to a public school,

37:00 if so facto there should be hostility. But not of a physical nature.

Was there any particular names or taunts that were used?

What was it sort of Catholics, Catholics ring the bell, Protestants go to hell or something in the third or fourth class vernacular. But I can't remember

37:30 but I was amazed you used to see things about anti-Papist and dogma and so forth. But even so that continued long past my school days the divide, secretarian divide both in sport and in business.

Were you religious? How

38:00 **important was religion?**

Well, I was an altar boy for many years and I wouldn't say I was deeply religious. I just followed the trend. That was it you were just part of a group. You weren't a God-botherer or anything like that.

38:30 I suppose you went with the flow. You were a Catholic and Catholics went to Mass. Growing up you went to Mass and I found that during the war years religion was very strong. Remember that old quotation, "there are no atheists in fox holes." That the war seemed to bring out a religious fervor because it seemed to offer a hope to people.

39:00 You see what religion is doing today throughout the world. It's completely opposite.

Did your wartime experiences strengthen your faith?

I don't think so. I think I became somewhat fatalistic and one of my chief helper in Holland was a

39:30 Lutheran minister and that didn't strengthen or decrease my faith at all but it does show that although the Netherlands was pretty deeply divided religiously there was no hesitation him helping me or you know putting his life on the line whilst he was hiding me. No, I don't s'pose it

40:00 strengthened or diminished. Life just went on.

Tape 2

00:41 **Can you tell me a bit about school? A little bit more about your Marist Brothers college in Randwick?**

Yes, that school was founded in

01:00 '23. 1923 Same just as old as I am and I got there in fifth grade. It was I s'pose most of the kids came from working backgrounds or their parents were working class. It was discipline was strict.

01:30 One of the things that happened or during that time there the football teams were all up to about fourth year were weight teams under 5-stone-7 under 6-stone-7 and so forth and Randwick being the place it was just about every backyard had a stable and there were jockeys and

02:00 trainers everywhere. And we produced some marvelous under 5-stone-7 6-stone-7 football teams cause they were sons of horsemen jockeys and so forth. And a friend of mine both his brothers were jockeys and he was playing in the under 6-stone-7's at the age of 16. So we were almost unbeatable in the weight teams.

- 02:30 As I've said a couple of times, discipline was very strict but very fair. Nowadays the teachers wouldn't get away with giving you a clip over the ear or giving you six of the best with the cane. I understand Christian Brothers were even more severe.
- 03:00 A friend of mine describes his life at Flog Strap College, a Christian Brothers School. Tuition was good. We had good teachers and they were involved with your personally. They if you wanted extra tuition it was there. You got homework and they, it's not a pun,
- 03:30 religiously went through your homework and they showed complete interest in you. That was quite easy in those days because when I did the Leaving Certificate there were only 20 of us in the class because although we had about 500 pupils. I think it's 900 now,
- 04:00 there was a feeling that you are important to them. Not that you were the only person but you were a person in your own right and deserve good treatment. Admittedly, if you didn't do your homework or mucked up a bit sometimes you might get written punishment but generally it was the equivalent but not actually
- 04:30 of a kick up the backside and told to smarten up. School suffered from the fact that it didn't have any grass that the playground asphalt and well I s'pose you'd call it rubble. We did have a handball court. Sport was pretty important
- 05:00 and naturally Randwick being close to the sea we won the swimming carnival every year or practically every year. I achieved a certain distinction by being in the life saving team the year it was defeated for the first time in 10 years. There's a certain amount of opprobrium about that.
- 05:30 We weren't actually asked to leave the school but we were certainly not the happiest boys around the place.

Who was the arch rival in the life saving stakes?

Our arch rival in practically everything was the Marist Brothers at Darlinghurst. They have now gone out of business. One of their stars in football and cricket

- 06:00 was Ray Lindwall. He slowed up a lot after he left school as a bowler but he was still pretty fast. Darlinghurst were always our pardon me our main rivals. The other school Christian Brothers Lewisham were always pretty tough in football and cricket.
- 06:30 But it was an enjoyable competition.

Was there a military component to your education?

No, not at all. We didn't have cadets in my day but when ever you went anywhere as a school group going from A to B you marched. You didn't go along as a gaggle you went as a formed

- 07:00 body but that there was no militaristic pressure at all, or presence I should say.

When did you leave school?

I left at the end of 1940 having got my Leaving Certificate. That was the end of 5 years of high school and the war was

- 07:30 you know becoming closer round about that time '39 there was a war on but you really weren't pardon me affected but '40.

What was that life like you for you? Do you recall it as being a slow build up right for many years or did 1939 suddenly hit you with the war?

Well, 1939 really there it was

- 08:00 the war has been declared. We were aware of problems in Spain and in Abyssinia because that came into the modern history and you knew that but it was over there. It didn't worry you but you were aware of Hitler [Adolph Hitler, German Chancellor] and
- 08:30 Mussolini [Benito Mussolini, Italian Prime Minister] growing in strength. Well, you couldn't avoid it it was in the papers. But didn't have a great affect on you it just accepted it was happening. It 1939 I remember the headmaster addressing the senior boys and you know saying that the war had come and what the ramifications
- 09:00 were and so forth and how probably we'd all be affected some how or other. But I think mainly that talk although informative it went over our heads. It's somebody else's problem. It's the war is here but will we be really affected?

What were your own personal views towards the

- 09:30 **prospect of becoming involved in such a war?**

My own personal views were that, OK if there is a war I'll probably called up or go into the forces. I thought if I did go into the forces that the air force would be the

10:00 most attractive. OK the war is coming on blokes. Or the war is here now your elder friends are going off and for you it will be inevitable. But well I s'pose it was a shrug of the shoulders and so what? I'll get called or called up

10:30 or join up and off I'll go and didn't regard ourselves as cannon fodder or anything like that it was just a question of I s'pose latent patriotism.

What were you doing when you immediately left school your first job at the Department of Agriculture straight away?

Yeah. There was a couple of months hiatus before

11:00 I got called up. You talk of the Depression, the Depression was on it's way out but I got a teachers scholarship and I was going to get 10-and-6 [10 shillings and 6 pence] a week to go to the teachers college but my parents couldn't afford to keep me going as a young adult on the

11:30 princely, me getting a princely sum of 10-and-6 a week so I had to. I would've liked to have done it but I just couldn't afford to do it. Admittedly, going into the Department of Ag [Agriculture] I used to get 30 shillings a week but this was supplemented because of my early start in the morning of 2-and-6 a day breakfast money. So

12:00 that put me in a much higher bracket.

What did you do with your first pay cheques?

Well, I used to give half to my family and up till I left school my clothes were pretty well all school uniform. So I had to start and buying clothing. Not

12:30 that I didn't have anything but school uniforms. But I didn't have a great variety of working clothes or business clothes and the occasional Saturday night at the movies that was it. I didn't drink or smoke. I still don't smoke and so there was no money spent on that.

13:00 Going to the footy on Saturdays that's where the money went. There wasn't much left for riotous living to say the least.

What about girlfriends at that time?

13:30 Yes we used to play tennis of a Sunday and I had a girlfriend. We used to go out occasionally on a Saturday night. I had a pretty steady girlfriend just before I went into the army.

14:00 Fortunately being at Warwick Farm I was home one day a week so I managed to see her. That was about it. That's in my school days. I had this girlfriend when I was in the air force

14:30 but then you know I went overseas and that was sort of the end of that but if I can digress once more. When I got to Canada about the first week I was there I met this young lady she was in the women's army and we used to go out every weekend and

15:00 things were getting pretty serious. And then I went off to England, there were letters and things just sort of faded and that was it and about 10 12 years ago I was at home here in Hackett and I got a letter from Department of Veterans Affairs saying Mrs so and so nee, so and so says she knew you as a trainee in Canada and would like to get in

15:30 touch with you. So they wouldn't release my address but they wrote to me and said if I wanted to get in touch with her she was in Sydney and I could do so. What had happened, she and her husband were on holidays in Australia and they were going past Veterans Affairs in Sydney so her husband, he must've been the jealous kind said why don't you go and see if you can find out where Brian is. So that

16:00 was a turn up to say the least. I subsequently visited her in Canada and stayed with them a couple of times. So there's really no escape if the person wants to get in touch with you.

What memories did seeing her again bring back?

Just about the good times that we'd had. The sort of the highlight

16:30 of the weekend in Canada was to go to the Saturday night hop and that was it. We both generally had the whole weekends off and we'd just wander round Edmonton and that was it.

Was it the same back in Australia before the war? What would you do with your girlfriend there, what sort of things would young men and women do?

Much the same. We played tennis one

17:00 day of the week and in the summertime we'd go surfing. Occasionally semi-formal functions like balls and so forth we'd go to them. That was it.

During that period did you start to see men

17:30 in uniform more commonly? Did men start joining up?

Yes, you'd see them everywhere in the city. I can recall in '41 they used to have the trainee military police directing traffic in the Sydney streets give them the experience.

18:00 And where we lived in Maroubra we could see activities on the rifle range at Long Bay and that was spectacular watching tracer so you knew there were soldiers there. And you'd go to the movies and there'd be lots of soldiers. Football, cricket matches, there'd always be lots of soldiers. But apart from that military police I mentioned they were always guys on leave and there

18:30 were plenty of them.

You decided to join the air force first?

Yeah.

Is that right? Can you take us through that decision and what you did?

Well, there was a lot of propaganda join the air force what a great life it was. This is a man's job sort of business and I think I

19:00 fell for the glamour and it seemed to be an exciting new lifestyle to be flying around in an aircraft and so that's why I applied and was accepted. And it's hard to believe now that I had to produce two references to get into the air force

19:30 saying I was of good character etc etc. I thought well I didn't want to go to the navy. I wasn't at that stage particularly keen on going to sea. The army didn't appeal to me at all so that left the air force as the prime choice. But I thought it was a good choice.

20:00 We to bring you up to scratch educationally the air force used to run training courses for people like myself who were waiting to go in. It was mathematics and physics mainly I'd done that at school to as far as you could go at high

20:30 school so I found that pretty simple. Morse Code, they used to run courses for that. That was always my weakest thing listening to Morse and sending Morse and so forth. But I didn't do much of that signals training. I just went along for the maths and physics. There might a been a bit of map reading I really

21:00 can't remember that. That was at the local high school.

Who were your references?

One was from a clergyman and if I showed it to you you wouldn't believe what a great bloke I was. And the, as a matter of fact and the other one was from an Alderman. I was surprised that he could even sign his name but it was

21:30 quite reasonable. I've got photos. I've got my service records from the archives and that contains you know these references and so forth. But it seems strange that in retrospect that you had to wait for nearly 8 months before you could go to war and that you had to have references

22:00 to get there. But still that was those, them's were the days as they say.

Can you tell us in a bit more detail about the discussion that you had with your father at this point?

Well, I said to my father that you know I wanted to join the air force and he wanted to know why. So I said, well I thought it was the best of the three services to go into and

22:30 it was something I'd like to do was to fly in aeroplanes. And there was no element of flag waving or patriotism bursting out and that was when he told me of some of the you know his episodes during the war. He was quite amenable or semi-amenable

23:00 but my mother was dead against it. She didn't want her little boy to be going off to be shot at by the dreadful Germans or Japanese. This stage my grandmother came into the argument. She was a frequent visitor to our place and she was Irish by the way

23:30 and they both appealed to her what did she think and much to their surprise and I suspect horror she said "Well if he wants to go let him go". So that was it. There's ever an acrimonious debate at all. It was just I wanted to do this they were cautioning me against it. This I guess is where I became stubborn and dug my heels in. Wasn't

24:00 it was sort of a protracted argument generally popping up every now and then. I was still the university and working and that's about all I can say.

Before you got into the air force though you were called up for the army?

Yeah.

Can you tell us how that happened?

Yes, well I when was called up you know for my medical

- 24:30 exam and so forth. You were called up and not necessarily straight into the forces. But you were there you'd been medically examined and you were available. And out of the blue I had to enroll at Sydney University cause I was a student and out of the blue I got this letter saying you know turn up and there were 24 of
- 25:00 us as I mentioned and we spent a couple of days at Sydney showground sort of being kitted out and doing menial jobs round the place. And then all of a sudden we were off to Warwick Farm to join the 1st Australian Survey Regiment. This was a militia unit there was an Australian Survey Regiment in the Middle East
- 25:30 who were on active service and we spent most of our time training. Field work. We played football on Wednesdays and at the weekends we also played football against district teams. Easts, we played Easts and Wests and Randwick. So it was a pleasant existence.
- 26:00 Close to the city and there was no war hanging over the top clouds of war hanging over the top of Warwick Farm so it was I was going to say an extension of your civilian life. Not quite but we I don't know why but we escaped the rigours that most people were subjected to in the bull ring
- 26:30 in their first 3-6 months marching here marching there. Doubling here doubling there. We just sort of came and joined the regiment and that was it. It was a most unusual start to a what we military career.

You hadn't wanted to join the army what did you think now suddenly you were there?

Well, OK

- 27:00 the army perhaps I'd better rephrase that. I didn't mind going into the army but it was not my first choice. So we get there and suddenly we're thrust into a mixture or a group of I would say elder personnel than ourselves. We were kept apart a little bit in as much as
- 27:30 everyone was in tents about 4-6 guys to tent but we were in a big marquee the 24 of us. So we weren't isolated on purpose it was just a matter of convenience. But you mixed in with the other guys particularly when you're playing football with them and it was quite harmonious.
- 28:00 It was a strange regiment. They well they didn't they must've known they were going to be disbanded. All the time there were efforts to make all the troops all our the two Battery's that were at Warwick Farm to transfer to the AIF. They were quite successful but it really wasn't a
- 28:30 great deal of thought put into training and so forth. We did some because we were new boys but the rest of the guys didn't have a great deal to do. There was always some job that can be created and when they can't think of anything else to do they send you off on a route march. So off you'd go. I
- 29:00 remember one corporal he used to take about a small party of 6 or he'd be detailed off to take 6 or 8 guys on a route march and they'd march very briskly to Liverpool where they would then go into the local pub. And then they would get a taxi back to within about 200 yards of the camp form up and march briskly into camp you see.
- 29:30 Everybody was satisfied. They'd got rid of these guys for some time. But some of the jobs we had to do was to calibrate shootings anti-aircraft shootings and we'd go out to various locations and they'd set up the odd light and get the fall of you'd see the
- 30:00 a plane would go past towing a drogue as the target and the batteries would open up. The AA [Anti-Aircraft] Batteries and our guys would well spot where the shell burst in relation to the target and this was all coordinated and they could tell whether the guns were calibrated properly and so forth.
- 30:30 That was quite enjoyable. We were actually located at Maroubra at one stage sitting on a headland there. Also Port Kembla. A few places up and down the coast. That was you know quite enjoyable because you were doing something as opposed to just wasting time.

Had the Japanese entered the war at this point?

They came in

- 31:00 October I'm sorry December '41. Let me think when did I go in? Yes they were in the war at that stage. Yes definitely. But there didn't seem to be a great sense of urgency because what have we got to fear from these little men who can't read or write
- 31:30 or shoot straight and can't fly aeroplanes and then we've got the British fleet our own fleet and Singapore there to protect us. So we were I think we were lulled into a sense of false security and weren't really worried. You know if they come they come that's it. But we don't think they'll be

32:00 coming this far. That seemed to be the general attitude.

What happened then when the Japanese advance started in earnest what was the atmosphere change like?

Well, as I say I didn't go in till the April and September. December was when the Japanese came but when they started to move in things were completely different.

32:30 You know people suddenly realised OK these guys are coming. How are we gonna stop them? What can we do? Then with the disasters that befell Singapore and losing two battleships. Was it 2? One or 2 things were this is pretty grim. We were really in for it.

33:00 And nobody got really fighting mad it was just an acceptance. Perhaps that's incorrect. Say not fighting mad, well we went from effectively lethargy to an alertness that OK there should be may be fighting here at any

33:30 time and people were starting to get a bit twitchy. Then going slightly out of slightly ahead the submarines in Sydney Harbour that caused panic. Bombing of Darwin there was even a greater panic there. So that's about all I could say about that.

What do you remember about that incident where the submarines came into Sydney Harbour? Where were you?

34:00 I was in the air force then I'm pretty sure but it was a feeling of not believing it you know how could this possibly be? How not why are they there but how did they get in there? And the war is much closer now than we ever anticipated.

34:30 OK Darwin bombed it's "We're really getting to be in a bit of a mess". There was panic in the eastern suburbs. People moving out of the eastern suburbs and schools moving as well so fear was really starting to hit the place.

Before you joined the air force

35:00 **after the Survey Regiment you were briefly in the Australian Heavy Regiment?**

Yeah.

What was that?

I don't know we never saw any guns. So the guns didn't arrive before I left so still sort of mucking around establishing a new camp. We moved from Warwick Farm to I can't remember the name of the place now it was getting that

35:30 established for the guns which eventually I dunno whether they eventually got there or not but I was out before they arrived if they did arrive. So on my discharge it says I'm discharged from the First Australian Heavy Regiment but I never as I keep reiterating I never saw any guns at all.

You've made your time in the militia sound quite pleasant even

36:00 **even slightly comical in a way I mean what was the atmosphere like? Was it boring, was it interesting?**

Well, it fluctuated between extreme boredom and you know the highlights of enjoying yourself. I s'pose it's like a civilian job. Sometimes you're down and sometimes it's great. They were a good group of guys to be

36:30 with apart from our own Uni Teachers College mob of fellows and we all got on very well together. Yeah, I can remember one occasion I presume now it'd be classified as mutiny. The breakfast was always a shocker and eventually one morning

37:00 everybody lined up for breakfast and refused to eat. Nobody was shot or anything we just went hungry that was all and we were told to butt out our ideas. There's a war on this is all you can expect and so forth. That's the only well you could almost put that down as a comic incident. But it was serious at the time.

In the boring times did the men play pranks or get up to

37:30 **mischief of any kind?**

No, they were I wouldn't say it was active mischief more inclined to be keeping out of sight. Doing nothing and keeping out of sight and not drawing attention to themselves. I can't remember any great pranks that arose during periods of boredom.

38:00 **During that period there was a documented tension between the militia and blokes that were joining the AIF?**

That's right, yeah.

What did you see of that?

I didn't see much of it myself but you were always apprehensive if you were traveling on a train or public transport or anything and you were sort of the only militia guy there surrounded by guys

38:30 of from the AIF who'd some of whom had returned I never saw any overt violence or anything like that. I have heard of mud slinging name calling and so forth but there definitely a tension and the militia were known as the chocolate soldiers or

39:00 'chocos'. What was the other thing they were called? Curtin's [John Curtin, Prime Minister of Australia] Koalas. Not to be taken out of Australia or not to be shot at you so see there was that sort of bandage went on. But I frankly was always a little apprehensive of being surrounded by real

39:30 soldiers I s'pose.

Were you proud of what you were doing in the militia?

I think proud is perhaps an over statement. You were pleased to be a member of a fighting force even if you weren't doing any fighting. You were showing that OK

40:00 I'm in the armed forces and I will do my duty as required. But that was it. Some of course said I will duty my duty as little as required. There's a subtle difference there.

Tape 3

00:40 **Thanks. How did you end up getting into the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]? You'd applied but you were already in the militia can you just share that story?**

Well, the militia or the army were well aware of the fact that I had been accepted by the air force

01:00 and when the air force said OK we're calling this guy up they had to release me. But the militia were rather cunning about this they made sure you behaved yourself by saying that if you got on a charge any disciplinary action while you were in the army you won't be released to go to the air force you see. So we were those of us who were waiting to be

01:30 called up for the air force were very good soldiers to say the least. Did exactly as we were told.

How many of you were there that had been called up the air force?

Of the 24 there were at least 6. We didn't all go at the same time I think I was the first to go. I subsequently met up with some of them in my air force time.

02:00 It was quite a swag of guys waiting to transfer into the air force. We even had AIF guys who somehow managed to wangle their way into the air force. Some had been in the Middle East a couple of them had served in the Middle East came back to Australia and applied to join the air force and just the mechanism of that I don't know. But they were there.

02:30 **So you went to Bradfield Park?**

Yes, I was there for 3 months.

So what were you doing at Bradfield Park?

It was all apart from drill and stuff like that it was all military subjects. Basic navigation pretty simple navigation. Morse training.

03:00 Lectures in military law. Lectures in hygiene. Like lots of other guys I've spoken too the lectures in hygiene the only thing any of us could ever remember was that the incidence of venereal disease in native prostitutes is remarkably high. Now that's always a very interesting fact to know but it didn't seem to have any

03:30 practical purpose and same as military law. The number of guys who got involved in Court-martial's or anything like that or served on a Court-martial was not that many. So a lot of the subjects were well barely relevant to what you're doing. But all academia and

04:00 PT [Physical Training] and Morse training that was at Bradfield.

There any particular laws in military law that stand out to you?

No, nothing like hygiene no. No, not at all. No, the only thing of course is that mutiny there

04:30 has to be a minimum of two people. One guy can't be a mutineer it's got to be at least two. But so you can see it had an impact on us those subjects.

How did the discipline compare to the militia that you were in?

Much stricter. You were really under the thumb. Perhaps that's a crude

05:00 way of expressing it. But it was strict. Monday nights was what they called panic night. We you had to be in your barrack block and an officer and a couple of NCOs [Non Commissioned Officer] would come along and they would inspect everything including the old white glove treatment of running their hands on the window ledges and seeing that there was no

05:30 dirt on their gloves. Parade ground discipline was very tough you had to perform. But you were so busy with your studies keeping up with your studies that you really didn't have much time for hi-jinx and I remember the first day this is rather crude. We were at

06:00 Bradfield Park we fell in at the right time and the warrant officer there in charge of us and one guy was about 2 minutes late and the WO [Warrant Officer] screamed at him you know, "Where have you been?" And he said, "I've just been to the toilet sir." And the WO said, "You shit in your own time not in the air force time." So

06:30 that's the sort of well mentality or discipline that existed. Tough but fair.

Could you describe for me a typical day? What you did when you woke up what time?

Yes. Up and into the showers then breakfast then parade fell in

07:00 on the parade ground. You might do some drill but generally you just went off to the classrooms and one period during the day you would go to the gymnasium and do an hour or so you know PT or PE [Physical Education] as it's called now and there was a lunch break and

07:30 then you finished your lectures or whatever you were doing round about 4 in the afternoon and then you were free till the next morning. Although you generally had some study to do and in the case of armament you could go and practice taking

08:00 pardon me taking Browning machine guns to bits and putting them together and so forth. That was more just a fun thing filling in time. So that was the routine. One afternoon a week was sport and used to choose your own sport and in the evenings and apart from studies and

08:30 so forth there was a camp cinema and you could go to the movies. Nothing else it was just like a boarding school but the discipline was much stricter and one of the other things they had which was enforced was that you could never be in a barrack block by yourself

09:00 there had to be 2 guys in a barrack block. This was to prevent theft or anything like that and I was caught in the barrack block by myself one afternoon. I can't remember why I was there by myself but that resulted in me spending the rest of the afternoon scrubbing out pots and pans in the galley so. Well, that made

09:30 sense I'd broken a rule. They could've put me on a charge and given me a couple a days extra duty or so forth but the punishment was delivered there on the spot and something I remembered. I presume it was useful to my career to be able to scrub out pots and pans.

Was there much theft amongst the men?

No, no. I never heard of a case.

10:00 But you must admit there I was in this barrack block by myself I could've had gone through lockers and so forth and nobody had very much to steal anyway. You always carried your cash with you. But no, I never heard of a case of theft although it must've happened sometime.

Friends, was it easy to make friends?

Yes it was.

10:30 You were divided into flights. I suppose there were about 30 guys in a flight and you were always together and you got to know guys and slept in the same barrack block as them and you were in the same classes and so forth. And in my flight I don't think anybody knew anybody before they went in but there were firm friendships

11:00 established. Some of it lasted after the war and so forth. It was a friendly atmosphere. Disciplined though.

Did you know what you wanted to be? Did you want to be a pilot?

I wanted to be a pilot and after 2 months at Bradfield Park you were divided into 2 groups.

11:30 You were assessed as being capable of being a pilot or a navigator and you went on for another month further training at Bradfield. Guys assessed as wireless operators gunners their time at Bradfield was finished in 2 months and then they went off to wireless school or gunnery school. Pilots and navs went onto the next

12:00 another month before they went to further training as pilots and navigators.

OK so at this point in time had you been already told that you'd be a navigator?

No it was after the 2 months at Bradfield Park.

OK.

They had what they called a Category Selection Board and you appeared before this board. They had your test results after 2 months

12:30 and they decided what you'd. You'd state your preference and then at the end of the day they'd tell you whether you were gonna be a pilot or a navigator.

So when you heard that you were going to be a navigator were you disappointed or?

Well, I did have a very brief fling as a pilot trainee. That was the complete and absolute waste of time. I got there and

13:00 this my instructor was a flight lieutenant which was the equivalent of God in those days for trainees and there were only so many could go from the first Elementary Training to Service Flying Training school. So as a result about two thirds would pass the course and this guy decided I wasn't going to pass the course.

13:30 I learnt how to take an aircraft off and then for the rest of the lesson in adverted commas we went low flying around the country side with him doing the flying and beating up houses and so forth out in the bush farm houses. After a fortnight of this it was decided I'd never make a pilot. Which is not surprising. So I became a navigator.

14:00 But it only took 3 weeks I think it was from the time I left Bradfield that I was back there again and ready to start being a navigator so it was a brief episode.

So that 3 weeks where was that at?

Narrandera, out in the bush.

So you're selected as a pilot you've gone to Narrandera can you just talk me through arriving there and meeting this instructor?

14:30 Well, we got there and we arrived by train and there was only transport for half of us so half of us had to march the 3 or 4 miles that was a good start.

Which half were you?

I was in the walking party. Your day consisted of half the day would

15:00 be flying and half day lectures and there's also half a day's PT. Not half a day period of PT and that went on until it was decided I just wasn't the type to be a pilot. But I remember on sadist in charge of our physical training.

15:30 Just to develop our what shall we say our killer instinct the 30 of us would all have boxing gloves on in the gymnasium and you could hit anybody you liked. There'd be some innocent soul like this and you'd go and crunch them in back of the head and the same would be done to you until the gym floor was strewn with bodies. He seemed to think that was toughening us up

16:00 and making us into killers. Didn't do much for me but that was it. So anyway a fortnight of that or 3 weeks and I was back in the pool at Bradfield waiting to go to Canada to do my nav [navigator] training and I caught up with the guys I'd been with originally.

16:30 They'd been waiting in the pool while I was doing my flying training.

How'd you fare though? I mean you said this instructor allowed you to take off I mean how'd you cope with all that?

That was alright I could take off OK but then he decided it was his morning joy rides started then that was it. A complete waste of time.

Had you met him before?

No, no. As a flight lieutenant my goodness

17:00 be the lowest of the low. Or not quite but a leading aircraftsman. Normally you knowing what I know now I would've gone up and complained about it but ah-ah I'd still be scrubbing pots and pans I s'pose.

And what type of plane were you flying?

Tiger Moths. Twin engine. You still see them around they're worth a fortune

17:30 now if you can get hold of one.

What was it like to fly one of them?

They're as light as a feather and Narrandera is out in the west out in the plains and they were so sensitive that in the mornings before mid day you'd be flying along over a big open paddocks and so forth

18:00 if you'd go over a road the aircraft would go up because of the heat coming up from the pavement. That's how sensitive the things were. Anyway lots of guys survived and so forth. But we had one guy the first trip it was pilot training was you were taken up by an instructor and just flown around and had a look at

18:30 the world and this guy he came back from that flight and said not for me. Just after and he volunteered to be a pilot but that was his idea. I don't know what became of him he's probably still scrubbing pots and pans.

Any accidents during those 3 weeks?

Yes, yes. There was one tree in the middle of the airfield and a guy literally flew into

19:00 it. There's such a thing in dive bombing that's called a target fascination where a bloke will fly into the ground. But this guy was flying straight and level and straight into a tree. The Tiger Moth in a crash the Tiger Moth is injured more than the pilot cause it just falls to bits and that's

19:30 it.

So when you received the news that you weren't gonna continue in the course how'd you feel about hearing that?

Well, I thought oh well I was a bit cross that I'd never really got much instruction. But I said oh well I'm still in the air force. I've got the choice of I could. When

20:00 I got back to Bradfield Park I was interviewed again to see whether I was nav material or not and they decided yes. Otherwise I could have been a gunner or signaller or something like that. Disappointment. Annoyance. I suppose are the words that spring to mind.

So after Bradfield Park I take it you went overseas to Canada?

To Canada yeah.

Can you

20:30 **just explain the leaving process? Did your family come and see you off?**

No, no you were you knew you were going. You knew you were on your way to Canada or South Africa very few went to South Africa but you were at a place called an embarkation depot and you got normal leave and so forth. But I think it was

21:00 the day before or 2 days before you were due to go the camp was closed and you couldn't use public telephones and well you didn't see your family. You knew you were pretty close to going you know before this closure and you were you know just said your usual farewells and saying I'll be going shortly can't tell you

21:30 when. Excuse me. But then you knew when they closed the camp that you were going and they took you in buses to Central Railway station. We got on a troop train which took us to Brisbane

22:00 and from there we went by bus to this American ship the SS President Monroe. It was a former cargo passenger ship which carried 12 passengers and the rest were cargo. And it'd brought a tremendous number of American servicemen to Australia. But

22:30 I think there were only about 150 of us went back in it to where'd we go to? San Francisco. It was a pretty circuitous trip. You know you didn't go direct cause we were trying to create a false impression if anybody was trying to follow you and avoiding what were supposed to be submarine areas

23:00 and so forth. I'm getting, a what shall we say? Almost a fetish about that but food was crook on that. I'm not a gourmet by any means and we traveled as a lone ship. We weren't in

23:30 convoy and the sanitary conditions were less than adequate. It'd only been built for 12 passengers and the crew. Our toilets were up on the folksall in a wooden structure down this wooden structure or inside this wooden structure there was a trough

24:00 and you performed in the trough and water was running salt water was running through it and going out into the ocean which in any sort of sea you had the cleanest backside for miles cause the thing was going up and down. And occasionally some humorist would light a piece of paper at the top of the thing and let it flow down

24:30 and causing guys to jump high in the air as the paper went past the lighted paper. So it wasn't exactly a cruise ship. It for wartime conditions it wasn't that bad. Three tiered bunks but there were plenty of

them because of the small number of going back as oppose to the small number

- 25:00 coming here. We got to Frisco [San Francisco] and I think we were only there a matter of hours and we got a train trooper up to Vancouver and we were in Vancouver for about half a day. Then we went to a place called Brandon in the middle of
- 25:30 Winnipeg not Winnipeg. It was about 20 miles from Winnipeg and we were just held in a pool there until time for our nav [navigation] course to start and once again we were taken by train to Edmonton and we disembarked there or disentrained
- 26:00 I s'pose is the word. And went to this Number 2 Air Observers School and that's where we spent the next 6 months doing our navigational training. That was a modern facility and it was run by Canadian Pacific Railway. Apart from the navigational instructors
- 26:30 all the people there were civilians. They had civilian pilots. They were mainly former bush pilots very skillful and they as I understand it the railway company ploughed any profits from the school back
- 27:00 into the school. So we even had a swimming pool there and good gymnasium and so forth and very comfortable quarters. Good food and it was no we didn't have a cinema there. We used to have the occasional dances in the gymnasium and so forth. We were only about 3 miles out of town or city and
- 27:30 we could go in there every weekend. We didn't get any nights off as I remember but every weekend practically was free. The course was difficult and demanding. At the end of a day you know you were absolutely beat because the more intricate navigation was something new to you
- 28:00 and you really were first to forced to work hard and also into the allied subjects as well. But once again it was pretty much flying in the morning or the afternoon and the other half of the day devoted to what you'd call academic subjects. But it was a pleasant place enjoyable.

28:30 **Just a few of questions to cover some of the material that you talked through. Firstly, arriving in San Francisco, what were your impressions there compared to Australia?**

Well, coming up into Frisco the first one of the first things you see is Alcatraz. That's dominating the scenery and then once you got ashore and we had

- 29:00 a little time in Frisco was how different it was. It was a big vibrant city and there didn't appear to be any sign of a blackout or anything. There were lots of servicemen. Lots of civilians and the cable cars were running. It was just like Sydney but slightly more hectic in it's

- 29:30 pace. I dunno whether I'd like to stay there a long time. I have been there subsequently. In those days good a good spot.

Was there any sort of formal greeting by the Americans?

No, no just went from the ship for about half a day I think or a day and then we got in the train and off we went. The train

- 30:00 ride I think was well to Vancouver and across to Brandon in Manitoba, Manitoba was I think 3 days and 2 nights or something like that. That was a bit wearying to say the least.

How did the trains compare with the trains in Australia?

They were much the same although

- 30:30 there were more we didn't get into them but what they called the Pullman cars which were sleeper cars [train]. They seemed to have more of them than we had in Australia. But otherwise they were much the same. One of the dunno whether you'd call it a highlight but an incident in the train travel. We pulled up somewhere in the middle of nowhere and there

- 31:00 was snow on the ground. Blokes were jumping out of the train to see this new fangled stuff. I had seen snow once but I s'pose about 90% of the Australians had never ever seen snow. So they thought that was great.

You then went to Brandon?

Brandon. That was a holding depot and that was

- 31:30 pretty dreadful sort of place. Once again there wasn't much to do there. You were just waiting round to go and start your navigational training. But there was twice a week we were only there a few weeks used to be a march through the town of

- 32:00 all the people being held in Brandon with the band up the front playing like mad. The Australians were always last and we put on some dreadful things at the rear of the. The townspeople were always out there and I suppose there were about 30 of us and we'd march along very properly and then all of a sudden

- 32:30 we decided we'd do a goose step you see and the crowd used to love it you know. They thought it was great and then we' have our one armed panzer march marching along like this and the crowds are cheering. And every now and then when we'd go round a corner the bloke leading the procession would look round to see what was happening. Some of those guys in that 30 finished up as senior officers
- 33:00 you know and if we found blokes behaving like that we'd give 'em about 40 days in the boo [jail]. Anyway, we never got caught so that was that. That was one of the highlights. But we also got a weeks leave in Winnipeg and we were all adopted out to various families and they looked after us very well. Took us round

- 33:30 Winnipeg and showed us things showed us the city and it was time to go back and then eventually another train to Edmonton to start work.

You've mentioned the snow how were the Australian uniforms sort of coping from the temperature in Australia to the winter in...?

That was quite OK we were in blues and not the khaki which we wore mostly in Australia. Yes. there was no problem

- 34:00 there and we all had overcoats. So we were quite well prepared for it.

Now as far as the navigators were concerned were you really the only navigator who'd been now up in a plane given that you'd done the pilots course?

No, there were a few others who were in the same category as myself who'd failed the pilots course and were or been scrubbed and then became navigators. So it wasn't

- 34:30 a unique experience by any means. A lot of the guys that were scrubbed as pilots they decided they didn't want to be navigators or wireless operators and they just went of and did a 6 weeks gunnery course as air gunners. So quite a few air gunners were scrubbed pilots who didn't want to

- 35:00 pardon me go through the rigors of another 6 months training.

So could you just talk through with me some of the courses that you were doing? What they were trying to teach you at Edmonton?

Can you just hang on a minute or perhaps you can do it. (interruption).

Just have a read through. So what courses were they?

Navigation theory. Navigation exercises.

- 35:30 Reconnaissance. Aircraft recognition. Meteorology. Photography. Signals. Armament. Now they were all ground subjects and then we had navigation by day and navigation by night. So that was the full gamete of the course. Navigation elements

- 36:00 so you learnt all aspects of navigation various types and astro navigation we had to do. That was you had to do so many ground shots using a sextant [navigation device] I think 300, and had to do I think it was a hundred might be less air shots while you were flying.

- 36:30 Now some of the later Ansons, the Ansons were pretty old had a bubble in the roof of the aircraft so you could sit or put your sextant up there and look out and take your star shots. But some didn't, there was a hatch which folded down and you could imagine in the middle of a Canadian night sticking your head out into the fresh air

- 37:00 taking a star shot. It didn't bowed well for accuracy but certainly speed you got your head in and out as fast as you could. The navigation was both day and night or astro was obviously by night. Cross countries for well reconnaissance work

- 37:30 there's also one enjoyable thing of low level navigation getting down as close to the ground as you could or reasonably and trying to navigate your way round at very low level. It was, as I said, tough but enjoyable to a certain respect. Although I, as I say at the end of the day

- 38:00 you were beat.

What did you find the most difficult of the navigation types?

I think they were all much of a muchness there was no outstanding difficulty. I used to prefer flying by night. Not a fly by night by any means but

- 38:30 Canada was pretty flat and featureless but at night it was I found it easier because you know you could see a town in the district or something in the distance or something lit up and that made life easier. The way to get home if you were really lost in daylight was

- 39:00 to travel by what they called the Iron Compass that was the railway line. You follow that till you got to Edmonton. But degree of difficulty no nothing much in it but as I said I preferred the night flying.

Tape 4

00:41 **Just back at Edmonton. Could you describe for me a typical day?**

It was much the same as Bradfield Park. Half

01:00 the day well OK you got up in the morning and went to your morning meal and then you'd start either in the class room or flying and that went on. There was one thing about the Canadians. They're somewhat in time to be full of bull and everything has to be so so

01:30 and our beds you had to make them exactly right. There were marks on the bedstead as to where the pillow should finish and where it shouldn't and so forth and after you'd gone off to your days work a warrant officer used to come round with a measuring stick and measure whether your blankets sheets and so forth were in the exactly the right position and if

02:00 they weren't he'd just rip your bed apart and then if you had a ripped bed you had to report. And the only charge I've ever been on in my life was that whilst being on active service did have an untidy bed. Which I think that's pretty low on the scale of offences. However I managed to talk my way out of that so there was no

02:30 conviction recorded.

That was in England was it?

No, that was in Canada.

Oh, Canada.

At Edmonton, yeah.

What were they gonna give you as discipline for that?

They might give you some extra drill or something like that or stop your leave at the weekend. Pretty strict and you had to salute the flag every time you walked past it and there are instances in Canada

03:00 where it's alleged that Australians chopped down the flag pole but I can't vouch for that but I can believe it.

So you're taking us through a typical day in the morning after breakfast ?

Lectures or flying and that alternated. Might be flying in the morning lectures in the afternoon and

03:30 some evenings there was night flying as well. But if you flew in the night you still had to front for lectures the next morning as well. So it was pretty intense. I can give you an example of that really working hard and we had to go and change to go to our physical training session.

04:00 We got into the barracks one of our guys was really beat we were all changing into gym shorts and singlets and he was getting into his pajamas to go to bed. He was a bit overcome by the amount of work. But it really was hard work.

Do you think your training was actually adequate for what you were about to face in the UK?

Yes, I think so.

04:30 A pre-war air force officer told me that our training was more extensive than they got at Point Cook for the pre-war permanent air force. I dunno whether that was a good thing or not. They were a good standard to measure it by. But those things I mentioned earlier at Bradfield they were just a waste of time the hygiene

05:00 military law and things like that. But basically yeah we were pretty well prepared.

And the civilians you mentioned that there was quite a lot of them. How did they work in respect to training?

Well, they did all the well they did the flying. The pilots did the flying and the mechanics were all civilians. People in the cookhouse in the canteens the cafeterias

05:30 etc. Clerical staff, they were all civilians. We had one non a civilian one air force Canadian air force sergeant who was on the ground staff there. He was an instructor he was the guy that taught us parachuting but apart from him they were all civilians.

06:00 **How did he actually teach you parachuting, did he take you up and...?**

Well, he said he'd done 78 jumps and we reckoned he fallen on his head 77 times. But he didn't take us up well further on in the UK [United Kingdom] they'd teach you how to fall and roll and so forth and how to control your parachute on the ground. But you didn't do a jump at all. He gave us

06:30 one demonstration jump we all turned out to see it. He got out of the aircraft alright and went straight through the wing of an Anson on the ground. He lost a bit of credibility at that stage. But that was that.

So after you were there in Canada for what 6 months?

6 months, yeah.

And then can you share with me the journey over to England?

07:00 Once again we traveled in the Mauritania, the big fast ship and we traveled alone. Not in a convoy and the ship was jam packed. It really was. I think we got 2 meals a day that was all they. Why do I keep harping back on food?

07:30 But there was nothing to do. We'd get out of bed and if appropriate have your meal and then you'd get up on deck and you'd just walk round and round the deck and you were shoulder to shoulder and it was pretty grim. The weather was tolerable. The amenities were virtually non existent.

08:00 And that was that. It was not a hell ship my any means but it was the best they could do under the circumstances moving so many men.

So there were the RAAF boys on board ?

There were people from all services and also foreign troops as well being transported to England from Canada.

08:30 We actually sailed from Halifax that was a pretty dull sort of place. Nothing much doing there. We were there only for a couple of days before we caught the ship. It wasn't the most pleasant of journeys but it was only about 6 or 7 days because the ship was fast and that was it.

Were there any sort of life boat drills on board you had to go through?

Not that I can recall. There may have been. I think we

09:00 might've assembled once wearing life jackets but I cannot recall any life boat drill at all. It would've been if we'd been hit by anything it would've been chaotic with the number of people aboard and there obviously weren't enough life boats for us.

And what were the sleeping conditions like?

They were, I think four bunks

09:30 you know. Getting into the. Well, let's say it was three. Pretty grim. The weather wasn't the best and well when I say wasn't the best it wasn't all that bad but at night you seemed to feel more of the movement of the ship and you've got a blokes backside about a foot away from you so it's not so good. But

10:00 messing getting your meals that was you know queuing up for. With 3,000 guys and dolls to be fed. It's a feat in logistics to do anything like that.

So there were women on board?

Yeah, some women. I can't remember but they weren't English they were foreign troops.

10:30 I don't know where they came from. There was about 20 or so of them. That was the highlight of the day to see them walk past. That was our only touch with reality.

Any fellas try and meet and greet?

Not really. I think some did but the language problem or perhaps they spoke English perfectly and there was no meeting and greeting.

11:00 **So where did the ship arrive in England?**

It arrived in Liverpool. We docked there and then overnight we traveled down to Brighton which was the Australian reception depot. There are two big hotels there can't remember the names now. One was for people arriving

11:30 Australians arriving and one was for people leaving. And the first night we were there there was an air raid or air raid warning all of us new guys raced out to the shelters as fast as we could. All the guys that had been there awhile they just stayed in bed. Apparently, old stuff for them they didn't bother. So Brighton

12:00 once again just waiting round to go to your next unit and we were sent off on leave to the scheme called the Lady Ryder Hospitality Scheme and they had families all over the UK who would accept you for a week or so. So three of us

12:30 went up and stayed with a family up in Yorkshire and they were pretty wealthy family. Big luxurious house even had maids there which in war time England was most unusual. But they were very friendly the family. We got on very well with them and wasn't

- 13:00 much they could do in transport because there was no petrol for private use but we used to get around the country side and see things. Then we pardon me got a recall back to Brighton and then sent off to what they called an Advanced Flying Unit which was up in Scotland and that was basically to acquaint us
- 13:30 with flying in England. Not that the conditions were much different from Australia or Canada but you just learned about the country side and the various navigational aids they had like aerial lighthouses and beacons and so forth. So we can't remember how long we spent there but we spent new years eve
- 14:00 there and Glasgow was about 20 30 miles away so we migrated to Glasgow for new years eve. Which is quite a place to be Glasgow on new year's eve.
- So this is new years eve 1943?**
- Forty-three, yeah.
- And Glasgow was quite a place to be because of ?**
- Scotland. New years eve, you know they really live it up
- 14:30 there. Most enjoyable. We got back to camp. I can't remember how about 5 o'clock the next morning. Pleasant.
- Did you feel like the war was going on during that time?**
- Well we, yes you did because of the blackout
- 15:00 and already there was food rationing. When we went on leave we were given food coupons which you generally handed over to your hosts. Naturally there were troops everywhere and well as I say on that first night there was this air raid. So you were well and truly aware that there was a war being
- 15:30 fought somewhere and excuse me.
- But the air raid I mean you've just arrived can you just talk me through the events of that night what happened?**
- Well, first thing we knew. Well, we were told when you get there that air raid precautions are that you all go down into the cellars of the hotel. Not using the lift walk down the steps. And anyway the
- 16:00 sirens went and the new arrivals were all together so we got in our clothes and walked down the steps and as I said the old hands just stayed in bed and we got down into the cellars and just sat round there and then the all clear went. We went back. I don't think there were actually any
- 16:30 bombs dropped at all. Probably just a guide flying past or something like that. But that was an indication that there was a war going on.
- When you initially arrived did you see much devastation in Liverpool?**
- Yes, yes it was a mess. We didn't see a great deal of it but you were
- 17:00 well you saw you didn't see much of the centre of the city you just saw the docks but they had been hit as well. And they're big gaping well spaces where there'd be houses and factories and things like that. So that was a real introduction to, well not the art of war but the presence of war.
- The Advanced Flying course you did, how was that**
- 17:30 **different to the Canadian course that you'd done?**
- Well, the Canadian course was basically well teaching you how to be a navigator and having graduated from that you had to become acclimatised for want of a better word to English conditions. They wanted you to be able to map read or can do that in any country but also to be aware of
- 18:00 aids that were available. Wireless aids. Beacons and so forth so you did your navigations using these aids which you didn't have in Canada, so that was the difference.
- And what planes were you ?**
- Still Ansons.
- Were these ones any better than the ones in Canada?**
- No, I don't think so. They were much the same. But I remember it was very badly organised
- 18:30 the first night flight we did at this Advanced Flying Unit. We all went to briefing and then we were told to get into our aircraft but nobody told us. Well, we knew the aircraft were in a park aircraft park but we didn't know which aircraft was which. Nobody, said you know your aircraft Uncle Charlie is

19:00 in parking lot 3 or anything. So you had a batch of navigators wandering round trying to find their planes and aircraft starting up. That was chaos. That's about the main thing I remember of West Frew [?].

Doesn't sound like sort of British you know regimental?

No it wasn't. It was far from it. West Frew was always known naturally at Wet Through. For quite obvious reasons.

19:30 **And pilots, you'd just join up with any fella?**

Yeah, they were staff pilots. They were there all the time.

So this was still strictly a navigation section?

Yeah navigation and bomb aimers. We had bomb aimers as well. You'd do a trip and you worked with the bomb aimer which you didn't do in Canada. He was giving you pin points of where you

20:00 were to help you and also you'd then get the plane to the bombing range where he'd do his bombing. So that was the first experience we had of carrying a bomb aimer.

Was it important for you to also know the pilot's job and also the bomb aimer's job?

Yes, yes.

So what training were you getting in respect to flying?

None at all. You'd just we're aware of what the pilot did.

20:30 Well, you knew he did and you knew what the bomb aimer did because you worked with him in that he would give you drifts air drifts from how you were drifting by using his bomb site and also being helpful in calling out if he saw an obvious land mark that he recognised and you could use that in your navigation activities.

Excellent.

21:00 **So after this particular course this advanced one what happened to you then?**

You went to excuse me I just. Not much gin left in this. We went to an Operational Training Unit and this is where you met up with your gunners wireless operator and pilot.

21:30 There'd be I think 10 crews on each course and there'd be 60 guys just thrown into a room and you were told OK get crewed up you know just find 5 compatible guys and so forth. So the pilots did most of it. They'd it was just hit or miss you know

22:00 a pilot might like the look of one guy and he'd ask him whether he'd be his navigator or bomb aimer or gunner and so forth. So eventually you finished up with crews forming up. In our case my pilot had been at school in Brisbane with one of the gunners a couple years in advance of the gunner. So they

22:30 crewed up and the gunner always went everywhere with another gunner so that was three of the crew. And then they just wandered round and came up to me and said you know would you like to be in the navigator? So but it all worked out. You're thrown in the melting pot and crews came out at the other end.

Were you at that point actively looking for a pilot to?

Oh no, I just didn't care really.

23:00 They were all I hadn't seen any of them before. You know didn't know who they were or what they were and so forth. So just a question of gravitation.

Were there fellas who were sussing out people?

Oh yes. I know some one guy at least he a navigator he was looking for an older guy because he thought he'd be safer with

23:30 an older guy. Little prejudices not prejudices but little indications like that it was. You might not like the look of a guy you know for some reason and I wouldn't like to fly with him but. Anyway, all the crews got sorted out and stayed together.

Everyone was an Australian in that room?

Oh no there were Brits [British]. The bomb aimers quite a few bomb

24:00 aimers were Brits. So anyway the 6 of us formed up. Eventually we became 7 but that will appear later. So we went off and flew in Wellingtons, twin engine obsolete bomber that had been used at the start of the war.

Where was this at?

That was a place called Silverstone.

- 24:30 Which is now a car motor car racing track in the UK. So we were there a few months I think it was. We got crewed up and we did our well we did familiarisation flights so the crews would get to know one another the crew members
- 25:00 and did navigational training gunnery training and bombing on the local ranges. Cross countries and so forth and you started to form up you started to become a well organised crew at that stage and then we moved on to Heavy Conversation
- 25:30 Unit where you flew in Stirlings also another obsolete bomber with 4 engines. And at this stage we picked up a flight engineer because the 4 engined aircraft carried flight engineers whereas the others didn't. From memory
- 26:00 we were just allocated a flight engineer. There was the 6 of us and the squadron commander said right here's Joe Blow, he's going to be your flight engineer. Anyway, we finished up with this ancient gentleman who turned out to be 27 you know decrepit old guy and he told us later
- 26:30 after we got to know him better that he was horrified when he found himself in a crew with 5 young Australians. It was the last thing in the world that he wanted. Anyway, he mixed in very well indeed.

He was an Englishman?

He was an Englishman. All flight engineers were Englishmen. At that stage we weren't training any in Australia at all.

Can you just share with me the first flight on the Wellington? I mean

- 27:00 **all you boys have been put together you don't know each other do you remember the first flight?**

No I can't say that I do. It would've just been a with a seasoned pilot flying it and our pilot as second dicky second pilot. I can remember just going on a cross country and this

- 27:30 seasoned pilot was just there to supervise us and well see how we were reacting as a crew and that was it. And that was the way we occasionally had. Well, first night flight we did we had a seasoned guy flew with us and occasionally during the time we were there
- 28:00 they'd throw in a seasoned for want of a better word pilot just to see how we were going but no outstanding recollections of you know the first flight apart from a new guy being with us.

And any memories of short tempers where people tried to get things right and there were stuff ups?

Not that I can remember on

- 28:30 Wellingtons. No we didn't have any there. I had 2 disagreements with the pilot but that was when we were in Lancasters. But then we had no harsh words or anything except on that first one of the flights we had with an experienced pilot the weather was bouncing us all over the sky you know we were getting around like
- 29:00 that. And I called up for a 2 degree alteration of course to get us back on track and this experienced guy nearly fell out of his seat because keeping within 2 degrees of the course was under the circumstances a bit difficult. But there were no harsh words just laughter that was all.

Can you share with me the names and the type of characters that were in this particular

- 29:30 **crew?**

In the Wellington?

Yeah.

Yeah, well first guy was Sye Borsht he was from Brisbane. He's about 5-foot-6 or thereabouts. He was a Jewish boy Jewish guy I should say. He was very keen on jazz

- 30:00 music and for the duration of the war he carried this portable gramophone round with him. He's still got it. They gave it back to him after the war the Brits. Cause when you were shot down they took all your gear and stowed it away just in case you came back. Tommy Lang.

What was his position in the plane?

Sye was the pilot sorry.

- 30:30 Bomb aimer was a Englishman Tommy Lang, he was a failed pilot. He was very professional tended to be slightly exaggerate things. His past life and romances and anyway apart from that he was OK. Then

- 31:00 coming back next was myself and there were 2 gunners. They were both young they were both 19. One was a complete extrovert Tommy Lonnigan a Sydney guy he and I became very good friends during and after the war. Old Tom an extrovert, a con man.
- 31:30 If there was any lurk Tom'd be there in it. It came in handy when they were POWs [Prisoners of War] and Glen Cooper was a big guy about 6 feet. He was a very fastidious guy in matters of dress you know he always looked as if he just stepped out of the tailor's shop
- 32:00 and he prided himself on his appearance. OK, they're small idiosyncrasies but he was a good guy and we all got on well together. Now the bomb aimer, as I've said, was a failed pilot and the two gunners were both failed pilots. So you can see there was a and these were the two guys the two gunners who
- 32:30 having failed as pilots went straight to gunnery school. So that I was actually the of the Australians I was the junior boy in the crew. They were all seen to me as they were all flight sergeants I think and I was still a sergeant. Anyway, that's the only time when I eventually became a flight sergeant
- 33:00 the guys gave me a really tough time. The guys in the our crew kept referring to me as yes flight sergeant, no flight sergeant. Good morning flight sergeant and so forth. However that was all good fun. It was good fun I'm digressing again but the crew the Australians this is before
- 33:30 we had a flight engineer we'd all go out of a night together. Sometimes pilots just went with pilots. However for our entire time we always went out together as crews as a crew and go to the pub and go to the dance hall. We'd probably split up after that but we're very tight knit
- 34:00 crew. Racing ahead this elderly gentleman who was 27 who was horrified at these Australians. When we were in Lincoln, on Lancasters if we'd go into town of a night into Lincoln you know we'd all go to the pub the usual routine and Eric used to go up to Lincoln Cathedral
- 34:30 and spend an hour or so in prayer there. And in the barrack block when we're on Lances [Lancasters] he used to kneel down and say his prayers every night and very genuine dedicated sort of bloke. And I s'pose it's ironic well he was the only guy that got killed. So whether there's a lesson in that or not
- 35:00 I don't know. I won't moralise.

Depends what he was praying for I guess?

I guess so yes. Poor old Eric.

How did your I guess your I'm thinking of your role as a navigator on the Ansons how did it actually change or was different when you went to the Wellingtons?

The Wellingtons, they were a faster aircraft

- 35:30 and you had no visual or very limited visual access so you had to rely on your instruments much more and also any advice that you could get from the bomb aimer or the gunners as to where you were. I don't think at that stage we had any radar. I'm pretty sure we didn't.
- 36:00 But we did have direction. I'm sorry I have to skip back. The wireless operator in the Wellingtons had directional finding equipment and he used to get bearings and so forth and give them to me. I didn't mention him in the crew composition. Max Stawnton-
- 36:30 Smith he was from Hobart and he went straight from initial training to a wireless school so he didn't go through the failed pilot episode. Max had the habit of being the worst joke teller you've ever met in
- 37:00 your life. It was so funny you know he'd generally start off with the punch line and try and work back toward somehow. But he was renowned for that. But Max is still alive and down in Hobart. Visited him for his 80th birthday a couple of years back. Anyway, I'm sorry that I got things out of order there.
- 37:30 **OK. Well, now back to the Wellingtons you said that it had no radar but it had direction finding equipment?**

That was radio equipment.

Anything else that you had to sort of learn to do new in that phase?

No, it was just the basic navigation. No, nothing new.

Stirlings then the same sort of question? Was there anything new you had to learn and differences there?

- 38:00 No. The Stirling was an enormous aircraft. But it was just a question this was more for the pilot to learn how to handle 4 engines as opposed to two. It sounds small these days but the pilot was 22 feet above the ground when the aircraft was on the ground. Which was enormous in those days.
- 38:30 And that was basically it for the pilots and engineers. We did navigation and wireless and gunnery training but basic pilot training.

And as far as your job I presume the Stirlings were faster than the Wellingtons so did that effect your job at all?

Just made it a bit harder that's all. You were supposed to fix your position every 12 minutes at the outside. If you could get it down to 10 it was pretty

39:00 good. On a simple trip you might get it down to fixing it every 6 minutes. But obviously the faster you go 12 minutes becomes more difficult 10 minutes becomes more difficult because you've covered so much extra ground as opposed to the Wellington.

That figure of 6, 10, or 12 minutes is that the same for night flying and day flying?

Yes. Yeah. Six is pretty rare

39:30 but 10 was the normal. Cause 10 fits nicely into 16 for your calculations and so forth 12 also.

And night flying was astro navigation still the primary form of navigation?

No. No. We did astro I'm not sure weather we did it in Stirlings or not. But I never used astro

40:00 on operational flights. When we got to Lancasters never bothered because you had more sophisticated aids and it'd takes say about 8, 10 minutes from the time you start shooting at the stars to do your plotting and in 8 minutes you've gone a long way or it'd be more than 8 possibly 10 so the astro was by the board.

40:30 **And so what equipment was helping you?**

Well, in the Stirlings we didn't have much than the Lancaster had. I'm sorry the Wellington had. It was when we got onto Lancasters that we got radar and what they called G. Which was a device

41:00 That used in navigation. We got signals which you had to interpret and then plot on your chart. But right up till the time of Lancasters it's pretty much the same as you learnt way back in observers schools at Edmonton. Just that you were honing your skills all the while.

Tape 5

00:46 **You were just saying there was one stage that we skipped over in the Wellington stage which was fighter affiliation? Can you tell us about that?**

Yeah, we'd be sent out

01:00 just to fly around the country side and they would scramble training aircraft generally one to attack us and make a dummy attack on you as you were stooging along. And you were taught the methods of avoiding fighters. There was a standard tactic of

01:30 when we was coming in at you from let's say the port side you would turn towards him. That decreases the time he's got to get to you because you're increasing the closure rate. Then there was a standard corkscrew they called it where if you were being attacked from the starboard side you would dive to starboard then climb to port

02:00 and down to port and up to starboard and go on like that. Which made it very hard for him to get a sight on you and at night you generally lost him on the first dive. But in daytime he could see you but you were putting him in a position where he was unable to get a bead on you. So that was fighter affiliation which you did

02:30 from Wellington time on.

What was it like inside the aircraft when that corkscrewing took place?

You got negative G, negative gravity and you were sitting at your navigators table and your instruments used to rise off the table so as soon as the gunner used to call the corkscrews. As soon as

03:00 he'd say corkscrew you immediately flat down on the table holding onto everything. Otherwise the first time I experienced it to see your protractors and rulers floating past you it's a bit disturbing. So you got to work quickly and laid on everything on the table that was moveable. It was a bit gut wrenching too.

Was it a dangerous time?

03:30 Well, in Lancasters yes because you knew there was a fighter after you. The gunner had seen it and he could see him approaching and wherever he was approaching from. The gunner was in control during that corkscrew time. There was a device in Lancasters called

04:00 Monica which warned you. It was a radar device which warned you of the approach of a fighter. The only trouble with that was the fighters could home onto that warning device so it was a 2 edged sword.

So they tossed it out that wasn't used.

Did you ever fly operationally with a Monica working?

Yes, only once or twice and then they removed the thing

04:30 from everyone yeah.

Can you just describe it for us and what sort of warning it gave?

It gave an oral warning and that was it you knew there was somebody homing in on you. But then as we subsequently found he was homing in on you on your anti homing device.

I want to move onto 463 Squadron and the Lancasters. You mentioned

05:00 **your job was a little bit different in a Lancaster because you had radar and G can you tell us what firstly describe the radar equipment you had?**

The radar equipment we had was pretty primitive and virtually useless. It was subsequently after our time superseded by H2S was the code name which

05:30 gave you you bounced off signals from your equipment picked up the echoes and you got an outline of the ground underneath you. Over flat terrain it wasn't much use. It was very good at picking up cities and coastlines rivers and things like that. Later on the Lanc carried two navigators using H2S.

06:00 One would do the standard plotting and the other guy would give him positions that he'd picked up on the H2S but that was a luxury we never had. G consisted of two radio beacons sending out a beacon and you picked up on your screen the time elapsed

06:30 from beacon A and simultaneously beacon B. They were concentric circles and where they intersected that's where you were. So you had to translate the signals you got and then you had a special G chart where that's where you plotted your results

07:00 and then you changed that onto your main plotting chart. That wasn't good all the way to Germany. It gets you into Germany but not very far. So after G cut out you were back to basics with just deduced

07:30 dead reckoning. The correct term is deduced reckoning. But always known as dead reckoning and you were relying on the winds which affected your navigation. But you had calculated on the way in while you were using G and you could try and determine whether the wind was veering or backing or whether it was changing whether it was constant and you relied on that to get you to

08:00 the target after G ran out.

What equipment did you have to judge the wind speed?

Well, basically you did what was called an air plot which was where you'd be in position of still winds and you also that was basic. You also had an air position

08:30 indicator into which the speed and course of the aircraft was fed and out came a figure saying you know you're still air position or air position is such and you had either fixed your position or actual position by your G or by a pin point. And then by contrasting those two that gave you the wind

09:00 speed and direction. So you were pretty busy in that 10 minutes every 10 minutes to fixing your ground position.

Can you just describe then what your navigator table in the Lancaster looked like and where all the equipment that you used was around you?

Yes. Well, you had the well a table basically. Up on your left hand

09:30 side was the G box where you got your it was above shoulder height and you had to reach up and twiddle. And on the table you had a parallel rule which you didn't use often. You're dividers and a thing called a Dalton computer. It was just a hand held little thing and that

10:00 when you get your true airspeed you had a revolving dial with slots in it and you'd feed in your height and outside air temperature that would give you a refinement on your actual air position. Also on the Dalton you could do your

10:30 calculations speed distance to travel and speed you were going and things like that. And also the navigators never used it. It had a small thing it was only what 8 by about 4 a small little plot which the fighter pilots could use if they ever did at plotting their position on this little screen or

11:00 cellophane thing.

What else did we have? Air position. G. The things on the table. That was about it I think. It was a pretty wide table. The navigator it

11:30 **depended on the mark of the aircraft it had a bench or a bucket seat. The bench was used later on when they had H2S [navigational aid] and you'd have to navigate it sitting at the same time table. You also had repeaters from the pilots showing your course and airspeed. That was on the right hand side.**

12:00 **Well, that was it.**

What about other equipment that wasn't related to navigation?

Nothing that I can remember. There were all sorts of odd cables running through above your head and round your head and so forth. But I can't recall any other.

Where was your parachute for example?

The parachute was on a rack on the side the wall of the aircraft.

12:30 All the crew except pilot had chest type packs which you clipped onto your harness on your chest. The pilot had a seat type so he was he didn't have to get up and do well when he bailed out he didn't have to reach up and get his chute it was attached to his backside.

What about

13:00 **things like communication within the aircraft oxygen or where was that?**

Yes we all. 10,000 feet you went onto oxygen. Pilots generally went on at night time at ground level. Some of the crew as well but you all had to have it on by 10,000 feet and you were you had a microphone in your mask

13:30 in your oxygen mask and all the crew could communicate with each other. The pilot could communicate with other aircraft or broadcast on you know distress frequency. At one stage they had an isolation switch so the navigator to concentrate on his work

14:00 could throw this switch and he was cut off from communications with the rest of the crew. The pilot could call him up and the navigator would throw the switch and then he was on full talking terms with the whole crew pilot and the whole crew. There was one incident we were coming back from somewhere or other I can't remember where

14:30 and I had used the isolation switch I had switched off from everything and I switched it back on and forgot all about it thought I was still on isolation. I was very pleased with life and I was singing away I thought to myself and you know 'la-la-la-la' and we got back to land and I standing around talking

15:00 and one of the gunners said did you hear that German bloke singing? You know trying to break up our wireless they were trying to jam us I'm sure. So I didn't say a word. Just thought discretion.

You've described your workstation could you now put that in the context of the entire aeroplane and where everybody else was?

Yeah, well the bomb aimer was up the front

15:30 up in the nose and he had two guns up there so he could stand up and fire his guns as required and he also lay flat on the deck for the bombing run looking through a perspex thing. Next was the pilot on the left hand side and standing up next to him or he could use the jump seat

16:00 was the flight engineer right next to the pilot. He'd be doing the fuel checks and things like that and generally did the engine handling taking off and landing. Then I was behind the pilot on the left hand side and my compartment could be blacked out for night flying cause otherwise didn't want any external any light showing.

16:30 Then behind me was the wireless operator with his wireless set and next to him was the astrodome and then just above that was the mid-upper gunner. And right down the back was the rear gunner. The guys

17:00 up as far as the mid-upper gunner to a less extent were all didn't wear any flying clothing. It was quite warm in the aircraft. Heat supplied by one of the engines. But the rear gunner was immuned from that and he wore an electrically heated suit. A big bulky suit and

17:30 that's what kept him warm. I think it failed only once this electric suit and old Coops was pretty bitter and cold when he got out of the aircraft. So some of the Lancasters after our time had a gunner who could fire downwards sort of a hatch that you could open

18:00 and there was a gun position in there. I never actually saw it but apparently it was in later models.

What problems did you have inside a Lancaster in terms of comfort and all that kind of thing?

It wasn't too bad. I was reasonably comfortable. You know when you're working

18:30 flat out you were too busy to worry about comfort. But occasionally I used to get up and have a look out and so forth. That was just to break the monotony and stretch my legs. That was when we were out of G

range and just on dead reckoning. The rear gunner was a bit cramped but everybody else was reasonably comfortable.

19:00 We had a toilet down the back of the aircraft a thing called the Elson which nobody in our crew ever used because the outside temperature was minus 50 or 60 if you went down there you had to put on an oxygen bottle. The big hazard because

19:30 of the extreme temperature that if any part of your body touched that wretched toilet you were there. You were stuck to it which is not to be recommended. The only time I've ever seen anybody answer the call of nature was the pilot who suddenly wanted to have a leak and I dunno who it was he screwed the nose cap

20:00 off a flare and handed it to Sye. Sye was having this leak into this nose cap. There were screams of horror from the bomb aimer because there was a hole in the middle of the nose cap and poor old Tommy Lang was somewhat annoyed and upset that something or other from a great height yes.

20:30 **Was that any problem that you had to have to answer the call of nature?**

No, no. That was the only time I've ever seen that happen.

Can you tell us about joining 463 Squadron?

Yes. We after the we did the Lancaster finishing school which was just to accustom you to the aircraft. We got to the squadron

21:00 and we were allocated to A Flight. There was A Flight and B Flight and Sye went into meet the CO [Commanding Officer] and then we went to our various well we were all in the same hut at this stage. We all went to this hut. Sye on arrival at

21:30 463 was promoted to flying officer. It was standard then for pilots irrespective if they were sergeants, flight sergeants, warrant officers soon as they got to an operational squadron they were promoted to flying officer. So Sye went off to the officers quarters and the six of us were all in this same hut. Sye went and saw the I think I mentioned that went and saw the CO and our

22:00 flight commander. Then later in my case I went along to see the navigation leader the senior navigator you know said hello etc etc. Same with the gunners and bomb aimer and engineer all to their respective section heads and then we went on a navigational

22:30 exercise for 5 hours or so in a Lancaster and handed our logs in or navigator handed his log in and nav experts scrutinised that just to see whether you were OK. Then after that you went on operations.

What was the squadron like when you arrived? Was it a

23:00 **welcoming place or a scary place?**

Well OK, you entered the big league now and these guys you're meeting with they've all done it before but everybody was very friendly and you soon fitted in with the rest of the navigators and you were all separated the pilots had their ready room. The navigators had theirs

23:30 the gunners theirs so virtually you were in the company of navigators all the time. But there was one little story told to me about a new crew arriving. It was a guy from 463 that told me this. That the skipper goes in to see the squadron commander and the squadron commander said oh yes glad you're here. We've actually got you down for operations

24:00 tonight. Be first off. Your briefing is such and such a time and you'll be at the safety equipment at such and such a time and take off is such and such a time. And this new boy would say but sir we haven't unpacked yet and the CO said that may not be necessary. So it was a good welcome to the

24:30 squadron. That's probably not a true story.

I know that's a joke but was there ever any thought given that you're probably replacing a crew that didn't come back?

Well, you knew you were there as a replacement. That's why you were there and I have known two guys that went on their first trip. One was actually a school mate of mine.

25:00 Their first trip to Berlin was to Berlin which I thought was a bit rough a new crew. Ours was to Stuttgart which not as bad as Berlin but not a very good place to start with.

Just before we talk about your first operations and then on. How were you feeling about this was it excitement or fear?

I think

25:30 apprehension was the best word. You knew it was going to be rough. You knew that the loss rate was a 5% you've probably heard that before was the acceptable. They'd except that then when you've got to

do 30 trips your prospects of surviving are not the greatest. So yeah it was good

26:00 to be getting on with it at long last after all this training. But going to Stuttgart about 7 and a half hours there and back a bit daunting and the way it happened was that after briefing all the crew except the navigator went to the aircraft. The navigator stayed behind and did all his plotting

26:30 and prepared a flight plan so that if anything happened to the navigator they could follow this flight plan and then you went and joined the rest of the crew at the aircraft and frankly I didn't know what to say to the guys. They're all standing round and didn't know whether to shake hands with them and say

27:00 good luck or whatever and anyway eventually Sye said, "OK it's time to go." So we hopped in the aircraft and that was that. And you're thinking you know what's going to happen and also you're thinking how will I react to this. These guys are relying on me to get them there and am I up to it? I thought I was. And the other

27:30 guys are probably thinking much the same.

Are there any traditions or routine things that are followed at this time?

Not routine but nearly everybody used to have a leak on the tail wheel. That seemed to be the tradition. The story was that most of the transport drivers were females and that was a way of keeping them away

28:00 you see. But I can't vouch for that. Everybody used to have a leak on the tail wheel.

Why were you so keen to keep women away from the tail wheel?

I dunno it was just women near a dispersible were generally regarded as bad luck. What the basis of that was I never knew. It doesn't seem very logical.

28:30 **Anything else that was bad luck?**

No not that I can think of. That was the only sort of superstition. Some guys you know always carried a mascot with them of some sort or another a lucky charm lucky coin something like that. But that was about it.

29:00 **Tell us about that first operation to Stuttgart what happened when you're after the briefing and you'd stood around what?**

We got into the aircraft and that trip our tail gunner was unavailable he was ill so they gave us the guy he was a flight lieutenant and he'd already done one tour and

29:30 he was assigned to us as our rear gunner and he was far from delighted at having a brand new crew taking him to Stuttgart and back. It was uneventful. There was a lot of flack. A few fighter alarms. But we got there

30:00 on time and got back. There was one this poor flight lieutenant on his second tour we came across we're getting close to home and I said to Sye the pilot look we're running about 3 minutes early. We were still full of keenness and

30:30 enthusiasm and not battle hardened. We've got to waste some time. And the roar from this guy on his second tour you know it was he cast some doubts about my parentage and that was the most exciting part of that trip.

How did you react when you came under fire and flack?

Well, the navigator could black himself

31:00 out from reality because it was you could close your compartment off to everything. Fighter attack when you're weaving doing your corkscrew it's more how much longer is this gonna go on? Is he gonna get a bead on us? That's a bit intense. There's nothing much you can do about it

31:30 because you're hanging onto your plotting table. Flack is frightening. It's human instinct it's strange. Cause I've been up the front a couple of times looking out and you see a flack burst and you instinctively duck.

32:00 It does absolutely no good what so ever but the navigator that was the only bloke that could really walk about. The rest of the guys were strapped in there and that was much harder for them than for the navigator because you'd go out and see the flack or particularly tracers. They were frightening. I only struck it a few times on

32:30 relatively low level. You see these bursts of light coming up towards you tracer bullets and then they seemed to be coming straight at you and then all of a sudden ssshheeeewww they've gone past you. The pilot was the worst one that was affected by that because he could see it all the while and so could the engineer and bomb aimer.

33:00 The other thing was search lights. If you got combed by searchlights or one searchlight you're like a fish you know in a fish bowl. Our pilot I mentioned was about 5 foot 4 might've been a bit higher. He was

fortunate he used to just lower his seat

33:30 and come down below the level of the combing. So all he did was look at his instruments. He wasn't blinded by it at all. But that is not a nice experience. Cause you know if the search lights got you the gunners on the ground can see you and anything in the air can see you as well. That's a passive deterrent the search light.

Can you just explain what it meant to get 'combed'?

34:00 Well, you've got searchlights that are sweeping the sky and one guy will pick you up and be visible and then another guy will home onto where he can see you. So there you are or sometimes a third guy will come in as well and some searchlights were radar controlled as well.

34:30 But when you're combed you're caught by two or more searchlights and it makes it extremely difficult. You've got to try and avoid them by maneuvering or like Sye did put his head down and fly on instruments. You were illuminated that's the problem.

I'd just like to go back. Obviously you flew

35:00 **28 sorties before you were shot down I was wondering if you could just take us through one of those from start to finish? I don't know whether there's one that stands out as being a memorable one?**

Well, there was one memorable one I'll go into that. But it wasn't typical. We'd flown the night before and on ops and about midday the service police came round getting us out of

35:30 of bed because we were going to fly that afternoon.

Just stop you there. Is that where you got shot down?

No, no.

Sorry. The service police came round?

And got us out of bed and told there was a meal ready. We had to be at briefing. It was a raid that was thrown on at the last minute and they sent 30 aircraft from our group to go to Calais.

36:00 We had a new boy wireless operator our wireless operator was ill and we went off. We were told to bomb below cloud. Well, we went off and I think they thought we'd be able to go at 3,000-feet. We're flying down England and we were all over the place. The aircraft was bouncing everywhere and we got to Calais and on the run in to the target

36:30 we couldn't see the target cloud was so thick and we were right pretty close to the deck and this flack radar controlled flack bursting around us and anyway we broke cloud. For some obscure reason the gunners were told not to fire at troops on the ground you know machine gun positions. So we went in at close to a thousand feet and you could see guys

37:00 on the ground and anyway we bombed and veered away sharply and we went past a hotel at about the third floor and I'll never forget that and headed for home. And eventually we got back to our area Waddington

37:30 and we called the place was in darkness. We called up and they lit up the airfield so in we landed and we were driven and well we were usually interrogated after a raid by the Intelligence. We got there and we were taken to the CO's office and there were a couple of others officers

38:00 there. And the CO apologised for not having any lights on he said we didn't expect anybody to get back. Which was what had happened. Was that 30 of us went off and they sent a recall while we were still over England 22 of the guys got the recall and were diverted back to the UK [United Kingdom] or back to bases.

38:30 and our new boy didn't get the message. So 8 of us bombed this target and as they said the flak [anti-aircraft fire] was fierce the visibility pretty low and the guy in front of us went down in flames. Anyway, the eight of us that got through or eight that attempted that bombing

39:00 another signal went out diverting them to different airfields and not back to our normal base. Once again our new boy didn't get the message. And I must say he was an extremely honest fellow. He was a pilot officer first trip and the signals chief said you know,

39:30 "We've sent out two messages. You didn't get either of them?" He said, "No, I didn't." "Well, why didn't you get either of them?" He said, "I was so scared I couldn't hear anything." So I thought he was very honest. You know he could've said he had a malfunction or something. So that's how 8 of us attacked Calais with somewhat disastrous results. That you know should've been the easiest of trips. It should've been on at all actually.

40:00 But it's one that stands out as the most horrific that we did.

Tape 6

00:40 **You mentioned on that particular operation the radio operator had missed...**

Two calls.

...two calls. And you told it as if oh well one of those things but amongst the crew was there anger towards him?

No, no.

01:00 Perhaps muted anger. Nobody said anything to him. We didn't know till we got back that he'd missed the two calls. I think we felt sorry for him if anything. Sorry and thought oh well he's already been through poor guy. Yeah, no, no anger.

Did you go up and fly with him again?

No, he was just a spare we just took him. It was on that one trip when our

01:30 wireless operator was ill.

For the planes that didn't come and did get the call back does that count as an operation for them?

No, that we counted or designated as a boomerang, you know returned without any activity. We did one boomerang. We lost two engines

02:00 malfunctioning so we had to come back and it was a daylight. We got back to the base and we came into land on 2 engines and you had the fire engine on one side of the runway and the ambulance on the other side keeping pace with you. A bit disturbing.

When that happens did you drop your bomb load?

Yeah, we dropped our bombs out in the middle of the ocean

02:30 somewhere. There was a designated spot because of the Channel traffic to drop bombs. If you were safe you could see what was happening you'd drop em and get rid of them.

So when that happens amongst the crew is there disappointment or is there relief?

Disappointment that you didn't get it done. Just meant you had to do it over again.

03:00 And relief because you've only got 2 engines going and you've got say 13,000 pounds of bombs slowing you up you're glad to get rid of them.

Other operations besides the 28th operation what other interesting things happened? Did you ever get attacked by fighters and have to do the corkscrew?

Had to do the corkscrew quite a few times

03:30 even if you weren't absolutely sure there was a fighter there you'd corkscrew. It was much better to avoid see fighters were better armed than the Lancasters. In our time we only had Browning 303s which are pretty useless. More for building up morale than anything else.

So you weren't actually attacked

04:00 **by fighters on any operations?**

Never saw one. Well, we weren't fired at shall we say. But we had been I s'pose you'd call it quazi attacked. They tried to get us but were unsuccessful.

You said earlier when you returned back you were I dunno if this is the right word interrogated or asked questions could you ?

Yes, you'd go in after briefing.

04:30 I beg your pardon. You'd go in after landing and you were debriefed. Intelligence officer is there taking down what you saw or what you heard which is little any enemy activity pardon me or any ground activity anything that was going on. For instance going back to that dreadful Calais trip I saw something which

05:00 I reported. We were going in towards the target and a parachute came down descending through the clouds so I reported and nobody knew who it was or whether it was a German or whether it was us. You know little things like that they want to know. That's very, very insignificant. But you know whether you saw a big explosion when your bombs dropped or stuff like that.

05:30 Any other aircraft going down or any fighter sightings. I only saw one fighter actually. It was a JU-88 [German dive bomber] I think. It went past us going the opposite way like a rocket and the split second

later there was a Mosquito going the same direction after it. Didn't see any fight or anything.

06:00 **These particular interrogations was that one on one or was that a group thing?**

They did the crew. As a result soon as you'd finished your interrogation you went off for a meal and then to bed or whatever so there was always an anxiety almost a contest

06:30 to be back to base first so you could get the interrogation over and done with. You couldn't bend the rules you know say flying straight home instead of taking an indirect path but it was always competition to see who got home first.

During your operations as well were there ever any of the crew killed from ack-ack [anti aircraft artillery] and stuff like that?

Our crew? Yeah our engineer was killed.

07:00 **That was on the 28th one?**

Yeah.

But before that?

No, no, we none of us suffered any injury at all.

What about when bombers didn't return home was there a loss felt amongst people or you just got on with it?

Well, you got on with it. You missed it more if they were in the same accommodation block as yourself you know their empty

07:30 beds their empty bunks. The Americans and ourselves worked on the principal of trying to fill those as quickly as they could. Just to nullify the shock effect.

You mentioned earlier off camera about fellas that had been shot down and escaped

08:00 **and they gave lectures. Can you share with us some of those things?**

Yes, well escaping is a well a complex business and you were prepared by that by the intelligence officer at the airfield giving you lectures on escape techniques and this was bolstered by lectures from people who had escaped. One was from

08:30 a guy that was in the wooden horse which was a classic escape. He came and lectured us the possibility of using a wooden horse a second time was somewhat remote and then they another guy who came and lectured us on escaping from Marseille area. He had been told

09:00 that in well we all knew that in the south of France particularly Marseille to head for the brothels if we got if willing and able and he did that and they assisted him in escape back to the UK. I don't know whether he recommended it or not. Anyway, he got home so he was happy. There were a couple of other

09:30 ones but those are the ones that stand out in my memory.

So before every operation were you given guidelines for escape?

Not really. You might be told if you were near the Swiss boarder and you were in a bad way to head for there. Or head for a neutral country if you obviously couldn't get back home. But we had it drilled into us from almost recruit days

10:00 that it was always your duty to escape and that was a principle you adhered to. You tried to get back if possible or get out of the bag.

What equipment was actually supplied to you in case of being shot down and escape?

Well, you could carry a revolver if you wanted to but very few people did to hold off the Germans with a revolver that had 6 shots in it was

10:30 expecting a bit much. But you carried a small plastic case in which you had well ingredients for escape. For instance there was a very small hacksaw there were chocolates and sweets fishing line a sewing kit sunscreen

11:00 ointment. Very rare to use in that part of the world but that was in there. There might'a been yes and a spare compass. Compass was the size of a fly button and actually some guys early one had one of their fly buttons was a compass so and they were very small as you can imagine.

11:30 Dropping your daks [pants] in the middle of the street to look at your compass'd be a bit revealing in more ways than one. We were also given a wad of money currency for the occupied countries and yes maps we were given silk maps of the occupied countries and they were the three

12:00 disregarding the revolver they were the three main ingredients. But you always had this tiny compass you know in your top pocket or something like that to give you some idea where you were going.

Did these lectures of the fellas who'd parachuted down and escaped did they ever share what they felt was good equipment or bad equipment?

No, I've seen

12:30 intelligence reports from guys that have been shot down and they all quite complimentary. The only negative remarks I've ever seen was that the sweets in this escape pack were too sweet. When you're complaining about things like that I think it's a bit over the top. However everybody seemed to think these things were OK.

Just in respect to your

13:00 **Lancaster, what did you guys do to personalise the plane the inside or the outside ?**

Well, on the outside there was always the caricature or an insignia or something like that and each plane I think had a bomb on it's side designating a trip. So our plane when we

13:30 were on leave whoever took it they would if they did a trip would put a bomb on it so it really didn't signify it signified what the plane had done not necessarily excuse me what the crew had done. Our skipper was a very good artist and the side of our plane was from the good old magazine man we had sniffer

14:00 the dog with one leg against the telephone pole or something like that. A series of puddles nearby. So once again this Sye Borsht he wanted to be an architect but for family business reasons he couldn't but he was an excellent artist and in the POW [Prisoner of War] camp he

14:30 had a book in which he depicted scenes in the prison camp. I didn't know he well I wasn't in the camp but I didn't see it till many, many years after and it's a very graphic description of or perception of life in the camp. And I think it should be in the war memorial myself.

This piddling dog, he didn't paint that after he piddled on the bombardier did he?

15:00 No, no a separate Snifter was the dogs name.

LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre] men with did you come across men like that?

Yes, I know guys that went LMF and you feel sorry for them but you feel that they were brave in their own way. They were game

15:30 enough to come out and say you know I can't hack it anymore. I'm not gonna fly anymore. And they just quietly disappeared.

Could you give me a couple of illustrations?

Well, there was one guy with a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] he just flatly refused to fly that was it. Said he couldn't go on any long he'd done enough

16:00 and he went off. I saw a very cruel exhibition of punishment of LMF. This was at a training school before we'd even gone on operations I think it was the final thing and two sergeants RAF [Royal Air Force] guys deserted they weren't gonna go any further. They just didn't say they weren't gonna go they took the matter into their own hands

16:30 and they were brought back and they were paraded in front of us and they came along and just ripped off their stripes literally. And also their wings and then marched em away under guard and that was the last we ever saw of them. I've known guys that have gone LMF but I didn't know the circumstances at all.

17:00 One guy from round here he came back before going on operations. He'd been reduced to leading aircraftsman because he wouldn't fly. So it wasn't uncommon but not a great deal or great many to cause a concern amongst those who were still going on. There was no

17:30 harsh criticism of the guy. As I said, when you get up round 15 20 trips it's much easier to keep going instead of saying I've had it I've had enough. I'm sure everybody felt like that at some stage.

So what was the maximum when was the end of a tour?

30 trips.

18:00 Some guys went on to do a second tour straight off which meant 45 trips. They were guys who went to things like the camera unit who filmed activities over target areas and raids and so forth. There weren't too many of those guys.

Why would a man select a second tour?

Bravado.

18:30 When you got up to 30 or thereabouts you had a feeling of invincibility and that you could go on and do another 15 and be finished for good. You'd done 30 why not 45? Not everybody thought like that but that was some and there was also an aura about somebody on their second tour.

19:00 They were men amongst men sort a business.

You spoke a little bit about Eric who prayed before he took off with you? The chaplain what was he like at base?

We didn't see much of the chaplain. The base was a big area and if you wanted to see him you'd have to seek him out. You know you'd go and see him in his office or

19:30 in the mess or wherever. But he was just another officer. He was there to give spiritual comfort if required. But he didn't come around say looking for O'Connell. We hear he's a dreadful sort of fellow needs to be straightened out or perhaps he needs comforting. That was that.

Did anyone from the ground staff ask if they could come on an operation with you?

Not

20:00 with us. There are recorded cases of ground staff going on ops [operations]. I never knew anyone myself. There's one recorded case of two ground staff who went on a trip in a bomber and nobody only the crew knew they were on it. The crew got shot down and these two guys nobody knew they'd been on the trip. They

20:30 were posted as deserted cause they'd just disappeared from the base. So a double whammy there.

Well, if it's alright we might actually if you could share with me the story of the 28th operation. But could you begin it from the very beginning when you received news that you were going?

Yes, well every 6 weeks

21:00 we used to get one week off. We came back having done 25 trips so we knew this is just about the finish. So we went to Nuremberg. No, went to Brennan pretty nasty place 26th. Next one was Nuremberg 27th that was pretty hectic and then we were to go on our 28th

21:30 on this easy sortie over and bomb gun positions at Flushing. Flushing was holding up the Allied advance. They couldn't get. Flushing Port was open the Allies but they couldn't get ships in there because the Germans controlled the entrance. So they were anxious to knock out these guns on Flushing. So we get briefed

22:00 for the first day 21st of October. The weather went sour we couldn't go. We were briefed again the next day. The weather bad again and it was on the 23rd of October that we eventually got off. One small side light to that is that the first day briefing we got our

22:30 little bag of sweets and bar of chocolates for the trip. The second day exactly the same happened and the last day they said no you've had two lots of and you didn't go anywhere. I didn't think of that sort of miserly approach of. Anyway, I digress. Anyway, we got off and the weather was pretty bad

23:00 and we had to go in under the cloud that was and the cloud was s'posed to be 4,000 feet we broke cloud on the run to the target at about 3,000 feet and the guy in front of us Johnny Dack he was actually on his last trip and he got hammered. He went down we were next in line and we went

23:30 down. We got hit by light flack on the starboard side basically and we lost one engine on the starboard side and then we were hit again and lost an engine on the port side and then we got hit up front and the thing exploded and the engineer took practically the whole

24:00 explosion. He was still alive very briefly for a very short time and the wireless operator and myself got hit by fragments and then a fire started in the navigator myself compartment which couldn't put out. So at that stage the pilot gave the order to bail out and

24:30 I went to the front hatch the bomb aimer had already gone. And the engineer was lying there near the hatch and to all appearances he was dead and so I dived out. You don't really rush into diving out. I got to the hatch and oh. But there was no alternative so out I went and pulled the rip cord

25:00 and the thing opened and the initial jerk is quite severe. I thought perhaps I'd been hit by the tail plane but it was just the initial thing and I floated down and landed in about 4 feet of water.

The actual ground fire that was coming up was that more than what you'd ever faced before?

Pretty well this was very severe. Severe stuff.

25:30 **What they were firing at you?**

It was about .50 calibre stuff. Light stuff and heaving stuff banging away a bit of that but it wasn't

worry us at all. We were being what they call hose piped. They just straight along the fuselage once they got your height and

26:00 direction. So end of story. End of tour.

Now you described earlier in the day that you couldn't really see much being the navigator when did you first realise that you'd been hit severely the first time?

Well, the noise and I popped out to see what was happening and you could actually see some of the tracer stuff coming up

26:30 and then we were sort of along the fuselage 'bang bang bang bang' and that was it. So I was off the air at the time taken my helmet off or unplugged the radio so I went back into my compartment and plugged in again to see what was happening. And the pilot was calling up trying to ascertain who was left in the aircraft and who was still alive etc.

27:00 And shortly after that he gave the order to bail out and that's when I went.

So the engineer was the only one?

He was killed yeah. I thought he was dead. The bomb aimer thought he was dead. The pilot took a look and though you know maybe alive so he pushed him out the hatch hoping that if he was alive that he'd be able to pull the cord

27:30 but apparently not.

Had you already dropped your bomb load?

No, we couldn't. We were hit in the hydraulics and electrics and we just couldn't realise the bomb load so that was that. They went down with the aircraft but they didn't explode or anything.

Now you said you popped out the front after thinking if there was another way out

28:00 **but the rear gunner and the top gunner?**

The wireless operator and the two gunners went out the back door which meant that they had to straddle whatever you call it then roll out sideways and they did that. And apparently one gunner was saying to the other you first no you first. Anyway, we all got out

28:30 reasonably well.

Can you at all recall the conversation that was being said leading up to the pilot saying lets...?

Let's get out? No, he was just calling up and that was all the conversation that I got you know rear gunner tail gunner so forth so forth you know answer and no answers. And that's when

29:00 he decided that it was time to go and that was it. There may have been conversation well there obviously was while I was up the front and out of radio communication.

Now you mentioned while you were still in your navigators seat that you actually got hit by some shrapnel what happened there?

It was just piece of shrapnel came whistled through the compartment and got me in

29:30 the leg and also I was wearing just the usual battle dress and the piece of shrapnel had gone through there and didn't touch me just went through like that and there was a burn mark where the thing had gone through. So I was very lucky indeed.

Did you try patching your leg up at all?

No, I didn't. It was patched up

30:00 the following day by an underground doctor. But there was well there was nothing to patch it up with.

So jumping out or falling out I presume a lot of ground fire was coming up at you?

Well, they were more intent on shooting at the planes rather than the other planes in the raid rather than the individual. Although you were always afraid

30:30 that they might lease of a few at a parachute but it didn't happen to me.

So what could you see as you were coming down?

Well, this island had been flooded by the RAF breaching all the dykes letting the seawater in so all I could see was just a mass of flood water and I was concentrating on that

31:00 you know, wanting to make sure I made a safe landing and that was it. So it was just water basically.

Were you looking around to see where the rest of the crew were?

No, no I was looking around to see whether I could you can guide your parachute by pulling on the different straps I was looking around to see whether there was any better place to go than straight down. There wasn't. So I just went

31:30 straight down.

How do you actually guide the parachute as you go?

Well, you pull down on one side and spill the air out of the that side and you've only got air going through the other side you see so that's it's pretty inaccurate way of steering but it does work. People have done it. It was no use me doing it. I was gonna land in water no matter where.

32:00 **Did you have sort of a boat attached to you?**

No, had a Mae West life saving jacket and that was all. No, the aircraft carried a dinghy but that was that pops up in the water when the plane goes into the water. No boat.

So when you landed you

32:30 **did land in water?**

In water yeah about 4 feet a water and I got rid of my parachute by putting the harness etc on top of it so it'd sink. Cause it's a pretty good giveaway a parachute in the water and I saw I think 3 or 4 guys on the shore and they beckoned to me to come over to them.

33:00 So I swam and waded and wallowed my way for about I s'pose about a quarter of a mile or so and they greeted me on the shore and fortunately where I'd landed the Germans had left that area and were on the other side of the island because of the flood damage. There was no actual German ground

33:30 activity in the area I landed. So these 3 blokes beckoned to me and so I went to them and their English was pretty shaky and my Dutch was nil. But they indicated that I should follow them and that was my start of the meeting with the Resistance. These guys weren't active members of the Resistance but

34:00 there were lots of passive Resistance members.

What was going on up above you at the time with the aircraft and the other planes?

Well, the aircraft were still coming in and bombing and there were still AA [ack ack] firing going on and well just the battle went on that was it.

Now it's pretty hard swimming in a swimming pool with

34:30 **clothes on what's it like swimming with all your gear on?**

I think I would've passed Ian Thorpe at any stage. It's difficult but wading and making the best you can. Your Mae West [life jacket] keeps you above the water. So it wasn't easy but manageable.

Did you dump any gear?

The only gear I dumped was my parachute that was all.

35:00 I didn't have anything else really to dump.

OK, so you came ashore. These fellas did they greet you in any particular way or?

No, they shook hands with me and then you know come with me you know sort of signs. So off I went with them and they took me to this small village and there they

35:30 I was led into this. The village there wasn't a sign of life anywhere. The inhabitants were either I believe watching the raid from the safety a little further away. But anyway they took me into this house and took me upstairs and then they indicated that they would get somebody who could speak English.

36:00 And anyway after a while a clergyman was approaching you know in his long robes and he was carrying this big book under his arm clearly labelled when he got to us as English/Dutch dictionary. So this is not the brightest of things to be doing. However, he came

36:30 in and we stayed up in this first floor there were part of a family there and one boy about 10 or 12 and we waited there till after dark and the clergyman the pastor took me to his house and we went upstairs

37:00 he gave me something to drink coffee or tea or something. And we stayed in his house and about 4 o'clock in the morning this big guy arrived and he slung me over his shoulder. My leg was a bit sore at this stage and he took me to this barn and

37:30 there was a guy there a young fella 23, 24 slightly older than myself and we made a, the big guy just parted and we made, well a hide in the barn you know in the straw bales of straw and hay and so forth. It was a two storey barn and where I was I could see what was happening in the barn

- 38:00 and this young guy informed me that we'd have to be very quiet and not be seen because they didn't know quite which way the farmers alliance lay. Whether he was with the Brits or whether he was with the Germans. And so anyway I was there and about 10 o'clock in the morning a doctor arrived and he bandaged up my leg
- 38:30 and put some sulfanilamide I think it is into the wound bandaged it up and departed. Never found out his name until about 20 years ago. I got a letter from Holland and this guy introducing himself as the doctors son and that he was coming to Australia and he'd like to meet me. And so I met him at Mascot and
- 39:00 he stayed with us for a while in Canberra. But the names of the other guys. I knew the Padre's name at the time but the names of anyone else never knew. Never found out.

Up to the point of the doctor had you had anything more than just a cup of coffee or tea?

I don't think so no. That was it. I still had my packet of sweets from day 2 I think. I had something I know

- 39:30 I had something to munch on anyway.

And the doctor I mean what did he wrap round your leg what did he put on?

Just a normal dressing. That I thought he was putting himself into danger because if I had been captured a professional treated wound with sulfanilamide on it and a good surgical banner. Banner bandage would've led to

- 40:00 a physician straight away. So he was sticking his neck out.

Tape 7

- 00:42 **I was wondering if you could tell me in a bit more detail exactly what your injuries were when you landed?**

Just some, well holes in my leg.

- 01:00 One particular piece went through and didn't quite penetrate the other side of my leg so I was wandering round with this about half a dozen pellets in my leg. Not life threatening or anything like that just a nuisance. And it felt like you'd been hit with a baseball bat or something on the

- 01:30 leg when it happened and it was very sore for a couple a days.

You mentioned that the Clergyman spoke a bit of English how much trouble did you have communicating and how much communication took place?

He was quite fluent in English but he brought this dictionary along just to help out and he

- 02:00 said that he, the next day he would go and see the underground in Flushing which were there headquarters were and see what they thought about the situation. So we didn't speak much more than that. We didn't discuss the war

- 02:30 or so forth or the damage round the area. It was just well social chit chat if you could call it that and he said there were definitely Germans in the area although most of them had left and to be very quiet and not expose myself at all. That was

- 03:00 about it.

What did you know of what had happened to the rest of your crew?

Well, the next day I was informed this is through the underground and after the padre came back from seeing the underground people he said the consensus was they saw 4 parachutes coming out of our plane. That turned out to be incorrect there were actually 6.

- 03:30 So I surmised that the pilot hadn't got out and Eric hadn't got out and I thought the rear gunner probably was the other one that didn't get out. So that was the first I knew of the other survivors. It wasn't till I got back to the UK that I found out who the guys were.

What did you

- 04:00 **know or what were they able to tell you about what was going on the ground in relation to the Germans and the underground?**

The underground didn't I didn't see very much of the underground and conversations were absolutely limited to bare essentials. So that you were in a position of not knowing. They said the Germans

- 04:30 were in the area and they were holding out in Flushing and across the River Scheldt in Breskens and they were expecting an invasion any time so that was that. But I came up to the part I was at a house the night he'd been in
- 05:00 to see the underground and he had some of his neighbours in there with him and he said the news was bad. The Germans knew there was one guy missing and they knew he was somewhere in the area of this village and that I was too hot property to handle and that I should fend for myself.
- 05:30 So I accepted this that I'd have to do that but then the pastor and his neighbours said no we will keep you hidden until you can be rescued which was very brave of them. And after that I was moved practically every day from one house
- 06:00 to another. You would never know when anybody. These were abandoned houses because of the floods but you'd never know who or when someone was coming and a guy'd arrive on your doorstep or at your haystack and indicate you follow him. So you'd follow him
- 06:30 and he'd just break off you know and nod his head and he'd disappear. You'd wait there generally on a street corner and then somebody else would come up and tap you on the shoulders and walk off and you'd follow him until you were dropped off somewhere else. All this was done in broad daylight. We never moved at night. Which was perhaps wisest
- 07:00 because travelling by day you're not nearly as conspicuous as if you're travelling by night. You know you're just one person in a crowd or one person walking along two people walking along the street. And this sounds incongruous but one of the worst things is you get in a house barn or whatever and you get bored
- 07:30 sitting there doing nothing. Sound absurd but you want to be doing something no matter what. Anyway, my last episode as I was led into this town and a guy peeled off next thing I see this gentleman in the black uniform black boots
- 08:00 peaked cap like that coming towards me. So not being very knowledgeable about uniforms I assumed he was a German. So I turned around and tried not to break into a run. The next thing I know this bloke's alongside me. He turned out to be a Dutch water policeman. He was my next contact. But it was a harrowing couple of moments.
- 08:30 But he took me down to the waters edge and we got in a boat and he rode me to a barn a flooded barn isolated in the middle of the flood waters. He couldn't speak English very well but it turned out he'd been in the navy and he'd been to Australia so that was a starting point anyway.
- 09:00 And he delivered me to this barn and there were four or five Italian POWs in there. The Italians had switched sides and were on our side at that stage. And they were hiding they'd escaped from a German labour camp. So the five of us stayed in this place. It was
- 09:30 you got a grandstand view of the war. The fighters used to come over in the morning and shoot up anything that moved and the Typhoons [aircraft] used to come over in the afternoons and rocket anything they could see. And about a quarter of a mile away there was a German AA Battery up on dry ground and we used to see them going through their
- 10:00 shooting at planes and so forth. So I stayed there. You'll notice that I've made no mention of food at this stage. Mainly because we didn't have any. But a guy from the underground a young lad used to paddle out in his canoe about every third day with some food.
- 10:30 There was no fresh water because of the floods. I don't know whether you've ever tried to exist of a diet of tinned peas and soda water. When you stand up it sounds like a gun fire going off. So that was my main diet. In the early days just when I first started the
- 11:00 underground presumably had given me some sugar some cubed sugar and a loaf of bread and that kept me going until I eventually reached the barn. And then I lived on the remainder of my emergency rations. The Italians not so fortunate had nothing. But two Netherlands cats
- 11:30 managed to get into the barn. I don't know where they came from so the I-ties [Italians] captured them and cooked them. So it was a delicate dish of cat food for a day or so. That was about it. The guy eventually came and said "The Germans have retreated they've gone past here. You can come out now."
- 12:00 So I went out and was taken to a first aid post run by the Dutch Red Cross and I had a wash and they gave changed the bandage and some meagre rations. I spent the night there. The next day I was taken
- 12:30 down to where the Brits were advancing and I popped up and this soldier took me to an officer who then detailed a couple of guys to take me back to Flushing which was their headquarters. So I got back there and I stayed there for a few days the invasion had
- 13:00 practically well it was getting close towards the finish. The Germans weren't far from surrendering. But Flushing was still a bit of a hotspot. If you went anywhere across this large village square you had to run because there was still snipers here and there. And I stayed there I was quartered with two army

sergeants and eventually I got placed on a barge

- 13:30 and taken over the mainland to Breskens. Breskens' a town which had been raised right to the ground. There wasn't a building standing there. I should mention before I was taken over to Breskens I was in a field hospital in Flushing and it'd been taken over so quickly that there was still a German doctor
- 14:00 there. He seemed quite amiable and quite happy to be wandering round in a hospital not doing much and from Breskens I was taken by jeep to Brussels and I was s'posed to go to an army hospital in Brussels but I saw an RAAF officer
- 14:30 wandering round the streets so I latched on to him and he took me to an RAAF unit, a fighter squadron there. I thought that was preferable to the going to the army hospital and I was only with them a day and they took me to Canadian army headquarters and there I was interrogated and given a
- 15:00 Canadian army uniform naturally there I was dressed as a Canadian private. Interrogation was demanding but quite friendly. The Germans at that stage were infiltrating people into the escape lines to get em to England so they could do sabotage whatever. But a wringing wet Australian
- 15:30 with a wound in his leg is hardly a suspect. Anyway, that was a couple of weeks earlier. So I got back to England. Or before going to England I got Priority 1 pass to go back to fly back to England and we were waiting out at the airstrip and I think everybody else there was a Colonel or above except this
- 16:00 Canadian private and I was looked at with you know sideways glances who the hell is this guy? And flight sergeant came around checking everybody's name and so forth and said, "O'Connell," I said, "Yes." He said, "You're a flight sergeant?" He was disbelieving so I managed to convince him. We flew back to Northolt in London and
- 16:30 one of the guys there was another escaper on the plane he was a Polish fellow and we got to Northolt and I went up to the air force and they tried to palm me off to the army seeing I was an army type and anyway eventually sorted out that I was a evader and it was lunchtime. So this Pole and I who'd
- 17:00 chummed up he'd been hiding for the best part of a year went up to the RAAF mess and there was a Polish squadron there and they welcomed their returning Polish airmen conquering hero. I trudged along behind him and by the time we'd finished in the mess and got back to where we should've been I would've answered any
- 17:30 questions at all. I would've sung the answers. Anyway, from there we went to London or I went to London I suppose you'd call it a safe house and there I was kitted out and given accommodation and once again I was interrogated. This time by two civilians
- 18:00 and they were quite happy to accept me as being an escaped airman or an evader and from then I was in hospital for about 6 weeks. It was 6 weeks not because of my leg wound or anything like that but debilitated and my skin was a mess from sleeping in barns and haystacks and
- 18:30 rough living and when that was all over I went to RAAF headquarters that's when I was given the opportunity to come back to Australia which I did.

I want to go back over this in a bit more detail. So I'll just take you back to the first time that you arrived on the ground and there are people there. I want to talk about the issue of trust how hard or easy is it to trust people?

- 19:00 Well, you've got no option that's it basically. You have a completely open mind hoping that you're doing the right thing. There was one incident, I saw a sign post and I thought it was written in German and anyway I stopped there and wasn't going to go any further and via sign language and so forth they indicated to me that wasn't German. That was a Dutch
- 19:30 sign post. That was the only time I had any doubt of that group. The next time of course was with the padre and his other guys few guys in the first house I went to. The only thing that worried me was a boy there about 10, 12 something like that and I thought how the heck are they gonna keep this guy quiet when he goes to school tomorrow?
- 20:00 Does he casually say there was an airman in our house last night and so forth? But apparently nobody talked. So it was trust.

What did you fear the most in that situation?

I feared most the moment of being captured. I thought that'd be you know really traumatic. I wasn't quite sure what would happen whether the

- 20:30 German's come bursting in with guns and so forth and what would the initial contact be. I wasn't looking forward to it but I really wasn't greatly perturbed about a POW camp. It seems strange. You don't want to go there but if it's an option and the only option well you've got to accept it. So that was that.

How

21:00 **hopeful were you of getting away?**

Well, I knew I couldn't get off the island. But I was optimistic that the invasion would take place but although when I was in the barn I had doubts I thought maybe the invasion won't take place. They'll just bypass

21:30 this island and get on with the war in Europe the rest of Europe. That was my worry for a while but that was a worry.

How were you able to get message out? Were there any contacts made back to?

No, none at all. First contact I made was the army in Flushing they sent a message off to say

22:00 in the usual army terms it was NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] had come through enemy lines and such and such a time and it was address to RAAF headquarters but that was the first indication.

Was that something that concerned you at the time that you were missing in action and your family wouldn't know where you were?

It did worry me but I though you know eventually

22:30 this will come out. My family had already heard that I was missing in action got a telegram over there so they were well aware of the fact. There nothing you could do about it. You know niggling doubts you know what are they thinking.

Apart from the doctor who you already mentioned were there any other examples of

23:00 **real courageousness amongst the people who helped you?**

Well, the guys that led me from place to place provided they were careful and I was careful they were in no great danger. This policeman who rode me out to the barn he was a gonner if we'd been intercepted anywhere. And people in the village the Padre in particular

23:30 you know if somebody had talked there would a been repercussions but apparently there was a conspiracy of silence and everyone knew I was there and nobody mentioned it, you know.

How did you deal with the boredom that you mentioned before?

There was nothing you could do just sort a one hide I one house I discovered a book called

24:00 The Green Door, it was written in English I can't remember the plot the author or anything but at one stage I thought "If I read this bloody book once more I'm gonna go off my rocker". There's nothing much you can do. You were a prisoner but you're not behind bars just sitting it out.

24:30 **Did you ever think you might go crazy from boredom did you?**

You think God how much longer can I sustain this? You know what's keeping these blokes from invading this island? I should mention in addition to these fighter sweeps every day there was another Lancaster raid and each night there was a battleship

25:00 called The Warspite that used to pull into the river Schedt and then shell the island and this talking to people after I was liberated that shelling seemed to annoy them more than the bombings. I don't know why. It seems irrational to me but they were dead against being shelled from the sea.

What were you wearing and what was the

25:30 **weather like?**

It was typical October weather getting cold not too cold but not comfortable. I was wearing by battle dress and also a sweater and that was it and this wretched Mae West caused me trouble. When the

26:00 gave me this sugar and perhaps I better start again. When they sent me on my travels I was given a suit of overalls and they'd take every label every identification right out of it. So I wore that over my battle dress and I put my Mae West in this bag

26:30 cloth bag with the bread and the sugar. And that was hard to get rid of you know cause you can't just leave it lying around a bright reddish yellow Mae West. So I had that until the very end and I left it in the barn when I left the barn.

27:00 **What was your relationship with those Italian POWs like?**

It was quite amicable. We couldn't speak each others language. I think it was mutual tolerance we were all in the same barn or the same boat and we were all waiting to get away. I was a bit perturbed when I first got there to find them.

27:30 You know I thought they might've been fighting in the desert against the Australians or something like that but they were just ordinary foot soldiers who'd escaped and OK here's another guy that's escaped. I don't know what became of them. I was whisked away before they were by the underground or after

the troops passed by and they were still there. So I don't know where they got too.

28:00 **You mentioned the various stages in your movement back to England. At what stage on that journey were you sure that you'd made it and you were gonna get away?**

I think I knew I'd made it when I got to the Canadian headquarters. There was still fighting going on sporadically round the island and the mainland. Brussels wasn't exactly safe

28:30 but when I got into the headquarters there I thought this is it. Complete change of clothes and shower and good living conditions. It was quite a pleasant headquarters. I can't say I enjoyed but I was happy to be there and on the way home.

Was the stress I mean obviously you'd been under a lot of stress whether or not you'd been actively doing

29:00 **anything did that affect you during that time?**

Well, I think it. Well, let's put it this way. The Veterans Affairs one of the elements in my pension is for stress so they've recognised stress. I can't say I've really felt anything different. You were on edge all the while though

29:30 trying to think one step ahead of what's going to happen or alternatively of what might happen you know that's it. So I guess there was stress there. I didn't get the shakes or anything like that.

When you came out of that situation as you said at the Canadian did you find it difficult to adjust to being essentially safe again?

No, not really.

30:00 Particularly you know having been in well Allied hands and then getting over the water back to England you know everything assumed a rosy hue. And well here am I back almost in London at this safe house where they looked after you very well.

30:30 It was I didn't see a uniformed person in this safe house. They were all civilians and presumably they worked for MI-5 or MI-9 [English Secret Service] but there was the normal messing arrangements and so forth. But I did have one incident there. By this stage I was in a RAF

31:00 grey battle dress and cap and because of my ears they'd been painted with gentian violet so I had purple ears and I went up to London. They gave me a day off to go to London and I came back got off the train and I wasn't quite sure of my exact bearings and there's a young lady walking along and I stopped her to ask

31:30 where this safe house was. She took one look at me and last seen disappearing over the horizon having been accosted by this purple eared character. That was a lighter moment.

Can you tell us in a bit more detail about the kinds of things you were asked in those interrogations?

Basically you were operating from. What the station commanders name was.

32:00 What was your aircraft? What was it's call sign? What time did you take off? What was your target? Basically questions of that nature and there was one which I thought was a catch question they wanted to know the serial number of your aircraft. Nobody knew the serial number. It was just an aircraft. It had JOG [Joint Operations Graphic] on

32:30 the side and somewhere down near the tail there was a serial number. I think if I'd known the serial number I would a been suspect cause perhaps an infiltrator would have been aware of that but that technical questions. Were you well treated and who looked after you and that was about it. Where did the aircraft crash?

33:00 What happened to your confidential books etc etc. That was it.

A message had been sent home to say that you were no longer missing?

That's right, yes.

When did you first find out what had happened to the rest of your crew?

It was till I thinks it's around about Christmas time. I was staying with friends just outside Birmingham and they got a message

33:30 from the girlfriend of one of my crew an English girl that you know he was safe. That was the first time I knew that I think he mentioned that they were all safe or something like that. That was the first time. I knew before I left England that these guys were all in the bag and they didn't know that I'd got away. They knew I was

34:00 missing. They were all rounded up pretty smartly after hitting the deck after bailing out and all they knew I was missing and first indication they had was one of the guys got a letter from his mother saying

that I had been to visit and that was in Australia.

34:30 A letter through the Red Cross etc. I understand their jubilation was mixed with some harsh words about that rotten so and so getting away. They used to say in jest after we met up again that if I jumped out a second earlier I would've landed in the Thames [River] you see. But completely untrue.

35:00 **What was your jubilation like on finding out that they were alive? You'd assumed ?**

It was wonderful you know great. I knew that some of them were alive but the indication I got that they were all alive that was really tremendous. A big thing.

I've heard some survivors when the rest of their crew doesn't escape feel sometimes guilty were you guilty that you weren't a prisoner ever?

35:30 No, I wasn't. I was obeying that well known commandment it's your duty to escape. The other guys if they'd been given the same circumstances would've escaped. The mid upper gunner got away for a couple of hours. He was trying to escape but he thinks somebody dobbed him in. Some Dutch guy cause he was thrust into a house

36:00 by some kind soul and into the attic about a couple of hours later the Germans arrived and straight to the attic and grabbed him. The other guys didn't have a chance and they were all rounded up together all in the one place and one of the guys the rear gunner he was the big guy he landed on the roof of an the old familiar rural

36:30 outhouse and sprained his ankle. And they marched my crew and another crew the remnants of another crew up to an interrogation place and the Germans just commandeered a wheelbarrow. And they had to put our rear gunner in the wheelbarrow so that he traveled in relative comfort he didn't have to march.

I'll ask you this now,

37:00 **did you ever get a chance to find out what happened to or thank those who had helped you?**

Yes.

What happened?

Well, first of all letters passing between us and then 1950 I went back to Holland and I stayed with the pastor for a few days and we went round to the various people who'd helped me and I was

37:30 able to thank them personally. I was very pleased to see them and they were very pleased to see me. So it was good meeting and I've been back twice since then. Second time the Pastor had moved to a remote part of Holland so I couldn't see him. But there's an historian or an amateur historian on Walcheren Island

38:00 and he's taken a keen interest in my activities and I've visited him twice and we talk about the good old days of when I was on the run. And the doctors son I visited him and he drove me around and up to where I was shot down and he took

38:30 Betty and I round the various places that I'd hidden, the ones that I could remember. So, and we're going back then again in November Betty and I. So it's been a continuing thank you and reminiscence.

What of the water policeman, did you ever meet him again?

Yes, I met him the first day back in 1950. He was there

39:00 with the pastor to meet me when I arrived so I was very grateful and he a very nice guy. His English was still pretty fractured but we got on together. So I've had a continuing association over those years. And I will catch up with this historian and his mates

39:30 and we'll probably go round to various hidey holes and just reminisce about the good old days you know.

Is there a certain bond you formed with that place and with those people that?

Yes, yes I enjoy going back there and they're always pleased to see me. We've got a letter from the doctors son recently when I said you know

40:00 we might be going back. Let us know when we were getting to Amsterdam and he would come and meet us and he'd drive us up to the area where I was shot down so I could meet up with this historian gentleman. So, yeah it's a continuing friendship.

Were they eligible for any awards or commendation?

They were but they've got to be

40:30 it's a tedious process. Some guys got awards and decorations and some didn't. It was just a matter of luck. I could say to I didn't but I could say to somebody you know Hans Schmidt was a great help and probably all the fellow would say that's good. But needed positive action at the line for people

41:00 to get a commendation. Incidentally, I met Nancy Wake a few times. There's an organisation out here the air force Escape and Evasion Society the Australian Branch and she's been to a couple of reunions. She's a lady that enjoys life to say the least.

Tape 8

00:42 **Well, let me ask again when did you take off?**

23rd of October 1944. I got back to England about 13 days later a bit longer might've been the

01:00 13th of November so it was only a short stay.

Had these people that had helped you like the Pastor and the policeman had they actually helped others as well?

No I don't think so because prior to that the island hadn't been flooded and there was no way they could get anybody off. It was just like a fortified island just a prison island and I don't know

01:30 whether they attempted to get anybody off but it would have been an impossible task. And I never heard of anybody and the underground never mentioned anybody else getting off.

Were you asked at all to give talks on your escape story?

What, back in the forces? No, no, no. Nobody wanted to hear.

So what happened then did you have to finish off your next two flights to get to the 30?

No, no,

02:00 they said go home if you want to so I went home came back to Australia back to Bradfield Park. Had another interrogation and medical exam. They sent me off on leave 3 weeks I think it was and then I came back and Bradfield there had more aircrew

02:30 than they knew what to do with. They were still churning through the pipeline and there was nowhere for them to go. Some went to the islands but the Brits didn't want anymore they had enough aircrew over there. And so every second fortnight I'd. I went home to Maroubra which was accessible from Bradfield and I used to just roll up there every fortnight it was

03:00 to get my pay and also there was also free beer on payday. They had so much money you know so many people using the messes there trying to get rid of their surplus cash they'd free beer for everybody on or officers and NCOs yeah. It was ridiculous. As is aid the place was full of aircrew and

03:30 one day I'm at home and I get an urgent telegram to report to Bradfield at 9 o'clock the next morning. So I thought posted at last I'm going somewhere. So I made as many amorous farewells as I could and went off to Bradfield the next morning. Nobody knew anything about me. Eventually after much kaffuffle [fuss] yes we want you to do a night vision test.

04:00 Now why the heck if they want somebody to do a night vision test they couldn't pick one of the thousands running round Bradfield. But anyway, that's by the by.

What was the night vision test for?

I don't know. It's normally just part of your medical examination to test your eyes under night conditions.

What does it involve?

Well, you'd sit in a chair like this which is bolted to the floor

04:30 and you'd have a dog collar around your neck so that you can't lean forward and there's a big screen facing you and dots of light appear in various. The room is absolute blackness the dots of light appear on a screen and you've got to indicate where they are and whether you can see them where they are and that's it. Seemed a heck of a waste to me but.

Just coming back to the

05:00 **UK in respect you'd done 28 flights was there an unwritten law that you could return home if you were shot down?**

No, not at all. I just wondered why I got the offer. There weren't very many escapees actually at that stage. Whether other guys got the option or not I really don't know but there was as far as I know perhaps I was just lucky.

You rest of the crew

05:30 **you mentioned that Tommy was a bit of a con man and scrounger what did you find out about him in the POW camp?**

Well, he was still a flight sergeant he managed to get in with the foreign POWs. sergeants and above don't work in POW camps and he managed to wangle

06:00 or change identities almost on a daily basis with a friendly foreigner. And he would go off on a working party working on farms and he'd scrounge whatever he could and bring it back to the boys. And also anything worthwhile that he could get hold of he'd bring back and the thing was cigarettes

06:30 you could get hold of cigarettes. And he somehow managed to get cigarettes and he'd barter those and get food and so forth. And the pilot, Sye, was in the next compound and Tom had managed to get hold of some cigarettes and he threw a packet over the wire to Sye but unfortunately it landed on the roof of the building and Sye got up on the roof and there was

07:00 after this packet of cigarettes this is at night and the German guard came by and there's Sye on the roof and a German there so Tom quick as a flash threw the German a packet of cigarettes and he just kept on walking. So he was a quick thinker this guy.

So you came back to Australia and you mentioned that you were interrogated back here what was the deal there?

07:30 Just the same questions. I don't know why it was necessary here. But that was combined with a medical exam. So it might have been testing my truthfulness or whether I was stressed strained or anything like that you know cause there was really no need for it.

So I take it you really stayed around Bradfield Park until...?

Yes, I was discharged in

08:00 November '45. Then I became a civilian student until I joined the navy.

Just before we go forward into joining the navy. In respect to the Americans Betty aside what were your opinions of the Americans A fighting in Europe and then B back home here in Australia?

08:30 Well, we regarded them as hopeless navigators. We were pretty sure they didn't match up to our skills. I'm talking about the airmen of course. We thought they were very brave going out in daylight like that and the losses they survived. On the ground the ground crews seemed to be more

09:00 arrogant than the aircrews and they seemed to think they were God's own gift to the local women pub keepers etc. But we never got into any real hassles with them. We didn't get together with them very often. When I say get together find ourselves in the

09:30 same area. So we were pretty remote. When we got back here you know we heard that things were bad between the troops. I never saw any instances of it myself but the word filtering down from Queensland Brisbane and Townsville was it was riot stations most of the time. But once

10:00 again, no real contact myself.

You didn't notice anything in Sydney?

Well, I noticed that you couldn't get a cab. You know if there was an American in the line in front of you and some of the night clubs would only let Australian officers into night clubs no NCOs. But the

10:30 Americans were always allowed in because they were much freer spenders than ourselves. No, the few that I met all seemed decent guys but there's always an element fringe element that's wanting to show off or yeah well show off I guess flaunt their goodies

11:00 and their wealth. But anyway, my cousin married an American naval officer and I was best man at the wedding so there were no fights between us at the wedding. So some guys had bad experiences and others didn't. I think money was the problem.

Your parents you mentioned at the beginning of the interview

11:30 **weren't exactly fond of you joining the army, air force or anything?**

No, not particularly.

Once you arrived home, what was their reaction?

Yes. "Home is the boy. Home is the hero or whatever." They were very pleased to see me.

But did their views change in respect to the war?

I don't think so. I think they thought the war was there had had to be fought but once again let

12:00 somebody else fight it which is the attitude of a lot of parents of servicemen you know why is my son

there. But if everybody had adopted that attitude there wouldn't be anybody at the war.

The war ended, I'm thinking we might actually skip forward a few years between your working years. Can you share with me how you actually got involved and ended up joining the navy?

Well,

12:30 I got into a very boring job in the department and I had a reasonable career prospect there particularly as I was completing my degree. But then came this opportunity which just happened to fluke seeing this advertisement in the newspaper and

13:00 I'd grown very fond of flying and particularly navigation still attracted me greatly. So I thought, "Oh well, I'll give this a go and see what happens." That was it.

Before this were you actually involved in the air force reserve, is that right?

They put you on the reserve but you're not active and they eventually took me off that a couple of years after '45.

13:30 I can't remember what year.

Can you just tell me roughly what you did in the reserve before we look at the navy?

We did nothing. I mean to say you were just a name transferred to the Reserve and I think that happened to everybody. But some stayed became active but it was only if you wanted to be but most guys accepted the transfer as you were surplus to requirements I think it was

14:00 and transferred to the Reserve. It didn't mean a thing really.

During this time of boredom at work your thinking never came into re entering into the air force side of things?

I had thought about that and they were advertising at the same time pretty well as the navy but I had the difference was they started up the air force had this crazy scheme

14:30 they were if you went in as aircrew you didn't become a corporal or a sergeant or whatever you became an N-4 they called it or an N-3 N-2 N-1 which meant that you were just restricted say to navigational duties or P was pilots duties and it was pretty limited. N-4 which was the basic

15:00 start was roughly equivalent of a corporal and then this navy advertisement offered you entry rank as a lieutenant. So it seemed to be better to be a lieutenant than the equivalent to a corporal.

Was that the major thing that swayed your thinking?

No, not really. I would have been happier to go into the air force but it was a better offer from the

15:30 navy.

What year was this that?

'49.

So in joining the navy did you have to go through again all the medical?

Yes, the whole bit and we started off we did 8 of us we did 6 months training at Flinders Naval Depot and they

16:00 taught you you know basic seaman ship and stuff like that a bit of drill. The navy was still very stuffy in those days. It really hadn't changed much since pre-war days although much looser and it's absolutely essential that as an officer you could tie a bow tie to go to the evening meal so that was some of our training. But basically it was

16:30 good training.

Was there a distinct culture in the navy different to that of the air force?

Well, in as much as aviators an aviator in the air force was part of the mainstream. Seeing there I think there was 7 guys on the ground to keep one aviator in the air and you were a semi-elite group. In the navy it

17:00 was different. The aviator initially was regarded as a bit of a nuisance. If we didn't have this aircraft carrier and all these naval aviators this has being expressed to me you know we could've had 3 more frigates or 3 more destroyers and once again we were sort of slightly on the outer until we wormed

17:30 our way into peoples confidence. On the other hand the Royal Navy had had aviators since about 1920. No, during yeah let's say 1920 and so they were an established fact. It's the same when the navy started buying submarines not so very many years back everybody looked at the sub mariners with

18:00 some askance you know who are these guys and which was good for the aviators cause the sub mariners got the blame for any riotous behaviour. Yeah, there was a bit of settling in time.

When you were thinking about joining the navy or the air arm of it was your hope to move on to be a pilot or to stay as a navigator? What was your thinking?

Well, I had no option I had

18:30 to be a navigator. The conditions of entry were that you had to be under 26 operational experience and what was the third one been a warrant officer or commissioned officer. So under 26 ruled out quite a few guys. But there were lots of applications and eventually they selected 8 of us

19:00 and we were the carter I s'pose to get the Australians into the air as navigators in the Fleet Air Arm.

And the backgrounds of these other 8 fellas?

They all were much the same as mine. Let's see. One had been in the Pacific and the other 7 had all been in Bomber Command.

19:30 So we were very homogenous and harmonious I s'pose group. We got on very well together.

So what did your you said you went to Flinders Naval Base what did that initial training comprise of?

We learnt pardon me we learnt seamanship basically. Navy communications systems

20:00 gunnery. Torpedo. Electrical. I think they were the schools we went through and square bashing you know marching round and round and doing rifle drill and so forth. So it was quite interesting the 6 months there. And after 6 months

20:30 they split us into two groups of 4. Four went straight off to sea that was to get sea experience and ultimately to get what they call a Watch Keeping Certificate which entitles you to be in charge of a ship at sea. The other four of which I was one we went to the UK to do some more training.

21:00 We started off at the Naval Air Signal School. We joined up with navigators aerial navigators are known as observers in the navy. We joined up with a class of midshipmen who were on Number 2 air observers course and we spent with these

21:30 midshipmen and two other officers we did signals. Learning about how the signal system worked also getting up to speed in Morse. That was there was flying attached with that. We used to go to an airfield called Campbell and we

22:00 flew in Ansons there doing signals training and also we started to learn about the radar in naval aircraft. We did as I say 3 months there and then we went to Air Observers School for 3 months that's just the four of us

22:30 joining up with number 1 course for the last of their 3 months and then we started off in aircraft called Fireflies and navigation radar radio and reconnaissance exercises and anti submarine work. And

23:00 that was that took 3 months and then we went to Northern Ireland to an anti submarine school there where basically the emphasis was on anti submarine work naturally by air and there were ground subjects as well. I think we did

23:30 about 3 months there and that was the end of our training in the UK. We came back to Portsmouth and we were based there waiting to go back to Australia or we did some small courses like damage control in ships and fire fighting and

24:00 stuff like that. There were some other aspects but basically ground courses and then we came back to Australia.

Can I just ask you in respect to these courses in the UK were they helpful were you learning particular things?

Yes, yes. None of us for instance had done any anti submarine work. The

24:30 navigation was basically refresher and the signals school taught us a lot about navy signals. Once again you can't tailor make courses and like my air force hygiene on this signal course I had to learn well we learnt some of it at

25:00 Flinders. Flag signalling. I've never heard of a guy in the backseat of a Firefly getting out and making flag signals to anybody. Did seem a trifle irrelevant. But the courses were good and it was an introduction into the navy.

And what were the key aspects of anti submarine ?

Well, you had learnt got to learn new equipment

- 25:30 dropping detection devices into the water in a pattern and they were all different frequencies. And provided you there was a submarine in the area you could pick up it's movements because submarines are pretty noisy under the water and that was one of the things we did. Tracking submarines and that was about it. I don't think
- 26:00 we did any strike work there. But all the courses we did some were a bit irrelevant a trifle irrelevant but basically they were all good stuff.
- The anti submarine, if you dropped something in the water would you pick that up? How would you?**
- Well, there was a microphone attached to the buoy. The microphone sinks but the buoy floats and any noise in the water like a submarine
- 26:30 propeller going round if it's picked up by the microphone. It's then relayed to the aircraft and you have a listening device in the aircraft and depending on which buoy it is you know where you've laid the buoy you know that the submarines are within a certain radius of that buoy. And if you can pick him up on two buoys and get intersecting lines and
- 27:00 you've got him there and you can track his movements as well once you pick him up. That was a basic anti submarine thing has been improved tremendously since.
- Were the aeroplanes also given weaponry to actually...?**
- Not on the course we did there. The fighter boys they did weaponry and so forth.
- 27:30 The planes we were flying in were basically anti submarine aircraft and they would carry if required depth chargers. But some of the early the Firefly models ran from 1 to 8 Mark, 1 up to Mark 8 which is a pilotless one and some of them had guns. The Mark 5 had guns
- 28:00 most of the others or some of the others didn't have armament at all. They were just there for tracking purposes plus they had depth charges.
- Navigational equipment, had that improved since '40?**
- No, not really. We had radar which wasn't the greatest. We had
- 28:30 radio and that was it. But they were pretty basic type aircraft the Firefly the early models.
- When were you starting to fly these Fireflies was that in the UK or?**
- That was in the UK yes. We did 9 months altogether flying round in these things. The Firefly depending on which Mark, of Firefly it was some were
- 29:00 they were cramped really cramped and it was said the Mark 6 I think it was designed for one legged observers but it was really hard the insides of the machine.
- So you came back to Australia after those courses, what happened from there?**
- I went to an anti submarine squadron based at Nowra. Then it was decided to send
- 29:30 the Sydney to Korea and I was transferred to one of the squadrons going to Korea and I became the senior observer of this squadron and we did our work up round Harvey Bay in Queensland and off the coast up there
- 30:00 and that included mainly gunnery and bombing the emphasis was on that. The observer didn't have any offensive weapons and his man job was getting the aircraft from A to B and getting it back onto the carrier again.
- So that is that 817?**
- 817 yeah. I went to 816 first and then I went to 817.
- 30:30 **So, is 816 attached to Nowra is that right?**
- Yeah.
- Just your time at Nowra that was anti submarine work?**
- Initially yes, when I was in 816.
- That particular work was that just mere training or was that because Australia though there was a threat?**
- No, it was a front line squadron. Training is done by second line squadrons. Front line squadrons you've got to be ready to go you know, if
- 31:00 anything breaks out and there were submarines operating off the Australian coast there's no doubt about that. Never coped any ourselves but in the UK this was later on a few years later we picked up a

submarine in Brit waters just off the coast and

31:30 if you do find a submarine the standard ploy is to circle round and round keep tracking it. And keep him under water till he can't last any longer when he comes to the surface and if he's in international waters all you can do is wave at him and say goodbye. It's good training that.

I presume you'd call in ships as well if he's

32:00 **in your?**

Yeah, yep. There was one submarine off Jervis Bay detected by a ship and he called in you know forces and they brought down a few ships from Garden Island but the buy managed to get away and wasn't seen again. Occasions like that were pretty rare

32:30 but it's good training.

So you went to 817 squadron with the Sydney can you just describe for me the Sydney the ship?

Well, it was a light fleet carrier. I think about 19,000 tones or thereabouts. It normally carried about 16 aircraft of a mixed variety fighters and anti submarine.

33:00 For the Korean crews we took 36 aircraft which meant we couldn't put em all in hangers. Some were up in the deck strapped down on deck. It was the initial name it was built in the UK and the name was HMS Terrible which it's not a very

33:30 prepossessing name so it was called Sydney when it came out here. I dunno the I s'pose there were about 800 sailors and very little in the way of anti-aircraft armament. Carried sonar for detection underwater detection. That's about it just an aircraft carrier. It had a straight deck which meant

34:00 that you had a barrier. When you landed on the barrier was up in case and when you were on safely you taxied. They lowered the barrier you'd taxi forward up into the deck park and then the barrier would come up for the next guy. Cause in case he missed a wire you went into the barrier and didn't go into the deck park scattering aircraft

34:30 everywhere. I've only been into the barrier once it was a malfunction on the hook the aircraft hook and it didn't catch a wire and it's just a boom bang you know go forward in your straps but nothing serious. That was a...

Was that in a Firefly?

That was in a Firefly, yeah.

And the plane doesn't crumple up before you?

No, no

35:00 the engine gets badly knocked about but not the so much the airframe and the crew are unscratched that's all.

When did you realise that you were in trouble and about to hit the barrier?

I was. You hit the deck the aircraft hit the deck and you started to float you didn't decelerate at all you still went you hit and bounce and you knew you were in trouble then.

35:30 **Just coming back to the Sydney living quarters, what were they like?**

They weren't to bad they were mostly double cabins. The senior guys had a single cabin. Comfortable but very, very warm particularly in tropical waters.

36:00 Lots of the guys the crew the sailors used to sleep up on deck to get a good nights sleep. We didn't do night flying in those days so they'd be sleeping in the gun sponsons or any spots they could find. But it was a warm ship to say the least particularly in the tropics.

One of the areas the archive's interested in is sort of the social side as well. Can I just ask you particularly in the area

36:30 **of the navy but probably also in the area of the air force, the issue of homosexuality does anything like that come up?**

I, there was one guy I was on course with he was highly suspect and there was one guy in the Sydney, he was a lieutenant commander, he was with us one day and he wasn't there the next day. He just got whisked

37:00 off. There was here in Canberra in the '60s, there was a lieutenant working for me and he was always a bit suspect. He just disappeared overnight. Amongst the sailors occasional, but they were pretty well shunned by the rest of the crew.

- 37:30 There was no, what they call these daisy chains of sort of a ring of homosexuals. But well it existed but if it existed to any extent it never became open. I read a book in the [United] States just before I came here Don't Ask Don't Tell. It's about
- 38:00 homosexuality in the American forces and that's really a frightening document, the extent.
- Just your experience with the RAF during World War II was there anything like that that came up?**
- No, there was one guy in our course he didn't survive the war but he was always suspect and
- 38:30 well might've just been unfortunate the way he sort of used to prance around the place and wearing shorts which must've just about cut his groin in half, you see so that was the only overt sign. That was all.
- And the navy and obviously the air force came down pretty hard on these fellas that ?**
- Yeah. They generally the officers generally given them they were discharged and the troops
- 39:00 they'd be sent off to somewhere else generally disciplined and I had one alarming experience when I was at Nowra. There was a guy who'd I'd only seen he worked in the sick bay and never even spoken to him and he was charged with some homosexual
- 39:30 offence and he was asked who he wanted to defend him. Much to my horror he said Lieutenant Commander O'Connell. So people started to wonder about me at that stage but fortunately I was posted away before the trial came on. A bit alarming.
- Did you ever ask him why?**
- I never spoke to him, never got a chance to speak to him. You know he just asked for me and before we could get down to
- 40:00 nuts and bolts I'd been posted somewhere else. Perhaps I was suspect. It was a serious problem though.

Tape 9

- 00:45 **Your job onboard the Sydney you were the senior observer?**
- Yeah.
- Can you tell me what that involved?**
- Well, in each squadron or each Firefly. No, I'll start again.
- 01:00 In each squadron single engine you had the CO [Commanding Officer], then the senior pilot. In the Firefly Squadron two seater you have the CO senior pilot and senior observer. Now I was responsible as senior observer for looking after the navigation of the three squadrons. But basically concentrating
- 01:30 on the observers in 817 Squadron. Seeing that they were you know really on the ball. You examined their logs when they came back. Not all the time just a random selection and just to make sure they were on top of their trade. All the other observers everybody in a squadron has what the Americans call collateral duties.
- 02:00 For instance one guy might be the compass officer. One another the armament officer. Signals officer and then you have divisional officers. The divisional system is that for every group of let's say group belonging to a trade all the armourers for instance they would have a divisional officer looking after
- 02:30 their welfare and keeping their records. So everybody had something to do including some guy who was lucky enough to be the bar officer. With the tendered perks.
- There were three squadrons on the Sydney?**
- That's right yes. Two Fury's single seaters and one Firefly Squadron.
- How did the Sea Fury's deal with navigation?**
- 03:00 By guess and by God mainly. They would take off to go to a target before they took off they'd have their route plotted they knew their airspeed and they knew the wind so they could get to a target pretty well without any difficulties. They'd make a landfall crossing the coast and they knew where
- 03:30 they should cross the coast and then from there they would fly to the target. After they'd finished their strafing or whatever they did they would then go looking for targets of opportunity and that's you know zigzagging all over the country side they would try and keep a mental picture but on the way back to the ship they would climb to height or

- 04:00 reasonable height and call up the ship. And the ship would give them a bearing to fly to get back to the ship. There was also a beacon which they could pick up. I have to be a bit careful on this. I'm not sure whether they had a beacon or not the Fireflies did. But basically they would call the ship and the ship would give them a course to fly. With the
- 04:30 Fireflies the observer had the full responsibility of getting the plane to the target then after doing that would they're targets of opportunity you're always trying to keep a rough track of where you were and then once again head back to the ship.

- 05:00 Your pride was infinitely damaged if you called up the ship and asked them you know for a bearing. You should be able to do it yourself.

What was just for one second. Is that noise coming from outside? (interruption) I dunno. Was there a difference in what the Sea Fury's and the Fireflies did?

Yes. The Sea Fury's had rockets and

- 05:30 machine guns or cannon I should say. They did you know targets such as ground support supported the army. They did quite a fair bit with the Australian army in Korea also demolishing you know buildings with their rockets.
- 06:00 They were also two guys in Fury's who were what they called Combat Air Patrol. They used to fly at height above the ship as protection in case of air attack. There were Migs up there and they never attacked the ship. Cap sighted them only once in the distance. The Cap dropped
- 06:30 their fuel tanks and we're all ready to be gung-ho but no attack eventuated. There was also spotting something that was common to Fury's and Fireflies. That was spotting for the ships on the battle line. They included the American battleships our own destroyers American destroyers and you
- 07:00 sort of called the fall of shot and told them whether to up 400 down 400 etc. All the Fury's and Fireflies were capable of doing that. The Fireflies concentrated first of all Fireflies started off as dive bombers and that was pretty terrifying. In the backseat
- 07:30 you called you went down at 35 degrees if I remember rightly you turned upside down and down you went that was to throw the fuel into the carbys [carburetor] and you went down in the backseat you called out the airspeed as you were going down because the boffins told us once you got to 320 knots the wings would drop off the Fireflies so it was
- 08:00 wise to keep a call on the airspeed. And then after that wasn't particular successful we went to low level which is generally attacking bridges bombing bridges then targets of opportunity barracks anything worth strafing or strafing. The Fireflies also did what they call ASPRO,
- 08:30 Anti Submarine Patrol. You would do a pattern round the ship which theoretically would place you within detection range of any suspected submarine you also did that on the occasional convoy coming into Korea. Perhaps the most hazardous thing for the
- 09:00 Fireflies was taking the mail into Kimpo the American base cause the Americans with their well known propensity would see this strange plane approaching and open up you see. So it was really dangerous that mail delivery but nobody got hit. So that was basically the role there.

You said that your job involved looking after the navigation in all three

- 09:30 **squadrons how integrated were they the different squadrons?**

Well, with the Fury's they had virtually no navigational aids at all except that beacon on the way back and you couldn't do much with them just to make sure that their flight plan was correct you know they had a flight plan.

- 10:00 With the Fireflies well you monitored some of the trips that the guys did just to make sure that they were on the ball. We generally flew in a formation of four so the guy in the lead had to be spot on in his navigation and the other guys you know should've been also so just to make sure
- 10:30 that they were really doing as they're told you used to, as I said, earlier at random select somebody's log and have a look at it and make sure he wasn't just there for the ride.

What was the relationship like between the naval aviators and the sailors on the Sydney?

What do you mean, the other officers or the? Well, OK

Between the navy sea, navy and the air navy if you like?

- 11:00 Well, the sea navy officers were known as Fish Heads and the aviators were known as Birdies. But there was it was arranged so that in the 2 berth cabins there'd be normally one Fish Head and one Birdie. So the sailors mixed pretty well. Each squadron had it's own lot of
- 11:30 ground crew mechanics armourers etc etc and the ship provided the back up extra assistance and so

forth. So the guys had to work together and I've never seen any disputes or anything. Well, I wasn't aware of any anyway. So morale was pretty good.

What other things did you have to get used to about working

12:00 **on an aircraft carrier as opposed to working from a land base?**

A land base? Well, you had to be pretty sure your safety equipment was you know your Mae West and you sat on a dinghy on your parachute made sure that everything like that was OK which it wasn't so common in land bases.

12:30 One of the things after a while after you've been flying over the sea. Wind of course is the biggest factor in your navigation, you could by looking over the side, this comes from experience, get a fair idea of the wind speed and direction looking at the waves the troughs where, and where there any white on top of the

13:00 troughs and so forth. Well, you can't do that on a land but you can do it at sea. Apart from that I can't think of any other major difference. It's the carrier is just a floating airfield and very little difference in operations.

The two that stand out in my mind is the take offs and landings?

Yeah.

Can you tell us a bit about how that

13:30 **was done on the Sydney?**

On the Sydney we used to catapult every time. You taxied up to the catapult and you hooked onto that and that literally threw you. Your engine was running up at full bore and the flight deck officer. I think it was he was there with his flag and when he was satisfied down went the flag. They fired the

14:00 catapult and off you went. In the Firefly the restraints of harness weren't the greatest. And you used to have to crouch like that as you would in a civil aircraft. You've seen that many times yes. Landing, you knew you were pretty safe at take offs

14:30 but landing was always a different matter. You were entirely reliant on the skill of the pilot getting you down and after a while sitting in the backseat you could tell whether the guy was making a good approach or not and there's that happy bang as the wheels and the hook you know touch

15:00 the deck and you know you're safe. But that can be a bit scary. I flew with basically I flew with the CO of the squadron who was a pretty cluey pilot but I also occasionally flew with the batsman, the landing signals officer cause they like to keep in flying practice

15:30 so I flew with them at times and other pilots at times. They were all good guys. They're some pilots naturally you might have reservations about but every night in the ward room they would show photos of every deck landing sunny photo in the black and white. And that's where the

16:00 guys learnt to whether their approaches were good bad or indifferent. You're sitting in there with say 30 odd pilots all critical of the guys that's making the landing. It's a good trainer.

What were the common mistakes made in a deck landing?

Well, it's pretty simple, too fast too slow, too high,

16:30 or too low. Not obeying the batsman's instructions and the batsman always had the alibi that you know if the plane went into the barrier or anything he'd always be quoted as saying, "It was alright when it went past me." So obviously pilot error.

You said you had one landing when you went into the barrier?

Yeah.

Who was the pilot on that

17:00 **occasion?**

That was the CO. He was somewhat irate when he got out of the aircraft. I think he wanted to arrest every sailor in sight. But when it was determined that it was the fault of the hook which had come back prematurely he was mollified then.

Were there slang terms used for

17:30 **hitting the barrier or jumping the barrier?**

Just into the barrier that's all. Probably worse terms but just a barrier. You'd say, "Had a barrier." That was it.

And were there pilots that had reputations for that kind of thing?

Some had well in the Sydney in the straight deck carrier the

18:00 rate you tried to achieve was one mishap on landing in every hundred landings. Sometimes it got down to 70/80 and then you know you're going through a bad trot. But one in a hundred was acceptable.

The Sydney went first to Japan?

That's right.

Can you tell us about that?

Well, we went up to

18:30 Sydney via Rabaul and Maubisse. The locals in Rabaul were getting a bit restive so we did a semi beat up of Rabaul just to show the flag and tell the guys to behave themselves. There was the usual greeting

19:00 Sampan or landing craft I should say came alongside when we got to anchor and there were all these glamorous ladies in their Japanese, I forget what you call them now kimonos, and navy band. They were on one side of the ship and all the sailors were on that side of the ship with the ship with a definite list to starboard.

19:30 So that was our first introduction to Japan. The old man was very good, he said when we were operating in Korea we can either operate out of Sasebo or Kure and he said, "I'll leave it to the aviators to make the choice." Which I

20:00 thought was very good and we all voted and we decided. It's not very often you can vote the captain out of doing what he wants to so we went to Kure which was a big British port and we operated out of there most of the time. We got the usual warnings about health etc and we were told not to eat food

20:30 from the or meat particularly from the Japanese restaurant while we were there. So we were in Kure and as a British port it had recreation facilities for both the officers and men so you didn't suffer greatly. Occasionally we went into the American port of Sasebo but not very often.

21:00 What would the trips from Kure how long would the ship be out for and what would you do?

Roughly out for 10 days with one day off in the middle when they refuel rearm put more bombs and ammunition on board. The rest of the time you would do 2 sorties one day and 1 the next. That's

21:30 a rough about 1.5 sorties a day and you'd be doing your bombing strafing or whatever. And that's when I say the navy was still the good old navy. You'd be out trying to keep people kill people all day and then night time you used to have to dress for dinner you see. So handy to know how to tie a bow tie. Anyway,

22:00 that was that. I can't remember how many. I did 62 sorties which is about average for you know a Firefly crew. We only got hit once so it was extremely lucky. There were a couple of adventurous things up there. One crew was shot down in a Fury,

22:30 I'm sorry a Firefly, and they were right in the area of Korean activity Northern Korea. In the backseat of the Firefly you had an Owen machine gun which was in 2 parts and like these guys did they put it together when they hit the ground and they held off the gooks aided by RAAF

23:00 Meteors who came into the act. And they had to leave because of fuel and then we put in some Fury's as well just covering these two guys with the North Koreans advancing the whole time. And then the ship flew in a helicopter and winched the two guys out. Just in time and it was too dark to get back to the ship so they landed in the South

23:30 of Korea. That was the sort of the maximum scare. A couple of other guys got shot down. One guy just disappeared. We were just flying along as number 2 and the leader called him up no response no response just disappeared. We search the area the next day for any sign of wreckage. It was over the sea and nothing.

24:00 So we never knew what happened to him. Another guy hit the tail plane when he bailed out. Another guy made a landing on the banks of the Han River. The Han sort of divided the north from the south and he was on the friendly side but the North Koreans weren't all that far away. And we always had a ship in the Han that came belting up to rescue him.

24:30 And this guy with an eye to business could see the ship coming so he took all the radio crystals out of the aircraft so they couldn't be used and he then sold the aircraft to the local villagers for something like 2,000 won which you'd be lucky to buy a beer with. But I dunno whether he returned the currency into the authorities

25:00 or that he kept it the business as usual.

Can you take us through an operation off the carrier?

Yeah.

The same way that you were talking about them earlier on?

Yeah, sure. Well, the night before the list goes up saying you know what the day's program is. And it might say four Fireflies

- 25:30 off at daylight and targets and the CO would designate who the flyers were. So, OK it was your serial so you'd go to the briefing room and the ops officer would detail where the target was and
- 26:00 what flack you were likely to encounter on the way. And the Met officer would give you the Met briefing just any changes in the weather you could expect the signals officer gave you the frequencies for the day. That was about it. The CO might say a few words and then you went to the what they called the ready room
- 26:30 and you waited there till it was time to man the aircraft. Got up, went up and got into your aircraft then off you went. You'd then carry out your sorties as I've already mentioned and then come back and land on and after you'd landed on you'd go down and be debriefed by the
- 27:00 intelligence officer or the army officer. We carried two army officers because of army co op duties and so forth and after that you were free unless you had a second sortie that day or unless you had some of these collateral duties to perform. The best we got,
- 27:30 I must mention here there was a Padre Chaplain Lake, he's been mentioned in various publications, he was a tower of strength. You'd come back from a sortie and he'd always be there in the briefing room, you know passing out cigarettes or chatting and so forth and he was really one of the boys, very good guy.
- 28:00 There's one sortie which was very good. You got back just after lunchtime. Everybody was back at work and you could go into the ward room dressed in your flying clothing you didn't have to change or anything and you were able to have a bottle of beer with your lunch you see, so that was a real good let down. We had to wear these clumsy immersion suits
- 28:30 whenever we were flying in case you went down in the water. They were rubber suits boots attached to your pants so the pants and boots were all one item and the jacket which had a gusset I think you'd call it which you'd roll into your pants and suit came with a hood and not what do you call those things you put on your hands? Not gloves. Not muffins. Mittens, yeah.
- 29:00 So clambering into the ward room dressed like that and having your bottle of beer that was the day's idea of heaven you know. No bow tie.

We talked a bit before about the well palatial room you had on a Lancaster to navigate what about in the back of a Firefly?

Really cramped. Very little room at all this is in the Fireflies in

- 29:30 Korea. You had instruments in front of you position indicators airspeed what else? Repeaters from a compass and so forth, so you knew your airspeed and direction. And there was no plotting table. You had a plotting board
- 30:00 and you put that on your knee and you used that and this Dalton computer which you did your calculations on. There was no room for that so that was strapped onto your leg. So it wasn't the most comfortable but generally only for an hour to a half to two hours. So it wasn't bad.

Apart from flack, what enemy resistance did you encounter?

That was all, and the flack,

- 30:30 the North Koreans were masters of camouflage. I don't think any guy knew what hit him. They were just melted into the background and they could, a squad could lie on their backs and just put up a barrage themselves at aircraft which were approaching and you'd never see what hit ya'. All you felt was the bang when it happened. They were
- 31:00 very, very good indeed. But flack light flack. That was light flack. Heavy flack, you'd see occasionally but not very often. The camouflage that there was one area that was a very troublesome battery aircraft anti-aircraft guns and we put 12. We knew roughly where it
- 31:30 was and we put the whole squadron of Fireflies over the area with 2 down on the deck and we never saw a darn thing. They were dug in so perfect there. So you knew that if you were hit after it happened that you had now warning.

How high were you flying?

Well, generally about 3,000 feet thereabouts.

- 32:00 when we were doing dive bombing we used to go up to 7,000 I think it was. But the normal patrol onto the first target was round about 3,000 but after you'd been to the first target you could get down to any

height you liked, you know consistent with safety. One of the big targets there were ox carts. The North Koreans, we were trying to destroy their railway lines

32:30 which we did reasonably well and they were moving supplies by the humble ox cart. And occasionally you'd find, you know a couple out and well in the middle going along a road but out in the middle of nowhere and you'd destroy them and not much fun doing that. The driver of the ox cart would generally leap out and be heading in the opposite direction to

33:00 the cart by the time you arrived there.

Was it ever hard to identify your targets?

Not really, a bridge is pretty hard to disguise and in small towns and so forth generally barracks or large buildings were easily identifiable. So

33:30 you'd go for them. We were doing a bridge one day and our number 4 his bomb missed hit the river bank and skidded into the bush and the next thing that happened there was a God Almighty explosion. He'd hit an ammunition dump you know completely unintentionally. That was just a by product of the activity.

34:00 **Were civilians hurt ever in these attacks?**

Oh, yes, yes. With the winter coming along there was a deliberate attempt to do what they call roofs off. To do away with sheltering places of people making houses inhabitable. If that's the word. Inhabitable and that naturally caused civilian casualties.

34:30 But apart from the ox cart man I don't think I can recall I saw some Korean soldiers once. They should've been in, there was a change in summer to winter or thereabouts and these guys were caught in their winter uniforms and they stood out. But that was the only human movement I'd seen.

What was a

35:00 **target of opportunity?**

Anything you sense was of military value. You might see a truck or a car. They were targets of opportunity. You might see a building that looks suspicious looks as if it might been a strong point you'd have a go at that. Troops of course but you never found them. Anything that gave aid to the enemy was a target of opportunity.

35:30 **What were the hardest things about flying in Korea and the conditions you had to put up with?**

I think the weather was the worst. Particularly with winter coming on. Occasionally, very rarely though you had to land on in a snow storm on a carrier which is pretty rough and very difficult and we also encountered a typhoon

36:00 while we were up there. Typhoon Ruth and I think we lost 6 aircraft damaged and one over the side and we had 26 electrical fires. The waves were coming in over the guns sponse and getting into the electrical system. That was pretty hectic.

We'll come back to Typhoon Ruth in just a moment but what about the cold, what problems

36:30 **did that cause for you and can you describe how bad it was?**

Well, of a morning when it'd been snowing overnight or ice had formed you used to have to sweep down the wings of the aircraft to get rid of the snow or the ice or whatever was there. It was bitterly cold on the flight deck. Particularly when the ship was

37:00 going flat out into the wind it was painful. The only thing that was exposed for the aviators was their face you had a hood and mittens, full coverage in clothing that was really bad moving on the flight deck and actually it inhibited the crews on the flight deck. But most of the maintenance was done down in the hanger.

37:30 But there were guys there the hook men and you know untangling the hook from the wire after the plane had landed and they were always well muffled up and keeping out of sight when there wasn't landing and taking's off. But it was bad the weather.

What about in the air?

No. No problem,

38:00 there's plenty of air warm air circulating in the aircraft and flying was occasionally cancelled because of bad weather. We never really went off as far as I can recall you know having had bad weather or a bad weather warning or anything like that. One early return, that was when the guys one flight had to land on in a snow storm

38:30 but that was a freak. But the, I think they estimated even with these immersion suits on that you could

last about 5 minutes in the water up there. So if you went in and they didn't get you out quickly that was the end. When I was in Northern Ireland there was a guy went in in that part of the world.

39:00 He was wearing a suit an immersion suit and they got him out after about 10 15 minutes but he'd gone. That was the frightening thing in that weather the ocean.

Obviously, in those conditions you wouldn't stop to pee on the tail wheel?

No, that's for sure.

Were there any traditions that the Fleet Air Arm had?

No, no, not really. Nothing like peeing on the

39:30 tail wheel or anything like that. I can't think of any crazy bits like that. No.

Were there other naval traditions were you exposed to things like crossing the line or?

I'd done that earlier. Most of the crew of the Sydney had been across the line so I had done it going to America in

40:00 WW2, they had a crossing the line ceremony. No, I can't recall any ceremony in the Sydney. We may have had one but it doesn't ring a bell forth worth.

Tape 10

00:44 **Brian can you talk me through the time when typhoon...**

Typhoon.

Typhoon, thank you Ruth, hit the ship?

Yes, we were in

01:00 harbour and this typhoon warning came in was issued and there are two schools of thought. The Americans say go into a typhoon anchorage and stay there. The Brits, whose example we followed, said go out to sea and ride it out. Judge the weather keep missing the hefty part and stay at sea until it

01:30 abates and so we went out to sea and the first day we started to run into rough weather tremendous waves and so forth. And we had a deck park and we had the aircraft lashed down to the deck and double lashings were put down. And the sailors used to go out and check the lashings

02:00 at regular intervals just to make sure they were still in place. And then it became too rough for the sailors to check on the lashings. So the brave officers were told to go out and check on the lashings which they did as long as they possible could. Then we just had to leave it.

02:30 One aircraft broke free from it's lashing and careered round the flight decking running into other aircraft and damaging them and we lost I think pretty sure all our sea boats they were blown away and I saw a fork lift truck for use on the flight deck that just was picked up and blown away like

03:00 an old newspaper that was the end of that. We had a destroyer in company, the Van Galen, a Dutch ship and the old man was on the bridge and he got extremely, extremely tired he went down to take a quick nap. And the ship rolled tremendously and he fell out of his bunk and broke his arm. But we didn't

03:30 have any casualties like that but it was an uncomfortable days. The old man and the ships navigator were up on the bridge the whole time. They rode out the whole storm of a couple of days. How they did it I don't know. It was scary with waves breaking over the flight deck and as I say equipment going

04:00 going everywhere and nothing you could do about it and as I previously mentioned the sea water was coming in over the gun sponsons. And there was petrol leaking from punctured tanks on the aircraft and so it was a hell of a mess and particularly with these electrical fires. So that's in an nutshell is a couple of days of hell.

You mentioned five

04:30 **planes were destroyed.**

Yes.

Was that because one of them broke free and ran into the others?

That's correct, yeah.

Why weren't just out of interest the planes flown off when you heard the warning?

There was nowhere to fly to basically. The Americans stayed in harbour, no carrier but ships and one of

their ships broke away

05:00 and couldn't be controlled even inside this typhoon anchorage and that ran into a couple of vessels and did damage to them. So you can make your case for going to sea or staying in harbour. Typhoon anchorage and trying to ride it out. Cause in a typhoon anchorage, any anchorage, you don't have much room to maneuver and you can put on all the power on the engines that you could

05:30 but sometimes you're just stemming the tide just going up and down in the one spot or sometimes being blown sideways. So that was Typhoon Ruth.

Seasickness onboard?

No, didn't encounter any didn't see any. I have seen seasickness at sea which has been pretty bad. But didn't spot any on the typhoon Ruth.

06:00 **OK. Damage, other than losing the five aircraft you mentioned electrical fires ?**

And losing all our sea boats as well. That was about it I think that was enough.

The electrical fires, how did you put them out obviously not with water?

No, couldn't do much about it. We did have some extinguishers for electrical

06:30 fires and they were used but they were relatively efficient but the fires pretty well put themselves out after a while.

In Japan, was that where you sort of took R&R [Rest and Recreation] and time to rest?

That's right yes. We'd get 10 days in harbour I think it was. I went on one R&R trip that was up to Kyoto which was the

07:00 cultural capital of old Japan and there were only about 4 Australians went on that 4 or 5. And we joined up there with the American marine aviators who were up there on R&R also so the Australians and the American marines got on very well together and we had a very good time

07:30 in Kyoto. We didn't see much of the culture but the rest was OK.

Can you tell me anything just about the brothels and stuff in Japan?

There were plenty of them and girls offering themselves and they'd come up and proposition you and some of these geisha houses, they weren't geisha houses at

08:00 all, they were pretty well brothels and some of the hotels in Tokyo were much the same. Even the big hotels. Japanese language was somewhat fractured. One of our guys was approached by a lady of the night, this is in Kure, and she offered herself for say 6,000 won which was about 3 times

08:30 the going price and he said, "6,000 won must be jewel encrusted." "Yes sir, yes sir jewel encrusted." She was quite happy to agree with what he was saying but yeah there was lots of prostitutes and lots of brothels in the... I know of one occasion

09:00 where some senior officers went into one of these geisha houses and there was a steam bath in there and they were fooling around in the steam bath and some of the young officers had seen them going in there. And the steam was generated from fuel by fire under the house, you know heating the water and so forth and these young guys

09:30 guys worked like navvies piling on the fuel onto the fire just to make it awkward for the guys above that were sort of getting par boiled by them. However, lack of discipline.

And given Japan's involvement in World War II and a lot of fellas sort of feeling sour towards them because of that was there any sort of treatment of Japanese

10:00 **people?**

No, we pretty well stuck to ourselves. When we were up there in Korea and operating out of Japan the Japanese tended to be very subservient. "Yes sir. No sir." "Three bags full," and always very respectful. I went back there in the Vengeance and that was after the a carrier that was after the

10:30 occupation had finished and they were completely different then. They're none of this being subver whatever the word was to the occidentals, they were back to their full well semi-militaristic life.

In Korea, did you work with the Americans much?

Well, they'd be we'd go to

11:00 sea with the carrier in the centre and a screen of vessels around us and some of those ships were American. You'd have a screen might have Brits Americans Dutch and Australians but that was the only contact we had with them at sea. But ashore in Sasebo, which was an American port, we used to go into their officers Club there

11:30 and socialise with them and we all got on very well together.

Had they changed much from your experience of World War II?

No, just the same. Although they didn't have the opportunity to be what shall we say? A bit as flamboyant as they were in WW2 because there weren't all that many people to impress and you had a limited amount of money.

12:00 You only had certain military cash so the dollar meant nothing there. This BAFs they called them for us for British Armed Forces and they were currency but you could only use 'em in Japan and you couldn't horde them away

12:30 because every say 3 or 4 months they'd change the colour of the notes so you had to hand in your old ones. And if you arrived with a roll that would choke a horse you were immediately suspect you see. They'd only accept so much. That was the currency problem. But no, we found out they were pretty good guys all in all.

Did you have in Korea a cause

13:00 **that you were fighting for? Did you know what you were actually fighting for?**

Yes that was instilled into you it was the Communist threat coming down and the domino effect was well documented or exploited. But basically as a full time professional aviator your put that to one side. You're just going out there to bomb

13:30 and strafe and so forth and politics are furthest from your mind. It's survival that's the key. You're fighting for you. I don't think we ever had we never got any patriotic fervor installed or instilled into us by the old man or visiting admirals or anything like that.

14:00 We had one visit from a senator who came up to visit the Aussies, we were in Kure at the time the Aussie troops there. And he was a good as 10 men short. We were all fall in on the flight deck the whole ships crew and this guy said, oh congratulated us on what a good job we were doing and how tough

14:30 rough it was for you being up here at this time of the year but you must remember I had to give up Christmas with my family to come up. Oh boy. That went down like a led balloon. You'd think he'd know better than to make a statement like that. I can't remember whether he was Liberal or Labour but the whole ships company changed their vote I'm sure at the next election.

How long did you serve in Korea?

15:00 We got there in October and we got back here in late February or early March, about 5 months, yeah 5 and a bit months.

Who replaced you?

An English carrier the Glory, we relieved Glory in Japan and then Glory came down to Sydney for refit and then came back

15:30 to Korea and took over from us again. So they did two tours and we only did the one. Sydney did a second trip to Korea but by that time the war was over and they didn't see any action.

And what happened to you after you returned home with the Sydney?

I stayed with 817 as senior O [officer] and we

16:00 were based at Nowra and then I got the job of operations officer at Nowra. Then I went to navy office, the air staff at navy Office in Melbourne and then I got a sudden quick draft to the

16:30 Vengeance. I went to Vengeance as the operations officer and as they said we went to Japan and we brought 77 RAAF Squadron back. They were flying, what was it? Meteors, I think at the time. I'm not sure, well anyway whatever they were flying they couldn't fly back to Australia they didn't have the legs. So we embarked all their aircraft and

17:00 stores and squadron personnel and brought them back. After that I went to England and 816 was forming up as a gannet squadron and I got the job as commander of this gannet squadron. I was the first

17:30 Australian Observer to get Commander of a squadron. Looks like the pilots union was gonna call everybody out on strike cause they saw this as a threat to their sovereignty. Anyway, we worked up in Cornwall and Northern Ireland and then we came back in Melbourne which didn't do any flying,

18:00 it was just transit virtually. Back to Australia on leave and then we went off in Melbourne. Melbourne ship that was the new carrier up round the New Guinea South East Asia and we came back and I was where I was

18:30 posted somewhere. Yes, I stayed on the Melbourne as operations officer and then after that was over the rest of my that was the end of my sea time the rest was in shore jobs in well Watsons Bay, that was

tough and Navy Office Melbourne. Navy Office Melbourne where I finished my time. That was the navy for me.

19:00 **Just before we just discuss those position briefly. The 816 Squadron went in the UK when you were given the top job there. How come you were given that rather than a pilot?**

I'm so handsome and fascinating.

I know that now.

I don't know. The top brass apparently thought it was time an observer had a chance at running a squadron.

19:30 It had always been pilots. It was not wasn't unusual in the Royal Navy to have an observer in charge. The Americans I met almost fainted when they found out as a navigator I was CO of the squadron. But it was very good. I had a very good squadron. Very good

20:00 mob.

And how did your role change once you stopped flying and you were at Watsons Bay and?

Well, Watsons Bay I was they had what they called an Action Speed Tactical Trainer, they had a series of cubicles which were blocked off which they had the 8 of them I think they had ships operations room. They had two submarine operations room and

20:30 one aircraft operations room and they were given a scenario and the game would start and any movement in the ships cubicle say on the wheel was reflected through optical means up onto a large screen. So you could watch the progress of this battle you know if you were on the staff seeing how they maneuvered their aircraft ships and so forth.

21:00 The guys couldn't see one another they couldn't see the big screen and the ships operations teams used to come and man these cubicles but the was the ladies the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Air Force] lady sailors who actually did the work in the cubicles you know steering the ship and things like that.

21:30 And the ops team would give the directions and then the ladies would carry out the and after they'd been there a couple of years they knew more about operating ships and aircraft than these high price guys that came from the ops rooms. That was very pleasant. I enjoyed that. And then I also went to AJAS which is

22:00 Australian Joint Anti Submarine School that was run by the RAAF and the RAN [Royal Australian Navy], that was quite good. We had RAAF, RAF, US Submariner Royal Navy shipmen, Australian

22:30 shipmen. So it was quite an international gathering and but AJAS I was they had every year senior officer study period. You had to be a captain or above to attend this august study period and it was quite enjoyable

23:00 as a lieutenant commander to get out there and lecture admirals on how they should run their ships and so forth. And also the air force blokes giving their group captains and air vice marshal's you know a bit of stick for doing something wrong. That was quite good. Then eventually I went to Navy Office to get into electronic

23:30 data processing. That's where I spent my 2 years is the normal appointment but I finished up doing near 5 years doing 5 years because I was stuck into a project which I couldn't get out of. Actually, I had to sign on for an extra year to finish the thing. So that was the navy except I went on the reserve for 5 years which meant that

24:00 I used to go flying for 2 weeks every year which made a pleasant break from working amongst the machines. Then it all came to an end.

Excellent. Just a few general questions. In respect to the Fleet Air Arm were you sad when that came to an end with the HMAS Melbourne?

Yes. I didn't agree with the decision.

24:30 There was lots of political pressure as you're probably aware. The air force were much more skilled than the navy in lobbying and they were very good and well their for want of a better word their propaganda succeeded. The Melbourne Fleet Air Arm was

25:00 abandoned or abolished on two occasions. The first time they rescinded the decision. The second time that was the end. One of the basic arguments was expense that to make a carrier pretty safe at sea you've got to have about 4 ships around it all the time and that's quite a drain on man power.

25:30 That's one of the reasons. A pretty critical one too. But it was a sad day. I was went to the farewell aboard the HMAS Melbourne. It was a very good party. You had to be a survivor from the Melbourne, nobody else invited except some of the top brass and the finale was when the

26:00 ships band played The Old Grey Mare, "she ain't what she used to be". So it went off on a cheerful note even a sorrowful occasion.

During your wartime experience were there any songs that you can remember you used to sing?

Not here. There was all sorts of barrack room ballads most of which had possibly sexual connotations

26:30 or were rude in all sorts of respects.

I realise that. Important for the archive though just to collect these things to know what was sung could you share one or two of them with me?

You don't want me to sing them of course?

If you could give me the tune that would help not just words.

Well, I think the filthiest one was the Ball of Carrie Muir. If you can ever get the words to that. What else was there?

27:00 It's a pity my friend Digger Bennet is not still with us he had a copy of every rude ballad that you could possibly imagine which he copied down assiduously into a notebook. I can't get hold of that one. I must thinking that one the Ball of Carrie Muir that was. But in your training days, you know you were sent out to do a route

27:30 march or something like that they guys'd sing along lustily generally in a barrack room ballad, not the correct words. But there was one it wasn't a bawdy song it was the Fleet Air Arm song. And that rambled on and on. That was about difficulties in the Fleet Air Arm. "I fly for a living I don't fly for fun. I'm not very anxious

28:00 to hack down the Hun [German]. And as for deck landings at night in the dark I told wings this morning stuff that for a lark." That goes on for about 7 or 8 verses. I'm surprised I can't remember some of the more bawdy ones. I'll get Betty and ask what she's heard me singing in the shower recently. Dear, that's dreadful my memory fails

28:30 at a critical moment.

So if we strip you off and put you in the shower you can probably remember one or two?

Yes.

Just another general question it's obviously for the archive. What would you like to say to future generations about war?

War is something to be avoided at all costs. The carnage is dreadful.

29:00 Nobody really wins a war but to quote an old communist saying, "You can die on your feet or you can live on your knees." You should keep that phrase in mind if you're ever forced into the position of having to go to war. But to be avoided at all times.

29:30 The pay is good but the after effects are not so good.

Given you quoted a communist phrase, was the Korean War worth fighting?

Now that's a good one. I think we achieved ambition or our we got we stopped the using the loose phrase, the Red Horde [communists], from

30:00 spreading a little bit further. But OK so war's are breaking out everywhere now. North Korea and South Korea are just at each others throat. The Americans are no longer the saviour of North of South Korea. No, not my, well I s'pose war or the threat of war have given me a great

30:30 lifestyle but I've never suffered any great trauma but lots of people have lots of people didn't know why they were fighting or why they were in a foreign country. So keep out of it if you can with honour but otherwise die on your feet.

31:00 **Do you have any traumas from your World War II experience nightmares and those sorts of things?**

No, none at all. I've been completely free of that. No worries. I know guys that do have but. After I got out of the air force back at work I had a minor breakdown and was put off work

31:30 for 3 weeks but that was all. That was just well 3 weeks in a lifetime it's not very much.

Any other thoughts you'd like to add to the archive?

My philosophy? I think not. I think that my philosophy on my wartime or anybody's wartime has been expressed

32:00 and no, I don't think I could add anymore except to barrack for South Sydney.

I think we'll cut that last bit out.

Censored.

Thank you for your time.

OK, it's a pleasure.

INTERVIEW ENDS