Australians at War Film Archive

John MacDonald - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:35 **Okay, so we'll start off with this life overview that we talked about and I'll get you to sum up for me, starting with where you were born and where you grew up.**

Right, well I was born in Melbourne of two country born families, original Australians, which makes me

01:00 fourth generation and they both had farms. Their family is still there, some of them and the nearest city or town really in those days was Stawell in the Wimmera but it was safer to come to Melbourne for childbirth, which my mother did. And I was born there and we went back to the country and we lived

01:30 in the Wimmera, in the Mallee during the Depression, because my father and his three brothers had to sell up because they couldn't maintain the farm and they split up. One became a Presbyterian minister and another one became a sign writer and lecturer at

02:00 Melbourne Technical College, as it was then, and the youngest one was killed on the farm. And my father came to Melbourne without any training whatsoever, other than as a young farmer with no farm and

02:30 he bought, he had money because he bought a Oldsmobile taxi and a licence to run it and that's what he did for as long as I remember. That's all he did, bought new cars and licences and made a good living. So my two brothers,

03:00 my sister is a nurse, my two brothers, well the eldest one became a school principal and the second one, now deceased, was a electrical engineer. So we sort of survived and grew up in Melbourne really, but always had a hankering for the country and we used to go back to Stawell and Wallaroo

03:30 where my people were, had their roots from.

And tell me about when you joined the army and a few brief sentences of where you were during the war?

Well, I was very unsettled when I was younger, sixteen or seventeen, and I joined what they called the militia, the citizens' forces.

04:00 And I was in the citizens forces at camp down at Mornington Racecourse I think at that time and with another guy I joined, went to the Caulfield Recruiting Office and joined the 2nd AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and was sent to Puckapunyal. I had a driving licence, an army driving licence at that age,

04:30 at seventeen and they sent me to the Transport Company in Puckapunyal and from there on, I was there about six months, did nothing, absolutely nothing from when we arrived, nothing and except early morning drill but I had this utility, the only utility in Puckapunyal and I was driving it and I

05:00 had trips to Melbourne and interstate and so on and it was great but then we went overseas to Palestine and then on upwards to the Western Desert, which was quite an event because we were with the 6th Division, being corps troops we were in a corps unit which is another division, which can be placed anywhere they want to use

05:30 them as reinforcements. So we were, fifty of us were sent to North Africa as reinforcements for the 6th Division who wanted more truck drivers and mechanics, so we went through to Benghazia and all of those places and then to Greece and to Crete

06:00 and back to, oh by that time the unit was in Syria, so I joined them and eventually came back to Australia but on the way back we were dropped off in Ceylon where some of our brilliant politicians reckoned we should stay there instead of coming home to Australia

06:30 and defend Ceylon. Fortunately for us, we were on our way, I was on my way on a ship to Burma and I found we were turned back and we turned to Fremantle because [John] Curtin, who was then the Prime

Minister, refused, he was the only bloke to stand up to [Winston] Churchill [British Prime Minister] really in my memory.

07:00 He said, “They are not going to Burma, they are going to Australia,” and we came back and I didn’t go to New Guinea. I joined the air force. They were advertising for air crew so I applied and was eventually

07:30 accepted. And I was in camp up here in Queensland at the time in the army so instead of going to New Guinea I went to Canada, which was very much better. And I did my pilot’s training there and went to Europe as a pilot and

08:00 that was about it and I’m still here.

Just take me through really briefly what you did when you came home from the war?

I was totally lost for about six months, completely lost. After

08:30 five and a half years in the services I didn’t know where I was, didn’t know what to do and I didn’t really have any commercial training anyway. So I finally got into selling jobs, sales and all sorts of, mainly food stuffs and so on, and finally got into a company where, a medium sized company, where I became the general manager

09:00 eventually, after a lot of hard work and study. And three years I was there, a Melbourne company, and it didn’t seem to fill the bill and I applied with a job with the Trade Commissioner Service, the Australian Government Trade Commission Service

09:30 and after twelve months I got called up, a phone call from my regional office, “Would I consider going to Singapore and becoming a Trade Commissioner?” And I said, “Yes,” grabbed it and at that time I had three children, and happily married and we packed up and went off to Singapore. And lived there, very nicely, in a beautiful home

10:00 which had been occupied by British army officers, three bedroom, three bathroom, that type of living. The Australian High Commissioner there, Dick Walcott, who was eventually with the United Nations as Australian Ambassador, the house he lived in was even grander

10:30 but it turned out, we found that it had been a Japanese officers’ brothel during the occupation, but that was all in the past. I was then told that I was going to be posted to Singapore, to Hong Kong. “Look,” I said, “I can’t take my young children to Hong Kong.” I had two of them in boarding school

11:00 while I was in Singapore because they didn’t like the British Army schools and so we put them in boarding school in Melbourne and Geelong and then they said, “You’re going to Hong Kong.” I said, “My wife will not go to Hong Kong and leave her children behind.” Well, after they said, “You can stay in

11:30 Canberra and think about it.” And both the Secretaries of Department of Trade in those days, both of them have since deceased. It’s remarkable how things change and life changes. So anyway, I stayed on and after six months they said, “Well, righto, what do you want to do?” I said, “I will have to resign

12:00 to maintain my family and marriage,” so I did, I resigned. I went back to Melbourne and mucked around a bit and finally got onto something that appealed to me and that was more travel, overseas travel. And I became a tour

12:30 leader for a company in Melbourne, Trabman, who were one of the first to go to China and I went to China six times. It was fascinating, really, really delightful. Difficult with twenty odd tourists, some of them very, very difficult, as you probably know

13:00 in a group like that but anyway I used to come back like a violin. Strung up like a violin wire after three weeks in China, just looking after the people or looking after their demands really but it went great and I enjoyed it. And since then I really

13:30 resigned from most things and that was in the ’80s and I’ve been pretty lazy ever since but I don’t mind being lazy these days.

Excellent. Well, what we’ll do now is go right back to the beginning and I’ll get you to tell me what you remember about the farm in the Wimmera that you?

Oh well, the farm was just survival, particularly

14:00 in the drought years, in the Wimmera and the Mallee. I mean for a meal we used to go down to the local dam and catch yabbies because there was no meat and there was very rarely bread. Father used to ride a horse for miles to go and get some bread, and we used to walk for miles to school, to a little place called

14:30 Warracknabeal, which if you can pronounce that, I can’t spell it but I remember the name, Warracknabeal, to the local one room school. That’s how we survived in our very young days. Back in Melbourne of course, I went to the Northcote High School as my older brother did and the state school at Carlton. They

15:00 were sort of normal living days and schooling days but from high school I went on and joined this militia mob and stayed in the army for five and a half years, because it gave me security I think.

And what was the life style like living on a farm for a young boy?

Pretty grim really. There was nothing

15:30 there really. There was a water tank with snakes in it usually, coming for water and if you heard a noise under your bed of a night, you could be sure it was a snake. The first thing we did was pull back a blanket to make sure there was no snakes in our bed, as kids, little kids. I remember one night,

16:00 one memorable night, my parents had one of those old iron poster beds and Father used to hang his pants with his braces over the end of the bed. And apparently they slipped one night and he thought it was a snake getting into bed and oh God, hit the roof and he woke everybody up looking for this snake in his

16:30 bed. That's the sort of living that you did and there were no other highlights really.

And what kind of a man was your father?

A very, I think sincerely religious and honest bloke but pretty simple, quite simple, you know he wasn't with it, with the world. When he came to Melbourne and into this taxi business

17:00 he didn't really know and it didn't concern him but we never had a sit down talk about where to go and what to do and what education was about. He was just a simple farm boy really but fair dinkum.

And how well did you get along with your siblings?

17:30 Oh okay, yes.

What sort of things would you do to entertain yourselves around the farm?

Oh, tramp through the wheat fields and annoy the neighbours. There was nothing to do really. There was no sports really. We never had games or television or that you could play.

18:00 Never even had things like dominoes or, there was nothing. You just had to read something if you could get hold of a paper or a book. There was no entertainment. There was no sorts of groups or togetherness like we have today. I mean kids

18:30 go off to these schools now and they're with their friends all the time. We never had that because your nearest school mates were ten miles away. It was a very lonely life, living in the bush.

And how was the school structured that you went to?

There was no structure. There was just one teacher for one classroom of maybe three or four grades

19:00 of different ages. That was the system in those days but we found it adequate. We didn't know any better and we didn't look for anything more. It was company and it was learning.

And what grades did you do at this little school?

Oh, about fourth or fifth grade I think before we left the area

19:30 and then in the state school in Melbourne I went to, I think it was about the eighth grade and then I went to high school and got to about, I did get to leaving, I got to Intermediate. And after the war I went to university and did commerce.

20:00 A very patchy educational background all round with no very high qualifications or degrees but learning more overseas, learning more with other people and travel than I ever did with school.

And tell me about how your family moved from the Wimmera to Melbourne?

20:30 I don't really remember that. I just remember living in the Mallee at one time of my life and then living in Melbourne at yet another and going to state school. In those years it was from about five years to about nine or something I don't remember really.

21:00 **And in what ways did your life change living in Melbourne?**

Oh, I suppose just excitement. Just living in a city with people and traffic and those things, it was all new and it was enjoyable really. I

21:30 found my younger life in Melbourne quite enjoyable.

Tell me some of the things that you enjoyed about life in Melbourne, some of things that you'd get up to or take part in?

Well, one of the things I do remember is myself and my two brothers, Brett asked me on the phone, I think he asked me what we did for pocket money. Well, we had no pocket money.

22:00 I don’t ever remember getting pocket money all my life until we decided, well my elder brother leading us, Fraser, we sold Heralds in Swanston Street from a newsagent’s in. I don’t know if you know Melbourne very well but our stand, you had stands

22:30 and you had certain streets where you operated and that’s all, very strictly controlled, even in those days. Well, we used to get our papers from a newsagent’s at the end of Little Bourke Street, around Franklin Street, no Russell Street, come down China Town and I’ll tell you what.

23:00 It’s hard to believe now but we felt safer selling papers down China Town in the restaurants, the old cafes, the opium dens. We used to go into these opium dens and they used to be smoking their bubble pipes and sleeping and we felt safer there and they made us more friendly because we were

23:30 young boys. And it was a tradition of Chinese culture and we used to sell our papers down there and go down onto Swanston Street and that was our stand, between Little Bourke Street and Bourke Street, and I remember very well. And Fine and Gibson’s was the big store on the corner of Bourke Street and that was our stand and you dare not move out of that stand because you’d

24:00 get a few kicks in the bum if you moved into somebody else’s territory, onto somebody else’s stand. But where we used to make a lot of sales in those days, well Melbourne, Swanston Street still is the main north south thoroughfare, unless it’s been bypassed. In those days the traffic used to come down from Moonee Valley Racecourse and Flemington, Wednesdays and Saturdays and I remember it well and

24:30 in those days the old cars had running boards and they had door handles on the outside. You could jump onto the running board and grab hold of the handle, with your papers slung over your shoulder and shove your papers into these cars of the bookmakers or punters or whatever they were and they’d take three or four papers in one hit,

25:00 which was terrific and give you, I don’t know what the papers were worth, two or three pence or something. They’d give you two shillings for your papers. That is what I do remember and after we’d sold all our papers and paid into the newsagents we used to go to

25:30 back into Little Bourke Street, into a Chinese restaurant, a name I will never forget, it was called The Hong Kong. The building is still there. I’ve seen it in recent years and the building is still there but they’ve changed the name of course, probably several times since those days. But you could look through, you could sit and

26:00 have your short soup and dim sims and so on, and we had our supper there before we went home. You could look right through to the kitchen. There was no walls dividing anything and you could look right through to the kitchen and there was the old Chinese cooks preparing the food. They were the good old days.

And tell me in a bit more detail what these opium dens were like, what they looked like?

26:30 It was a bit hard to be impressed one way or the other but they were smoky and dark and we knew there was something going on that we shouldn’t know about but we weren’t there to observe those things. We just went in, sold usually the proprietor running the place a newspaper and out. It was just a

27:00 fleeting vision of these. There was no violence and very quiet. They were just opium dens or drug dens of some sort in Little Bourke Street.

And what would they look like from the front?

Oh, just little store fronts, little shop fronts and this will amaze you. The next street over or the

27:30 next minor street was Little Lonsdale Street. There was Little Bourke, Lonsdale and Little Lonsdale and Little Lonsdale was the brothel area of Melbourne in those days and we all knew that but it wasn’t in our territory anyway so it didn’t matter. We didn’t have to learn anything about that but we were only kids but that’s how it was and life went along

28:00 pretty smoothly considering nobody had any money. This is in the ’30s after and during the Depression.

And in these opium dens who would be the types of people who would go in? Would they be Chinese or?

Oh yes, all Chinese. Chinese who had come to Australia and had families in China for sure, we knew that.

28:30 And they were trying to earn money to send back to try and get their families or their wife anyway back into Australia but I don’t think they ever did succeed. And they just worked whatever they were doing, in the market probably, labouring jobs in market gardens and in their spare time they went and

29:00 smoked the bubble pipes and so on. It was just the way life was.

And why was it that you guys felt safe in this Chinese community?

The Chinese just made it quite obvious that they had no ill feelings certainly against paper boys. They

welcomed, they didn't welcome you, they

29:30 were inscrutable but you never felt unwelcome ever. You were there to sell them papers, you went in and out. You didn't want to know their business and they knew it. They just existed.

And what would happen if you sold papers outside of your territory?

You got a few good hard kicks

30:00 in the bottom.

From?

From other paper boys. See we, riding these cars down Swanston Street we would get over-carried past Bourke Street into the next stand and then you had to get back and walking back, you had to walk back. There was no way of getting back any other way.

30:30 You'd walk back on the territory on the south side of Bourke Street, between Bourke and Collins and you were walking in somebody else's territory. And they made you very unwelcome I'll tell you because they thought you were poaching, which you weren't. You were only trying to get back to your own stand.

Did you ever have to fight for your territory?

No, I was a bit too young for that but my older brothers did.

31:00 **Do you remember what happened?**

Oh no, there was just a sort of a verbal fight mainly, stand up arguments and I used to get back and continue.

And how much money would you be able to bring home to your family from this job?

Oh, only odd shillings, not really a lot of money but we'd bring back two or three shillings I suppose

31:30 and give it to Mum.

What memories do you have of ways that your mum tried to make ends meet?

Oh, well they, while my father was driving his taxis, well he ran out of money at one stage because he had to buy a horse and cart to get to the market. And they bought a

32:00 fruit shop, fruit and vegetable shop, and Mum used to work in that, run that while we were at high school.

Why did your dad buy a horse and cart?

As he couldn't afford a motor car. I don't know, he didn't drink heavily. He did drink but he didn't drink heavily and he didn't gamble for sure but I think the

32:30 prices got out of hand after the Depression and he went back to cars. He got cars. We always had cars in the family, which was nice in one way but he had to go back, he bought a horse and cart. And we used to go into the market at four o'clock in the morning twice a week, the Victoria Market to buy stuff for the shop. And

33:00 so his cart while he would be out buying stuff I used to go and we used to take our turns the boys, and sit up in the front seat of the horse. And make sure nobody got in the back of your truck and stole all your stuff but there was very little that we could do to stop them anyway if it happened, but it never did happen in my time. But at four o'clock you'd get up and go into the market

33:30 with your dad.

And how did your dad have enough capital to buy a fruit store?

I don't know, I really don't know how that worked out. I suppose he bought that instead of another car.

How many cars was he running at this stage?

Oh, only two at the most. He was only running two but always one favourite that he used for the family outings and things.

34:00 **What were the taxis done up like, painted like?**

They weren't, there was no Yellow Cabs or Chequered Cabs. They were just private motor cars.

How were they recognisable as taxis?

Well, my father used to wear a white coat, tailored. My mother used to iron his white, launder and iron his white coat down to here and that

34:30 was part of your trademark and you didn't have to be recognised. You just went to the station, the railway station usually or certain parking spots in the city and you were automatically recognised as a taxi. You didn't need signs. There were no flashing lights on your hood, no coloured cars, just private.

35:00 **And what sort of hours would your dad work?**

Oh, odd hours, sometimes at night if there was something special on. He never went early in the mornings. There was no traffic, there was no business in the early mornings. He would take off mid morning and come back in the evening sometime. It was a funny sort of a career

35:30 really or job. It wasn't a career but it contributed to our living.

And do you have any idea what the prices he would charge in a cab were?

It was only shillings and pence in those days really to ride in a cab.

And how much did it cost for fuel?

36:00 Oh, heavens, no you've got me. I don't think the cabs even had meters, they didn't have meters like we have today. It was just a charge and people accepted what the charge was. Petrol, gee whiz, look I'm sorry. It was extremely cheap,

36:30 ridiculously cheap per gallon fuel and fuel wasn't an item. It wasn't a problem for running a car. Running a car was owning it, buying it in the first place, having the capital to run a car because only about one in fifty families had a motor cars in the years I'm talking about. Nobody had cars because the capital,

37:00 you couldn't afford it. They couldn't on the wages accumulate enough money to buy a motor car.

So with your dad having come from a struggling farm how did he accumulate enough money?

Dad had his share of the farm break-up then and he got enough. I think

37:30 right from the beginning he always had money, this sort of thing. We were never in that sense like thousands of others were, destitute in the Depression. He wasn't dependant upon a job for his wage. He seemed to have enough money, whatever his hand out was from

38:00 selling the land in those days and they had a lot of land. They were pioneers. They broke the ground. They cut down the trees in Wimmera to grow wheat and run sheep. They were the first, the MacDonalds' and my mother's family, the Wingfield's and some of the

38:30 Wingfield's are still there. I don't think there are any MacDonald's left up there but the Wingfield's are still there and they got bigger and bigger but the banks took over the rest of them. They got their cut, Father got his cut and we never talked money. We wouldn't even know what to talk about in those days. We were too young but he always had enough money

39:00 and he always seemed to own his own house in Melbourne, which was quite a thing in those days. I never remember them worrying about rent. We always had a house, we had several houses and always seemed to have a car but we were never wealthy. We were not wealthy in any way

39:30 but we survived and we did it the hard way growing up which I weep sometimes. I don't get sentimental about it now but the young blokes of our age today expect it to be there for them where we didn't.

40:00 We just didn't expect anything.

Tape 2

00:36 **Alright, I might start with asking you when you joined the militia and why?**

Oh, I joined the militia in about 1938 because I was terribly unsettled. I didn't know what I wanted to

01:00 do and it gave me company, it gave me interest. I went on free camps with them. I was working in a factory in Melbourne, a glass company but I always looked forward to these, they had what they called their annual camps but they usually had them at least

01:30 twice a year. And I went to Portsea, which was a traditional military camp, permanent accommodation. I went to Mornington Racecourse for a camp, pretty rough and oh some other camp, Bittern, we went to a Bittern camp

02:00 which was just tents in paddocks. Anyway when I was at Mornington I enjoyed the militia and another guy said to me, "Let's go and join up the 2nd AIF in 1940." So off we went and joined up and I was eighteen and which my father was pretty curious about when I arrived home in an army uniform,

02:30 an AIF uniform. And I'd forged his signature because you had to be twenty one in those days. I think it's about eighteen now but I was under eighteen. I was about seventeen and they just signed me on at Mornington Racecourse, the military, "Oh, yeah, sure." And that's how I joined the AIF and went to the Middle East.

03:00 **Well, tell us, did you have any idea when you joined the militia in '38 that there was a possibility that war was coming?**

No, no, no idea, it was just virtually a hobby and when I was at Portsea I mentioned that I was very fortunate and got a driving licence, a military

03:30 driving licence because there was virtually, it was a transport company but there was nothing else to do really. And what we used to do is drive up to Melbourne to the markets and pick up all the fruit and vegetables and bring it back to the Port Nepean permanent military camp. They were there all the, permanent and we used to bring back their fruit and vegetables so all we had to do was drive.

04:00 We were transport of course, little thirty hundredweight little trucks and we used to drive up and bring it back so it was natural that I started driving and got my licence eventually and that was all a hell of a lot better than working in a glass factory. Then I gravitated to the 2nd AIF

04:30 but I had no idea, of course the war was on then, but I had no idea what, nobody did.

Tell us how you specifically rather than other men got your truck licence in the militia? Why you rather than some of the other boys?

Well, most of our guys in this small transport company got their licences.

How did you get into the transport company particularly rather than another section?

Somebody must have recommended me to go.

05:00 It was in South Melbourne, not far from where I lived and South Melbourne and transport and it sort of appealed and I sort of gravitated into it and didn't think about it until I went to camp.

And what other kinds of things were you learning in the militia?

05:30 Nothing, very little. Honestly nothing. I mean you learnt to live with other guys. You saw a few fist fights. I did between officers and men and there was some pretty tough guys used to join the militia because they were out of work and

06:00 there were boozers. And they used to get into fights with some of these officers and I've seen some pretty bad guys go into gaol, military gaol, for their behaviour. But the general life was just so more interesting and dynamic than just going to work from eight to

06:30 five with nothing at the end of it and nothing in between, from eight to five really. You were doing a routine job, making glass or light shades or something and you weren't making them, you were supervising a production line, sort of thing. And I think that's why I was attracted

07:00 to join the services where there was mainly company I think more than anything.

So what was it like for you as a young bloke, you were only sixteen or so?

Oh, very friendly, very friendly. I mean for a start you were usually four to a tent somewhere and you got to know these guys and they were older than I was but they were all

07:30 very friendly and you felt a part of a body, you belonged somewhere.

Because they were older were they teaching you some?

I don't think they were teaching. They were a bit like I was I think. They were a bit like looking for company as I was from a different. Some of them might have been married or divorced but

08:00 it gave them something that they didn't get outside. I can't really explain it. It's one of those human life sort of needs and this sort of filled it.

And tell us how you sort of heard about the declaration of war? Where were you and what did you think?

Oh, I was at home and I heard it on the radio,

08:30 September '39. I heard it declared on the radio that we were at war.

What did you think about this?

Oh, a bit bewildered really when I heard it. I didn't know the consequences, the enormity of what war meant but when I heard it I think it

09:00 was [Robert] Menzies [Prime Minister of Australia] declare war on Germany, I think the day after the

Brits did, he couldn't get there fast enough Menzies. He's the greatest royalist we've ever had. I thought, "Gee, I wonder what that means?" I'd seen films of the First World War. They used to show them in Melbourne and I was horrified but in

09:30 those days I realised that I wouldn't want to go into the trenches, which they showed these films and many years after the First World War. But they also showed aircraft and I used to say to my mother and also my mates,

10:00 "If there is another war on I'm going to fly," true and they couldn't understand me. "I'm going to fly, I'm not going to be in that mud," and that's where I finished up, flying and it didn't go back to my childhood dreams, it was just that I wanted to fly.

Why did you then join the

10:30 **AIF at this stage, a couple of months later or?**

Oh, I think it was on the spur of the moment. I don't think I had any motives at all for joining up. I didn't even think about going to war. A friend of mine said, "Oh, let's go and join up," on the spur of the moment and I think it was just like that and before I knew it I was

11:00 in the AIF. Not from any noble reason at all and it didn't occur to me what war meant and I didn't have any realisation that I would be going to war, not me. It was somewhere over there, the other side of the world. So I just found myself in the AIF and there I was, shipped off to

11:30 Middle East.

You say you didn't know you'd be over there. What did you think would happen to you when you signed up for the AIF?

Oh, I thought it would be a continuation of the militia, sort of thing, just continue on with the army. I didn't know what it meant really. I didn't even think of going to Puckapunyal for training. It never occurred to me that I would be

12:00 drafted into a unit, in the 2nd AIF. I just joined up for the AIF. It was the sort of thing to do I suppose for some people and I did it as a young spur of the moment, thoughtless really, action.

Where did you join up physically? Where was it?

Oh, it was in Mount Martha. I was in camp I think in Mornington and I signed up in Mount Martha

12:30 where there was recruiting office, down on the Mornington Peninsula and then we were drafted up to Caulfield Racecourse, as a member of the AIF and eventually sent to Puckapunyal.

And you told us earlier that your father was a bit crook on this idea, tell us what he said to you when he found out?

13:00 Oh, he said, "You can't do it, you can't. I'm going to cancel it." And I said, "It's too late, I'm in," and he just drove away. He realised that he couldn't do much about it. We went off to camp then and that was that but he never forgave the guy who all this happened with. They were

13:30 old family friends and he never forgave this guy, Wentworth. He's deceased now but he never forgave him to this day that he talked me into joining and when I went up to Africa, he stayed in Palestine and that made it even worse, I'll tell you,

14:00 so there it is.

Okay, why was your father so opposed to you joining the AIF?

Well, he wasn't a military man himself. He never did any service because he was a farm boy and he had to stay on the farm. In fact, neither of his brothers joined up either

14:30 but that's just how it happened. It didn't even concern me, didn't worry me and I never discussed it, never.

Was it more your safety or was it because your father was kind of politically kind of against war or?

Oh, probably against the thought of it, as much as anything.

15:00 He wasn't a terribly religious man but he was a pacifist in that way. He didn't even like the thought of it. He knew enough about it of course, that you could get killed fairly quickly but he never changed it from then on.

And what about the sense of Empire, was your family into that or?

No, no, never, never Empire

15:30 minded. My mother died at the age of, this will interest you, ninety nine and seven months of age and

every time I've said that to some people who were interested they'd say "Oh, she would have got a letter from the Queen," and I said, "Christ, I never heard the bloody royals mentioned in my house in my life time," never,

16:00 just the farm. All they talked about was their friends on the farm. Not about the Queen and the King, never. I said, "I don't think she was waiting for a letter from the Queen." She just died of old age. Her heart gave out. It wasn't bad, ninety-nine and seven months. She had a brother, her brother, my mother's brother,

16:30 was on Gallipoli and got wounded and they sent him to England and he was in hospital and they sent him back to Australia and patched him up and they sent him back to France and he got wounded again. So he came back after the First World War and he went to America.

17:00 He said, "I've had enough with this mob. I'm not having any more to do with them," and he was Australian born and he went to America and became a chiropractic in Texas, Houston, Texas. And he came to Australia and I met him, Uncle Jim, and funny old bloke, since passed away and his

17:30 wife has since been out again to see my mother when she was alive. And this was the only sort of connections we had with the First World War and I all remember is Jim coming out and telling me how big their trains were. So well that's great, did you a lot of good but he became an

18:00 American of course, after all that and I don't blame him.

Well, tell us now you're in the AIF what was Puckapunyal like? What was the initial training like?

Oh, it was just sheer boredom, just sheer boredom, Puckapunyal. Marches, all you did

18:30 was drill on the square and routine marches. We marched to Albury once, from Puckapunyal, and that was our route march, camped in our sleeping bags on the way up. Took us about three days to march up there and back but that was the big deal. There was nothing else.

19:00 I don't even remember firing a rifle at Puckapunyal in six months. The infantry did and the Pioneers did but we never, Transport Company, don't waste bullets on those blokes. And I had the only, I think I mentioned it, I had the only vehicle in Puckapunyal, the first utility. And now

19:30 they're flogging off the little utility, two seats and a tray in the back and I had the first Ford utility in Puckapunyal and it was heaven for me, heaven. And in six months I only did one overnight guard duty because I had a driving licence. And these officers all wanted to go to Melbourne and get on the booze and to Seymour, terrific, and it was

20:00 boredom, except that I had this vehicle and it made life very pleasant for me. For the rest of the guys it was just sheer boredom and I think when they got shipped out to the Middle East they were glad to go when we went. We left on December 1940, on the Mauritania, sailed on the Mauritania.

Before we get there I've got a couple of questions about Puckapunyal.

Oh, I see, you must know Pucka [Puckapunyal].

20:30 **You said you'd drive officers to town, was there any kind of "hush, hush, don't tell anyone" kind of trips that you'd be driving an officer to?**

No, no, no, you'd drop them off and they'd say, "Come back at x time," and you'd drop them off at a pub, no meetings, believe me, I'd drop them off. Usually

21:00 on a weekend, drop them off at a pub somewhere and come back at four o'clock. You'd be there at four o'clock and you'd drive them back to camp. Cause there was always a guard on the camp but you'd never have to show them any sort of passes to get in, they recognised probably the car or the officer and they just waved you in. There was nothing else

21:30 to do for these other guys, it was dreadful.

Were they pissed, the other officers that you were driving back?

No, no, they just had enough and they would have gone back to the mess though. The mess would have opened by then, the officers' mess would have opened at four, half past four, five o'clock, whatever and it was pretty grim.

And did you ever wonder when

22:00 **you were going on these route marches why you were doing it considering you were going to be driving trucks?**

No, no, just to keep fit. You knew you had to do physical training and I never went on many of those long marches but there was quite a few one day marches around Puckapunyal and the hills and that sort of stuff. That was just your daily routine,

22:30 you expected, not you didn't expect to sit in your hut all day long so you had to go out and do something.

And tell us about going overseas? You mentioned that they were pretty keen but tell us about the atmosphere as you received the orders and went up to the Mauritania?

Well, we sailed on the Mauritania which was very comfortable.

23:00 There was six to a cabin or something but it was comfortable and proper mess decks and that sort of thing and we got to Colombo, this does stick in my mind. We were transhipped onto some British India ships that on their last journey had been carting cattle

23:30 from India to the British Army in the Middle East, Egypt and it was obvious. And oh they just shipped us off, transhipped us onto these bloody things and no questions. See we were a colony, in 1940 we were a British colony and there was no politician living,

24:00 alive and dead, that would question what we were told to do. So we were sent off on this bloody thing and I remember this thing, this little tram ship from BI Line, British India. You lived in a hammock down in the well decks where the cattle had been and still

24:30 were to a certain extent, hanging on a, trying to sleep on a hammock that was strung from the ceiling, from the deck and these cockroaches were as big as your thumb and they'd be dropping down on your chest. You only had on shorts, it was stinking hot, particularly down below and these great bloody cockroaches would be dropping down

25:00 on your body and I thought, "Bugger this." So I got my one and only blanket and I went up on deck and I wrapped myself around a staunching on deck and the ship by this time was in a storm. She was rolling, she was shipping water over the gunnels, she really was and I thought it was going to sink. I thought I was going to drown rather than go back down there and we were

25:30 rolling in this storm and lightning and thunder and waves crashing over me. And I hung on there and we finished up in Suez Canal and got off in the Suez Canal and went up to Palestine.

Did it stink a bit on this ship?

Oh, unbelievable, unbelievable, that's why I couldn't stand it, apart from the heat and the cockroaches

26:00 and the stink was, the cattle, they hadn't even hosed it down when they got the cattle off. We were cretins the way that we were allowed to be treated, in that way.

Did you or any of the men know where you were headed to? Did you know you were going to?

No, not a clue.

Where did you think you were going?

26:30 Oh, we didn't know, just thought 'going overseas'. We didn't know we were going to the Middle East. Hadn't occurred to us and nobody would have told us anyway.

What about the talk and the atmosphere on the first boat, on the Mauritania as you headed towards Colombo, what was that like?

Oh, sort of natural and resigned.

27:00 **Was there excitement?**

Oh, not excitement, no, interest but not excitement. Wonder where we were going and we went off on the Mauritania and there was two other ships. There was the Aquitania and the Dominion Monarch from, I think New Zealand. No escort, we crossed the

27:30 Indian Ocean with no escort and didn't think about escorts in those days because the Japs weren't in the war and we didn't think you'd ever see a German submarine in the Pacific. I don't know if there ever was but they were certainly plenty of Japs there. No, we just went off and sailed across the Pacific to Colombo and that was it.

28:00 And then the service.

Well, tell us about arriving in the Middle East? What were your thoughts as you arrived?

Oh, interest, well that stirred up our interest particularly through the Suez. Where we got off was Port Ismalia I think and it was half way up between Port Said and the Suez and that was, disembarked there and going

28:30 up the Suez, that was all very exciting when we went off to Palestine.

Well, tell us, how did you get to Palestine when you arrived?

By truck, they trucked us up. We went from there to Palestine, Hill 69 and then we did route marches

again around Palestine and I can tell you this,

29:00 it's only history now but on some of the villages that we marched through we'd drop off water in these little villages. And I remember sitting in a little sideway café once and this elderly Arab said to me, do you know what he said? I can hear it today, he said, "When you people

29:30 leave our country we are going to get rid of the Jews," and this is as true as I sit here. And that's another thing, it's 1941, and it goes back a long way. Now, I don't know the history of the Jewish or the Arabic world, I'm not involved and I don't want to be but it goes back longer than we think.

30:00 He was telling me then, "We're going to get rid or these people," or "When you people leave," because they thought there was a world war on there but what was uppermost in their mind was the Jewish intrusion, which the Jews had every right to be there after the Holocaust. They got

30:30 kicked out of Europe, especially Germany and the British tried to stop them from settling there. I say okay, good luck to them. They've got Israel now. They never had anything before but I don't get involved in the politics of it because I remember this old Arab, what he said to me, oh several

31:00 of us and it goes back to far for me to question it.

What was your set up there like at Hill 69?

Oh, quite reasonable, quite good, big tents, very enormous tents that they never had in Australia. Oh, we have now but we never had them then.

31:30 Because they were big and roomy and cool and had a draught and we slept on, we had a palliasse on a cane frame. You didn't sleep on the ground, you slept on these cane frames. It was all quite good for the army in and nothing wrong with that and the

32:00 food was unmentionable of course but you accepted that.

And so you said you were doing training, what kind of training were you doing here in Palestine?

Nothing, marching, All we did was march. There was no military training in the sense of tactics or battle orders or anything. I was in transport and we were not

32:30 included in these things. I'm quite sure the infantry were doing it. Oh, they did. They proved it when they invaded Egypt and Libya in 1941. They proved they were transport and it didn't matter.

Were you getting to drive trucks or anything?

I was driving a truck, a Ford and they had those front

33:00 engine things, front engine drive. I remember going up to prisoner of war camps, up near Benghazi and collecting a truck load of Italian prisoners and there were no roads. There were tracks across the sand in those days and rocks and I remember driving back once, on my own,

33:30 and I had a rifle strapped up on the ceiling of the truck and I don't think I even had any bullets in it but it was there and I drove them back and I got off the track once and I got into some sand and these very likeable young Italian prisoners jumped out and dug me out with their bare hands. They wanted to get to that camp. They

34:00 weren't interested in being prisoners of war in Benghazi or Libya. They wanted to get back to the prisoner of war camp. It was very much safer but they were very nice fellows and they were Mussolini guys that were shoved into it and didn't want to and I dare say some of them are in Australia today, still, I hope.

34:30 They dug me out with their bare hands. We didn't have spades or shovels or anything like that and they dug me out of that sand, got back into the truck and away we went.

How would they communicate with you these Italian POWs [Prisoner of War]?

Smiles, some wine and that's it, that's all. We couldn't speak Italian

35:00 and they couldn't speak English. They were just in a war that they didn't want to be in.

Did it seem strange to you, this kind of situation?

Yes, it did, it did, it did. I was quite surprised. This was the enemy and gee, and they were glad to be out of it. Why not? They were very nice blokes.

35:30 **About how many were in the truck?**

Oh, we might have had about fifteen or twenty in the back, packed in.

And they didn't give you a guard or?

No, no, no guard, no escort. I was on my own.

Why did the army let this happen?

Well, you ask the army.

36:00 I was driving a truck and I had a truck and why wasn't I using it? Go up and get these prisoners and bring it back. It's a funny, I'll tell you what in those days it was the most slap dash sort of a, when I got out of. This is digressing a bit but when I got out of Greece and Crete, I was driving a truck in Greece

36:30 and I got back to Palestine and the first thing, we got bogged coming out of Crete. Our ship was hit in the rudder and we spent all the night doing a circle. We didn't know that and in the morning we were still inside of Suda Bay Creek, the next morning and why the bombers didn't come back we'll never know. They must have thought we'd sunk or got away

37:00 for some reason. But when we got back to Alexandria and had our hot showers and clean clothes, which was heaven, an army officer, and I won't mention his nationality, he came up to me and he said to me, he was strange, he was a strange bloke. He said, "Did you get the truck's number before you ditched it?" I said, "What number?" He said, "The engine number."

37:30 I said, "What for?" He said, "Oh, just for the records." I said, "You must be joking." I couldn't believe that he was asking me for the engine number of a truck that we'd tipped over the side of a cliff on our way out of Greece. And we went up to the north of Athens, the north east of Athens

38:00 coastline and stayed there for two days in an olive grove and we were picked up by some sort of a landing craft and taken to Crete. And here's a bloke asking you, "What was the engine number?" Now that's the way the army was operating in those days. I'll say digressing but that's how slap dash it was. It was unbelievable. See this guy had never left Egypt or somewhere, probably still there,

38:30 at the Chivers Hotel in Cairo, probably. But that's the way it was being run, the way the war was being run and no wonder the Germans sort of walked over everybody else. It was crazy, really crazy and that's one of the reasons when those sort of things happen to me personally, when I came back to Melbourne and saw the ads in the paper

39:00 that they were advertising for air crew in 1942. That's when I, in late 1941, that's when I transferred or applied for a transfer into air crew. You couldn't just transfer into the air force, you had to go into air crew or apply for air crew and take your chances as to whether you'd be a gunner, navigator or pilot, so with my driving experience I eventually got through

39:30 all the tests as a pilot and went to Canada.

Tape 3

00:40 **I'm wondering if you can describe the truck that you were driving in North Africa for me?**

Oh yes, it was, I think they were called three tonners, open tray at the back with

01:00 those front engines. They were front engine drive. I don't know what they call them but they were quite common in those days, in the '40s and '50s. All the companies produced them and they had these compressed engines instead of the inline motors that they have now, they've gone back to.

01:30 The inline must be more efficient or more powerful or something. They had these frontline little engines and they did the job. Some of them had canopies, canvas tops and some of them didn't. They were open, open trays. The one I was driving had a canopy, a canvas top but they carried I think, I think their net weight was

02:00 about three ton of cargo and then they had lower ones of thirteen hundred weight and then the utilities.

What colour was it painted?

Oh grey. You can have any colour you want providing it was grey.

And how did these trucks drive? Were they automatic, manual, how did?

No automatics,

02:30 they were all manual in the gearbox, four gear gearbox if I remember and low gear they'd take you anywhere, very powerful.

And in terms of the clutch, how did the changing gears work? Can you just describe?

Oh, you had to double clutch to change gears. You depressed your clutch, got it into neutral,

03:00 pressed it again and got it into gear. It was double declutch every change of gear, you couldn't just go through the gate like you can now, no such thing. It was all double declutch, manual and hard work often. With a load on it was hard work and concentration required.

How manoeuvrable were they?

Oh, pretty good

03:30 because mainly you were on straight, narrow roads anyway or paths or, no traffic to dodge, no street corners, nothing like that, all straightforward driving.

What was it like trying to find your way in the desert with no roads?

You hoped for the best often, no signs, no maps.

04:00 **Who navigated for you?**

You did it by sort of experience. Mainly you went up the coast and very rarely you went inland because you'd get lost immediately or bogged on the sand and you couldn't get through, there were no tracks. So up the coast road of the Mediterranean right through to Libya, there was

04:30 traffic and you just stuck to that course as far as you could. As long as you could see the sea on your right you knew you were heading in the right direction.

And were there any surprises about driving in the desert in terms of the terrain?

No, if you got off you might run into a land mine but normally you,

05:00 there were no surprises unless there were any aircraft, any enemy aircraft, which was very little when I was there so not many surprises.

How did the sand affect your vehicle?

Oh, very severe, very destroying really on all your moving parts,

05:30 particularly your engine. It wasn't sand like on our beaches, it was like flour. The sand, what we call sand now but the dust in the north African desert was like flour and it permeated everything, got into your skin. You couldn't get rid of it, so it got into your engines very, very quickly.

06:00 **What would it do to your engines?**

Oh, just grind up all your bearings and gears and your oil would dry up and freeze up your whole works.

So were you responsible for the repairs on the truck?

No, no.

Who did that?

Oh, we had our mechanics but we never had to repair our own trucks. They'd just throw them away and get another

06:30 one if there was something they couldn't repair. They never changed engines in that sense. If they couldn't repair them quickly they just got a new one and there was tons of those around.

What sort of wear and tear would happen to the wheels and axles and stuff from rocks and stones and?

Oh, yes, your tyres would go very quickly,

07:00 mainly on rocks, jagged rocks.

And what dangers were there of sort of hidden ravines or gullies that you wouldn't be able to?

No, no, if you stayed to the main course you were alright really.

How often would you drive at night?

If you could avoid it never, but it was routine daylight stuff. You just

07:30 didn't get off, all these things you mentioned you could run into ravines or hidden traps off the road which you couldn't see because it was only this sandy level surface and you could find yourself in a lot of trouble and I think these Italian boys knew it.

08:00 They wanted to keep going on the main road heading down the coast.

Staring at the desert as you drive, is it hard to keep?

Yes, concentration is, you can be mesmerised. I've driven from the Suez Canal up to Syria and they had a black, the road was just a black strip, the only road.

08:30 The rest was just similar open space of desert and if you stayed on that road long enough without a break you got mesmerised. The black line sort of hypnotised you and even though you had to stay on it, you knew you had to stay on it but after a while it got quite difficult to stay on the black

09:00 line and not run off it. So it sounds silly these days when you think of all our wonderful driving conditions but not there.

How would you keep yourself focused and concentrated?

Drink water, that's about all. That's about all you could do and watch the truck ahead of you, concentrate on the truck ahead of you and

09:30 might be a hundred yards away but you just had to watch it and they stopped every couple of hours.

Would you ever see things like mirages?

No, I didn't personally, no. No, no mirages. No such things.

10:00 Not when I'm sober anyway. I might have in the canteens in Beirut but not out in the desert.

Before you went to Greece when you were driving, where did you get to go on leave?

Alexandria and Cairo.

What was Alexandria like?

Oh very, very pleasant. Unspoilt in those days,

10:30 not overpopulated, just a nice, comfortable historical city really and architecturally quite pretty really.

What sort of things were there do?

Drink beer or go to a brothel really, that's about all and you had plenty of touts to lead you to both or

11:00 either.

And how did the brothels work?

You're asking me a personal question there. I don't know but I have been in them. You went into a rooming house and you waited in a waiting room until you got a call. There might be half

11:30 a dozen girls working there and finally one would come out and give you a signal and you had a choice of accepting that girl or not.

And what was the house done up like? What was the décor like?

Oh, just like an ordinary residential house, nothing special. Couches and chairs and I don't remember, such as curtains and pictures. I don't remember

12:00 that but I have been in them and seen how they work with friends and I declined.

And how many people would be waiting in the waiting room?

Oh, three or four all the time.

And was there someone in charge of the brothel?

Oh yes, there was always a Madam there.

What would she be like?

Oh,

12:30 pleasant, middle aged, businesslike, no mucking around. They were there for business, you were there for business or pleasure and that was it.

And from what you observed in what way would the girls behave? How would they be dressed when they came out and that?

Oh, in a kimono [loose Japanese robe] or very rarely in a street dress or frock, usually in a kimono.

13:00 **And what nationality would the girls be?**

Oh, I wouldn't know but I think they were multi-national for sure. Not necessarily Asian but Middle Eastern, Middle Eastern.

And from what your mates told you what was a fair price for the?

Look whatever it cost for a bottle of beer in those days was

13:30 what it cost you for a lady.

And how would people protect themselves from diseases and things like that?

If you were in the army you could go to the doctor and get a prophylactic or treatment but people off the street had no protection at all.

Were there any brothels in the area that had a reputation

14:00 **of been a bit safer than others or?**

No, I don't think so, I don't think safety sort of came into it really. It was a matter of convenience but in those days it was pretty well controlled. I mean I was in Saigon for a week, after the Australians had left. I wasn't in the army there. I was on a private trip for the South Australian Government to Saigon

14:30 and the whole trade there was uncontrolled, nowhere like it was in the Middle East. The Middle East was catering for the army basically. Predominantly it was military and they had to take certain precautions but in Saigon there was nothing, nothing. No safeguards, no control, it

15:00 was just money.

Well, what sort of safeguards and controls were in the Middle East?

Only in the army, you go back to the army doctor, that's all. There was no civilian controls in that sense, no Government controls around.

Was there any control in a brothel to make sure that men paid and behaved themselves?

Oh yes, there

15:30 were a few punch up guys in the background and you wouldn't dare go in there and come out and not pay, no way.

And how would these places be identified? Were there signs?

Oh, they were just known, you didn't have to. There were no signs up, you just knew certain streets you could go and get a girl in certain streets.

16:00 It was as simple as that. They didn't like in parts of Europe the girls sit out in windows and publicise themselves but nothing like that. It was very much more private in a sense or controlled in that way. Didn't need publicity.

16:30 You just knew that if you wanted a girl you wanted X Street.

I mean in terms of the army what did the MPs [Military Police], were you allowed to go to brothels?

Oh yes, the police didn't enter at all. Their only interest was the doctor and if you'd been to girls.

Was there any kind of repercussion if you ended up with an

17:00 **embarrassing disease?**

Oh, you got shipped home after a certain time in some isolated hospital.

What sort of a fine or a charge or?

No, I don't think so, you just got shipped out. If you got a disease that they realised was the finish of your military service you were finished in your

17:30 usefulness to the army, not to yourself or your family but to the army.

And what were the bars in Alexandria like?

Just a bar, usually a few girls there and just a bar. You went and bought your beer and tables and chairs usually and small, always small,

18:00 never any big bars, always small places.

What kind of beer would they sell?

Local, local beer.

How was it?

Not bad, it wasn't bad. I can't remember the name of it now, but it wasn't bad beer from our point of view, lighter but quite tasty.

And were there any other

18:30 **drinks that were popular or was it?**

Oh, only whisky, if you wanted whisky but nobody drank gin and tonics much in those days, usually beer. It was the common drink.

And how long would you spend in a bar?

It depends if you were on the move or stationed there. Could stay an hour or

19:00 ten minutes, I mean it depends.

How about when you went on trips on leave?

Oh, you could spend all day in a bar when you went on leave because you had time.

And how many mates would you be with?

Oh, two or three, always with mates. You never wandered around on your own anywhere, even though you knew it was safe enough.

19:30 You went with them not only for company but for security because there was always somebody in the background who didn't like foreigners, abhorred them.

And were there any of soldiers from other Allied...?

Oh boy, everywhere, everywhere.

Which ones?

Mainly, a lot of Africans, black Africans, British, no Americans

20:00 when I was there, French of course. A lot of French, people like that.

How did the Australian soldiers get on with the British?

Never did.

Why is that?

Tradition I think. No, never did. They were just so different. They think differently, they

20:30 speak differently, they think differently and this is the problem. You couldn't understand their dialects half the time but that wasn't the problem. They didn't see things as we did at all. They wouldn't stick together like we would. You're getting beyond

21:00 me now but it hasn't changed, I'm sorry to say. Well, I'm not sorry to say but it hasn't changed really, we're two different races. I don't care what they say and that's where it begins and ends as far as I'm concerned.

Would this differences that existed, what sort of, fights or?

Oh yeah,

21:30 sometimes, sometimes.

What would they be about?

Petty things I think, minor things, just some beer argument which erupted into punching. There was no compatibility really. I can't explain why but I think it goes back to the First World War really.

22:00 **And of the other nationalities of troops was there anything about the Australian uniform that they were impressed with or?**

Oh, we were always better dressed, yes. Our uniforms were always rough and ready but they were always better material and better cut

22:30 than even the French, we had better uniforms. They were sort of a rag tag mob really and the Africans who were bought in by the British and the French were, they were awful. They were there just as sort of cannon fodder.

And what did people think of the Australian slouch hat?

23:00 I don't think they commented very much on it. It was a sun breaker, that's about all. It wasn't something that was featured as Australian so much. It was just a part of it, such as your brown boots, which are now black. I don't know why but they've gone black. Must be cheaper

23:30 to buy black boots than brown boots but one of the features of the Australians was their brown boots and nice neat uniforms and for some reason, not so many years ago, they switched onto black boots. Nobody has ever explained why, in fact they changed the uniforms into London bus driver grey, the same as the RAF [Royal Air Force], which the Canadians went into the

24:00 grey and now the Australian Air Force is going back to the original blue. They're switching back and

why, why does this all go on? I can't answer.

And what were the French troops you came in contact with like?

Oh, pretty difficult, very difficult. I remember driving some French, I think they were Free

24:30 French [French opposed to their German occupiers] people, I don't know, Free French or Vichy French [French sympathetic to their German occupiers] in Beirut down to the port to ship them back to France and they were a very surly lot. I don't know why because I was a foreigner to them in what was their colony. Beirut and Lebanon was French and they were going out

25:00 and I had to drive them out to the port from their barracks and I was much happier driving Italians back in the desert than the French. They were very touchy people and I've got nothing against the French. They've got their reasons but it was the time. It was

25:30 all very delicate. See they were beaten in Syria. They lost their ground in Syria and that I think was what was hurting them, the fact that they were now sailing back to France to some, Vichy or Free France, didn't matter. It was just at a difficult time for the French. They built, Beirut was the

26:00 Paris of the Mediterranean. When we were there it was lovely, beautiful city and big squares and gardens and lovely architecture but now it's rubble. It's almost gone because of the Sunni Muslim problems, Sunni Shiite conflicts. It's all a Muslim

26:30 conflict there now in Beirut and I think it's a drug problem. The drugs were moved from Marseille headquarters because I noticed two truck fulls of them in France and they moved to Beirut and then the fight for the drug control I think ended up with a conflict between the Muslim groups. Whatever their religion purposes is, doesn't matter. I think it came back to money

27:00 and control and today Beirut is a heap of rubble. It's tragic, absolute tragedy and you can't change it. You can't alter it or bring it back.

And when you were on leave what sort of interaction would you have with locals in the towns?

Oh, generally pretty good,

27:30 yeah they were friendly enough. Well, they were tolerant anyway. They were never belligerent towards you, even though they knew you were foreigners and they were just waiting for you to go home but they were always courteous I will say that, wherever it was in the Middle East.

And where would you stay when you were on leave

28:00 **in Alexandria?**

Oh, usually a hostel, a serviceman's hostel, just a room and a bed that's all you'd get, quite cheaply.

Did you get to go down to Jerusalem or?

Yes, that little side table over there I bought in Jerusalem, that inlaid table.

How did you get it back home?

28:30 Oh, I got somebody who was a carpenter in one of the groups to make a box, that comes apart, un-assembles and folds down. And the legs come off and you can back into a small box and it was shipped back under the title "soldier's gift." I sent it to my parents in Melbourne, "soldier's gift, no commercial value,"

29:00 and it came right through the mail's services, shipping, post office to my family. And that I bought in 1942 in Jerusalem and all hand made, hand put together. I treasure that. That's for my daughter.

29:30 That's the main closeness that I've got to the Middle East service that I had.

What did you think of Jerusalem?

Well, I'm going back sixty years, but in those days and I'm sure it's still the same, we

30:00 went to the Wailing Wall and banged our heads on the Wailing Wall and to the Church of Nativity and so on. But there were so many religious groups, worldwide groups of religions unknown to me at the time, that it sounds awful now, but we used to call it "JC [Jesus Christ] Proprietary Limited."

30:30 Honestly, we called Jerusalem "JC Proprietary Limited." It was so overrun with religion then and we maintained that there's no way that Mary, that a pregnant woman could have ridden on a donkey or a mule, a hundred miles on an unknown

31:00 track. It wasn't a road, you couldn't drive a jeep on it because I've been there and I've crossed it in a jeep. You could not drive, you could hardly walk a mule a hundred miles from Nazareth to Jerusalem, a pregnant woman, impossible. A hundred miles with a pregnant woman on that track, dodging rocks and landslides and we

31:30 say that is not, in those days we said, “This is not true.” That’s the impression that we got sixty years ago, which isn’t long in time I know, but that’s to me it doesn’t matter now, whether it’s true or not, but that’s what we thought. Particularly when we saw Jerusalem with all these masses

32:00 of people practising dozens and dozens of religions their own way. What do you know? I never had any deep religious education in those days at nineteen years of age, no way. I just saw and accepted what I saw and what I was told.

32:30 But “JC Proprietary Limited” still lingers, I’m sorry to say.

And tell me about when you heard that you’d be going to Greece?

Well, we were a bit diffident about it but we were given the wrong information by the British.

33:00 We were told that we would have this support and that support and I remember Blamey, our Commander in Chief at the time, who got us out of Greece, was told and he reported back to the Australian Government, that there’d be so many British squadrons to support us. But what they weren’t told at the time was that the number of British squadrons, which they were quoting were all old

33:30 fashioned aircraft anyway and they were stationed from Gibraltar up to Turkey. That was the line they were spread on, in the Mediterranean and only a handful of them got to Greece. So we didn’t know that. We went to Greece full of beans and bitter and we were unloaded at Port Piraeus and

34:00 headed for the nearest bar of course and restaurant, terrific. In Athens we were and it was very pleasant and the Greeks were still fighting the Italians before the Germans and this was when the Germans came into it. Of course when the Germans came in with their Panzers [German tanks] the Italians just vanished. The Italian Army just gone and

34:30 when they went, the Greek Army also vanished. They did, there was no hope for them. They knew there was no hope against the Panzers. All they had was rifles. They had no armour, the Greek had no armour. It was a dreadful, it was another Gallipoli really.

What was your job to be in Greece?

Driving, I was driving

35:00 a car, a staff car at that time.

What kind of a car?

I think it was a Chevrolet sedan, running around an officer.

How was it to drive?

Oh, quite pleasant, good. Not automatic, just an ordinary 1942 Chevrolet sedan, with camouflage painting but

35:30 it didn’t do any good.

And where were you based?

Oh, we went up to, we weren’t really based anywhere, we were on the move. I was with a group of fifty with trucks and mechanics and we went up to Elasson, which was half way to Mount Olympus and that’s where the Australian headquarters were. That’s where Blamey was based in Elasson and we went up that far

36:00 before we had to get out.

And who were you driving?

An officer in one of our companies.

What was he like?

Dreadful, awful.

Why?

See I was a driver, he wanted me to be his batman [servant]. He wanted me to clean his shaving gear of a morning and clean his boots. Here we were in mud up to our necks and he wanted me to clean

36:30 his boots, polish his boots.

Did you?

No, I never washed his shaving gear either. I was a driver. I wasn’t a batman and I refused and he tried to talk me into it or twist me into it really.

How did you get out of it?

Just didn't do a thing. I just drove. I drove the car when he wanted it and nothing else.

37:00 That was it.

Would you talk to him while you were driving?

Only if he spoke to me, which was very rarely. No, not personal conversation, no.

And what were the roads like in Greece?

Poor, they were tracks, mainly tracks over the hills and mountains and very dangerous because

37:30 one side is straight down into a ravine and the other side was a cliff and you couldn't manoeuvre. You couldn't get off the road if something was coming up, which very rarely it was. It was all going the one way.

And describe to me what Elasson was like?

Just a village really, just a village with

38:00 the army, the Germans knew, the German Air Force knew and that was how they spotted us because we were constantly dived bombed.

What's it like to be dive-bombed?

A bit nerve wracking. I spend as much time in a ditch in the side of the road than I was in the car because when they saw a car they said, "Oh, senior officers,

38:30 let's get them." So when you heard or saw these Stukas [German dive bomber] around you just stopped and headed for a ditch and lay there.

You and the officer?

Oh, usually, yeah, whoever was still able to get out and dive.

And how would

39:00 **know when a Stuka was coming? How much warning would you get?**

Oh, only a few minutes and then you could hear them. They were very noisy the Stukas, very noisy.

What did they sound like?

Oh, a sort of screaming noise. I think they used to put screamers on them to make them more terrifying and then they just dived straight down at the target. I mean they didn't last long when they got some decent aircraft

39:30 against them. You could shoot them down like pigeons but.

Tape 4

00:36 **Right oh, we were just talking about the dive bombing. Can you describe what the feeling was like being under attack?**

Unnerving, unnerving, without any defence you couldn't fire a rifle at them. That was useless and we had no machine guns or light cannon, like the Bofors, nothing like

01:00 that. And they were unnerving, these things screaming down and knowing that, well they didn't have rockets. Stukas never had rockets but they'd let the bombs go in the dive, which were pretty accurate. The projectory was quite accurate and they could get pretty close to their target, but they were after moving targets on the road

01:30 or headquarters at Elasson in Greece but when they were there you kept underground, if you could.

What kind of things would go through your mind as you were under attack?

Only fair, you might think, "This is it," and that's all. You didn't dwell on it too long. If they hit you, they hit you. You couldn't run away,

02:00 you couldn't do anything about it. You were just used to this sort of treatment really. You were in awe and these things were to us at the time unmatchable, the dive bombing. They were very demoralising. That's all I can remember.

02:30 **And when you'd go off the side of the road for a ditch would you go away from the car or would you go?**

Not far, no, it was just to get away from any bomb blast, shrapnel. To get down below the road level in a ditch and lie flat in the valley and you kept your face down so it wouldn't reflect and you just lay there until the dive bombers dropped their bombs and went.

Were there any particularly close calls that you remember?

03:00 Yeah, car I was driving had a lot of shrapnel marks in it, close, when I wasn't in it fortunately but I drove it back into Athens. And when we finally got there and people were pointing at the shrapnel holes in the car and I said, "I must be a hero or something," but

03:30 it wasn't me. It was just the car they were after at the time but that's as close as I got.

What did this car look like exactly?

Oh, it was just a 1940 odd, '42, '43 Chevrolet sedan. You can probably still see some around the roads now. It was a manual, two seater sedan with

04:00 nice smooth lines on it that they were producing from Detroit at the time and of course the Americans had a mass of equipment. You could always get more equipment. They used to fly, the Americans, after I left Egypt and the Americans were there a few years later and

04:30 they'd fly in with their Bostons or whatever from Italy for leave in Cairo. And if they pranged their Boston on landing somewhere, before they went back, to get back to Italy they'd just pick up another one from the depot and fly it back to Italy. It was fantastic. We used to go to dances in England

05:00 and we would ride our bicycles to the local dance hall, which might have been a mile away and the Americans would go by jeep, two of them in a jeep to the dance hall. It was staggering the equipment and freedom that they had, the Americans. We never,

05:30 we never thought about that sort of stuff. I mean when I was training in the army and the air force, we had wooden benches, unlined wooden tables in our eating room. I won't call it a mess. We had black, iron stoves from the First World War in our kitchen, black iron, cooking stoves on

06:00 wheels, terrible stuff. When I went to Canada, all the tables, air-conditioned mess for airmen, not just officers, airmen. Formica [laminated plastic] topped dining room tables, stainless steel equipment in all the kitchens and we thought we were seeing things in a new world,

06:30 the difference in their standards sixty years ago. I can show you a photograph today, I've got it still, of the mess, sixty years ago "No Smoking" sign in their eating room and it's only about five years ago that they started to think that we should have them in our eating places.

07:00 It makes me weep. They are the things that make me weep about how far behind we were kept really as a colony. We were dudded and I think a lot of people still think we are, honestly, I really mean that.

I'm just interested to know about the officers in Greece, like you mentioned one which was trying

07:30 **to make you his batman?**

That's true.

Well did he have a kind of Britishness about him or?

No, he was a Queenslander actually and he was a, I suppose he had some sort of British background but he was a Queenslander and he was a, what we called a 'reo'. He was a reinforcement officer. Before

08:00 we went to Greece our British officer got crook, or went crook. He went off sick and never came with us and they sent up this lieutenant, reo, which is a reinforcement officer from. He'd done his training in Queensland and got over to the Middle East and they stuck him with us and it just didn't work. You can

08:30 imagine in Greece during the evacuation of Greece when you come to have your lunch, whatever you were going to eat, a can of bully [bully beef, canned meat] or something. The men would be sitting on this side of the road and he'd be sitting on his own on the other side of the road having his lunch. You wouldn't think it was in the same mind that people could be so insular really

09:00 and this was just, this is one of the reasons I left the army really, this sort of attitude and carryings on. It just wasn't right but they got away with it.

Did he seem to have much of an idea about…?

Not a clue whatever you're going to ask me, not a clue about anything.

I was going to ask about tactics or?

09:30 No, no, no, I don't think he knew where to put the petrol in the car back then.

What was your impression of these, not just him, but the other officers planning this withdrawal?

Oh, I met some very fine officers. I was, after we had got to the place where they were embarking

10:00 on the escape ships. I was told to get off the road and go back to a depot outside Athens and I was told to get the car off the road. And I went back to this and dumped the car and a British MP [Military Police] came up to me and he said, "Look, is that your car?" And I said, "No, I'm driving it though," and he said,

10:30 "I've had a call from the Australian headquarters at the George Hotel in Athens, right in the centre of Athens, and they want some transport." And it turned out that these three officers were planning the evacuation or some of the troops evacuation and they wanted transport so I got

11:00 in and I drove back to Athens into the George Hotel. Went in and found them and there was one, Major Moss, there. I'll never forget him. He was in charge, terrific guy, real gentleman. I mean I was Jack to him, I was a driver and he organised the whole thing and got all the troops out that he was responsible for up the coast

11:30 of Greece and shook my hand and he said, "You go." So that night I went and I don't know what happened to him.

Some fine blokes. He probably finished up a POW actually, he stayed but in fact that group of officers were terrific.

12:30 But there were too many of the other sort that spoilt it for them and in fact the bloke that I, the reo bloke, he vanished, he vanished. When the troops got down to the wharf where they were supposed to go, they never saw him anymore.

13:00 We saw him about five years later in Adelaide, never spoke to anybody. He just didn't tell anybody what happened or how he got out or why or when. He just left them half way in Greece. He just shot through, true. So I can't blame the rest of the officers on them, that particular

13:30 experience, on that.

What was the atmosphere like amongst those officers planning that withdrawal?

Oh, very strong, determined, in control, knew what they were doing, knew what they had to do, knew their responsibility and they just did it, irrespective .

14:00 **Was there some stress or some tension or?**

Oh, no, not amongst themselves there wasn't but I remember on our way up to the east coast where we had to stay a couple of nights we were pulled up on the roadside by somebody. I forget who it was, some Greek military bloke

14:30 and he told the officers, this Major Moss, he could speak a bit of French and enough to get through to this fellow that there was a Greek farmer running some sheep. And he used to point the sheep, used to point them, get them in a position pointing towards where the Australian troops were,

15:00 either headquarters or some office or some building where they were stationed. And we were listening to all this and getting half the story and Moss said, "Well I'll tell you what to do, we'll leave him with you, we're going and have got to move on and prepare what we're going to do." But he said, "We'll leave him to you."

15:30 And he pointed his finger and we drove off so we think this loyal Greek bloke would have finished him off because he had a rifle. And whether he was a Greek military police we don't know, I don't know, but

16:00 the last I remember of that bloke he was guiding the German Stukas with his sheep and it was all pre-arranged of course. The Stukas knew where to look, watch out for the, and this guy I think would have bought it for sure.

Did you ever see the sheep pointed towards?

No, but we could see sheep around the fields where he was

16:30 obviously looking after them, herding them.

And did you know how he pointed them? Was there a certain shape or?

No, couldn't say. We were only getting half a story through this Greek soldier that they'd discovered what he was doing. I don't know how he pointed them or how he guided them or whether he

17:00 put them in a certain area or what but he was collaborating with the German Air Force.

How soon after getting to Greece were things starting to turn bad?

Oh, within weeks really, within weeks, less than a month I would say. We no sooner got up past Elasson and then the Germans came in from the north and

17:30 just overran everything and that would only be I think three or four weeks of landing there. It collapsed very quickly.

Was there any sense of panic or?

No, I can't say there was really. No, I didn't see any, not amongst our chaps. There might have been

18:00 with civilians if they knew what was happening, which half them wouldn't know anyway. They were never told. There was no broadcasting of information. They would feel pretty helpless I think and pretty vulnerable, knowing that the Germans were coming and we just felt pretty hopeless if the Germans were coming.

18:30 I mean at one time our little unit was, the New Zealand Infantry was behind us. We were ahead of the infantry because the German tanks were just over the hill. We got out of there pretty smart but that's how fast it was moving and no, it was a totally hopeless situation

19:00 right from the beginning. There was no preparation, no support. It was Gallipoli all over again, frankly.

Well describe for me what it's like to be part of a mass retreat from a more powerful force coming at you?

Oh, pretty nerve wracking I can tell you, pretty fatal. You think you've had it. We reckoned we'd had

19:30 it by then and just driving a truck or a car against a tank is not on because you knew they'd knock you off for half a mile, those Panzer's. No, it was pretty unnerving, pretty hopeless situation knowing that you are in a retreat,

20:00 knowing that from going north and all of a sudden you were turned around and you were going south. It was so obvious and oh I don't know. I'm not a military historian but it shouldn't have happened, shouldn't have been on right from the beginning.

Did you come under Panzer fire?

No, no, no, didn't.

20:30 I didn't get that close. I did when I was flying but not when I was on the ground, later on but not in the army.

And you were driving a truck, what were you carrying on the truck as you were retreating?

Only troops, nothing else, petrol, a few cans of petrol and nothing. No food, no

21:00 supplies, no military supplies.

Were you seeing any explosions or any of the fighting directly as you retreated?

Oh yes, in Piraeus, Port Piraeus, the port, Athens port there was constant dive bombing of Piraeus, the ships in Piraeus, constant when I was in this camp outside of Athens and then when I was in Athens it just went on and on. The Germans

21:30 were out to sink every ship that was afloat or any ship that was evacuating from Greece as their target but to me that was a couple of miles away. I could only observe it. I wasn't attacked directly, personally.

And looking at it what could you see from a distance, how far away?

You could see the dive bombers just diving in

22:00 and dropping their bombs, quite clearly. We were that close and the explosions were quite clear but far enough to feel that you weren't being attacked yourself.

What do you think when you look at this?

Hopeless, we've had it.

22:30 Just say you've done it.

So did you think you were going to be either a POW or killed?

Oh, I just didn't think that there was any way out whatever. I didn't think about being a POW or whether I was going to get popped off. I just realised that there was no way out. I think that was the only port out, all those little beaches around Athens, the south of Athens where they were evacuating. And you looked at that main port and you thought, "You're not going to get out of

23:00 there." That's when we went, fortunately we went north, north east up the coast into olive groves and lay down there for a couple of days, no smoking, no fires, nothing. And because the spotters would soon pick it up if you lit a fire or cooked and we just lay there until one night a couple of nights

later and we got the nod, filed down to the beach. And I waded up to there in freezing water and go onto this thing and was pulled onto a destroyer later and onto Crete.

What did you do at this olive grove for these couple of days, what did you do there?

Nothing,

you couldn't do a thing, you couldn't move. You couldn't make a move in case you gave yourself away. You just had to lay, sit down or lay down and do nothing, otherwise you would have been picked off. There were hundreds of troops in those olive groves, just not a few.

How were they all hiding?

Well it was very thick under those olive groves, a lot of thick undergrowth and the trees were full leaved. It was good camouflage really and unless you did something silly, like light a fire to cook something or smoke at night, they would have been very hard to find really.

So where were these troops from that were hiding in the olive groves?

All Australians.

Was there much talk amongst everyone about what was happening?

No, everybody I think was too scared to know what was happening, or not knowing what was happening or not knowing what was going to happen. We never expected ships to come in at night and collect us. We were just waiting there for the

inevitable. Probably POWs, that was probably the main thought of the troops but didn't happen.

And what's the atmosphere like in this situation where everyone is waiting to be caught?

Oh, not very nice, not very nice.

And what was the atmosphere like in Athens

amongst the local Greek people that you knew?

Oh, it was quite light hearted really because I really, as I said, I don't think they knew what was happening. They were waving from the windows and, "You're here to save us," I suppose they were thinking and worse was to come for them. They probably finished up in some slave camp or something or brothel. Oh no, it was very sad, very

sad, shocking really.

And what was this boat that came in the night? What was it like?

Well it was a landing craft that took us out to a destroyer. A landing craft with the front down and you climbed in and then went out about a mile or so to a destroyer offshore and all we could see was a light flicking on

the horizon. That's the only way we knew there was a ship there and that would be guiding the landing craft back to where it was. And there was only one, one destroyer and they took us non-stop to Crete, which is about eight hours sailing along the coast.

Well tell us about this landing craft arriving. I mean how did you know it was for you? What was said?

Oh, the officers knew, these guys that had bought us from Athens, Major Moss and a couple of his mates and they knew about it and where they got their information from I don't know. But they knew what was going on, they knew that ship was coming in and they knew that landing craft would be there on that night. And so they came around and shook us all up and, "Right, start walking," and we did.

And what was it like to get on board?

Oh, first thing I got was a big, tin mug of hot tea, that was lovely. We didn't care where we were going or what we were doing, we were just out of Greece, as far as we knew, which we weren't by a long way but it was a marvellous feeling of

relief to be with some Allies, the navy. They were British Navy and yeah, what happened to that destroyer I'll never know.

What was it, which destroyer?

I don't know, I don't remember. I don't think I was in the frame of mind to be wondering what ship I was on. We were just going.

So what happened next as you went down towards Crete?

Nothing happened on the way down, at all. Nothing happened while we were in Crete except the paratroopers started landing at the other end of Crete. And we found ourselves being organised to get down to a little Greek tug boat, cargo boat to get out. So

29:30 we went down to Suda boat harbour and got on this ship and sailed out of Suda Bay and to our astonishment the next morning we were still there. But finally we chugged off to Alexandria and got back to Alex [Alexandria].

Did you spend any time on Crete at all, much time at all?

Yeah, I was there a couple of weeks.

30:00 **What were you doing during those two weeks?**

You couldn't do anything. You just had to lay undercover. We visited the local village to get some food. We came across a warehouse full of Spanish cans of tomatoes, or something and that's all, so we lived

30:30 on those for a few days. All the village shops, a few of them were shut anyway. People were just hiding. They knew they were going to be invaded I think and they had no protection. So we were there about ten days or so I reckon.

And what were you being told was going to happen?

Nobody told us anything.

31:00 We were just a small group on our own virtually. There was nobody coming around with, "These are the instructions for today." No officers there and I think we had a sergeant with us, that's all, our own sergeant and he got a message from somewhere that we'd better get down to the wharf and get on this boat.

Where were you in Crete waiting?

Oh, at Suda Bay.

31:30 Almost on Suda Bay, which is a port in the north, that's all there was.

Did you have any weapons with you?

Only our rifles, we had bought our rifles out of Greece, that's all. And no blankets, nothing, just our uniform and a rifle.

32:00 **Did you think you were going to have to face the Germans at all?**

Yeah, we did for a while, we expected to but we got out before their paratroopers had moved and taken over the aerodromes at Maleme, or somewhere. I've forgotten the names now, they got hold of the aerodrome and they moved down towards Suda Bay and in the meantime we got out before they got to us.

32:30 **Had you built up defences and made preparations for this?**

No, we had nothing, just a hole in the ground. That German, that German prize fighter, Max Mellen, one of those guys, he was in the paratroops squadron that, was it Max Mellen? I think so,

33:00 one of their best top fighters, he landed on Crete.

And were you being kind of spotted by planes or attacked by planes or anything?

Oh, there were reconnaissance planes but we were never attacked while on Crete. We were never attacked except on the ship getting out and they did, they hit us then. We thought we were alright.

33:30 **What was it like being attacked by this plane when you were on the ship?**

Well helpless, totally helpless. You're sitting on exposed deck and you either get hit or you go overboard, that's the only way out and you wouldn't go down below because that was suicide. If you got hit and you were under decks, you'd never get out so you stayed on deck. I've got photographs of these guys getting out of the ship, packed, all

34:00 packed on deck and you wonder why they sat up there but it was so they could go overboard quickly and we got hit but the old Greek captain wouldn't abandon his ship. He was told to get us off onto a destroyer, onto a cruiser. The Colombo I will never forget, the British cruiser came alongside and said,

34:30 "Righto," loud speaker, "Be prepared to transfer ship, onboard the Colombo." And the old Greek said, "Yeah, yeah, I'm going to fix this ship up and they're not leaving." So the cruiser just shot off into the dark and he left us. He couldn't do anything else. He was a sitting duck himself and

35:00 sure enough the next morning there we were, still at Suda Bay, but he got it going. He got it straightened out and he was running it and they bombed his rudder and got it all mucked up but his engineers fixed it and we could head at about three knots back to Alexandria, without getting hit again.

I'll tell you it wasn't what you'd call a posh cruise on the Mediterranean, no way.

35:30 But when you get back and you're in one piece you look back and you think, "Gee, that was an interesting dicey do wasn't it?" And you look forward to tomorrow.

What did the men think when he rejected the help?

Well they weren't too happy about that. They were ready to go, they were ready. The cruiser was that close to us and it would have just

36:00 thrown over a few ropes and things and we would have got across safely but then that Colombo. I don't know whatever happened to the Colombo, that could have been sunk the next day. You never know, it was all luck.

Were there any more incidences on the way to Alexandria?

No, no, not until we got there and that block asked me if I got my

36:30 truck number, engine number. Oh, yes, it was good. When we got to Alexandria incidentally they put us back into cattle trucks. There were a couple of hundred of us, a dozen or so trucks on this Alexandria branch line and we were sitting there and someone had discovered on the next line,

37:00 or two lines over there was a British canteen beer train. It sounds like I'm making all this up as I go along but there was a beer train there alright and somebody discovered it so off they go and grabbed all these cases of beer of NAAFI. NAAFI was the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute, that was their canteen, the name of their canteen and they put all these cases of

37:30 beer onto our train and we're slogging away and the Red Caps, the British Military Police arrive, and "You bring that beer out of there." And these guys went along all these trucks went, "What are you talking about? We haven't got any beer." And they're throwing all their empty bottles out of the carriages. So anyway, they decided that they'd better, or they were going to call up the

38:00 troops, the force and they said, "Well we're all going to finish in gaol, so let's get what beer is left." So they put all the empties they had left back into the cases and knocked on the lids with the rifle butts and staggered across the sand with these what looked like full cases of beer and put them back into the beer train.

38:30 And finally our train started to move and we'd been there for hours, doing nothing, just dying in the heart and thirsty. So finally our train moved off and as it moved off all the blokes pulled out a bottle of beer and drank it for the benefit of the MP's. Oh God, they could have shot us on the spot. So anyway, they got us back to the staging camp and we had our

39:00 hot showers and two bottles of beer. After our hot showers and a meal they gave us two bottles of beer of NAAFI beer and it was a very fitting climax and then we got shipped back to our unit up in Syria near Beirut.

How did it feel to be back on land?

Oh very, very comfortable, very yeah. I'd never join the navy I'll tell you.

Tape 5

00:35 **Well tell me about where you were and how you were set up in Syria after Crete?**

Well we were at a little place half an hour's walk from the Beirut city in a little waddy there and I can remember it was near where the airport

01:00 is now. And we could walk into Beirut for the restaurants and bars and so on. It was a very attractive place and we often did that but we were out enough to be quiet, no traffic where we were. But other than that it was pretty

01:30 uneventful really our stay there. The foreign troops caused some strife. The French mercenaries from Africa were usually in fights.

What about...?

Race, sex, beer.

Who would they fight with?

Foreigners, anybody and

02:00 oh we just had a fairly pleasant time. It was usually quiet. That didn't happen every day.

And what would you do on a typical day there, in terms of work?

Well, I was still driving a car for the brass and oh went right up to the Turkish border on one trip, Damascus, Osmaniye, they were on junkets but they also said

02:30 they were looking for tools and spare parts and what have you.

What sort of tools?

Oh, engineering tools. We had a small workshop and they got away with it.

What kind of junkets were they?

'Look-see' junkets, that's all. It was worth it. I mean I loved it. I saw a lot of the country that I never would

03:00 have seen, particularly up around Derna. There's a fellow down at the shopping plaza here, he's a Turk. They wear these Turkish hats, the staff and himself and I said to him once, "Oh yes, I've been on Aleppo," which is right on the border of Syria and Turkey. And I watched a bus of tourists would come through or visitors of some sort. And they just emptied the bus and threw every case on the ground

03:30 and tipped them upside down because of smuggling and guns and dope and all sorts of stuff and they just tipped them up. And I said to this Turkish fellow one day, "I've seen how they treat visitors to Turkey," and he said, "You've never been in Turkey." I said, "Yes, Aleppo. I didn't cross the border. I was too frightened to cross the border but I've been there and I've seen them."

04:00 He said, "You're too young," this was about three years ago and I said, "Well, it was during the war." "Oh," he said, "That explains it, does it, that explains it." And ever since then he's been the most friendliest guy you'd ever want to meet. Waves to me and I often buy something from his takeaway as he had a shish kebab place down there.

And where would you have to take the officers to on their look-sees, like

04:30 **for example bars or brothels or?**

No, they just wanted to do a country tour. We'd take them to the officers' mess wherever we were, usually a British officers' mess somewhere and they would stay their the night and I would sleep in the back of the car or something.

Was there any protection for?

No, not then, the war was over. Most of the anti-foreigners French had gone back and

05:00 their troops, their mercenaries from Africa had mainly been repatriated, so it was pretty quiet. It was pleasant living so I weep now when I see what rubble Beirut is today. I really do weep and it was a lovely town and very pleasant people who were living there.

And how did the officers' treat you during this time?

Oh okay,

05:30 At arm's length but quite politely and no problem with them. I minded my own business and took them where they wanted to go.

How lonely was it?

Well, it's always lonely in the services, it's a permanent state of affairs really.

Why was that?

Well, if you had family some thousands of miles away it's always lonely.

06:00 **What about your mates?**

Oh yes, well that's only a male to male friendship. It's lasting but irreplaceable really. When I left the army there were very few people in the army that I missed leaving or even said goodbye to. They were just acquaintances really and

06:30 they had their own lives and interests and just a phase of your life really but I found the air force far more fulfilling and satisfying than the army ever was. There was more in it. You were on your own. You were studying all the time

07:00 whereas you went for months in the army and never learnt anything. And in the air force you had to learn something virtually everyday because of the training required quickly. You were on a timetable too. There was no 'if you fail it this year you do it next year.' So if I didn't pass all my pilot's training I would have been an air gunner. They wouldn't have kicked me out.

07:30 They would have made me an air gunner or made me an navigator. I wasn't clever enough for that.

And just before we talk more about becoming a pilot, did you when you were in the Middle East at all have any girlfriends at home that would write to you?

No, only family, my sister. I was too young for a

08:00 girlfriend, so I never missed it in that sense. I had girlfriends at school and Sunday school, in church but not when I got to that age. I drifted into a different field so I didn't have any letters.

And how long did you spend driving the officers around?

Well, I was in

08:30 the army a couple of years. Right from the start I was a driver. I enlisted as a driver.

Particularly when you were near Beirut, how?

Oh, four or five months, that was pretty constant.

What sort of things would you do for entertainment or relaxation?

Oh none. We used to go to restaurants or bars or maybe

09:00 a nightclub occasionally, a show but not organised. There was no organised army entertainment like there is today.

What would the shows in those clubs be like?

Girly shows, dancing, not much really, not really startling but entertaining for troops on their own. Just enough to

09:30 satisfy people I suppose, think about their girlfriends at home.

And when did you hear the news that the Japanese had come into the war?

Oh I was, I might have been in

10:00 Canada, training in Canada at the time on my pilot's training when that came in. That was December, oh no, that was earlier wasn't it? That was '42 or something?

'41.

'41. I must have been at home sometime, yeah. I was still in the army then.

10:30 **Well, when did you hear the news that you'd be coming from the Middle East?**

Oh, we were just taken out overnight virtually from Syria and we were taken down to Suez and just put on the sand with some tents, nothing else to sleep in, sleep on, just on the sand. And

11:00 waiting for the Orcades, which was one of Britain's prime tourist ships at that time and we went on barges, they put us on these barges and we went and circled the Orcades for several hours. It was anchored out. There was no port at Suez, no wharf or anything and we went out and circled this Orcades and it was packed with troops,

11:30 we all thought the Orcades was coming back to Australia. This is another hand of fate here. We couldn't get on. They took us back to the desert and put us back on the sand until we could get another ship because we couldn't get on. There was nowhere to sleep on this Orcades. That Orcades went straight to Indonesia to what was then Batavia at the time and most of those guys got POWs

12:00 of the Japs or died in the camps. And we were thinking how unlucky we were not getting on board and that's what happened to them and we were taken to Ceylon and got on another old tram ship and finished up back in Fremantle. All that happened in a very short time and Churchill and Curtin, who I think was

12:30 then Prime Minister of Australia, they were fighting. Curtin just refused to send anymore troops to Burma or Indonesia or anywhere else, or India. He said, "They're coming back to Australia to defend Australia and that's the end of it," and Churchill never forgave him for that. He really didn't because he stood up to him and Curtin won the argument and that's why

13:00 we finished up back in Fremantle instead of going somewhere else. But that doesn't matter now, that's how it goes. It can go one way or the other.

And how did they take you from Suez to Ceylon?

God knows how we got there, on some tram ship really. See in those days

13:30 even some of the Australian politicians fell for the line that we had to defend Ceylon, and not Australia and three quarters of the Australian 6th Division, which was our senior division, most experienced in Australia at the time. They'd been through Tobruk and the first campaign in the Middle East and Greece and three quarters of those men were left in Ceylon to defend Ceylon against the Japanese. And

14:00 this was supported by Australian politicians who were based in London and didn't know any better. And it wasn't until that they realised it was the Japanese Navy that they had to worry about, not an invasion of Ceylon, that we were able to be taken back to Australia. It was all cockeyed, honestly it was.

And how long did you spend in Ceylon?

14:30 I never got off the ship in Ceylon. We stayed onboard for a week or so and then we sailed for Fremantle and took another three weeks or something in those days but no, I wasn't based in Ceylon although I was on leave there several times. I'd been to the Gold Faced Green Hotel for a meal and I'd been up in the tea plantations in Ceylon and all that tourist stuff

15:00 but I was never based there. So I was lucky really to come back and got on the West Australian beer.

So which ship did they put you on from Ceylon to?

No, I couldn't tell you that, it was just a cargo ship. Just put us on anywhere and slept where you could.

15:30 There were no hammocks or bunks. There were just decks.

And did you get anywhere near Burma before you were?

No, halfway, we got halfway there and we were turned back.

What did they tell you about why you were turning around?

No, they didn't, they didn't. You won't believe how dumb we were, how ill informed. They didn't tell troops those things, why.

16:00 Never why, just do it.

And when you came back to Australia did you have time off or?

Oh yes, sure we got our overseas leave.

And where did you go?

Oh, I came straight back to Melbourne where the family was.

Did they know you were coming home?

No, I went to Adelaide. That's right, we camped in Adelaide. Our unit was dumped

16:30 in Adelaide on the parklands once again, we loved the parklands and we were there for about four or five months in the parklands. It was right in the city, of course. It wasn't isolated, in the hills or somewhere and my family came over to see me, in Adelaide, and that was great. And then I got appendicitis in Adelaide and went into hospital and when I came out I got sick leave on

17:00 top of that and I went back and spent it in Melbourne. By that time my unit had come to Queensland, up near Enoggera they were camped and I finally joined them. They thought I had gone AWOL [Absent Without Leave] but when I produced a doctor's certificate that made all the difference. They couldn't touch me.

And when did you start thinking about the air force?

17:30 When I was a young boy. I had no idea that I'd possibly get into the air force or fly an aeroplane. That was beyond my dreams but I just admired the guys that flew them in the First World War from what I'd seen and then after my experiences of having no air support in the Middle East

18:00 I realised then I wanted to be in the air force, I wanted to fly. And that changed the scales a bit which is what eventuated and when they advertised when I was back on my sick leave from Adelaide in Melbourne, and I advertised and I only would have seen it in the daily press, I applied. And it wasn't until about seven or eight months later that a couple of air force

18:30 officers arrived at our camp at Enoggera to interview me and several others. About four others in the unit had done the same thing but they hadn't written me a letter to say that they were coming. They just arrived and interviewed us.

How did the army feel about this?

Never said a word. They couldn't really because 1942 the air force were having a very tough time,

19:00 very tough and they were desperately short of crews. So the army couldn't sort of say, because we were only sitting around in the army before New Guinea opened up and we were needed in New Guinea. Before that happened the air force wanted us first and they had first say and we had a lot of squadrons in England, bomber squadrons

19:30 at the time and they were very short. So they just opened the doors and let us in.

Well, tell me about the interview?

Oh, the interview, look I think it was so short. They had all my application history on my papers, so they had that and read that and asked me the odd passing questions but there was no

20:00 deep sort of analysis of why I wanted to join the air force because in those days. Well, at that time anyway you didn't join up as a pilot or a navigator or anything else, you just joined the air force and you got graded later on. You got categorised in your particular branch as you went through. And I had to come back to

20:30 Victoria, to the Showgrounds at Shepparton and do a three month rookie course. Would you believe I had to learn how to shoulder a rifle and march as a rookie in the air force and I'd done all that years ago in the army, but I had to do it again.

How did you deal with this?

Oh, I hated it really but I had to do it because, in your spare time you did Morse code [communication system] and

21:00 operated the machines and all this sort of stuff. And you learnt what you could and had what they called twelve lessons question and answer. You had to study them and it was all about meteorology, flying, aircraft construction, aircraft instruments, all these twelve lessons and you had to pass an exam at the local

21:30 high school in Shepparton before you even got into aircrew training and it wasn't until I went to Somers in Victoria for my aircrew training that they started to give me pilot training. It was a long tedious business and when I was asked to go, and I

22:00 did my exams at the high school and then I got word that they didn't get my results. The air force in Melbourne didn't get my results and all my mates went down to Somers for their initial training school and I didn't. So I rang up the headmaster at the high school and said, "Look, can I come in and do the exam again later, they've lost my papers or something's gone wrong," and he said, "Sure."

22:30 So he gave up another night of his spare time and I went in on my own and I did the exam and apparently it went alright, and I went AWOL [absent without leave] to do this because I couldn't get leave. When I went to the duty officer and said, "Look, I'd like some leave to go and do this exam again," and (demonstrates), so I went AWOL. I went over the fence at the Shepparton

23:00 Training School and they were waiting for me on the way back and they booked me. The MP's got me and, "Right, you're AWOL," and this and that and I said, "I asked the duty officer could I get some leave and he refused me to go and do it and so now I'm going to be booked AWOL." "Yes," they said and, "Now," I said, "I want to see the CO [Commanding Officer]." I said, "I want to be

23:30 paraded." I'd been that long enough in the army to say you don't get bushwhacked that quickly. So I saw the CO. He saw me immediately and he was a squadron leader pilot from the First World War and I explained the whole story to him and he said, "Listen MacDonald, you go and pack your bags." He said, "You're

24:00 going to Somers tomorrow." So I was, and of course when I got in my dress uniform next morning on parade and here's this guy who had refused me leave, he couldn't believe it. I had my bag and I was packed. We only had kit bags in those days, didn't have trunks and stuff and I went to Somers and the whole thing started down there.

Well, just tell me a little bit more about what you had to learn for this exam, some details?

24:30 The twelve easy lessons or lessons, oh it was just the basics. As I said meteorology, air crew construction.

Well, what sort of things would you learn about meteorology?

Oh, cloud structure or weather formations, forecasting. I can still forecast the weather with a reasonable amount of accuracy

25:00 just by looking at the clouds and those sort of things, the basics. The basics to air crew really and a certain amount of instruments, how does a compass work and all that sort of stuff. How do controls, what are the foot controls for and what is the joystick for and you had to know the moving parts of an aeroplane, all the basic elements of

25:30 being, in getting into air crew in any category really. So that's how, that's what the twelve easy lessons were called and you did them privately. You didn't have to study privately or sit for exams but you had to pass this final public open exam.

Well, who instructed you on this?

26:00 You instructed yourself. You were given the questions and answers with the papers they gave you. You just had to learn them and it was just basic knowledge they wanted you to absorb, basic knowledge that was essential for air crew.

What were you learning about Morse code and things like this?

Yes, we had to learn, we could signal Morse code, send messages and receive them and you had to learn to receive

26:30 them and you did that of a night in your spare time. We'd go to the post office and they'd give us someone to help us to operate a Morse code key.

How would you practise of a night in your spare time?

Well, you can because you can 'dit dah' on a key without sending a message. It's sort of self explanatory really. You're pushing a key and it's going 'dit dah, dit dah, or dah, dah, dah,'

27:00 and somebody can read it just by the click of your machine.

Did you have any specific methods of memorising Morse code on practising?

No, just practise, just memorising what three 'dah's' meant or three 'dit's' and a 'dit' and a 'dah' and that was all sheer memory.

And how many words could you?

Not very many. You could

27:30 do a lot of words but the speed was the essence of it and we never got up to high speed like a post office operator could. We could just tap out a message and providing it was understood that was it because I never used a Morse code key ever in the air force from then on. It was just in case of an emergency if you needed to listen, to hear a Morse code message

28:00 you might understand it years later for some reason. I didn't get that way but for a wireless operator it was pretty important because in those days I could have been a wireless operator or a navigator and wireless operator combined. There was any sort of combination of possibilities where as a pilot you had no chance, no chance

28:30 and no time and no need to use this sort of information, so it didn't matter.

So what was Somers like when you were sent there?

Oh, it was good. We used to do all our exercises on the beach at Somers and it's since been a holiday camp of some note but Somers was a hard slog but fair and we felt we were going somewhere, we were there for a purpose.

29:00 And every day you'd go down to the beach and do your physical training and a swim and you did your drill on the square, in between your studies and it was a pretty well run place and fair and healthy, and positive, progressive so I liked Somers.

29:30 **And take me through the kind of studies you did there?**

Oh, it was pretty well what I've mentioned, aerodynamics and navigation particularly. You had to learn navigation.

And how were you instructed here?

Oh, you had fulltime instructors in all these subjects, experts they were. They were good. They were ex- I think

30:00 schoolteachers who knew all this jargon in air force language and they taught us and by the time you finished your Somers ITS course, that was Initial Training School, you then got posted to an Initial Flying School. And I was sent to Western Junction outside Launceston for my Initial Elementary Flying School, where we flew Tiger Moths.

30:30 **At Somers how well did you enjoy these lessons?**

Oh, I enjoyed it. I liked school. When I went to school in high school I enjoyed it, my studies there.

And what were the differences you were finding between army life and air force life?

Oh, enormous difference, just even in your living conditions. We had barracks,

31:00 not tents and the food was sort of more balanced, you got more vegetables. It was an entirely different system because they were training a different type of person I suppose and they had to look after us more than they had to look after a soldier because we were going onto more responsible jobs

31:30 in the air force.

And what was your favourite subject that you were learning?

I don't know if I had, I think I always liked navigation actually because it was very absorbing, navigation. I suppose it's like becoming a ship's navigator.

32:00 It was very similar and you were subject to all the weather conditions which altered all your plotting and programming but it was absorbing all the time and I think I liked it as much as anything, navigation. We did air gunnery and instruments and meteorology but I think, I would say that navigation was one of the best.

32:30 **And what sort of specific things were they teaching you to prepare you for the elementary flying?**

Well, that was all in your physical aptitude to a large extent. They gave you tests and they gave you the control pedals and you operated pedals and a joy stick and they used to put a light up on a wall and you had to trace the light with your

33:00 own. You had another spotlight, which you controlled, and you had to follow that light as closely as you could and it jumped all over the place and you had to stick with it. And that was one of the big measures of your aptitude, quick reaction to controls, operating controls. That's one that I remember very clearly.

What did you do with the pedals?

33:30 Well, that, the pedals sent you laterally, left or right and the joystick up or down, so it was a combination of, a bit tricky to get used to.

How long does it take you to master that?

Well, if you were still flying after a couple of years it meant that you'd mastered it. If you hadn't, you were in the dirt.

34:00 You were either sacked or you couldn't fly, you didn't have the aptitude and that put a lot of people out. See I'd been driving for years before this so I had some basic aptitude for these controls of some sort, brakes and the pedals and steering so I was halfway there I think. But for others that had never done that it was pretty hard to just combine the whole light and follow that little light,

34:30 drive you mad. That's one of the reason I think I got there.

And just describe again the process of assessment after Somers? The way that it was decided whether or not if you were good enough to go to Elementary Flying School?

I don't

35:00 think it was whether you were good enough, it was a matter of suitability really. I don't know. I just found I was posted there. I didn't go to my instructors and say, "How come I'm on the flying course?" You got your movement orders and you got on a boat and went to Tasmania with a few others.

Well, what was the set up in Tasmania like?

35:30 Pretty crude in those days. Western Junction, which I think is now the main Launceston airport, it was only a paddock and for night flying we had jam tins and they used to stick candles in them, or flares of some sort, and that was your night landing strip. And there was no cement or concrete to land on, it was just a paddock.

36:00 And the conditions in the barracks was pretty crude and it was a matter of survival down there and the flying was hard and it was always cold when I was there. But I remember on my first solo, I had to go solo in about three hours, night flying, so I went off. The instructor got out and said, "Off

36:30 you go." And I was coming in to land on the first time and I what they called ground looped, I spun it and my foot slipped on the pedals and I just did a circle. The CF, chief flying instructor came around and, "Get rid of that so and so, scrub him immediately. Send him somewhere else. He's not going to fly another Tiger Moth under my command."

37:00 And I said, "Look," this is another true story, I said, "Look, I've just had my shoes mended," which I had and in those days they'd put soles on your shoes that thick, real army style with hob nails in your boots. And I said, "I slipped," and you only had metal rudders, no padding on them, it was just metal, and I said, "My foot slipped off the rudders, that's why I did a ground loop. Let me go off again."

37:30 And he said, my instructor, he said, "I don't know," Tim Gray, "I don't think they'd like it." I said, "Give us a go," and I bent down and I untied my shoes and I threw them out of the cockpit at their feet and I said, "Now, have a look at them." And sure enough they picked them up and "Oh, let him go." And I took off again and came back,

38:00 in my socks, and I've written a little story in my memoirs, "I went solo in my socks," and I did and I put it down quite good enough to pass and I got through.

How did you make it spin?

Well, you only had to move one of your feet off the rudders and your aircraft just took you around, the lift on the wings and the rudder. The rudder

38:30 would be out of control, one way or the other. You still had power. You had enough power to land so that took you around in a loop, a ground loop really and a very unpleasant feeling really to do a ground loop.

How high above the ground are you?

Oh, you're on the ground, you're on the ground when you did it. Instead

39:00 of touching down and going straight ahead, your feet slipped, as mine did, and you just did a circle, which could have done a lot of damage to the aircraft. It could have ripped a wing off, that's what upset all the instructors as you could have damaged a very expensive aircraft.

Could you have run over someone?

No, you were still out on the field. There was nobody there at all to be in danger. It

39:30 was just luck, once again.

And was it not dangerous to do it in your socks?

Yes, because your socks, your feet froze to these metal, it was winter, mid winter and my feet were frozen to those bars, the pedal rows. I couldn't feel them but luckily I had enough feel

40:00 to keep it level because I knew I was really under a lot of pressure and strain. So I made sure I got her down and kept going and so that was one of my lucky episodes in Initial Flying School.

Tape 6

00:35 **Right, were there any other interesting events that happened in the Tasmanian training?**

No, not really, not really.

Were there any accidents or deaths from that?

Yes, one of my ex-army mates killed himself in Tasmania, with his instructor onboard.

01:00 Flew into a tree, low flying and they both perished. That was the only major accident we had and pretty serious one too.

How did the squadron deal with this?

Very subdued, very depressed because they knew we were mates as well and they were frightened I was

01:30 going to do the same thing. I used to go up and fly and do all my aerobatics on my own and they often said, my instructor said, "Well, I used to see you up there doing all that and wondering if you were going to dive in," out of sheer something but I never did of course. I did it to restore my own confidence, to do it on my own without an instructor and I think it probably saved my life in

02:00 later years because I wasn't frightened. You see in England you were told when you first got there and were training, "You must not fly into cloud. There's too many aircraft in the cloud or on top of the cloud," and I used to deliberately fly into the cloud to practise my instrument flying. See, instrument flying was absolutely vital as it turned out and a lot of these young pilots around or

02:30 girls or boys and you wonder how they crashed, just because the weather changed. And the first thing they do is want to come down and see where the ground is. They can't instrument fly. They can't trust their instruments. They don't know how to. They've never been taught and that's one of the biggest weaknesses with private flying, they don't get enough training. And so when I went to England I didn't know all this at

03:00 the time but I deliberately flew into cloud against all instructions that it was too dangerous. But I did it because when you came to do a hundred and eighty degree turn to come down again in the cloud, God, England looked all the same. It was just a patchwork quilt and then you sort of got used to pick out your own landmarks where your drome

03:30 was amongst dozens of dromes. But it was confidence in my instrument flying that I found out later on flying back across the North Sea from Norway say, in storm, that I could trust my instrument flying.

Well, tell us about instrument flying. What are you looking at? What are you trusting?

Well, it was all very simple. You had your altimeter and your horizon indicator level

04:00 up or down, direction, speed, those basic elements and you had to trust your aircraft if it said straight and level on your instrument panel, you stayed on straight and level. You didn't try and, even though you might have been in a spin, in an updraught or a downdraught and some of those storms were frightening. You stuck to what your

04:30 instruments were telling you, that your aircraft was straight and level and you were at such and such a height and you were climbing and descending, believe it and if you did that you had a pretty good chance. That was what instrument flying was about.

What about with instrument flying as far as other objects, like other planes or possibly mountains?

No, that was all visual.

05:00 We never had any radars as they've got today or sound equipment to tell us there was a danger or another obstacle there. You either saw it visually or you didn't and it was too late.

Wasn't this a danger of flying into cloud, that you could run into another plane?

Yes, that was why they insisted you shouldn't, the danger of running into cloud, because you had

05:30 no idea what was in a cloud and usually if you got on top of a cloud. If you ever got on top of it, you got the fright of your life, there were so many aircraft buzzing around, either going or coming from raids or shot up, or something. The whole country was a mass of aircraft so they said, "You cannot fly into that cloud because you do not know what is in there."

06:00 So once again I took a chance and I'm glad I did because it got me back across the North Sea a couple of times really.

Was there any consequences of you doing this?

No, no, nobody put me in, they didn't know. I would fly away from the drome and when the opportunity came, it might have been off the coast or something I'd just slip into the

06:30 cloud and do my own thing.

Back in Tasmania when you were first learning how to fly, what was some of the hardest things to get on top of?

I think landing was always the hardest. Take off was not difficult because you were concentrating and you had power and you were flying but with landing

07:00 you'd cut back your power and you'd virtually lost control of your aircraft. It was flying itself into that last half minute or so and to get down safely was a lot of luck, apart from some judgement, there was a lot of luck. See in both take off and landing the body is used to

07:30 that direction and that direction (demonstrates) but the body can't, a lot of us can't get used to this angle (demonstrates) of direction. Your mental or biological senses can't cope with that and that's why a lot of people just couldn't overcome this problem of landing and takeoff. As I say, with takeoff

08:00 you had power and you virtually felt you were in control, but landing you didn't feel you were in control. You were in the hands of God really that she came down nicely because you could get a sharp cross wind or anything. And you had to know how to handle the aircraft when it was vulnerable, when it had lost its own power, that was the difference.

How do you handle it when it's vulnerable?

08:30 Just experience really. You let it do what she wants to do and gently put her in, even though you're travelling at a hundred miles an hour or something, it's still a gentle approach and this was the problem with a lot of, today anyone learning to fly, this

09:00 cross movement, not that one or that one (demonstrates) this one, this angle, down or up.

Were you learning at this stage anything about loops and tactics?

Oh, yes, yes, oh we did loops and rolls and all that aerobatics, spins. You had to put it into a spin which was one of the hardest things you'd ever want to do when you're on your own. And you do that just by cutting back your motor

09:30 and kicking your rudder, (UNCLEAR) rudder, left or right, and away she went. Now the big problem there was, "How am I going to get out of it? How do I get out of my spin when the world's, the earth's going like that?" So you did the reverse, you kicked your rudders again and put on your power and just eased it out of a spin, but that was a critical moment, but that was a critical moment of your flying,

10:00 putting it into a spin first and then coming out of it. That was very, very basic.

What was it like to do that for the first time?

Oh, frightening to do it the first time on your time. You'd do it with an instructor but then you had to do it on your own and I don't think anybody like it but it was a must, part of basic flying,

10:30 training.

How long did it take you to get competent or pretty good at flying?

I've forgotten how many hours we did down there. It wasn't until I did my service flying in Canada that I started to feel confident because you're in a much better aircraft, more power, beautiful to fly the old Harvard [training air craft]. In fact Brent,

11:00 I don't know what his name was, no, it wasn't a Harvard, he said to me he didn't know what a Beaufighter was. I might give you a picture to give him if you ever get that far to show him what a Beaufighter was. He didn't know what I really meant because he hadn't seen one and they're not flying now. Not like a DC3, they're still flying as

11:30 they were in the war, the Second World War but oh no, the Beau [Beaufighter] was just a part time, short term rather, aircraft designed for a specific purpose, an attack. It was an attack aircraft and that's what it was built for but with the old Harvard in America. I think every flying school in the world had the Harvard, the North American Harvard.

12:00 It was a beautiful, beautiful, you could fly it. You could fly it straight and level with your feet off the rudders and hands off the controls and she'd put her nose on the horizon and she'd stay there. It was that well designed and beautifully balanced. To fly it was sheer heaven but I only flew them and I've since read where every air force in the world had this North

12:30 American Harvard as a trainer, an advanced trainer after the Wirraway and the Anson and the Tiger Moths and then they'd step up and then the Harvard was the next one before you went onto operations, operation aircraft. So I remember the Harvard with a lot of affection really but I've got a book here with a lot

13:00 featured and that's when I started to really feel confident in my own flying ability. I remember once flying with my instructor in Canada and he said to me, "We'll do some rolls," and if I had of been a Canadian I would have been an air gunner by now for the rest of the war because

13:30 I didn't do the basic essential. I didn't look around to see if there were any aircraft near me or any were heading towards me. I just started to roll. Oh, did he strip me off and I deserved it. I did the unforgivable. I started to go into aerobatics without checking.

14:00 There wasn't much cloud around. It wasn't a cloud problem. The sky fortunately for me was clear but I didn't check first and as I say if I had of been a Canadian I would have been scrubbed. He was so furious at that breach of basic flying instruction, just security. I would have been scrubbed if I had of been a Chinook [Canadian] but the fact that I came from Australia and it cost a lot of money to get me

14:30 there, he let me off.

Well, tell us how did you feel about maybe not being completely prepared as you finished up in Tasmania and started to embark for Canada? How did you feel about this situation?

Oh, I felt on top of the Tiger Moth at that time. I reckoned I'd been through enough to cope with my standard of teaching

15:00 at the time and I went off. I didn't know I was going to Canada. We were sent up to Queensland for takeoff somewhere and we got onto, I remember the ship, the American cruiser, the passenger ship, the Mariposer. And we went down through the Panama

15:30 Canal, instead of going straight to Frisco [San Francisco], where most of them went and went overland or midland to Canada, we went down. A most enjoyable experience going through the Panama and we went ashore at Cologne, at one end. We didn't get off at Panama end but we got off at Cologne and

16:00 we nicked off actually, another bloke and I, we went ashore. We'd been loading stores onto the ship and on the last trip we just ducked out into the sheds and didn't go back on the ship because we'd found out it wasn't sailing until the next day, so off we went. Took off our dog tags and gave them to the guards on the gates and they just took the dog tags and said, "Okay." And we had dollars in our shoes and

16:30 off we went and did a few nightclubs in Cologne. Terrific stuff that was, South America, really hair raising, particularly after Sydney and Melbourne, oh we never realised that the world lived like that. Somebody met us there, an American guy and he had a big car and he took us back to the ship anyway after we'd had a few drinks with

17:00 him and it was very nice.

What was your night like out on the town?

Oh, fantastic really, non stop trouble. No violence just after being on the ship from Queensland over to New York. Oh, we eventually got to

17:30 New York but going through the Panama was a terrific break. We hadn't been on shore for a couple of weeks or so, and I remember I was very sick the next day and we'd had a few grogs and rum and coke was the big drink in those days and I got on board alright and I went to sleep on the deck.

18:00 I didn't even get down to, there were four of us in a cabin and I didn't even get to my cabin. I just laid down on the deck and went to sleep and I woke up the next morning with somebody shaking me and all the troops are doing their physical training on the deck around me. And they said, "This bloke must be ill, get the doctor," so I finally got to my cabin and hit the bunk and they left me there. I was ill alright but it was a hangover.

18:30 But the night, we went to those nightclubs and they were dynamite. We didn't think it could happen but it did.

What exactly?

Oh, these girls, practically, oh they did all these, what you see every night now on the telly at these nightclubs, high kickers in their scanties and all this sort of stuff.

19:00 But we'd never even thought about that before and they were very exciting and you bung a few rum and cokes in between and it was a 'whoa.' So and then we finally got to New York and I did my pilots course there okay and got through that and I was sent onto Prince

19:30 Edward Island, up in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, on the island, to do a navigators course. And I thought, "What the hell am I doing a navigators course for?" And it all came out a long time after, I think after the war even, I didn't realise that I wasn't, a Kiwi [New Zealander] on that course, a pilot, we were

20:00 all pilots came and said, "Look, you've been posted to the Bahamas and I'm going to the UK [United Kingdom]. Are you interested in switching?" And I said, "Oh, that's funny, you couldn't change that." I said, "Only God can change your postings, up high tells you where you're going." He said, "Oh, I can change it," and I thought, "Gee, this is very strange," and I said, "I'll think about

20:30 it tonight and I'll let you know tomorrow." And the next day I thought, "I don't want to go down to the Bahamas. We'll be stooging around on anti-submarine patrols and it will be as dull as hell in Liberator's probably." And I said, "I'm not going to do that. I'll switch. I'll go to the UK and you can go down there." Well, how funny can it be but

21:00 going to the Bahamas wasn't going down there to do anti-submarine patrols, it was learning to fly Liberators for long tours. And after you'd done that you went to Ireland and did the Atlantic convoy stuff and fifty percent of those guys never returned. Because they had no navigation equipment like we've got today and they flew in horrific weather, storms and

21:30 fifty foot seas. And they had to close work with the convoys and they just got hacked to bits one way, mainly weather and getting lost or running out of gas was one of their problems or the winds would just sweep them off their course and they'd get lost again. And they lost fifty percent of those guys and

22:00 that New Zealander would have finished up going there, to Ireland. He thought he was going to the Bahamas for a nice, quiet cruise down there, a tour. Didn't happen. You were only there for a very few short weeks on these Libs and then off you went and I didn't know that and he didn't know it obviously but that's where he went and I've never heard of him since, so let's hope he survived,

22:30 got back to New Zealand. But that's how it works and I went to the UK and did my training and go onto an operational base squadron and survived that. I didn't do a full term but I did about seven months.

Well, before we get there I'll just ask about Canada, like what the set up there was like?

23:00 Oh, first class Canada. Well trained, organised and they had a very efficient neighbour in America and their conditions were up to scratch. They were virtually competing with very, very terrific conditions. We used to fly down and it was just near Toronto that I did my training on Harvard's and

23:30 Toronto was not far from Niagara Falls and just outside Niagara Falls there was an Air Cobra, an American Air Cobra manufacturing plant. And when they did their assemblies and made these Cobra's they used to fly them up and for testing and so on and we used to fly down over their plant and they used to come and chase us away,

24:00 so we used to have games. We used to fly there deliberately over American territory over Niagara and they'd come up and off we'd go and after a little while we'd give it away and, "That's enough," and we'd fly back to our base. See the standards in America was the best in the world, in every way, so the Canadians had to keep up,

24:30 which they did. There was interchanging of people and services all the time, so they kept up with the Americans and the conditions in Canada was really great, absolutely great, in every way that I can think of.

And were there any accidents here while you were training?

No, no, there was none.

25:00 We were always pretty careful by that time. See that was also a wings course where I was training on Harvards. You didn't get your wings until you'd finished training so people were very careful that they didn't get into accidents and so on, apart from physical reasons, they wanted to graduate. So we all

25:30 got through without accidents.

Well, how did it feel to get your wings?

Oh, tremendous, very, very exciting and exhilarating, everything, proud, and I was commissioned of course, which was quite rare, even in Australia and out of about thirty old blokes only six to ten would get commissions and I was one of the lucky ones

26:00 and got a commission. So I graduated as a pilot and a pilot officer, which makes a hell of a lot of difference, whatever you do, if you got a commission straight off.

What difference can it make for you?

Oh, respect, pay was almost double from a sergeant in their money it was. We

26:30 used to get paid in American and American rates of pay, well Canadian rates of pay. Not Australian rates of pay while we were training in Canada. It was double what Australians would get if they had of finished their training here and there was the exhilaration. With the commission it opened so many doors that wasn't open to a good old sergeant who might have been twice

27:00 as good as you were really but it didn't open the doors. And I remember we went to, two of my mates who graduated, both sergeants, with me and none of us put our ranks on and we went to New York for our leave, our graduation leave. And one of my mates who subsequently

27:30 became a school teacher in Sydney, he was a sergeant, much smarter than I was really, mentally and he became a sergeant and we went down there and he found out somewhere that the Singer sewing machine people had a town house in New York. I think it was Fifth Avenue and that was open free, butler service, and beautiful rooms in their town house,

28:00 which they'd vacated, to non-commissioned officers as long as they were servicemen. So as we had no rank we all went and booked in, he got us booked into this place and I reckon that butler who used to let me in late at night at the door, I reckon he was awake up but nobody said anything. And then you'd wake up to this

28:30 enormous buffet breakfast, every egg that ever been cooked they had them. They had sausages and hams and steaks and everything was there, juices and this was the buffet breakfast and they made us welcome. We never met any of the Singers but the place was always welcome to us and we just loved it. So

29:00 we used to stay there, about a week, we stayed there and of a night time we'd do all the bars in New York. Jack Dempsey, I've got a photograph of Jack Dempsey's bar and we went there for a few grogs and got around Broadway, the Opera House, did all those. And it was one of the best weeks leave I've ever had and then I had to go back and go on up to Canada for my navigator's

29:30 course and they went off to England I think.

Did you meet any women in New York?

Not purposely no. We met a few at dances, yes. One girl actually befriended us and took us to her family home. Her husband, incidentally, was in the Canadian Air Force as

30:00 a pilot and she was a hostess, dancing hostess and door hostess and so on at what they call the USO, the United Services Organisation. Once again it was for non-commissioned officers and you went into this USO and she let us in and the beer was free and the food was free and there was Jack Dempsey's band on the,

30:30 no, not Jack Dempsey. He was the boxer, wasn't he? Anyway, two of the leading bands, dances, everything was on the house because we never had our ranks on and this is why we got in, oh they could have go in with sergeant's ranks but I couldn't have got in. So we all went in and they made us all so welcome and I remember and

31:00 this is interesting. There were some other Australian there, not many. Maybe half a dozen at the most and they played Waltzing Matilda and everybody stood up, everybody in the place stood up. They thought it was the National Anthem, as they still do, they played Waltzing Matilda. Now, I couldn't dream that up in my wildest moments but they stood up when they played Waltzing Matilda.

How did it make you feel being an Australian there?

31:30 Oh, terrific, seeing everything was free as well. We were different. We had our blue uniforms and we were all the only people in all the services that had a blue uniform like we had. We were distinctive and we had our wings but we didn't have, as I said, our ranks and we were welcomed. People would say, this girl after we'd been to this family home, who was a stockbroker on Wall Street, oh

32:00 Upper Montclair. I've since written to that address but I can't find out if they're still there, but apparently not. Either died out or moved away and very foolishly I didn't get in touch with them sooner. But we were having dinner, which I've got some nice photographs of, this magnificent dinner and she

said to me, John she used to call me then, “Oh, John, you’re a

32:30 lieutenant?” I said, “Oh, I might be,” but they’d told her I’d got a commission and that they were sergeants and said, “Oh, Jack’s a pilot officer.” And she said, “You’re a lieutenant, aren’t you?” It was just magic because I’d moved into her level because her husband was a squadron leader

33:00 in the Canadian Air Force and that put me up a rank. Things like that, and I’ve forgotten all these things but it’s only that I’ve got photographs of all this in my diary, in my album, that gee that Upper Montclair. That was luxury where they lived, just outside of New York. It was an upper outside suburb of New York and

33:30 money. They had about three Cadillacs in the garage and that sort of living, when Cadillacs here were one in a million.

Well, tell us about your trip to the UK and arriving to the UK? How did you travel over?

Oh, we went by ship. Left from Canada, Halifax Canada and sailed straight to Liverpool on a ship that

34:00 was being built to cruise the South American waters so it had big square windows, no portholes, all open decks and we crossed the Atlantic in the winter. It was BA [Bare-Assed], I’ll tell you and we were glad to get to Liverpool, which no sort of anything to hurrah about. We got there and got on a train and went down to Brighton,

34:30 which was the Australian staging receiving depot and I stayed there a couple of months, which was nice. Saw southern England, quite a lot of travel and till we got posted to a flying school or Initial Flying School.

How did you keep warm on this boat trip?

You didn’t, there was no heating, nothing,

35:00 only your overcoat, that’s all. It was not the right ship to be sailing the Atlantic at that time of the year. Oh, one of those beautiful cruise ships that the millionaires used to go down to South America on and the Bahamas and all those places but not as a troop ship, but it was a troop ship.

35:30 **And any scares on the way?**

No, no events at all to England.

What was your impression of the UK when you arrived, like in wartime what was it like?

Oh, pretty bleak all round, everything, food, the attitude, conditions generally, just poor.

36:00 I didn’t like it frankly, didn’t like it. The people were alright, they accepted you and southern England was alright but once you started getting north of London, Birmingham and Manchester and these places, they’re just tragic really. You wouldn’t want to live there.

36:30 Poor housing, virtually dog boxes mainly and in wartime there were no civil services or civic services at all. You’d be lucky to get a bus but you never had any other way. That sort of living it was just unpleasant really. You were there and you just went along with it.

37:00 **And tell us what flying school did you get posted to?**

I was posted to a place South Cerney in Gloucestershire for my initial flying and night flying and then I was sent up to an Operational Training Unit in Scotland at, not far, North Berwick, East Fortune was in North Berwick, not far from Edinburgh and from there you go onto your squadron.

Well, tell

37:30 **us, at Gloucester you were learning night flying, what were you learning here? What aspects, what skills did you have to learn?**

Mainly instrument flying, blind flying we used to call it. You had to fly because down in that part of England there were also, overlapping, the flight paths were overlapping. The one near us was a glider training

38:00 school, so they’d be towing their gliders up, training the pilots at least overlapping our takeoff circuit and at night time that was pretty dicey. There were a few prangs. People hit the cables between the glider and the aircraft towing it and so we did blind flying

38:30 there, some days, but mainly nights to get used to night flying and watching out for aircraft of a night. After a while you could see them in the dark or sense them but that didn’t last long. That was only about a month or something and we went onto our next station.

Did you have any difficulties learning these night flying skills?

Oh, yes, I didn’t enjoy

39:00 it. It was too much of a hazard, a strain. Flying day time, no problems but I hated that night time really.

When you say strain, what do you mean? In what way?

Oh, concentration I think and not knowing, not knowing what was coming at you from any angle,

39:30 any direction because somebody wasn't flying as well as you were or was careless with his look-see, which often happened. It wasn't always the guy that got hit that was at fault. It was somebody else. I've had some near misses and they're frightening. They make your blood go cold for sometime afterwards when

40:00 you realise how close it was. When you see the aircraft sort of hover above you and vanish. They're that close and you could have pranged and at that level there is no way out, fatal, a thousand feet, no way out. You can't bail out anyway, too low and

40:30 by the time you know what's happening you're into the deep and that's why I didn't like it. Day time never worried me a bit, it was that night stuff.

Tape 7

00:36 **Tell me what you noticed about the way the war was affecting Britain?**

Oh, I think just depressing all around, pretty well. Everything was depressed. You'd go into an underground

01:00 station and there was no joy or laughter, just grimness and people going somewhere to do a job or doing something. They all had a mission and there was nothing, nothing enjoyable about visiting Britain in those days. It was too glum and understandably. There is one

01:30 thing that is a bit of propaganda is the bombing of London. Well, most of it happened in East London. I've seen these American video tapes and you'd think the whole of London was in flames and the British wanted it to look that way, but I drove around London after the war for several hours and you couldn't find a bomb crater

02:00 on the West side but there was a lot of damage in East London. They copped it badly but it was one sided. The story was not true what everybody believed outside of London that London was flattened but it wasn't that way at all. And there were books published and I've seen them, I've seen them, paperbacks published in Britain talking about the

02:30 onslaught of fighters on the streets of Brighton on southern England. There was never a fighter there, a German fighter, not for miles. All that was propaganda and I suppose that's the way they do it. We might have done the same thing.

And did you get to stay with any British families or anything on leave?

Yes, I did but I couldn't

03:00 take it. I stayed with a couple of elderly people in Suffolk who had acres of garden, you should have seen the food they were growing. It was better than New York and they were the most meticulous about that I didn't drop any crumbs on their carpet and all this old fashioned stuff and that put me off. I wrote

03:30 to a friend in my squadron and said, "Just send me a message that I'm recalled from leave," which I did and he did. I couldn't live in it and that was just one small sector that didn't know there was a war on really but that's all a part of it.

Did you have any fun times?

Oh, yes, of course, there were plenty. There were plenty of good

04:00 dance halls and restaurants there. We had our happy times. It wasn't all grim.

What were the dances like?

Oh, pretty free and wild. I think the, what's the dance that was popular then?

04:30 Not the trot, the jigging?

The foxtrot?

No, not the foxtrot, oh you know, you just let yourself go, arms and legs and kicks and it had a name.

Jitterbug?

Yeah, jitterbug, the jitterbug was taking on then and we had a lot of fun and they had

05:00 good bands and oh no, we had our nice times.

What were the English girls like?

Oh, friendly, attractive.

Did you meet anyone special?

I got pretty close to one girl. I thought, I went north again, back to Scotland and she wrote to me a few times.

05:30 When I went back to London I never continued. I think we both sort of went different ways. Oh, no, I'm not sorry about that, that I didn't marry an English girl because what I've seen of my friends that did, some of them still haven't adjusted to Australian way of life. They're homesick I think and

06:00 I think they're lucky that some of them haven't gone back, permanently. So when I look back and think, "It could have been me." I'm not sorry I got married in Australia to a Western Australian girl and had three kids and lived happily ever after, almost.

And when you went up to Scotland

06:30 **what exactly was the kind of training that you were doing up there?**

Oh, Operational Training Unit the first time, that was preparing you for operations.

And what planes were you flying?

Beaufighters, the same. The same as the one I went into ops [operations], on Beaufighters. We had a lot of losses in training on Beaufighters.

Why?

Well, one of the problems

07:00 was on a Beaufighter, unlike a Mosquito, you can have two pilots in a Mosquito sitting side by side, although one is a navigator, but he can also fly the aircraft if necessary. On a Beaufighter there's only a seat for one so the pilot had to, see there was no instructor to fly with you. The first time you flew a Beaufighter, you flew it on your

07:30 own. There was no one to say "Hey do this, pull back the throttles or something." You flew it off the ground the first time and you bought it back on your own, so that caused quite a few accidents actually. They reckoned there was something wrong with the aircraft. There was engine trouble with these Beaufighters. So they sent an expert guy, an pilot, down from Bristol who

08:00 made the Beaufighters and he flew it around on one engine and did everything except upside down. And put on a demonstration to rekindle a bit of confidence but we lost about four crew, four pilots and aircraft in a week and they said, "There's something wrong with it, must be something wrong with the engines."

08:30 It wasn't, it was the pilot, inexperience basically. Nothing wrong with the Beaufighter itself or its engines.

Are there any other quirks about the way a Beaufighter flies?

Yes, you had to be careful landing it. It had a very touchy stalling speed, had a high stalling speed.

Just explain what this means in the context of landing?

09:00 Well, if you didn't have exactly the right sort of angle and speed the aircraft lost control, it just flipped. It could go on it's side or upside down if you lost control. That's what happened when you loose climbing speed. You loose the lift off the wings and it stops

09:30 flying, the aircraft stops flying unless you've got it right. And it was only by hours of flying and practise that you got it right and landed it okay to avoid this high speed spin or stall, high speed stall, otherwise it was pretty sweet to fly really, once you got it off the ground. Once you got it into the air then it was

10:00 nice. You could fly it with one hand quite easily.

How?

You didn't have to hang on like this. You could fly it with just one hand on the control panel or control stick.

What would you do with the other hand?

Throttles, throttles in that hand, mixture control and flaps and take your hand off and flaps was to slow you down if you were landing.

10:30 But usually the left was pretty busy most of the time as well as the right. They wouldn't let you have a rest, the people who designed it, no way. You weren't there for a joy ride.

And what sorts of guns and bombs and stuff did the Beaufighters have?

Well, we were very heavily armed.

11:00 We had eight rockets under the wings, four under each wing, armour piercing and four cannon in the nose. Four Hispano cannon, twenty millimetre, they're a pretty big cannon and right under my seat they came and magazines at the back and the barrels came under my seat and out through the nose. Made in Spain they were, Hispano and I never had one blockage ever,

11:30 stoppage. Whenever I fired my cannons they kept firing.

What exactly did the cannons fire, what sort of?

We had armour piercing, we had explosive and I think about one in ten was tracers to give you guidance to get on target, but the noise was tremendous.

12:00 The noise when we fired them and the cockpit filled up with cordite smoke and noise, no fun. But there it was, that was your armour.

Where were the controls for firing the cannons?

On my control stick, had the button right there.

And how would you aim at the?

12:30 Oh, we had sight, an illuminated sight that you could swing out of the way when you were landing but normally it swung across right in front of your face and you looked right through it at your target.

What did it have on it?

Just calibrations and distance and target in circles and

13:00 centre dot.

And given that the cannons were underneath you, what adjustments would you make to makeup for the difference for where you were looking and?

Oh, that was all built in, that was all designed really between the manufacturer's knew the difference between where the cannons were aimed and your sight,

13:30 that was all synchronised. It was spot on and if you got in your sight a target your cannons would hit that site automatically.

And how do you split your focus from lining up a target and flying the plane?

Well, you don't. You just fire your cannon when you have to, when you're attacking a ship or a ground

14:00 gun position. You forget about your flying. Your flying just comes automatically and you do it without thinking about it, about your speed and your control of angle and all that sort of stuff. It just does it and you're just mainly concentrating on your target and where your tracers are going, if you're on target or not. So you're more interested on lining up your target than you are your air speed and you're

14:30 probably diving anyway so air speed didn't matter. You had enough speed to keep you out of trouble or get you into it.

And these rockets that you had, tell me about how they worked?

Well, the idea of the rockets was we used to tackle a lot of shipping because the Germans used to bring their iron ore out of Norway and down

15:00 the coast of Norway usually of a night time and take their ships back into the fjords and hide under the cliffs during the day. So there idea was to stop that iron ore getting down to the German industry. It was our prime reason for flying in the Norwegian fields and these rockets were

15:30 quite long things. The heads were about seventy odd pounds, armour piercing heads and the idea was that you fired fifty feet from the ship if you could get that close and the rockets would go down about six feet and level off. They were designed to level off under water and punch holes into the side of

16:00 ship, being armour piercing and they did. They would go underneath and into the side of the ship and you could disable a ship quite easily and your cannon was just to keep the German gunners from hitting you, to keep their gunners quiet.

And what was the difference in the firing of the cannons to the rockets?

Oh, quite independent, yes.

16:30 They operated independently, cannons and rockets. You could only fire your rockets once your were steady and straight and level with no movement, because if you had slight movement and you fired your rockets, your rockets could go anywhere. They'd just swing away so you had to be dead on, straight and level and as steady as a rock and then you could

17:00 fire your rockets and in the meantime your cannon it wouldn't matter how you fired them.

And for how long would you have to fly straight and steady?

Well, that was the big danger, too long, if you stayed straight and level too long in case the gunners got you, which they did but you had no choice. You either stayed straight and level and got your rockets off and then opened your cannons

17:30 at the German gunners. Didn't always work that way.

How many rockets were you meant to fire?

Eight, you could fire them altogether or in pairs or singly and we operated those also from our control stick. We could select our rockets. Usually you just fired the eight together and

18:00 when you fired singly or in pairs it was only in practise. It would only be in practise. It would be silly firing single rockets into a heavily armoured ship because these ships were also escorted by flak ships, heavily armoured flak ships and they'd have a ring around them protecting them and you had to contend with them and as well as the gunners on the ship. So you

18:30 had to fire your eight rockets and get out of there fast and hope they hit their targets. You didn't wait around to see. That was part of it.

And you mentioned the difference in the Beaufighter that you didn't have the navigator next to you, so describe the relationship with the navigator in a…?

Well, he was a jack of all trades.

19:00 He was a wireless operator. He was trained as a navigator but he never had to navigate because we'd fly to our target in a group, and there'd be a leader to take us there. Sometimes after we'd attack we'd all be, you'd be amazed, you could fly home to Scotland and never see another friendly aircraft and you had to fly yourself back across the North Sea and that's when a

19:30 navigator came in handy because he could sort of say, "Well, you'd better go that way," or "You'd better do it that way." He didn't have to sit down and navigate as they do on say the airlines and he had no special equipment and it was all done in those days by work it out by measurement from a sextant or something with no time for star shots or moon shots or

20:00 anything. He just had to work out the general direction and where you're going and guide you there and you'd check with him occasionally, "How we heading?" "Alright," or you're not and as for pure navigation he didn't and he had one little gun with him. What we called a 'scare gun' and it was only one

20:30 .303 to scare off any fighters that might have come behind us but very rarely they had to use them. But the German fighters always kept away from the front of us because with four twenty millimetre cannons in the nose. It was powerful stuff and they didn't like it and that's where you could frighten them off but they had to come in behind you and break away before they flew over you.

21:00 If you gave them a burst of your cannons you could blow them to bits.

If they came in over the top of you what manoeuvres would you make to get out of their way?

Just dive and try and increase your speed or if there was cloud, you'd try and go for the cloud. If the cloud was too high and you didn't have enough time you'd dive to get some speed up and get on the water usually, get low.

21:30 That would keep them off.

And talking about the navigator, what sort of relationship do you develop with your…?

Oh, very close, just being the two of you and doing the ops together you get very close.

How do you communicate during an operation?

Oh, just small microphone, earphone, in

22:00 your headset but you didn't talk on operations because you'd give your positions away. You do in training, that's all and the directions would come from the leader if you were operating in a group and he could hear the leader, what's going to happen anyway, if you had to go that way or dive into that fjord or something.

22:30 **And you mentioned earlier that you would fly in cloud, even if you weren't supposed to, how did your navigator feel about these sort of things?**

Oh, he wasn't with me when I did that but he learnt later in some very dicey trips home that my flying was okay. He didn't question what I did in my private time and I'd done all that before operations anyway. It was only in training

23:00 that I did that, didn't have to in operations.

And what was your navigator like?

Oh, he finished up a civil engineer in Brisbane, Bill, with a big business, a partner in quite a successful business. He's since passed away, Bill, but I've got his photograph up there. Very pleasant for a Queenslander, he was a nice bloke,

23:30 and he gave it to me and he was married when we got crewed up and I didn't know. I don't think I would have crewed up with him if I had of known he was married. It's a too big of a responsibility.

Tell me about crewing up?

Joining together, as one crew.

Well, when did you do that?

Well, at Operational Training Unit, that's when I first met him and they said, "I'll introduce you to Flight Lieutenant Bill Brennan

24:00 and this is your navigator." You didn't get really a choice but I didn't know he was married until some time later. It's a bit of a worry flying with a married man and you're single and what if you get him hurt? How do you bring him back to your wife? It's not right.

24:30 **And how did your relationship develop? What made you become close?**

Just operations, flying together in very difficult times.

And how long did it take before he trusted you and you trusted him?

Oh, I think it was pretty quickly. After a few flights together training at OTU, Operational Training, we flew together then and he would become accustomed to how you flew and took off and landed

25:00 the Beau and manoeuvrability and all that and once he gained confidence he just accepted it really.

Would you socialise together?

Oh, we did yeah, oh yeah. He came up here when I first looked at this place. This was advertised on television up in Noosa when I was up there and I came down and had a look

25:30 and I rang Bill up in Brissy [Brisbane] and said, "Look Bill, you're the builder," well civil engineer, "You know more about building houses than I do, would you come and check this out for me?" And he did. He came up with his wife and said, "Can't go wrong. This place is very well built," and I might have mentioned it's got galvanised stumps,

26:00 got galvanised bearings in the floors, all anti-rot places and he said, "Oh, no, you're right." And he saw the way all the roads were paved and gutters were all formed in the park and he said, "The price is right, go for it," and I did. Came back and bought it,

26:30 so we got together and he came up a few times and stayed up at the local clubs and so on with his wife and we went and got a few of these guys in the sky from Noosa and another one from Gympie. And we got together and had some nice times but he finished up with bad cancer, bad cancer.

27:00 **And how close would the two of you become with other members, other pilots and navigators?**

Not very close. On leave everybody would virtually go their own way. I used to go down to Blackpool where his wife's people lived and they eventually migrated to Australia and I stayed at their place in Blackpool but most of the crews, particularly the single guys, went their

27:30 own way with their navigator or a friend. You never got, oh your squadron was very close because you were in the same crew room everyday when you weren't flying and you got to know them pretty well. And in the mess of a night you'd have a drink with them but you wouldn't want to get much closer than that really because you wouldn't know if they'd be there

28:00 tomorrow, to dramatise it a bit but that's how it was.

Well, how did you deal with that feeling of uncertainty?

Oh, just treated them, just casually. You didn't, as I say, get too pally, too close. You flew together and went through the same risks and you knew the same problems. We all had the same problems and that's what kept

28:30 you together, that's what was the binding thing, the whole operation but privately we didn't get to know

them or their families very much. It just didn't pay off, not that you weren't interested in them but you got as close as you could I suppose but we

29:00 still see them. In Melbourne I always went to the squadron reunion but there was only about a dozen aircrew down there, the rest was ground staff and it was only the air crew. And when I left Melbourne eight years ago there were only about four or five of them left in Victoria, so there was no one to get to know anymore.

29:30 **And can you take me through, step by step, your first flying operation?**

No, I doubt it, no I doubt it, no. I don't think so.

Well, take me through the process of what you'd have to do to prepare for an operation?

Well, you got briefed for a start and you took off in a group and you were given a target

30:00 to a particular fjord or township or whatever and told that when you got there. And you'd fly across the North Sea at about twenty feet, with radio altimeters, which meant that we could get very close to the water because we were so accurate with those, not with the ordinary pressure altimeter but the radio altimeter was accurate within

30:30 feet. See, we could fly under the German radar with this radio altimeter. We thought we could but I think they knew we were coming anyway most every time because they were waiting for us and then we had the spray on our windscreens flying across the North Sea. If you do that for an hour it's a bit of a strain on the concentration, so once we got there we'd climb to maybe five hundred feet at

31:00 the most to get over some hills or dive into a fjord and from then on it was every man for himself. You had a target and you were on the left of the group and that was your target, that flak ship down there and you attacked it. If you were on the right you attacked that ship there and it sort of worked itself out that way and after you do that a few times it just became automatic until you got the word to attack

31:30 and your leader went in first and you went after him. Sometimes you were chased with fighters chasing us, or not, just flak [ant aircraft guns] coming up and it was all luck, one way or another.

And tell me about the briefing that they would give you?

Oh, it wasn't terribly good. It was mainly weather reports,

32:00 what the weather would be like over your target.

What would they tell you about what your target was?

Not enough, see they'd pick a target by sending over a reconnaissance aircraft who'd come back and report some ships at such and such a fjord and that would be the briefing, "There's some ships in such and such a fjord and that's where we're going." There was

32:30 very little about what the opposition would be like. If there were any guns or stations around the shores of the fjord, nothing like that. You just took your chance and hoped for the best that it wasn't too heavily guarded because they always had these flak ships, they were the problem. They were very heavily armed and they didn't need shore batteries or fighters for that matter. They just needed these

33:00 flak ships and if you got too close to them you were gone. They were bristling with guns and the Germans knew it. They were very clever and it kept you off the ships. We had one trip was my birthday and I'll never forget it and then one bad day and we had

33:30 a Canadian squadron flying with us and the Kiwis were flying with us and the Canadians lost eight aircraft and that's a hell of a lot out of about fourteen or something. They lost half of their aircraft because of these flak ships guarding the convoy.

34:00 **Well, tell me about what happened on this operation?**

Well, we were just told to go in when we got there and they never told us it was going to be so heavily guarded.

What was the target?

Oh, some German naval ships as well as some cargo ships and it was the naval ships that got us really. Our squadron lost a couple but the Canadians it was, they were on the left side of

34:30 the attack. And unfortunately they flew straight into these German war ships and there was no hope right from the start.

What did you see of these, was it Canadian or Kiwis?

Canadian.

Of these Canadian planes going down?

Didn't see them going down, they just, we were too busy on our own attacking targets to worry about what was happening to the right or left.

35:00 And they just went in and got shot down and you didn't know till you left the area or got back to your squadron who got out and who didn't.

And was there any particular way that you had to avoid the flak?

No way, once you committed yourself you were done, you had to go in. See if you pulled out too early you bared your

35:30 belly and you were a sitting duck for any German gunner so you had to keep diving right to the target with your cannons firing and your rockets.

What does this do to your nerves?

Oh, it sort of ruins you for a while, for several days in fact.

How do you make yourself do it?

Fear and how can you, you

36:00 get no choice. If you go in there with another group of aircraft when they say, "Attack," you just dive in and hope for the best.

Did you have any lucky charms or superstitions that you would?

I didn't have any lucky charms, no, but I think I used to scream out a lot when I was, just to release, just to release myself. Nobody could hear me except bar myself but I'd just be screaming,

36:30 "Yeah, yeah, yeah," while I'm firing my cannon and it sort of helped me but I didn't have any way of knowing what to do, just keep going. When I was telling you before lunch and we went in one of these times and this is my best story I think of my flying operations and

37:00 Mustangs used to come with us and fighters, single engine fighters. And they were flown by Poles and on this occasion there were only about eight Poles with their Mustangs and they used to fly with us on one engine right across the North Sea and wait for the German fighters. All they wanted to do was kill Germans, these Poles, more than we did because

37:30 of their history of invasion and so on. And we get there and the Germans are waiting as usual, fighters, and they jumped the Poles and they were outnumbered. The Poles were outnumbered by about two to one with Focke-Wulfs and Messerschmitts and my CO called up, whatever it was now, and I can still here the reply

38:00 now as I sit here, in my earphones. And he called up, "Hello Red Leader, this is Blue Leader, can we help you?" And when we saw what was happening these mixing it above us, maybe a thousand feet above us, the dog fights and we were ready to go in and attack the shipping, which we didn't do finally. It was such a shocking mess

38:30 and the Blue Leader called up and said, "Hello Red Leader, no thanks, there's just enough to go round." That's fair dinkum that is, absolutely true. So they got stuck into the Germans and got about three Germans and lost one Mustang but that's how they won, "No thank you,

39:00 there's just enough to go around," and they outnumbered them two to one. I think that's a terrific story, being true and I don't think I'll even forget it. When my leader called up and said, "Can we help you?" I nearly died of fright. What could we do against a German fighter? Nothing, we'd be dog's meat but when the answer came back I thought, "That's absolutely terrific."

39:30 I thought about it all the way home and these Polish boys came over and they were on a different drome to us and they used to fly over and have a few grogs and they said, "When are you going again? When are you going again?" Which never happened and that's how keen they were.

Tape 8

00:35 **I was just interested to know that when you got to UK and were doing your training how you ended up in the fighters rather than bombers?**

Very good question. I've got the right answer too. I was in the Middle East before I was in the air force. I was in the Middle East in the army

01:00 and it so happened that my CO of the first training school I went to in England was a Canadian who'd been in the Middle East also. And we could both sing the same dirty Arabic songs around the piano of a night around in the beer tent and I was the only one in the mess. So we got pretty matey and he said to

me, “Listen mate, what do

01:30 you want to fly when you finish here, before you go to your next course?” I said, “Look, don’t put me on bombers, I just cannot see myself dropping bombs,” mainly on unprotected cities and as it finished up, the war, that’s how it was, on women and kids. This was 1944. I said, “I just don’t want

02:00 to do that. What’s the choice?” And he said, “Well, what do you want to fly?” And long range fighters was the first thing that I could think of. I didn’t want to go into singles, Spits [Spitfighters] or Hurricanes and stuff. I said, “Long range fighters,” which meant in those days either Mosquitoes or Beaufighters. “Well,” he said, “have a think

02:30 about it. I think I can arrange that.” So a couple of days later a Mosquito crash landed on our drome returning from an operation and he had to put down somewhere. And the Mozzie [Mosquito] which was made of fabric and wood looked like a box of matches overturned on the drome, where the Beau would take a terrific amount of punishment

03:00 on crash landings and flak. And I looked at this Mosquito, heap of Mosquito, what was left of it and I don’t know what happened to the pilot. He couldn’t of got out of that and I said, “Joe,” or whatever his name was, “Forget about the Mosquitoes,” I said, “I’ll go for the Beau’s thanks.” And I finished up on Beau’s and only because I was on pretty good talking terms with this CO,

03:30 this Canadian. Because I’d trained near his home town and he lived near Toronto and it was a few miles from Toronto where I trained. So we had that in common and we had the Middle East and Africa in common and that’s what put me onto Beau’s really. I don’t think it was any special flying abilities.

I’m interested in these songs. Can you remember any?

Oh, I couldn’t remember them now. In Arabic we used to

04:00 sing them of course, in Arabic, (sings in Arabic) that sort of stuff and anybody speaking Arabic would know what we were singing, most of it and we used to have a lot of fun and he used to play the piano. And I used to sing around him with several other guys would join in

04:30 and we sort of got to know each other much better than you normally do. I was a flying officer and he was a squadron leader, so you don’t get too close, even on a training squadron, or they don’t let you get too close to them, so that’s how I finished on Beau’s.

What sort of bloke was he, personality wise?

05:00 Oh, very likable, young, friendly, open, approachable and you’d see how he became CO of this training unit and he’d done a tour, he’d done his own tour, I think bombers. Which is the only way they could get onto these jobs is in charge of another training school was to have done a tour at least,

05:30 and have the right temperament to control other guys. All aircrew had rank, whether you were an officer or NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] sergeant or warrant officer or what, so there was that management of other men which was important for these people and that’s why he often selected for these

06:00 things.

How would he become a CO at a young age, how old was he?

He’d be in his middle twenties at the oldest and I was only about twenty-two or three and he was about twenty- five. Well, they were all young blokes and that was the surprising thing. Aircrew were all nearly young people except you’d

06:30 get onto bomber commander and you’d get navigators in their thirties or air gunners but all pilots were usually under middle twenties and having all ready done a tour somewhere. And that’s how they got those jobs by proving themselves. And being Canadian

07:00 it was good for moral that they picked a few colonials, Dominion boys I suppose, otherwise it was all RAF [Royal Air Force]. We had some funny, this squadron I was on it was formed in NSW [New South Wales] originally at Newcastle I think. And first of all they had no aircraft, they were all ground staff and they went overseas as

07:30 ground staff, a hundred or so of the original squadron and went to England and got scattered to various English squadrons until Australian squadrons over there started getting their own aircraft and building up their own squadrons. See Bomber Command finished up with about twelve squadrons or something like that, with all links, all their own people. And

08:00 then when we started off with Hampton’s, they were an old fashioned type of aircraft, slow bomber type, and when they started getting their own Hampton’s, this 455 Squadron, they bought these Australian ground staff back in, still plenty of RAF ground staff on the squadron but they started bringing back the Australians

08:30 as well to supplement them and build up a bit of the Australian identity that way.

Did you notice any differences with the RAF people?

They were funny and in this way, it's not meant to be derogatory but they, see the RAF they used to have two uniforms, exactly the same and one was a dress uniform, going out Sunday uniform, walkout uniform and the other one they worked

09:00 in. They worked in, the ground staff and they were covered in grease but the Australians had the old blue dress uniform and they had their overalls, whatever you call them but they were overalls anyway, working overalls. The RAF said, "We're not going to have lunch with those blokes in those greasy overalls and they've got to go back before lunch to their rooms, their huts and change into their dress uniform and

09:30 then come and have lunch with us." It's written in my first, I've got two history books of the squadron and this is in the first history book record written by the adjutant and they said, "What about your greasy bloody uniforms? What are you going to do with them, wear them to lunch?" "Oh, yes, well they're our uniform." Well, there was a hell of a stink about that and

10:00 the Australians said, "We are going to lunch in our overalls or not at all." So that passed over and then when the Australians first went there they wanted to put them on RAF rates of pay, which was about half of what our guys were getting. This was from up top, the RAF top level boys said, "You've got to be on the same level as our boys," and

10:30 they said, "You can leave our pay rates alone. It's paid for by the Australian Government, not by the Queen, let us accept Australian rates or we'll go home." Well, they forgot about that one too. What difference was there? There was a hell of a big difference in attitudes and after all we were still a colony and they thought

11:00 they could get away with it and they couldn't. Time and time again they just couldn't.

What about amongst their officers and their higher ranks, was there an attitude amongst the RAF blokes?

Oh yes, all the air force operations were controlled by groups and groups were supposed to be experienced airmen who had been on tours but

11:30 quite a few of them hadn't. But they decided on your next target and all sorts of administrative regulations they set but two of my former CO's, both now passed away, both wing commanders, Jack Davenport was the most highly decorated airman in Australia, Australian Air Force, five times,

12:00 and his successor Colin Wilson, since passed away, from Brisbane, four times. And neither of those guys were invited to join any of these groups who actually dictated operational training and methods. They were never invited. They were too much like full bottles for these guys who were on these groups and some of them had

12:30 never been on tour, on an operational tour. And these two guys, Davenport and Wilson, never were invited. They might have been asked their advice from time to time but never invited to serve on groups where all the important stuff was decided.

Did you have any personal disagreement or just maybe even

13:00 **in reflection to some of the targets that they designed for you?**

I can't say, I can's say so. They were all pretty awful, but one was much like the other. They were all hidden in fields or somewhere, buried in fields, the targets, all difficult finds and you were scraping down the sides of fields, mountains to get to

13:30 you target and you couldn't get to it and the Germans would be firing up rockets with cables attached to them. Cables to tangle up your propellers, apart from their gunfire, this was just another little quirk they had. They'd bring you down with these. If one of these cables got onto your wing they would just slice your wing right off but it was,

14:00 no the operations were much the same, all dicey. But the difference between the ranks was pretty marked, even at the higher level. There was a reluctance to recognise any of the dominion people. They were still, see the Canadians got on top of this. In Bomber

14:30 Command the Canadians insisted that only Canadians would command their bombers and they sort of had a miniature bomber command within Bomber Command, still reporting directly to the RAF Bomber Command chiefs, Bomber Harris and these people but at a lower level they were run by Canadians and the Canadians

15:00 were the only ones that I know that insisted on this and did it and it never happened to us or New Zealanders. It wouldn't happen to New Zealanders anyway. They'd go along with the Brits and all the South Africans didn't object to anything like that but the Chinooks did. See you had this big French influence in Canada who were anti-British anyway, but they were

15:30 there doing their job, so there were divisions right across the board and some worked and some didn't.

Did you ever feel a sense of lack of appreciation from the UK?

No, I never had any problems with the ranks, with the British or

16:00 Australians. I'd been in the war a lot longer than some of these guys and I just accepted it, I went along and, "let's hope for the best," sort of attitude I took and I wasn't looking for trouble and I wasn't looking for personality fights at all and it didn't worry me. They could do what they liked and it just rolled off my back at the time. I was just glad

16:30 to be there and getting up every morning.

Were there significant personality clashes?

Not noticeably, no. There might have been underneath somewhere. Inevitably there would have been with some but nothing open that flared up.

What was the opinion that you had and others had of Bomber Harris?

Well,

17:00 he got banned you know from England after the war, Butcher Harris I think he's better known as. He went to South Africa, retired to South Africa and he had hoped to be, I think on Churchill's say so the next Chief of the Air Force. And Lord Portal who was then the Chief of the Royal Air Force tried to get rid of him twice

17:30 because of his treatment of his staff, his crews and Churchill said, "No, he stays." Churchill kept him on but he went to South Africa and he didn't get a gong for about thirty years after the war. They wouldn't recognise him. He never got promoted and he made a lot of enemies.

What was your opinion and the men's opinion?

We didn't have, very little to do with Bomber Command.

18:00 We didn't know what was going on there, didn't know. I've only read that since, why I know that story is that he was invited by the, there still is in existence I think what they call Air Force Europe, RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Europe, here in Melbourne and they have a dinner every year. And they wrote to,

18:30 this was announced at one of their meetings, they wrote to Harris in South Africa and invited him to come and speak and he said he couldn't do it, couldn't get away or something. And that story came out indirectly how he was virtually sacked from England and I think when the politicians went and saw what he'd done to a lot of undefended cities that's when they sacked him.

Well, you were telling us about

19:00 **some of those German defences with the cables, how exactly did they work with the rockets, what would you see?**

Just like vertical guns, shoot up these power driven rockets. I don't know what sort of explosive they had but they had rocket power anyway and they'd go right up, hundreds of feet where you were because we were diving down into them, which made it easier for them, as far as height was concerned.

19:30 They just had to fire them up in the general direction and we were diving in from two or three sides to do their shipping and they used to defend their shipping with these rockets cables. I never saw them bring one down with them but they were pretty scary, they were a bit scary.

What's it like flying through these defences, rockets and flak [anti-aicraft fire]

20:00 **and…?**

Oh, the flak was absolutely dreadful. You had to fly into the flak. You had to fly right into their guns because if you didn't they were going to get you but it was a wall of flak. I can show you photographs of it now, taken from some aircraft, just walls of flak. We used to wear flak helmets. We got into it so low it was all fine flak,

20:30 the ground stuff really, not big gun stuff, that exploded at thirty thousand feet, it was all fine machine gun, light cannon stuff, the ground flak was what we had to fly into. That was pretty frightening really because you'd never know where it was coming from or how much there would be

21:00 until it started and it was too late, too late to pull away. You couldn't pull away anyway. They'd court martial you when you got back, if you got back or threaten to court martial you but oh no the flak was the trouble. We could somehow survive the fighters but not the flak.

21:30 The flak got most of our fellows and once you got hit and I've got a map amongst my papers. It's made of rice paper and it's instructions on, and you've never read such nonsense in all your life. If you got shot down in a fjord, a frozen fjord, however if you didn't get out of the water in two minutes you were dead,

22:00 frozen to death in two minutes and how you're going to get into a German fishing boat and start up the motor I'll never know and escape but it said in it if the Germans get you and you try to escape in one of their boats, in a Norwegian fishing boat, you're supposed to eat the map, swallow the map so as the Germans didn't find it.

22:30 But if you were just trying to get away they'd put you in the worst prison they had just for trying to escape. That was a crime in their book. You just didn't go along as a passive prisoner. You were trying to escape and we used to carry it in our flying jacket, this instruction to swallow it if you looked

23:00 like getting caught and I've never heard of anybody getting into a Norwegian fishing boat and getting away, let alone getting away. Half of them never got out of the water. There was no time. If you were fifty feet above the water and got hit you went straight in, didn't have time to get into your own dinghy, which burst out of our wings, if you were lucky to get into one. But then the ice would probably kill you anyway. It was all

23:30 frozen in the winter, the whole surface was frozen. There was no escape so that's why our admiration for those pilots, Mustang pilots was enormous because the chances of getting hit in one engine for us and getting away we had a fifty-fifty chance but if you got hit in a single engine fighter there was no chance. It was

24:00 the finish but the Poles took it, "When are you going again? When are you going again?" Never, we hoped.

Flying down into flak, how do you steel yourself for that dive? What's it like when you're up the top and you're just about to go down?

I don't know. I think I used to just go blank. I could see the other kites going down and you went with them. I

24:30 didn't think of anything, of how to dive or what speed I was doing or what flak was coming. I just dived and hoped for the best and by that time I was screaming to myself usually, just to get my nerves up or take my mind off what I was doing. I wasn't flying the aeroplane for sure.

25:00 Those were the sort of, we expected those sort of things when we were on ops. You knew what was coming and we'd done it before and, "Here we go again," so there wasn't much you could do about it really. You couldn't pull out, you couldn't fly away,

25:30 you couldn't do anything. You were committed, too late. Once you got over those fjords and there were ships down below, you were committed, no way would it alter. So you hoped the flak wasn't too heavy or something. You hoped the ships would go away, which they wouldn't and so on but that was too late. Once you got into

26:00 your dive that was the finish of what might happen. You just took what was coming and hoped you'd be back in Scotland that night having a whisky or something. But getting back to Scotland was bad enough as there was fierce storms over that North Sea, which we used to have to fly through and often you wouldn't see one of your mates until you got back to the drome,

26:30 wouldn't see them. You wouldn't see them. You didn't know where they were but we managed. We got back alright.

And when you were going to attack or were in a dive was there a certain formation that you'd take?

No. No, you'd go in singly virtually. You were close by. You had them virtually all around you, to the sides, maybe behind you.

27:00 I was frightened of somebody behind me, one of our own aircraft shooting me down. If they opened up with their cannon and you're down below them and their shells could have come your way easily. Sometimes they'd pass us, the shell to the target. They were that close and they had been hit. Some of our people were hit from

27:30 our own gunners with firing and unaware that this other aircraft might have been in their range and they just fired, probably out of nervousness in many cases. As long as you're firing your cannon something's happening you hope. Oh, there was all sorts of strange things that went on.

28:00 It was like the training. I've got newspaper reports of people that were killed in training and it was enormous and sometimes in some squadrons it was higher than operations, just training, through lack of training. Accidents were enormous, taxing accidents, flying accidents,

28:30 inexperience and in some cases as many as people got killed on ops and that was where the problem was, with loss of aircraft at the same time and moral. Didn't help moral when these blokes were on a training course and a couple of their mates sort of go under, night flying.

29:00 **Tell us about, you told Naomi [interviewer] a bit about the rocket technology but tell us about how they exactly operated? Would you release them at a certain angle or?**

Yes, you had to, as I mentioned you had to fly, the aircraft had to be very stable only for a

29:30 seconds really until you pushed your button and your eight rockets would go together.

How did the rockets fly? Did they drop down and then fly or?

No, they accelerated right off your rocket racks and right from the start they were at flying speed and of course once they went your whole aircraft sort of went up.

30:00 And just the change of weight and the volition of them leaving and then you got as close as you could to the ship, mainly shipping to get under water with your rockets and they did the rest. They were designed to level off a couple of metres under the water so as they'd get under the waterline.

30:30 **So you'd have to release them so that they went in the water?**

Oh yes, you hit the water fifty yards from the vessel if you could get that close and they just levelled off and kept going.

Was there a certain height above the water you had to be?

Not really, but you could be too high and they just floated off into nothing. They just hit dead

31:00 water. They finally got down to the level but you had to be within just a hundred feet high to get the best volition and the effectiveness of the rocket speed. But that was the real big danger point, holding it steady until your rockets went because if you didn't they'd just skew off.

31:30 Just a fraction of movement and your rockets would go off into space, useless.

And did you know how they had the technology that when they hit the water they'd level off? Like how the rockets worked in that way?

No, I don't, I don't really. One of these guys coming down next month he would know. He was a navigator and he knew a lot of that stuff, technical.

32:00 He would have studied how the rockets operated once you got rid of them. I was too busy flying the damn aircraft as well as the cannon and the rockets to get rid of them and then get out.

And you mentioned a button that you pressed to release the rockets, what was, were there different buttons for all the rockets or one rocket or?

You could select as we did in training twins or singles

32:30 but normally we had it set for the eight rockets. Once you fired that the lot went. It was no good sitting on a couple of rockets. No good sitting on four rockets and letting only four rockets go. You had no hope of doing much damage that way.

And did you see the results of some of your rocket attacks?

No, after the war they did a few tests and showed training off the coast of England.

33:00 Had some old wrecks and they showed they punched some pretty big holes into the sides of the ships when they hit them. They disabled the ships alright. They were pretty hefty rockets, all big stuff. All armour piercing usually and steel headed and

33:30 somehow or other they didn't explode when they hit. They just went through the steel and you reckoned if you let them go and they looked as if they were going to hit, you didn't wait to see if they hit. You were getting too close at that stage and you were too busy trying to hit the gunners that were on the flak ships or the ship itself.

34:00 And I never hung around to see what damaged I'd done to the ships.

Did you ever think about the men that you were firing at on the ships or think about?

Yeah, oh yeah, definitely. I've seen them, I've seen them firing at me direct right between the eyes and it was him or me.

34:30 He had a double, I think they were deadly cannon, anti-aircraft cannon, about twenty nine millimetres which was a pretty hefty weapon and they used to mount them in twins, mount them on the backs of ships and this guy had one of this twin mounts heading right for. He was on a flak ship, not on the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] ship, not on a merchant ship and spare brackets

35:00 was the German name and he was getting right at me so I had to blow him off the back of the ship and there was no choice, no choice. He had me and I was a goner. I was right on top of him and he couldn't miss me. He swung around and saw me coming and there was probably another couple of aircraft attacking him as

35:30 well. Maybe in a different direction but when he swung around and saw me, with my cannon going there was no choice. You just keep going and I blew him off the back of the ship with his guns, so I hope

he survived, but I doubt it. But not often, not often you would see them that close,

36:00 only the guns. They had a bit of armour plate around them and that's the most closest I've been to a German gunner really. Oh, well that was the day, that was it.

Did it make things more difficult seeing someone close up?

Well, it didn't at the time but it did later on when you thought about

36:30 it. It stayed with you for a while, a few days, and then you got onto training or some other activity and it sort of went, left your mind but it was not an enjoyable thought.

Well, how long would the tension and the stress from say an operation stay with you after you returned?

37:00 Days, days, depending on the intensity of the action or it could stay a week until you start thinking about the next time. We would go off again within another ten or fourteen days. There was no sort of going on leave for a week or a month. We were ready again and if your aircraft was serviceable and if it wasn't they'd have a spare for

37:30 you. There was no way of getting out of it, not easily anyway. Oh, you had to do your share of so many trips per tour, so many trips per sort of fortnight or month or whatever. It was depending on what the group was saying how many times your squadron should be operating.

Do you remember how many your's was?

38:00 Oh, as I say we were taking ten or fourteen days.

I mean how many in total was the tour?

Oh yes, I think it was thirty trips for a tour, and plenty of them finished, well not plenty but quite a few finished the tour. And

38:30 not many volunteered for a second but my two former CO's did. One had served in the Middle East, from Malta. He'd flown Beauforts and Beaufighters in Malta, my last CO, Col [Colonel] Wilson, and I think he'd done a tour in England and he was ready to do another one.

39:00 **Well, when you returned from an operation would there be a debriefing conversation?**

Yes, always, straight after, straight after you returned you'd go to the debriefing session and they took down what you could remember and kept records of it but what they

39:30 did with it I'm damned if I know.

Did you talk about anyone that was shot down or anything?

Oh yes, they'd ask you if you saw any casualties and where and because they had to let their parents know details or the parents would want to know. They kept coming to me after the war at some of our reunions,

40:00 the parents, and asked me these questions as they didn't get enough satisfaction from the air force, or enough detail anyway, if there had of been any detail to be got. And I saw guys going into the North Sea with no possible way, with an aircraft exploding and no possible way of getting out and some people hoped that their son still was a prisoner of war somewhere.

40:30 And you couldn't say, "No hope, forget it." You'd say, Well, it's possible, who knows?" Strange things happen but you saw that kite [aircraft] explode, poor parents but that's the way it was for a long time after the war too.

Tape 9

00:36 **What would you wear on a flight?**

Oh, you had an ordinary jacket, a button up jacket, done up at the waist, that was your flying jacket, flying boots, fur lined flying boots

01:00 and usually a roll neck sweater and then your helmet. And then when you got near your target you put on a flak helmet and it was about, and gloves if you wanted to wear gloves. I used to fly in the white silk lined, they were the inner gloves, rather than your leather gloves, the standard flying gloves

01:30 because you had more control with the light inner silk gloves, more control of the aircraft better. That's what I wore.

What was the heating like in the?

Oh, quite good, yes you had, the cockpits were heated and the windscreens were heated because you'd either get a lot

02:00 of rain or spray and they had to be kept clear. And the heating could get hot on a sunny day because we had no cover over the top of us, just the canopy and that sun used to belt there and flying over to Norway you thought you might see some ice water around Norway

02:30 and snow but it was pretty hot. You could control it easy enough.

And what was your flying helmet like?

Oh, very soft leather really, just the usual thing you would have seen in photographs, came around here and with earphones like you are wearing. You wouldn't be aware that you had it on after a while. It was that good fitting.

And would

03:00 **you have oxygen?**

No, we didn't. We hardly flew over a thousand feet except to get over some of the higher mountains in Norway, just to dive down the other side and then we'd only fly about three thousand feet at the highest to get into them.

And if you put yourself in the pilot's seat can you describe to me what was in front of you?

Well, not a lot,

03:30 not a lot in front of you because we, as I say we were sitting well forward and you could just see the engines out of the corner of your eye, one on either side. You wouldn't see the wings necessarily, just the two big engines and you had clear vision out the front.

And what was literally right in front of you inside the?

Only your gun sight and control panel, just below your eye, your windscreen, all your instruments

04:00 and up high was your gun sight, that's all you had in front of you and you could pull on this leather flak helmet if the flak looked like being pretty heavy and that gave you a bit more protection. But we had steel at the back of our seats so we were protected on the rear but nothing on

04:30 the sides or underneath except for cannons, that's all. But you didn't worry too much about that because you'd have to get a direct hit to really be fatal pretty well, either on your body or engines or something.

And you mentioned before that flying really low across the North Sea was sometimes hard on your

05:00 **concentration, how would that affect you?**

Oh, very, mentally it was a big strain, concentration. You had to concentrate on how high you were all the way and you often had aircraft pretty close, flying in formation and but it was just keeping out of those wave tops, that was the big problem. And as I say, the spray

05:30 from the wave tops sometimes came across our windscreen and you had to watch it all the way and you could be subject to that for an hour, at least half an hour before you got to your targets.

And what would you do to keep your concentration, to keep focused?

Oh, just flying, just flying, keeping out of the drink and constantly checking your instruments

06:00 and temperatures and pressures and stuff like that, that everything was okay with your engines. You had to keep watching those instruments for your engine performance because you couldn't afford to have an engine pack up halfway across the North Sea.

What sort of thoughts would go through your mind as you were doing these?

Not a lot. You wondered what the target was going to be like, mainly

06:30 that was all.

Would you ever think about completely unrelated things?

I don't think so, that was definitely related to what you were doing, however limited it was. You were concentrating on what you were doing, that was all, flying that aircraft.

And you mentioned that the nerves, the toll it might take on your nerves, when you

07:00 **got back from a flight would you have any physical reactions from those nerves?**

Oh yes, you'd be half up the walls for quite a few hours.

How do you mean?

Well, you wouldn't feel normal after a trip. You were took worked up even after you took an hour to come home. You were all

07:30 still tightened up into a ball, your nerves were as tight as a violin string. And getting home wasn't sort of letting down immediately. Not until you got into the mess with the guys and started having a few beers that you started to let down and then you wouldn't be talking about it to them, you'd just

08:00 talk about anything, bar the trip and who is getting the next beer. That was the main things and just being alive really. Oh no, I remember coming in one night, it was dusk, and we'd been on a strike and they were landing. See we used to land as fast as we could because we were very short of fuel

08:30 by then and one would come in and land and another one behind him and I'm just putting down and there's a kite in front of me and he didn't seem to be moving very fast at all and I'm gaining on him. And a young lady was on the speaker, on the control and the control tower instead of calling out the aircraft numbers. See we had

09:00 UB0 or UB3, stuff like this, they'd identify you, the experienced controllers would identify you. This girl, she must have been training or something, and she just called and said, "Keep rolling, keep rolling," and I remember even at that instant I had enough time to grab my microphone and say, "I can't stop the

09:30 bastard," and the next voice that came over was a man's. He said, "Okay, UB0, understand," and the other aircraft just turned off the runway and I think my brakes had gone and that's why I couldn't stop and shot away my hydraulics and I just rolled off past him onto the runway. But I remember saying, "I can't stop it," screamed out and this poor little

10:00 girl. I never heard her and she didn't answer and the man came back and said, "Oh, okay." And he called my number and she should have called the number of the aircraft in front of me, "Keep rolling, keep rolling," and they must have seen that I couldn't stop. I was going too fast after just putting it on the ground and we often have a laugh about that one.

10:30 She should have said, "Yes, UB whatever his number was," he should have been, "Keep rolling." I don't know why he was slowing down anyway. He was probably so glad to be there that he didn't think of someone right behind him.

And what was your relationship like with the ground crews?

Oh, always good, yes.

How would you interact with them?

Oh, we'd go and talk to them. I was down at the drome

11:00 when we weren't flying and check the aircraft and see how. All they would do in those days check your whole airframe and bodywork and see if there was any flak in the body and start up the engines. They always had an engineer who was allowed to start the engines and

11:30 run them through to see if everything was okay and we'd go and have a chat with them and that was fine. And then you'd see them when you were taking off on the next trip. They'd be around your aircraft to make sure your chocks [wedges to hold rudder in position] were away and between your tail and your elevators you had little wedges that they used to hold the aircraft steady in the wind, and they had to be taken

12:00 out of course before you could take off. And it was one of ours, the West Australian Governor after the war, a group captain anyway, very experienced. And I believe he took off from Gibraltar with Winston Churchill onboard once as a passenger. And they had, this was a bad move all round, somebody had forgotten

12:30 to take the chocks out of his elevators, his rear elevators, which meant he couldn't go up or down. He had to fly by his four engines and he got a VC [Victoria Cross] for this and he took this thing off and he didn't know until he got it off the ground that he had no tail

13:00 elevators. So he flew it just on his engines, the power of his engines and he did a whole circuit and came around and landed safely, just on his engines without any other controls. Now that was brilliant and Churchill must have thought so, because he got a VC and finished up Governor after the war. His name's, I've lost his name now.

13:30 I remember him quite well. He was unique.

Can you describe the layout of the base that you were flying from?

Oh, there was nothing to describe really. It was a cow paddock I think before we got there and they put up some buildings for the mess and then they put up some tin huts for our sleeping quarters and it was just a strip of concrete. It didn't

14:00 go both ways like they do now. You just had one way to land, irrespective of the wind or anything else. Wind or snow, you had to land on that one strip and you were under strict control of the controller of the airport and I have been very close to hitting the control tower myself

14:30 once and it wasn't after an operation. It was in a storm. I'd taken off this aircraft in Scotland to do an hour's flying around, just training, checking instruments and stuff like that and filling in and you had to do a certain amount of flying training in between operations.

15:00 And the weather just came in, bang, like that. One minute it was blue sky and this was Scotland, all over, and the next minute in came the weather, black as pitch, pouring with rain and I can't see the ground and I'm flying around and I thought, "Gee, will I go out to sea? I'll have to ditch," we were right on the coast, "Or will I go inland and most possibly hit a hill, because I can't

15:30 see the ground." And I'm trying to make up my mind what to do in all this shocking weather and I just happened to look over outside and a gap appeared in the clouds, just like that and closed again, and I saw the aerodrome. And I realised that I was right over it, right over the drome and after mulling around in all this storm

16:00 so I lined it up to what I thought and I did an imaginary circuit then, round what I thought was the edge of the drome and bought her around, and I'm landing her in pouring rain. Can't see from here to the wall away where I was landing. I was just feeling, sixth sense, how far I was off the ground and if I had of gone another ten feet to my right

16:30 I would have hit the control tower or another ten feet to my left and I would have hit the officers' mess, ploughed into that. And I went straight down the runway, the middle of the runway and even the control tower called me up and said, "Good show, good show." And I think that little episode got me an above average in my flying log book.

17:00 It was a pretty good show, I must admit and very much to my relief when I realised how close I was to that control tower. I would have wiped them all off, whoever was on duty but I did a perfect landing in all that muck. I taxied back and took a few deep breaths and thought,

17:30 "That was lucky."

Did your navigator make any comments?

No, I was on my own, yeah, on my own and I might not have been able to do it if I'd known he was sitting back there behind me, would have panicked or something or concentrated on the wrong thing and I just did it, sixth sense. It was just sixth sense that bought me in at the

18:00 right speed and the right spot.

And how far away were the huts and the mess away from the?

Oh, quite a walk really. I mean the CO had a jeep and he could flip back and forth on his jeep but we used to walk it, about twenty minutes or so walk.

Why was it so far away?

Security I suppose, in case the drome was strafed or bombed and the personnel

18:30 were down in a treed area, a wooded area and corrugated iron huts though with a black coal stove in them, that's all for heating.

And you mentioned to Kiernan [interviewer] that you might go up once every ten, fourteen days, what would you do in between when you weren't flying?

Oh, we had

19:00 sometime lectures, sometimes visitors from another squadron to give us a talk or future targets possibly. Oh, general flying, you had to do a bit of flying yourself, training. It was just general, not much. You'd do some link flying, link training and you had to do that all the time, whether

19:30 you were on ops or not, you had to do your link [simulator] training.

What is that?

That's a miniature, it's a miniature aircraft cockpit and you get into it and it simulates the real thing and you get in and you take off and you do a trip. You've got all your instruments, the same as a normal pilot and that is called a link, L I N K, trainer but

20:00 it was stationary, but once you got in it, it was so realistic that you'd think you were flying. You really did think you were flying because it had a noise, it had an engine noise going and your altimeter operated, even though you didn't leave the ground. If you started to climb your altimeter climbed, it was very effective really for training. And you had to do so many

20:30 hours a month on that and that kept your hand in on general emergencies. Sometimes you had to do a whole cross country trip or a simulated strike somewhere. You went through the whole works, so it was

quite useful to keep your hand in, so you didn't get rusty.

21:00 You didn't do it every day. You did it a couple of times a month, so when you were flying it just came automatically, naturally, everything fell into place but those links trainers they could be a bit of a strain too. Because if you didn't realise it, it wasn't real and you started to think, "Gee, I'm going to get lost," or some such thing. "I can't crash, I've got to watch the earth," and it was that real.

21:30 And they had, outside the link, on the walls of the training section they had simulated skies and horizons and if you up for a while you thought you were flying in the real sky. And then they'd bring on, oh we did a lot of aircraft recognition from films and ship

22:00 recognition was a very important part of our training, so we did the British and German Navies, some Russian and later the Japanese. We had to memorise whether they were cruisers or destroyers or battleships and what their armament was each time, each class of ship in each navy, we had to know them. So if we were flying and this

22:30 used to happen in the link trainer and you then had to radio back that you had sighted such and such shipping. So many ships and what nationality they were and you had to send that back, on your Morse code. You didn't call it up on your thing, because you would have been out of range for your voice so you had to tap it out on this Morse code machine, 'tap, tap, tap,' and

23:00 they'd be getting this back in the training room, getting it all down. And when you finished they produced a whole flight schedule of exactly what you did and what you said and you'd get out of that for an hour and think, "Gee whiz, to hell with that," it was hard work.

And did you ever come across any, what they would call lack of moral

23:30 **fibre?**

But I think I've seen blokes with war neurosis, I've seen them accused of lack of moral fibre and they knew they were going to die, they knew it and they did and they asked. I heard

24:00 one ask to be taken off ops as he couldn't face it anymore, the pilot and his navigator. He couldn't face it. He couldn't face the flak, he couldn't face the flying and they said, "Oh no, you'll get over it," and sneered at him really. And I think the flight commander was that sort of guy that he thought this guy was suffering from lack of moral fibre. He wasn't. He was a war

24:30 neurosis case and he should have been medically taken off flying, but he wasn't and he died a week later.

What happened?

Killed. I can see if for a mile and that was an injustice, one of the big injustices of people who didn't know what war neurosis was and in those days there wasn't much cure for it. There wasn't

25:00 any cure or any counselling. They were just sick. People just couldn't take it.

What would you say is the difference between lack of moral fibre and war neurosis?

Oh, lack of moral fibre was sometimes faked, as war neurosis but other proper, genuine war neurosis was an illness, a mental illness and it

25:30 was frightening and the poor guys did suffer with it. Bomber command had a lot of cases, more than we did. We had a few but not like bombers. They were taken off through lack of moral fibre probably, a lot of them and not war neurosis but they just

26:00 couldn't take it. I mean everybody's different aren't they? You just can't expect everybody to perform the same way and that I thought was a terrible injustice. See in bomber command at one stage I've heard bomber command fellows say that they used to go to London and try and get the syphilis so as they were forced off

26:30 flying, deliberately. They'd go to London and pick up prostitutes without any protection, hoping to get a venereal disease, and they'd go back to their squadron and report to the doctor and he'd have to take them off, at least until they poured some penicillin into him or something.

27:00 But oh yes, bomber command suffered. In bomber command they had all these other crews. They had about seven guys in a bomber and some of them were only partly trained to the sort of training that we had to do, and we had intensive training. Well, certainly as a pilot and air pilots probably did a lot more than say a wireless operator in a bomber

27:30 or a tail air gunner. And those guys suffered more than anybody else really. We were too busy training, intensive training all the time, training and learning something different but those guys just had to fire guns or tap out messages.

And tell me about when you heard the news of the end of the war?

Oh, I was in London when that news came

28:00 through and oh, it was great, much rejoicing.

Tell me about the celebrations?

In the streets, yeah, oh they just went silly with joy really, cheered and everybody slapping everybody else on the back and everybody was just one big happy family.

28:30 Yes, I was on leave and I realised that I wouldn't have to go back. Oh, I'd have to go back for a while. We had to go back to the squadron before we got disbanded and dispersed. And when we did get back before we were disbanded, our squadron was disbanded, there was a

29:00 successor to the Beaufighter. Bristol had built a more modern, faster aircraft, the Brigand, it was called the Brigand. It was faster and much longer range and we were told, my CO went down to Bristol and flew one, the Brigand and at that time he thought and sort of told a few of us in the mess

29:30 he thought we were going to take these newer aircraft to Burma and we didn't. I don't think any Australians left the UK. They all came back to Australia and I didn't like the thought of going to Burma with these things.

How did you get back to Australia?

I waited six months to get a ship back. On the Stirling Castle I got back,

30:00 one of the old passenger ships. It was a troop ship of course for years and we waited. I was in Brighton. I was at Beckles for a while in Norfolk for a few months. That was a clearing, that was sort of a, that was a camp for dispersed airmen and when it moved closer we were moved down to Brighton.

30:30 That was a takeoff point and then you'd catch a train up to Liverpool and get on the old Sterling Castle and chug our way home, through Sydney. Caught a train back from Sydney to Melbourne, everybody waiting at the Exhibition, so there we were. So then I had quite a few, a couple of months leave due, still in the air force getting well

31:00 paid. So caught up with a few mates and had a good time.

And how did you find settling back into civilian life?

Oh, very difficult, very difficult, couldn't. Couldn't settle at all, couldn't. The idea of going to an eight to five job, from eight a.m. to five o'clock routine and dull work anyway.

31:30 I hated the thought of it but I couldn't settle anyway. I had office jobs with several companies, Goodyear, close to home and no travelling involved. We lived close to the city and Felt and Textiles was another big organisation in Melbourne. I worked in their office, the costing office for a while but I just didn't

32:00 like it for one day and I finally after, oh I took on a university course then which filled in quite a bit and kept me out of trouble and then I got a job for a

32:30 company. I moved to Adelaide for three years after a while and worked for the South Australian Government as their Asian representative and I travelled in Asia quite extensively. That was quite interesting.

What was it about life in the forces that you missed?

33:00 I think the security and the company, the routine, it all fell into place. You knew where you were, where you were going and had no worries, no pay worries and everything was all very cosy.

When you look at that time in the forces what do you think is the biggest lesson that you learnt?

33:30 Don't join up, no, oh I think discipline became a part of your life. You didn't question orders. Even a corporal could, sergeant could tell you to do something and you sort of did it, that was before I had any rank and you just went and did it. That

34:00 was a way of life, so all that sort of, was stabilising in a way. Somebody was really giving the orders and doing the thinking, just no sweat and that all came back to security I think.

And what changes do you think has time made in you

34:30 **as a person?**

I think I became a lot more independent and outspoken, wouldn't take any nonsense from people who were running companies. And I knew

35:00 damn well they were incompetent but they had senior positions and some of them deliberately exploited you from these positions but if I thought it was, not if it went against me so much. But if I thought it was wrong I told them, if it meant leaving the job. I wasn't frightened anymore of superiors,

35:30 no I wasn't so that changed me. I don't know if it was for good or the worse really but I became definitely more independent in my own self. I think I became more reliant, self-reliant than I had been before. Yes, for sure, I knew I could survive without these other

36:00 people, and I did.

And when you look back at your time, either in the army or in the air force, and think about the people that you know that were lost, do you think the sacrifice that was made of young men was worth the end result?

No I don't, I really don't, no. I think a lot of it was quite unnecessary, futile, a lot of these things were futile through sheer bad management.

36:30 Bad tactical decisions on the part of superiors killed a lot of people and they shouldn't have been killed. That's why I don't think any lose of life during any war is worth it because it can be overcome the problems other ways if they want to sit down and

37:00 really work at it and bury their smallness and their own ambitions and their own ideologies. I think all these problems can be overcome without all the killing. I don't think any life that I saw lost was worth it. I'm very sad about that. Tell you what

37:30 I'm a pacifist but I don't go and wave flags about it. I just live with it now. I don't attend any meetings or demonstrations. I just live with it and feel sorry and that's a part of the price we pay, some of us. It's a price

38:00 and it shouldn't be, so there you are. That's everybody's private decision. They've got to work that one out for themselves. But when I think of the nice guys, they died, it wasn't right, but they were all nice guys. They had a life and families and all that sort of thing and what did they die for?

38:30 Somebodies little ambition. I won't go into politics but I still think it's unnecessary.

And as we come towards the end of this tape, do you have any final words that you'd like to say, anything to sum up with?

No, I'm not philosophical in that sense.

39:00 I haven't any wise words for the world. You just try and play the game fairly and be as honest as you can with yourself and other people. I mean it's easier to be honest than it isn't. That's what I then discovered in my getting long life now, it's getting that way.

39:30 And I don't regret it. If people want to make their mistakes, well I'm sorry for them. I don't try and live anybody's life either but you can live a simple life if you keep it simple and honest. You don't loose any sleep. That's the way I am. If

40:00 I sleep there during the day, which I often do after lunch, have a nap, half an hour, I can get up at three o'clock in the morning and watch telly, watch the golf from America or somewhere and feel quite comfortable. I might get a bit tired later that day but it's amazing that you can live as simple as that but I don't see anything wrong with it either.

40:30 So how people live their own lives is their business and I think some people make it hard on themselves unnecessarily but some people worry a lot. Some people worry themselves into it and some are so lucky to be self-assured that what they're doing is the right thing.

41:00 There's no answer to it, no easy answer really. The human being is just too complicated. We all do our own thing. Time?

I think pretty much.

Okay.

INTERVIEW ENDS