Australians at War Film Archive

Robert Connell (Bob) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **Bob, thanks for talking to us this afternoon. And perhaps we can start just by where you were born and when?**

I was born in Gunnedah, New South Wales, on the 3rd of February 1920. Quite a few years ago.

01:00 **Can you tell us a little about your early family life?**

My father was on the railways, and he was a stationmaster, and we moved about a bit, and finished up at Ingleburn. We'd been to Shellharbour and Werris Creek, and Martins Creek, and a few other places. And we finished up at Ingleburn, he was a stationmaster at Ingleburn, and that was virtually where I grew up. I was about 5 or 6 when I arrived there, and went to school, and

01:30 eventually to Parramatta Boys Intermediate High. From there I worked, went to work at the age of 16 to the Ingleburn Council. I tried many other jobs before then, I applied for everything that was in the paper, in those days it was Depression days and things. Went through the Depression which was (UNCLEAR), I transferred to Baulkham Hills Council in

02:00 1938, and 1939 the war came of course. 1940 I enlisted in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] and that was an amusing exercise. It was down in Woolloomooloo area, there was a Ford agency round down there, that's where we went, and we had to do a medical test and keep the mercury up and all that nonsense,

02:30 and checking whether you were still alive. We eventually finished about, after lunch it was, or just after lunch, or lunchtime. And we were taken into a room, about half a dozen of us, said "Now your," congratulated us on being physically fit, "And now you become a member of the air force, and hold your hand up or put it on a stack of bibles, and swear allegiance" and all that. And he said, "Well, now you'll have to excuse me, I've got a golf appointment."

03:00 And that's the job that I want to have in the next show, if it ever comes about. That was 1940, we were on the reserve, and I was eventually called up in 1941. Went in, in March 1941, 12 course at Bradfield Park, initial training, there for 6 to 8 weeks, I think it was. They made us physically fit and generally

03:30 acceptable to the community, I imagine. From there, selected to pilot training. Went to Narrandera in, down in New South Wales, and there learned to fly a Tiger Moth, and I was rather ham fisted at it, it took me quite a while to master it, which I did eventually. Had a couple of strange incidents there. One of my instructors, a fellow by the name of Boston, he wasn't

04:00 very, well he wasn't popular with the pupils. We had to do under the hood flying, you sat in the back cockpit, and they pulled a hood over your head and you had to take off and fly, and we did this. And we flew up amongst cloud, and kept on going, and after about 2 hours, I think it was, it was time to come down. We came down, and we didn't know where we were. He didn't know where we

04:30 were, nor did I. We landed in a paddock, a farmer's paddock and the farmer, and asked him, "Where? What's this place?" It was Lockhart, so we had to fly Lockhart [Lockheed] back to Narrandera, which stretched the range of the Tiger Moth for the day, as to how long it would stay in the air. And I was only allowed to put 2 hours in my logbook for, that's the training we were supposed to have.

05:00 I noticed soon after I put time in my logbook, there was another entry in, put by flying officer Boston of another 45 minutes he'd put in there, so he admitted it to somebody, that he'd over stretched the mark.

After your training, when were you deployed?

We were posted, I was posted to Canada, overseas to a place Moncton, in New Brunswick. We were the first Australians to

05:30 go there, and they thought we were rather strange, but we also thought they were rather strange. I had difficulty, not communicating, but understanding their expressions at time, and the way they spoke. We

trained on Ansons, twin engine Ansons, and fortunately for me, I got off very quickly. Only had about 2 hours instruction and I was away. Enjoyed it very much.

06:00 Canadians were great people, they were very accommodating, they looked after us, and invited us everywhere, whenever we could get off, there was always somebody waiting at the gate south side to camp to take you, if you wanted to go away for when you had leave. Somebody would take you somewhere or other. They were very pleasant folk. One bad incident there, in our hut, there was about, what, 30, 20 or 30 Australians

06:30 and somebody robbed us during the night, when we were all fast asleep. And took all our wallets and everything, and we lost, you know, memorabilia that you wanted take with you where you knew you were heading overseas, and you wanted to see somebody or other, and we had information, and that was just lost. It made us pretty miserable for a while.

That's upsetting, yeah.

But the Canadians were excellent, and they clubbed together and gave us money, and tried to smooth their passage a bit.

07:00 After our Wings Parade, which was in November 1941, 7th of November 1941, we went to Halifax, further in towards the coast, there in a boat to England. It was a very slow convoy, of a great number of ships that started off. We ran into a western gale, western Atlantic

07:30 gale, and really, if you want to see a rough sea, you want to see a western Atlantic gale, doing 8 knots an hour – or 8 knots was the speed of our boat, anyway.

Keep the submarines away though, wouldn't it?

Well, it did for a while, yes, but when it quietened down, they got amongst us, and I don't know how many they got, but they got quite a number there. We heard a few bangs and, oh, yeah, the convoy was spread so far, that you, towards the tail, we weren't, we were in the middle

08:00 thank God, but towards the tail in the evening, there'd be a ship go bang or something. We saw a tanker go up one night, and it was a horrible sight really, but anyway. But after a long while, it took us about 20, no, not 20, around about 20 days to get across the Atlantic, that's how long it was, or how slow the convoy arrived at Liverpool.

08:30 Liverpool, we were put on a train to Bournemouth, that's right, we were down there to a, not embarkation depot, it was a reception depot, the RAF [Royal Air Force] reception depot, which more, few of our friends, or few of my friends from 12 course, which we originally started off at

09:00 Bradfield Park, I joined, they came, we met there, and it was great seeing them. We got to know each other better again, and went around. Went to London, of course. And a chap by name of Pete Elliot and myself met a Constable Pitt, I'm not sure, near Marble Arch it was, yeah anyway, we asked him for some direction to go somewhere. And he turned out to be a great bloke.

09:30 He told us where to go, but he said, "Now, tomorrow, I'm off duty. I'll take you," and he took us around, really took us round London, and we saw those pieces that were parts of London we only knew as history, and "This is the point, or the spot where King Charles II had his head lopped off" and here was something else, and it was just fabulous, it really was. And Constable Pitt, I'll always recall him, yeah, he was a great

10:00 guy.

Around about what time was this?

This is 1942. December 42. Americans had just, that's right, we were at sea and, in the Atlantic, when the Pearl Harbour show was on.

After England, where, what happened then?

After England was to the Middle East.

How long did you stay in England?

We left there in March,

10:30 yes, March, to get to the Middle East. We were sent out, the story goes, anyway, that they sent a message that they wanted 250 aircrews, and somebody left the 's' off and they sent out 250 aircrew. That's the story, but whether it's true, or not, I don't. We were amongst that. We went to the Middle East via South Africa, which was a long trip again.

On a boat?

11:00 On a boat, yes.

And you'd been doing any training in England?

No, we hadn't done any at all. Hadn't done any training in England. And then from there to the Middle

East, to a place just out, Abu Sueir, just near Ismaliah, on the canal, near the canal. We were there for a few months, or a couple months, waiting for something to happen, and then it did happen. And the Germans

11:30 pushed, put in a great push, and everybody panicked, so they moved us then, down to Kenya, of all places. We were sent down to Kenya, again by boat, and more, we did some training down there, and converted to Baltimore air craft, and did the training and back to the Middle East then after that.

You were in an RAF or RAAF squadron?

We, I was in an RAF squadron - 223 squadron.

12:00 We were, there were not many Australians, but there were a number of Australians in that

And how long were you back in the Middle East, in the Baltimores?

Well, we went back there in November 1942, and frankly, I was there until, well, apart from following, or chasing the German army up through North Africa, and into Sicily and into Italy, I was posted back

12:30 to the Middle East, and I was a flying instructor back there, so I was virtually in the Middle East from, you could say 42 until 44, 45.

How many hours did you put in, in the Baltimore?

Oh, I think it was about 2,300, or something like that. Some number like that. But I did 78 operations in them, which was rather a lot of operations, but we were very close to, we used to be close

13:00 support for the army, with daylight low level stuff and we were always within about an hour and 20 minutes from the front, and we could do our whole operation in about an hour and 50, an hour and 40 minutes or so. That's how close we were to the front line all the time. We were just virtually supporting the troops in the front line, and that's what we did all the way through. Had some very good results,

13:30 and commented upon, commended.

How, what happened after, how long were you a flying instructor?

I was a flying instructor from 1940, beginning of 44, through to the 45, June 45.

That's when you were discharged or came home?

Yes, well, no, I wasn't discharged,

14:00 I was posted home. And being in the RAF, home was England. And I was posted home, and it took me quite a while to convince the powers that be that home should be Australia, not England. And I set off to, fortunately, I knew a fellow in air ministry who had been on our squadron, and he made the necessary arrangements to get me physically transferred from the RAF to the RAAF,

14:30 so that made things easier. And I eventually got on a boat to come home. I arrived home on the 3rd of October 1945. So after leaving in June 41, and I remained in the air force until January, yeah, January 1946. I was discharged then, and went back to something I suppose I should have known about – local government – that's what I

15:00 did. But, yeah.

How long were you in the local government service for?

Well, I joined it in 1936, and with the exception of the war, I retired in 1981. So it was quite a step, quite a while.

You got married after the war?

Yes, we got married in 46 yes, in April 46, the 20th of April 1946. She remembers it now and again. She denies

15:30 it though.

How many kids did you have?

Three boys, three boys, yes. They're all grown up and married, and settled now, doing well for themselves. All within reach of us, they look after us, they are very good. Family is very good to us.

That's great. That's very good. So, we might go back to the beginning now.

Yes, fine.

Back to your childhood, and I, perhaps you could tell us, perhaps, some of the earliest

16:00 **memories of, say, the things you noticed about the Depression, when you were growing up?**

Yes, the thing, at Ingleburn, as I said, I believe I arrived at Ingleburn when I was about 5, 6, yes. I'd

started kindergarten at Shellharbour, that was the last place we were at, before we went to Ingleburn. I started kindergarten there, and recall being on a bus, with the bus driver taking us to school.

16:30 We were at the railway station, and the township of Shellharbour is on the coast, which was about 4 or 5 miles away, and recall that. But, then Ingleburn going to public school and the Depression years, yes, people coming knocking on our door, and asking, “Missus, can you spare me a tea, handful of tea, or a cup, not a cup, but tea to

17:00 boil my Billy?” Or something like that, or “Have you got anything for me to do?” or something - grown men were coming and doing this, and even as a child it impressed me. As I grew a little older there, I recall in one situation, my father being in permanent employment on the railways, there was a cut in their salary and oh, there was a great to do about that, for some reason or other, I

17:30 don’t know what, but it was pointed out to me what about those people that haven’t anything, because being young, I thought it was a terrible thing to take money from my father, but he pointed out to me that people didn’t have money to be, they didn’t have taken from them. And then when I was a 16 year old youth, I went to work at the local council, Ingleburn Council. And I was the bloke who used to hand

18:00 out to people who were married and had children, tickets for them to work on the roads with council. A married man with two children, he was entitled to 2 days’ work. A married man with three children, a single man, a single man was entitled to one day’s work and, and I know, it was all organised. All I had to do was hand these tickets out to them, but impressed me, anyway, that I’d

18:30 see these people, I thought now, “How wrong it was that I should be doing this and, but anyway, they got money for it?” They cracked a lot of stones on the road, because those days, they used to crack the stones with hammers and that’s how they made the base for the road, and didn’t have bulldozers or anything like that.

But were your family affected personally by the Depression, or were you relatively well off?

No, no,

19:00 they weren’t, the, only the two eldest, my two eldest brothers, they started off an apprenticeship at in the railways at Everleigh workshops as soon as they could, and that’s where they finished up. My younger brother and I, we were still going to school. It wasn’t until we finished in 1936, I finished 36, anyway.

Your dad was not in the First World War?

No, he wasn’t.

19:30 No. I think he was amongst, at the time the conscription argument came about, he was very much against it, I think. And he was in employment in the railways, anyway, and he was quite, I think determined in that regard.

But, did he have strong opinions about the First World War?

No, not express, no, not expressed. He didn’t have strong opinions, he was a Labor man all the way through, and no, he

20:00 just thought it was wrong, the conscription. No, his wife, my mother, had two brothers in the first war. One of them was a bit of a hero, and he got a, he won a Croix de Guerre, and a DCM, a Distinguished Conduct Medal, an MM [Military Medal], and Bar, so he must have done something.

Did you speak to him about that?

Yeah.

20:30 I did, when I came home in 1946, I happened to be wandering down George Street towards, on the corner of the street there – the pubs in those days were generally on the corner of the street – and I saw this fellow coming towards me, it was Uncle Arthur, and I thought “Good God,” and he’s got all these ribbons up here. So I stopped him, we went inside,

21:00 and I asked him, I said, “Where did you thieve these from?” He said he didn’t thieve them, he earned them. He was a signaller, who used to run signal wires out in the front or in the wherever the trenches were, and that’s how he managed to get it all there, no, he was all right.

Did, well, he was wearing his medals routinely all the time?

No, he had his ribbons up there, the ribbons were there.

Veterans wore their medals at that time? First World War veterans used to wear their medals, did they?

Well, they, no this was,

21:30 First World War fellows used to just have the ribbon, a little ribbon on there, indicating what the medal was for.

But they used to wear them during the day?

Yeah, no, I'm sorry, he was in uniform. He was in army uniform. He was in the, what defence? Civil Defence, Home Guard or, no England had Home Guard, it was the sort of Home Guard in Australia.

22:00 **When you were growing up, did you talk to him, did he talk you about the war, even before you enlisted?**

Whenever we saw him, not him so much, but his brother Les was the one we, used to do a bit of talking, there was Arthur and Les Wood. His brother Les used to do more talking about the war than Arthur ever did. And he didn't get any medals of valour, that I knew of anyway. No, and we were quite a

22:30 distance apart. They were at Berry, and we were at Ingleburn, and it was, you know, quite a way, and transport was railways in those days, and we didn't have an opportunity to go there or travel from Ingleburn to Berry.

Being part of a railway background did you have the opportunity to travel on the trains very frequently and to far away places?

Yes, Dad used to get a first class

23:00 pass for his family once every 12 months or something or other. He'd take us on holiday. Went to Sawtell on one occasion, up the North Coast and we dropped off there. We used to go to Woy Woy a lot – Woy Woy Bay. Where else did we go? I think they were the two regular spots we used to go to. But it was okay, we used to go on two weeks holiday with a suitcase – it's amazing. What we did.

23:30 **Is that unusual?**

Well, no, I think if anyone did get away, that's the way they'd travel – train was the means of transport, yes.

Were you aware of the Anzac Day celebrations very well?

Before the war?

Yes.

No, not really, no, I must admit. I was aware of such a thing as Anzac

24:00 and Anzac Day – had a book about it on one occasion. A lot of sketches in it of, showing about what went on and what didn't go on – I recall that – but, no, the answer's no, I wasn't very aware of it, or fully aware of it, but since then, it's quite different.

Well, was your home a happy home?

Yes, it was a happy home, yes, quite a happy home. We

24:30 used to play sport, cricket, football, and just wandering out. People would, our house was a railway house alongside the railway line, where the trains used to come through the front door, and go out the back, but we got so used to it, we slept, my brother and, my two brothers and I slept on the front veranda, open veranda, we had

25:00 blinds to prevent weather getting in. And we used to sleep through all these trains going through, and on one occasion, there was a railway smash right on the railway crossing, road crossing, which would only be a matter of 50 to 60 yards away from where we were actually sleeping. We didn't even hear it. I was only when we woke up in the morning, you'd hear this chip, chip, chip, but it was a Sunday, we knew it was a Sunday.

25:30 We couldn't work out what fettlers were doing working on Sunday morning. But there had been a train, it was a goods train, trucks came off, rattle and bang, and they were repairing the railway line. That's how soundly we slept.

Do you have any sad memories of that time?

No, not really, not really. No, I can't say I have bad memories, we used to, no, not bad

26:00 memories, they all came later, they all came later.

Did you enjoy school?

Not really, I wasn't a very good pupil. I just managed to get there, just managed to get there. I started off very well, when I first went to high school, and I was up in the top class, but I was more interested in sport than education – academic education,

26:30 anyway, and I gradually finished up, in the third year, I was down in the bottom class. There used to be A, B and C classes.

What sport did you enjoy?

Football, rugby, and played it quite a lot. We were in, our school was in the university shield for quite a number of years, and a lot of the boys that played with me in the team finished up in Parramatta,

27:00 Rugby Firsts, Parramatta Firsts Rugby League team. A fellow by the name of Andrews, he was a full back. There was quite a few of them, or quite a, a number of them, two or three.

What did you aspire to be, what did you dream of to be when you grew up?

Well, when I was at Baulkham Hills, the war hadn't started. I

27:30 came across an advertisement for a short service commission with the RAF. Always been interested in aeroplanes, and things that went on. In Kingsford Smith's day, when we were in the scouts at Ingleburn, he came, he and Ulm turned up in their little Fox Moth, I think it was, and landed, and we Ingleburn scouts were given the job of supposedly guarding it. But, you know, we were always there, but, there was,

28:00 it impressed me, the fact that it was an aeroplane, was Smith and Ulm.

Was it the Tasman or the?

No, this was, he'd just arrived up to see the, person by the name of Hurst, who was the managing director of the British General Electric Company, which was the largest electrical company in Australia, I think, at the time, and he was seeking funds for his future flights. He came up there, and it so happened

28:30 that Hurst was our patron, and that's how we scouts got involved in it. And we were just standing around, we were supposed to be guarding it, and keeping people away from it, but it impressed me. Later on, when I was still at Ingleburn, I went to Mascot aerodrome and had a, was 10 schillings, and I had a ride in a light aircraft, it was an open light aircraft of some make, and that

29:00 got me more interested. And when I was at Castle Hill, I saw this advertisement for a short term commission with the RAF, so I applied for it. I was interviewed, and amongst the interview questions, I always recall, that's how, it's an indication of how well informed I was. I was asked, "Who was the aggressor in China, the Japanese or the Chinese?" I stumbled over that one,

29:30 I didn't know. And as a result of that, I'm sure, they didn't accept me for the short term commission, so it was just as well.

Why didn't you apply for the RAAF?

Well, I can't, the opportunity of, I suppose, of travel, and the RAF. No real reason at all. I had a brother that, eldest brother by that time was in the RAAF.

And did you question the

30:00 **fact that the RAF were recruiting in Australia?**

Yeah, they were, yes. As a matter of fact, I know one or two people were successful, and I think you'll find, if you check your history, I think you'll find a couple of their boys in the Battle of Britain were RAF short term commission Australians. One I do know was, trying to say names now, Reg Bailey.

30:30 He was over there on a short term commission before the war broke out. And he finished up as a wing commander of a bomber squadron.

Was, that was, you applied after the war broke out?

No, that was before the war broke out, before August 39, it was early 39, March, April.

How long were you with the scouts for?

Oh,

31:00 all the time I was at Ingleburn, from the time I was about, I was in the cubs, and then the scouts, so from about 6, 7 years old until 15. It was at Ingleburn all the time.

Did you enjoy the scouts?

Yes, we did. We used to go camping, we lived on sausages, and we'd take a few rolls with us, and clean underwear and all that nonsense, come home and

31:30 we'd eaten all the food, and still have our clean underwear with us when we got back. It was good fun, I'd go away for the weekend somewhere or other, the scoutmaster would take you, go and camp in the bush.

Are they some of your happiest memories with the scouts, sorry?

Well, they were in those days, yes, it was something different to do, and boiling water with a wet match, or starting a fire with wet matches and things. Do you know how to do that?

32:00 **I was in scouts, but I've actually forgotten.**

You rub the match in your hair, and it dries it out, then you can strike it.

Really?

In case you get in a wet situation.

Set your hair on fire.

No, no. This was just the ordinary wooden matches.

Were you, in scouts, I think it's very much a British tradition, did you feel part of the British Empire, or did you

32:30 **feel Australian?**

No, I've always felt Australian. It was only, when Baden-Powell came out here, I remember we all congregated at, all the scouts, I don't know whether it was New South Wales, or all the scouts in the area that could get there, went to Randwick racecourse, and Baden-Powell paraded in the car, and we all waved and shouted and jumped up and down. No, I didn't have any real

33:00 affection, no, I can't say I was, I've been Australian, and wanted to be Australian all along.

Did you celebrate Empire Day?

Yeah, we used to have crackers was a major thing, to have crackers, but what was meant by Empire Day, except when we were at high school, we used to have to go along to a film in the morning, where we'd parade down to the cinema in

33:30 Parramatta and, remember seeing Brown on Resolution was the name of the thing. He was a fellow dropped on a rock in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, and there's a German cruiser being repaired and he did the right thing and shot the fellow, so they couldn't, yeah, it was a quite British, that was the only enjoyment we ever got out of that.

Where you aware of

34:00 **the trouble brewing in Europe growing up?**

No, no I wasn't. We weren't at all. It was quite foreign to me.

When did you first hear of someone like Hitler?

Well, I think the realisation was that morning, well, prior to the 3rd of August, maybe a month or so prior to that, but the real realisation came on that Saturday morning, when Mr

34:30 Menzies said that, "As a consequence, we are at war." And then that's when I realised, well, yes, we are at war.

Well, so you were, suddenly you just flicked on the radio, and suddenly you were at war or?

Well, no, I had realised that there was something going on. We had heard about the invasion of, he next, Austria, and then he,

35:00 Schleswig-Holstein, or there was another part of Poland, he put in a battleship into that – aware of that sort of thing, and then he eventually invaded Poland and, yeah. It was a gradual thing.

Your father was against the war, he couldn't have been too happy about a Second World War breaking out?

No, I don't think he was, I don't think he was at all.

Did you make it known to him, that you were intending to join the RAF?

Well, when it came

35:30 to, I was under age, and when it came to signing my application form, I wasn't prepared to ask him, so I forged his signature.

When did you eventually tell him?

After the war.

But, he must have known you went to war?

Oh, yeah, he knew, that I was called up, but he thought, I don't know what he thought about that, but I don't know whether he did think, or, about the fact that somebody had to sign the

36:00 authority form when you get there. But, people put ages up and did things, but I forged his signature on my age, my application.

Why did you not, why did you do that?

Well, I didn't want to ask him, because I knew that he was, had this different feeling about the whole situation. He was of Irish descent - and that might explain a lot. He was a,

36:30 not opposed to, but he was, didn't encourage the English attitude too much.

That didn't rub off onto you though?

In some little bits, it might off, yeah. Later on, in the war, it did I think, when I, expressed myself in, at times when I probably shouldn't have done so.

What about your mum?

She was

37:00 quite quiet. Yeah, no, she didn't say too much about it at all. And I had two brothers that knew what it was all about, so she didn't, and my eldest brother at the time, he was in the RAAF, he was a fitter 2E, in the RAAF. And the other fellow, Les, had gone to sea as a, in the merchant navy, so

37:30 I think they probably thought there was enough family contribution at the time.

Did you think, how did you break the news to your mum that you'd joined up? If you hadn't been discussing it with?

I told, when I got the notification that I had to go in for a physical and that, when I was called up in late 1940. I got this letter that came to me, so I went home and, I

38:00 was staying at, living at Castle Hill during the week, and coming home at weekends. And I broke it to her then. No bad reaction, fortunately.

How long were you on standby before you were finally sent off for training?

When we got sworn in, that would be

38:30 sometime in September and we went in, in March. So it was from September through to March. We had a badge of RAAF reserve, so that we could always say, if the army, if they wanted to call us up, we could say, "Well, we are on the reserve."

Did you join up with some mates, or did you just do this off your own bat?

No, I was the only one that did it. Most of the blokes that I

39:00 knew at the time were thinking of army, as a matter of fact. A couple of them were, as a matter of fact, in the army. There were a couple of lads who were older than I and in the scouts at Ingleburn who had joined the army. They were in the permanent army before the famous war declaration.

Do you have any other, do you have any strong memories of that

39:30 **time when you joined up?**

Only about this fellow going in to play golf, and nothing much other than that, just okay, I'm there, now got to wait and see to get there. Oh, we had to do a series of lessons, it was like going back to school, we had to do, I think it was 12 lessons, and we had to do them each week we had a booklet which, it was a maths,

40:00 something about, mainly maths, but geography or weather situations. We had to complete these and send them away, and then get another booklet back. Get the 12 lessons, you were supposed to have completed those before you actually went into the air force. Somebody that, some of the fellows that were there, when I got there had told me that they hadn't completed

40:30 them but I managed it –didn't seem to make too much difference. And the standard of education, one fellow I know, became a very firm friend of mine, he never passed his intermediate certificate, and of course, when he went to enlist, "Have you passed your intermediate certificate?" "Yes, I've passed it," nobody checked. So he was, that's the sort of attitude – once they got you there, well, they could make it

41:00 work. Which they did.

Tape 2

00:30 **Just before we go on, sort of one or two questions. I'm intrigued about your father. You mentioned he was a Labor man. Was he a union man?**

Well, I imagine he would have been a union man, he belonged to the Professional Officers' Association

or something, they called it in those days. Or he was, yes, I would say, certainly, he would have been.

Was he very political?

He was,

01:00 well, I was going to say outspoken, but he was quite firm in his views. He expressed them, yes.

When you say he was against the war, did he express those views as well?

The First World War? Which, you see, he was against conscription.

He was against conscription.

Yes, he was definitely opposed to that. And he expressed views on that. But with regards to the Second World War, there was no mention of

01:30 opposition in any way.

But he remained on the railways throughout the war?

Yes, he was, no, he retired before I got home, through ill health. He retired about 2, 3 years before I got home, so that would have been 1942, or something like that. Yeah, 43, I should imagine, because I'd only just left home in 42, 41, I forget.

02:00 **Did you have any other relatives who joined up the same time as you?**

No.

Cousins, or no...

No, nobody in the air force. I don't know whether there was anybody. Had a cousin who went down on the [HMAS] Sydney. But he was much younger than I was.

Did you know much about the Australian air force?

Yes. I did, because I was interested in aeroplanes,

02:30 and my brother Tom was in the air force, and, I used to, I'd been out to Richmond when it was, when they had bi-planes out there, and yes, I used to, been out there. And I went out on an occasion when they had a flying display, and everything out there, yes.

You actually went on a joy ride

Yes, that was down at Mascot.

Can you tell us a little about that first experience in the air?

03:00 Well, no, not really, you just, excitement, I think was the thing overwhelmed me most of all. Was the fact that you get out and float around and, we floated around Sydney Harbour and came back again. And I think it was the shortest trip round Sydney Harbour to see what happened, I think, we took of from Mascot and out towards Maroubra, and turned round and down the harbour and back in again,

03:30 and we ended. I think the pilot wanted to get away and have a drink. Because it was close to the afternoon, it was late in the afternoon, and I'd been there watching the aeroplanes take off and land and take off and land, and not doing much, and finally plucked up enough courage to spend my 10 shillings, which was a huge amount of money in those days.

When you joined up the air force, you didn't immediately see an aeroplane, did you? Can you explain the first initial training

04:00 **at Bradfield Park?**

Initial training, well, first of all they made us physically fit, which was a good thing, great thing, as a matter of fact. We also did an enormous amount of lessons, navigational, mathematics, what else, but like, radio, wireless. That was the thing prior to going into the air force,

04:30 we also had a requirement to go and learn a bit of Morse. And we did it with a group of ladies down in Clarence Street, I think it was something, volunteer ladies that used to teach down there. We had to go down there, and learn Morse Code. But, further on, when we got into Bradfield, this was increased, the amount of study we had to do, and yes. Physical training,

05:00 marching, and eating properly and just, I think we were all very fit when we came out of the place.

You said that was a good thing. How fit were you when you joined the air force?

I thought I was quite fit, yeah, I thought I was quite fit. The only thing that knocked me about was, they used to march us with gas masks on, and it was, what, March,

05:30 April, it still wasn't very cool, and they'd march us right round De Burghs Bridge way and then back,

and they'd run us up the last bit of hill. I tell you, you had a big, quite a large quantity of water in your gas mask when you finished. It was great. No, I was fairly physically fit, having played sport and been that way, I didn't have any real trouble.

Did anyone dislike the physical training in those first

06:00 **days?**

Oh, complained about it, complained about it, but I don't, as far as disliking it, I don't, they didn't express it in any way.

Did you have to march in full kit?

Never in full kit, the only real kit we had was the gas mask, that was all the only marching we ever had. Oh, we had to do some rifle drill, and firing and marching

06:30 and giving command, or each member of the squad was to take the squad and march them, and the instructor fellow would watch you to see whether you were doing the right or wrong thing, yeah.

Was the rifle drill the first time you'd used a rifle?

Yeah, first time I'd used a 303, yeah. Didn't like it very much.

Can you talk about the first time you used a 303?

Yes, we were on the firing range, it was a small range, I think it's 50 metres, 50 yards, or something or other.

07:00 And I didn't know, or wasn't told, and I didn't hold it close enough to my shoulder, and I, instead of squeezing the trigger, I pulled it. And the damn thing hit my shoulder and made me sore, so from then on in we used to take off our caps that we had and wrap it up and put it under there to stop the repercussions, but anyway, yeah, we learned the hard way.

07:30 **Was everybody in the, your group in the same boat, where they experienced riflemen, or?**

No, some of them had used rifles before. I'd used a pea rifle before, but it hadn't. You, know, it was nothing like this. Others knew how to handle it, which I didn't, apparently, you've got to be part of it, and get in and hold it tight and do everything. No, there were a few like that, but there were a few like

08:00 myself that had sore shoulders.

Did you learn about bayonets as well?

We had to fix bayonets, but we didn't have to do any charging around, like the army had to do. We were just more or less parading. Fixing bayonets, and marching and presenting arms and doing that sort of thing. But no bayonet practice.

In your whole rest of your war experience, did you ever have to actually use a rifle?

No, no, not once. Not once.

08:30 Fortunately. No, I've used a revolver, but not a rifle, no.

What other physical training did you do?

I, physical, well, the physical training people used to put us all, we'd be in a room doing all sorts of callisthenics, and they'd walk around in amongst you and tap

09:00 you on the shoulder if you weren't doing it properly and you had to get out and stand over there, and when everybody else had gone you'd, they'd bring you back and give you a bit more of it, just to let you know you weren't doing it properly.

Did you respond well to the discipline of the air force?

Yes, reasonably, well, I'd say, yes. Reasonably well. I accepted the fact that superior people, yes.

Was there any particularly harsh training

09:30 **officers?**

No, not at Bradfield Park. There was corporal there, used to shout a bit at you, but I suppose we all deserved that, because we weren't lifting your knees high enough or swinging your arms far enough, or whatever. No, there was nobody really harsh with us.

You mentioned wireless and Morse Code, navigation, can you

10:00 **tell us about the other things that you were learning in the classroom?**

Health, about, you know, looking after yourself and you know, had that. And what else, oh identification of flag, you know, countries' flags, identification of aircraft. No, the concentration was mainly on maths,

navigation and Morse

10:30 Code.

How do you learn to identify aircraft?

Oh, by their appearance, yeah. But it was just getting to know that particular, there is something about that particular aircraft that has a appendage on it that is different to anything else, and its wings are swept this way or that way, or whatever, you just had to identify a particularly, particular spot on them.

11:00 **What sort of aircraft were they teaching you about at this stage?**

Well, the Spitfire, and the Hurricane and the Messerschmitt. Messerschmitt 109 and 210, Heinkel, the Blenheim, and the Wellington, I think, and the Sunderland flying boat, yeah. And a couple of other German ones – the Focke Wulf flying boat,

11:30 Heinkel, the Junkers, yeah, something like that.

There was no mention in the training about Japanese aircraft at this stage?

My famous statement is: "When I went to the war, there was no war in the Pacific. When I came home, there was no war in the Pacific – was there war in the Pacific?" It really upsets a lot of people.

Everybody was expecting to go to Europe.

Yes,

12:00 they were all expecting to go there, because that's where it was.

Did you hear anything, much news about what was going on in the war in Europe at this stage?

Only that which was broadcast generally. Everybody got to know and things, yes. Because, nothing special that we got information on that nobody else had.

What about the Empire Air Training Scheme. Did you know much about that at the time?

We

12:30 learnt about it as we were part of it. And what it meant, but, it as a training scheme was quite brilliant. Because it bought all the colonies, as we were then, into being, and to assist the Empire, and it gave a lot of people a lot of chances, yeah. And each country threw their weight behind it. Canada, particularly, because

13:00 it used to get the New Zealanders and the Australians, and finishing off their training.

Had that already started to happen when you were doing your initial training at Bradfield Park?

Yes, I believe, yes it had. Because I was on 12 course EFTS [Elementary Flight Training School], and there was one course went in every month, so there was 12 months in front of me.

How much longer after that

13:30 **did you move onto Narromine?**

To Narrandera?

To Narrandera, sorry.

Yes, it was only, I think about 6, 6 weeks we had in Bradfield Park. And then onto a couple of months at Narrandera.

That was a completely different school?

Yes, and that was where they taught us to fly a Tiger Moth.

Do you remember being excited when you first saw the Tiger Moth?

No,

14:00 not really excited, but the excitement when I got in, and having, you, having to be you that flew the thing. That's where I was not quite as sharp as I might have been or could have been.

But before you got to Narrandera, was there some sort of decision on who would become a pilot and who would become navigator?

Yes, you went through a selection procedure, the whole course there would,

14:30 and some would be selected as pilots, some as navigators, some as wireless operators, and some as gunners.

How did that selection procedure work?

Well, there was a selection board, you went before it, and they asked you all various questions about who you were and what you did, and things like this, and apart from that, they had the result of your examination marks like that ITS [Initial Training School], yeah. And they made the selection that way.

It must have been a fairly terrifying experience to go through a board.

It was,

15:00 but not knowing where you are going to finish up. It was very satisfying when you finished up as a pilot, because everybody wanted to be a pilot.

Can you describe what happened, what happened inside that selection board?

Not really, no, I can't particularly think of anything, no they just asked the various questions about what you did outside the air force, and, you know, things like that mainly.

15:30 **And when you came out and it was announced that you were going to be a pilot?**

It wasn't announced then, everybody, it wasn't until everybody had been through the selection procedure. Then they posted it up on a board a day or two later, and of course, there was great consternation, everybody was racing around trying to find out who, where their name was, what it was on and things, yeah. Was a great relief.

It must have been a relief for you.

Yeah, yeah, it was.

Did you have any mates who wanted to be pilots, who didn't make it?

There were a couple,

16:00 yeah. Yes, they just frankly disappeared from, you know, they were there, we were there, and they went one way and we went the other, and I don't think we ever saw them or heard of them again. They went to various schools elsewhere.

Is that statement true for a lot of what happened to you during the war? You would move on and leave people behind quite often?

Yes, it was, it was, yes,

16:30 quite often you'd be with a group of people, and you'd get posted or particularly when we were in the squadron, you'd be there, and somebody's time would expire in the squadron, and he would go and then there was the occasion when people were killed, and you weren't really with a, the only group that you ever were with solidly was your own

17:00 flight crew, flying crew. But then, later on, well, no matter where you were, there was always a variance of people's times there, how long they'd served there, were they due to be posted, or they'd done this, or gone there, or somebody. There was never any continuity or length of association that would remain solid, not so much like army fellows, they were in whatever branch it was and they were in

17:30 it all the way.

Can you talk about the troubles that lack of continuity caused?

I don't think there was any trouble it caused, I wouldn't think so, it's only the loss of mateship would be the thing about it. But you'd be a group, and you'd be doing things and you'd have a great time, drink copious quantities of liquor together, and play sport or whatever we could do, and then

18:00 we went one way, and some of them went the other and we didn't see them after that, or some of them we didn't see later on we might have found one or two. But you kept, well, you had a record of them, anyway, photographic record of them, that you knew, and what they were.

Was it difficult to make firm mates in the air force?

No, not really, no, no. Particularly,

18:30 if you were the same posting, if you were a pilot there was no problem there. All the pilots seemed to get together pretty well. And, you know, I wouldn't say, the only people that you wouldn't make too many mates of were the higher ranking officers, naturally enough, they stayed amongst themselves.

They talk about mateship being an important part of the

19:00 **Australian military tradition. That's mainly the army, do you think it's the same in the air force?**

Oh, in the air force, yes, it would be the same, if, when you're talking the air force, you're a squadron of air force people. Now the Australian squadrons, which had Australians, I could understand mateship there. But we were an RAF squadron, we had Australians, Canadians, even had a fellow from Fiji,

19:30 and a fellow from Argentine, amongst Englishmen and Scots and Irish. You wouldn't have the same sort of mateship with them as you would with a bunch of Australians.

Why not, could you tell a little bit about what the differences were?

Well, you always felt that Australia was somehow a little better than most of them, but you

20:00 stuck together, you know, if somebody wanted something, or it came to a crackdown as to who would look after somebody else, yeah, you'd always count on it. But with the other fellows, well, you didn't know, I didn't think, anyway. Not to say they wouldn't, it's just that you somehow had that feeling that

20:30 there'd be no danger for the Australian backing you all the way.

Do you think that's a particularly Australian thing, or do you think the other nations felt that way about their kinfolk?

I think it's a particular Australian thing, because of our history and where we came from and how we did it, yeah, I think it's a particularly Australian thing. Can't say the same about the English, because from various parts of the country, it's difficult for some

21:00 of them to understand each other. And the Irish are not particularly keen on the English, and the Scots think the English could be somewhere else other than where they should be, no that's just a general approach to it.

When you came into the air force, there were hundreds, thousands of other young men joining the air force at the same time, from lots of different backgrounds. Did you notice sort of distinctions between where people came from?

21:30 Initially, but the few weeks at ITS initial training school eliminated all that, we were all from the same ilk now, it brought you back to square one.

So, after that, everyone was the same?

Yeah, well, everybody, were all on the same sort of level. Nobody was treated any differently or something. I remember we had a bloke on our squadron, on our course,

22:00 when we got leave, which was once every fortnight or something, on a weekend, his mother used to arrive in a chauffer driven car to pick him up and to go on leave, you know, it raised a few eyebrows as far as we were concerned, the first time it occurred, but after that, he was treated no differently inside the camp, and he wasn't. That's just to show the level that there was.

22:30 **Did you even know about what people did in their civilian lives a lot of the time?**

We used to talk about it to them, yes, we'd find out, but, yes, we'd do that, we'd find out, but a major interest was improving your ability to get a position that we wanted, you know, as a pilot. You out, you were studying, or trying to

23:00 out do the others, or not out do them, but at least be compatible with them, and get on and so that they wouldn't get too much of a higher mark than you. You'd be striving to stay on the same level, you wouldn't want to fall behind in any way.

Does that mean training at Narrandera, especially, was a bit of a competition?

Yes, it was, in a way, yes. Because there, people could get scrubbed, or get scrubbed, they'd be

23:30 wiped out, and sent back to wherever. It did occur on one or two occasions, there, where, it was very bitterly disappointing for anyone it happened to. Yeah, it wouldn't be very kind, and that's why you're always strove to keep up amongst them all.

How did you hold your own, did you do well in this competition?

No,

24:00 I didn't, I was only average, was only average, just average. I wasn't outstanding at all. I was just a bit average.

Was there any jealousy or bad feeling toward those who were competing harder, or doing better, or?

No, I don't think so. They, you know, just acknowledged it, "He's doing great, isn't he?" and so forth, didn't worry too

24:30 much. I was only when the, as always, exams sort everybody out and waited till the results came, and they were stuck up on the board, and then you take a deep breath, and check out.

Having said you were only average, you must have been able to fly all right?

Oh, yes, yes,

Can you talk about your first training flights?

My first one I had a very fine

25:00 instructor, chap by the name of Sergeant McGrath, he and I got on well together, and I had a couple of hours with him. And then I finished up with this fellow by the name of Boston, flying officer Boston, the fellow that lost us in the cloud, and we landed at Lockhart. I don't know whether, he just didn't like me or not, well I think he probably did, but he used to shout and scream at you down through the, you used to have a thing that went through your ears and down

25:30 and, there was no electronic device, and it was just. Then he'd get hold of the control column when you weren't doing anything properly he said, "No, that's not right," and he'd pull it or push it that way, and it was such a difference with the aeroplane. My confidence was knocked about considerably, and that's why I had difficulty, that's why I was very, taking a long time to go solo and that, and I was getting desperately afraid that they mightn't keep me.

26:00 I blame him, definitely. Always wished I could come across him one day, and just show him how I did finish up.

Can you just explain for us, describe the layout of a Tiger Moth when you are training? Where everybody sits, what the controls are, that kind of thing.

Well, your control column, controls your ailerons and your tail plane it well, lets say, if you wanted to turn or dive

26:30 or climb, your control column did that. Your rudder was only, assisted you in making these turns, because if you wanted to make a steep turn, you have to put the control column over to get your aircraft to roll, and then your rudder would hold it in that position, you'd have to use sometimes opposite rudders for the way you turn, to hold it in its position. Your rudder played very little effect, and it was your control.

27:00 column that did most of it and also your, yeah, your throttle, setting your throttle at the speed or the revolutions you were doing. It was a combination of your control column, your throttle and your trimming device, you had a trimming device if you wanted to climb and you wanted to keep on a steady climb, so you adjusted your trims so that your control column

27:30 would remain very much where it should be, and so forth. And did opposite things, and, so it was a combination of all of those things that you then flew.

How did the instructor take you on a flight, did they have controls of their own?

Yes, they always had controls. And they were in the front seat, and your pupil was always in the back. They always had controls, yes.

Can you explain to the archive what a Tiger Moth looks like and how you sit in it with a pilot?

28:00 Well, it's a bi-winged, two winged aeroplane, it has a Gypsy engine in it, which produced power that well, you could cruise at about 60 to 80 miles per hour. Very light, it's canvas covered, or material similar to canvas, and

28:30 performed very well. It had very few vices, it wouldn't do anything, you know, if you had a problem, and you went too far with it, it wouldn't just spin into the ground or do something like that. It would be fairly gentle with you, and you could avoid making any real grave errors. But lots of other aeroplanes didn't have that, but the Tiger Moth was a very gentle aeroplane. Very similar to the Avro Anson,

29:00 the twin engine one there that, I would suggest that if you couldn't fly a Tiger Moth or an Avro Anson, you just can't fly.

Was there ever a particularly difficult moment, you were having trouble with this one instructor. Did you have a particularly difficult flight that you can remember?

Yes, it was, apart from the one we got lost on. Another one, he was taking me up to do steep turns and things

29:30 and he was flying the aeroplane around atrociously, or I wasn't holding it in tight enough or what, didn't steep enough turn on it, and when we came back I asked the flight commander, I went and saw him, told him what was going on because he, Boston, said that "I might put you up for a scrub test" or something, so I went and saw the flight commander and said, told him what was going on. He said, "Well, come with me." Away he went, and we went up

30:00 there, he came back and he said, "There's nothing wrong with you."

You went up in a flight with the flight commander?

Yes, and that was it, because, a result of what Boston was doing.

Was that a difficult thing for a young recruit to do?

Yes, it was very difficult. I'd say, he was threatening me with giving me a scrub test, which, I wasn't prepared to accept that. He could have recommended such a thing, but I thought, "Well, I'll get in first, and go and see the flight

30:30 commander."

Can you explain the scrub test?

That was, somebody would take you up, the flight commander, or somebody totally different to your instructor, take you up and put you through all the things you should know, and if you didn't do them, well, they'd say, "Sorry, that's it." They'd have a talk to you before they let you go, or got rid of you I'm sure.

So when you went up with the flight commander, was that a scrub test, or?

Well, I would think, in a way, it was, but once he got

31:00 there, he started to show me what to do. I told him I'd never, it had never been explained to me, so he, we didn't have very long in the air on that. But he was quite adequately satisfied when we came back.

And what happened after that?

Well, we got back, just got onto doing normal things. I didn't get much respite from Boston. I think it was soon after that we

31:30 finished up at Lockhart.

What was the most difficult thing to do, in your early training, in a Tiger Moth?

The Tiger Moth, I suppose, recover from a spin, then, well, doing steep turns – holding the aircraft still – oh, doing a roll, you had to do a slow roll,

32:00 which is eight points, and you went around slowly – eight points of a circle - that was always a hard thing to do, because at your, one stage, when you are on your back the controls are operating totally in the total different directions to the way they normally do.

Can you take us through a slow roll? How do you do one?

Well, slow roll to the right, you push the control column over to the right, and

32:30 that'll get you up there, you hold that angle there with your rudder, so that you, you also increase your throttle set. And when you finally roll over on your back, you've got to then reverse your rudder setting, and your controls, so that you're virtually flying holding your control column forward, so that the nose doesn't drop, you hold, you push, so if you're climbing away, which you must remember, you are on your back, and you roll over the other side,

33:00 and you bring your opposite rudder into play, and your controls back that way and you finally get round again. But you're, you know, you're juggling with your control column all the time, because you're in positions that you normally don't fly.

All this time, how were you strapped to the aircraft?

You're strapped in with a four point strap.

Do you hang on those straps?

Well, that's when you are on your back. A good slow roll, you should hang on your back. And all the dust and dirt

33:30 falls out of the cockpit.

Did you ever fear that you might be going to crash?

No, not really, no. You had parachutes on, of course, you know, and you had to be above a certain height to do these things.

Did you ever have a close call at any time in your training?

Not, in my training, no, later on, yes.

We'll talk about that later on. I've heard that there were a lot of training accidents, though, in

34:00 **the Empire Air Training Scheme. Did you see any of those?**

Yes, I've seen one of, that was in an Anson, that was in Canada.

Can you tell us about that?

Yeah, it was, in Canada, there was snow, well, it had snowed, and our runways had been cleared, and there was snow 3 or 4 feet either side of the runway,

34:30 and this pupil – a Canadian – took off, and for reasons unknown, best known to himself, he pulled the aircraft up into a stall position. And it just flopped back onto the ground again, and more or less disintegrated. He was thrown clear fortunately, that's all, because he just pulled it up too sharply.

Did you see this accident happen?

Yes, yes. We were at the flight at the time. He was in our flight

35:00 and we were there waiting to get aircraft, or doing something, but I actually saw it happen.

What happened immediately after the crash?

Well, there was an alarm, the fire engine and ambulance raced out there and picked him up. He wasn't badly hurt, as a matter of fact. Well, you shouldn't be in an Anson, anyway.

Why do you say that?

Well, the things don't go so fast and they're made of wood and

35:30 fibre, not, fibreglass, sort of thing. But it's the sort of thing that would collapse around you, rather than break and bend. It would fold inwards.

We'll talk a bit more about the Ansons in a moment, but the whole time you were training in Australia, were there any fatalities at all?

There was at Wagga, when we were. Wagga was where they used to train in Wirraway,

36:00 single engine airplanes, and there, somebody crashed there, I recall, there was that. But there was none at Narrandera I'm aware of, there was a famous one at Wagga, it was about that time, it might have been later, where one landed on, piggy-backed on top of the other coming in to land. Because, you know, you can see ahead, but you

36:30 can't see directly down, but the fellow that's in the one underneath should have looked around.

Your training went from Narrandera, did you go to Wagga after that?

No.

You never were at Wagga.

No, I was never at Wagga, but Wagga was only just down the road from us.

What did you do in your spare time at training camp?

Most of, we used to go into Narrandera, there was a very good friend, myself and Peter O'Connell, we used to

37:00 go in and have a bath, which was, go and book a room at the hotel for Saturday night. Have a bath, a hot bath, which was great. Then we'd generally go and have a meal down at Greeks, there was always a couple of Greek restaurants in any town you went to, you always got a good meal there, with, what was it, a mixed grill. And then,

37:30 there'd be a dance or something on in town, where we'd go to that. But talking of mixed grills, at our camp at Narrandera, we all claimed that the agent had a sheep station because, all we ever had was mutton in every form you could ever imagine. Hot, cold, semi-cold, greasy, but that's why we enjoyed getting in and getting a different meal.

What were the conditions like in camp,

38:00 **obviously, you couldn't have a bath?**

No, only bits of showers about the place. You'd have showers, yes, not a real good soaking bath, which was just different after, we sort of forgot about baths when I moved on. I don't think I had a bath after that. Showers were the name of the game. They were quite good. You had to, in the huts, there'd be a number of you in one hut. Had to take it in turn to

38:30 do the washing up, and also the serving, or cleaning the place up, and doing this. There had to be a roster to do that – look after the place.

Everyone pulled their weight [did their work]?

Yeah, they had to. The others saw that they did.

Were there any harsh punishments?

Not that I can recall, only being abused, I suppose, but, "Why the hell didn't you do it?" or something, there was no

39:00 harsh punishment to my mind, to my knowledge.

When you went into these dances, did you have any particular girls you went to see?

No, anyone that was available.

Were there lots of girls available?

There always seemed to be a number there, yes.

Did you find the fact that you were training as a pilot in the air force made you attractive to the young ladies?

Well, they were in, the young ladies in Narrandera were there, and that's, the only people they had were trainee

39:30 pilots. So there was no advantage over that.

Did you ever find that in your air force career, that having the wings on your chest made you?

Oh yes, yes. Definitely. Made all the difference. When you didn't have them, before we graduated, it was very difficult, but once you graduated, it was quite different.

Did you get respect from everyone, once you had those wings?

Yes,

40:00 yes. Acknowledged. They acknowledged you and what you were. Up till then you used to have a little white thing, in your side cap up here to indicate you were aircrew. And that was the only recognition there was. But no matter whether they were pilot's wings or navigator's wings, people respected whatever wing it was.

When was it that you received your wings?

On the 7th of November, 41.

And where were you?

40:30 In Moncton, New Brunswick, in Canada.

We might go back to this, but can you tell us a little bit about that occasion, it must have been a huge moment for you.

Yes, it was, we were, well that was the object of us getting anywhere, was to get our wings. Fortunately everybody on our corps, every Australian passed. So, none of them would have been sent back home or anything. Yes,

41:00 doing the final exams and doing the final flying test and everything, and it wasn't until a day or so after they were completed then your list comes out as to who qualified, and who didn't. And then the preparation for the wings parade, and we'd have to go and march and stand to attention and form fours or twos, or whatever it was, and then your name would be called out, and you'd march up and salute

41:30 the commanding officer, and he'd pin your wings on your breast, and salute together, about turn and away you went. And from that moment on, you became a sergeant. There was only a few officers. I think there was two fellows out of the whole lot of them were made officers. So we then took advantage of the sergeants' mess. Brand new sergeants went in there, and enjoyed it all yeah, it was great.

Tape 3

00:30 **Can you tell us a little about the time before you were leaving Australia what the atmosphere was like in Sydney?**

I don't think there was, the concern about the war in Europe was paramount. And particularly the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] fellows over in the Middle East.

01:00 I don't think there was, so far as I could work out, and I probably wasn't taking too much interest in it, any other real effect on the whole situation. People going about their lives pretty much the same as they had been. Rationing had not been introduced when I left. No, I think, it was very much the same as it was. That was June

01:30 '41.

How many hours had you clocked up in the Tiger Moth at this stage?

At this stage, I think we had about, be a maximum of 50, maximum of 50, yes. I think we had to do 50 in order to, that's both dual and solo, you had to have at least 50 before we could more or less graduate.

Where did you go on your solo navigation flight?

Oh, that

02:00 was a remarkable situation. Our navigation officer at Narrandera was rather a smart cookie, he decided in order that, most of the fellows, to save their navigation, because we had to go along and also identify and record on a pad on our knee, what we'd seen and where, and what time and things. And he decided that the best way for

02:30 us to do, was to do Narrandera to Corowa, was due South, so it was Corowa back to Narrandera was due North, so there'd be very little that could be done wrongly. Except that some bloke would put red on black, and go the other way. But that's what happened, we had a due South and a due North thing. We landed at Corowa, re-fuelled and flew back again. One fellow

03:00 Vic Chemist, by name, he was, we were like a string of sausages across the sky, but, you know, probably if you were on the ground you'd notice it, but flying you probably didn't. He landed at, he was amongst the first to get there, and he didn't find Corowa landing strip, he landed in a paddock near the school, and he was smart enough to, all the school kids came out and he was smart enough to find out from the teacher, where was the

03:30 Corowa landing strip, so he got these kids lined up in the form of an arrow, pointing to where the landing, so we called him Vasco da Gama after that.

So you followed, and saw the arrow on the ground from the school kids?

I didn't, but other people did. Other people did. I didn't no. That's the story of Victor Chemist. He survived the war too.

Did you get up to any stunts in the Tiger Moth?

Nothing that

04:00 you would press your luck too far with. Looping and rolling, and half rolling, and stall turning and you had to do all of those, you had to be part of the operation of doing. No.

Low flying?

Low flying wasn't, was frowned upon, because there were too many sheep farmers about the place, and they'd report you on it, and things. We

04:30 had a satellite paddock, it was, aerodrome, near us, near Ganyan, was the name of the place, where we'd do practice landings. We'd get away from the aerodrome, and go down there, do take offs and landings, take off sand landings, and they'd only, it'd be the pupils doing it, there'd hardly ever a, instructor with a pupil doing it, because you'd do it back on the airstrip.

05:00 And Stan Sisley. I don't know whether you've ever heard of him, he was a cricketer, he used to, a wicket keeper, represented New South Wales. He was there, and he was on the 11 course, or the course in front of us. And Stan used to like to smoke. And he landed there, got out of his aeroplane, near the fence and sat down and smoked and it was unfortunately, it was one of those rare occasions when an instructor came by with a

05:30 pupil, and checked him out, and Stan got into a bit of problem over it. Anyway, that'll teach him to smoke.

And back in so, where did, after that, how long before you went to Canada?

We left, well, we were down there on March, April, May, yeah, early June we left for

06:00 Canada, so we had 8 weeks down at Narrandera. About 2 weeks leave, and then off, yes. We had two weeks leave at embarkation depot at Bradfield Park which was alongside the initial training depot. And we were all supposed to be there, but we avoided going, being there as much as we possibly could. Until such time as to we had to get

06:30 medically checked out and things like this.

What did you get up to? What were the main events before you left Australia?

Well, getting out and going to the pub to have a drink, we used to have to go up the back, the back fence there was a hole in it, you'd walk down the - everybody knew about it, even the people on the station knew about it. That's when you were not supposed to be on leave, but normally you're on leave from stand down about 3

07:00 o'clock or even earlier than that, until midnight, and that was just normal leave. But on occasions you got weekend leave and things. Oh, go and see your friends, or whatever.

Did you have any special friends?

Yes, my wife, she is my wife now. I used to go and see her and her family.

When did you meet her?

That's a very good question, would be about

07:30 1939, 1940.

And were you in the air force at the time?

No, I wasn't in the air force at the time. No she was, her father was in local government, he was a councillor, and she came to work at the council chambers, she got a job typing there, typing rate notices and I used to, I was

08:00 well, I was a stenographer, I had to, when I first went to Ingleburn, I had to qualify as a shorthand writer and a typist, so my shorthand disappeared quite some time ago, but my typing I kept up, and I used to go and talk to this good looking young lady in there. And she'd have to do this, continue to do the typing, so I used to go, come out,

08:30 a typewriter and type alongside her, and help her do her work. I think I did more typing than she did, and she got the benefit of it, she got paid for it, more than I did. But that's where it all started. And it's been on, went on all that time.

Did you get married before you went away?

No. Didn't get married till we came home – 46.

What did she think of you heading overseas at this stage?

I don't think she was entirely

09:00 enthralled with it, but, you know, there was nothing we could do about it. We were both young, there was nothing much we could do about it.

Did you know you were leaving for quite a considerable time?

No, all we knew was, okay, went to Narrandera, and we'd be trained down there, but where we'd go next for our service training, there were places in Queensland and a place in South Australia. We could have gone anywhere

09:30 to those. We had no idea, we didn't go to Narrandera with the sole view of being posted overseas.

But when you departed for Canada, did you know you'd be away for some time?

Yeah, I knew I'd be away for some time, but not the length of time that happened. I was anxious to get home, but it never worked out that way.

Can you tell us any stories of your trip departing Australia?

Departing Australia, we were on a thing known as the

10:00 [MS] Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, it was a Dutch ship. We were escorted out of Sydney Harbour by the HMAS Adelaide, and we ran into a Tasman storm and the Adelaide couldn't handle it, it had to slow down, and we thought it was not a very idea of being a successful escort. If they had to slow, we had to slow down to stay with it, but anyway, it was only for a

10:30 day or so. We eventually got to New Zealand, and we changed ship to a the Dominion Monarch, which is a very nice ship – Shaw Saville Line – it hadn't been converted to troop transfer, it was called in those days, because we were, we still had cabins, there was four of us in a cabin, which was very pleasant. But when we got to New Zealand, a group of us went into a

11:00 shop, similar to David Jones, it would be in Sydney, and one of the lads, there was four, five of us, decided he'd check out one of these good looking young New Zealander lasses, and ask her "Would she come out and have dinner tonight with him?" And she apparently acquiesced, and he suggested, "Look there's four more of us, have you got four of your friends here?" So we finished up

11:30 going to a hotel in Auckland somewhere or other, and, it's a terrible thing to do, is go through this, they might have charges against us. We had a delightful meal, we really did have a delightful meal and it was suggested to us that we go out that way and that way was a rear exit, whilst he and his lass when out the other

12:00 way. That meant, eight of us went out that way, and so he and his lass went out the front way, and they paid for two meals, and we ate, eight people had a full meal and nothing, didn't have to pay. We skimmed away from that, went up to a roadhouse, not a roadhouse, a nightclub at Mount Eden and we stayed there to all hours of the morning. We finally got back to the

12:30 Dominion Monarch, which was due to sail at 7 o'clock, we got back at about 6 o'clock, being escorted along the wharf by MPs [Military Police], being threatened with all sorts of dire consequences, we were going to have this, and have KP [Kitchen Police] duty all the way to where we were going and what have you. We eventually got on board, and everybody was happy to see us, to have the right number of heads on board and

13:00 nothing happened to us. We never did a bit of duty, never did anything, but as we pulled out of the, from the wharf, there was a woman, a New Zealand woman, stood on the end of the wharf and sang a Maori farewell, it was most striking, it was, really was. Because on board were a lot of New Zealand boys, they were, there was only a group of about 30 of us again, and there was

13:30 two or three hundred New Zealanders, but it was heart wrenching, to hear this Now is the Hour, the Maori's farewell. It was something really worth listening to. And we headed across the Pacific by ourselves, the Dominion Monarch. We went down and had a look at the South Pole, one day I think we went down damn close to it – it was cold and bitter and miserable, and we finished up at the Panama Canal, the entrance to the

14:00 Panama Canal, hadn't seen anything for days. We went through the Panama Canal, which was a very interesting exercise of being lifted up and down in the locks. And then onto a small island by the name of Curacao where the ship refuel with oil and bunkered, bunkered and things, and we had an opportunity to go to shore, which we did. And we got in a taxi, it was the first taxi I'd ever been in,

14:30 or the first car I'd ever been in that had kilometres on the clock. We couldn't believe ourselves. This fellow was racing around at 60 and 80, and we thought it was miles per hour. We were really scared, but it was only kilometres. We came out of that, and we left there and went direct to Halifax in Nova Scotia, and that's how we got to Canada. That was on the Dominion Monarch, a great ship, well looked after and

15:00 couple of the boys decided to play Crown, or got a Crown and Anchor school going, which they played every night. It wasn't until the, two nights or one night out of Halifax, somebody did them over somehow, I don't know, I never played Crown and Anchor.

It's a card game?

Yes, it's a game in which the cards and the crown and anchor. What's up?

15:30 **Right, yeah, sorry, the Crown and Anchor.**

The crown and anchor, yes. I frankly don't, you have a board on which there's a crown and anchor and dice, and you roll them to get two crowns or two anchors or whatever. And I think there's, as well, the card symbols, hearts, clubs, spades and diamonds and crown and anchor, and you roll it

16:00 to get, you put money on the board, on the thing that, as to what you want to bet on – two anchors or two crowns or something, whatever, but other things come up as well, and the bloke who runs, running the game, he collects all those people that didn't win. But something happened on the last night that, somebody did something, whether they lost the whole ruddy lot, so I'm told, but I very much suspect the fellows that were running the show knew too much for the betters, the blokes that

16:30 were playing – they got away with it.

Did you have any fights between the New Zealanders and Australians?

No. We didn't, we got on well together. The only thing is, when we left New Zealand, they bought a lot of their, well naturally enough the ship was re-supplied. It was re-supplied with Waitamata beer. I enjoy a black beer, Tooheys black beer, now this was even blacker than black, it was, it was terrible stuff.

17:00 Waitamata beer. We had it all the way from New Zealand to Halifax. It was good as anything to drink, I suppose.

In Halifax, what happened, where were you transferred to?

In Halifax, we were transferred to a train, and we were taken overnight to Moncton. Now there was, by that time,

17:30 we Australians had been in a group of about 50, I think, something like that. And at Moncton, half of us got off, and the other half went on to a place by the name of Camp Borden, down near Ontario, somewhere down there. And we were taken off there and taken to Moncton RCAF [Royal Canadian Air Force] camp. We were the first Australians to be there, and they went onto Camp Borden,

18:00 and they were 12 course fellows. That's how, we met up with some of them, later, but that's where we saw the last of some of them. But, and we arrived at Moncton, which was very pleasant, they looked after us extremely well. When we got used to their breakfast, consisting of pancakes and maple syrup, and what else was there, some really strange food, but,

18:30 yeah, we got used to it, it was good.

Can you remember first setting eyes on the Anson, the Avro Anson?

No, I can't actually, I know what an Anson is, but I can't remember, oh, I'd seen an Anson at Richmond, when I'd been out there before, in, there'd been in those days, the Anson was the bomber of the RAAF, and, yeah, I remember seeing one there when this air show was on, that I mentioned earlier, that I'd been to

19:00 with my brother, Tom.

They were originally designed as a bomber, were they?

Yeah, yeah, but, I don't know, I don't know how many bombs it holds, about one 250 pounder, about it, I think. But they did a lot of reconnaissance work with them, or they did a lot of transport too, they carried around VIP [Very Important Persons] passengers, and they were just a gentle aeroplane to fly. If

19:30 you ever ran out of fuel in them, we always claimed that the wings would start to flap, so there was no danger of them ever stopping.

Just to clarify, you were, been trained up to join as a member, you were RAAF, but you were also going to be employed to the RAF at this time?

Not till this time, it wasn't until we got to England, now, when we got to England, there were not very many RAAF

20:00 squadrons formed in those days, very early on in the piece. We were all taken into the RAF, and that's how it came about. Afterwards there was Lancaster squadrons, Halifax squadrons and Beaufighter squadrons, and Mosquito squadrons, all Australian over there in England that people went to as RAAF personnel. We were

20:30 the odd bods, you know, we were RAAF personnel in an RAF squadron.

Can you tell us about flying the Ansons, Avro Ansons for the first time?

The worst part about the Anson was taxiing the damn thing. It was the fact that you had a handbrake like a bicycle handbrake, and you didn't have foot pedal brakes, you'd just have to depend on pushing your left foot, and putting the brake on, and turn you to the

21:00 left, sort of thing, and using a bit of throttle power with the engine to do that. And of course, not having been in a twin engine aircraft, and you've got two throttles, you've got your handbrake, and you're trying to do a turn or something, you did some strange things with it, but you finally got used to it, and the great, or, the point about it all was to, not to rev your engines too highly, just to let them tick over, so that you've got some forward

21:30 momentum, and then use your brakes sparingly. But when you first got them you used to stop and turn and jerk around.

The Tiger didn't have any foot brakes, foot pedals?

Didn't have any brakes at all. So actually, you only had a tail skip, you had to taxi them with the rudder.

Same as the Anson, really, you only had rudder control?

Yeah, that's all. But you used your engines to do that. But you had that brake, which the

22:00 Tiger didn't have. You had that brake.

And you'd steer it with variable thrust on the engines?

Yes, yes.

How did you hold it straight, when you were taking it off?

Your throttle would go like that, till you got it going. It's good training for the Baltimore that we flew earlier, later. Because they had, they were inclined to be very temperamental on take off.

22:30 **Do you remember flying it for the first time, the Anson?**

Yes, I do. It was a fellow by the name of Farnham, Sergeant Farnham, he was the instructor, and he took us up, two of us. Spent an hour with us, circuits and bumps, circuits and bumps. And then he took me up for an hour later, and said, "All right, you can go for a solo check now," and that was it.

23:00 I'd mastered the art of taxiing, I think that was the thing that got me off the ground quicker than anything else. Because it was, it was a gentle aeroplane, you opened your throttles and, it ran fairly straight if you had the same sort of throttle pressure on. And once you got airborne, it just floated away. Very pleasant. It took, it had an undercarriage that you could retract, but it took 178 turns or something to retract it,

23:30 and you didn't do that, you didn't do that when you were doing circuits and bumps.

You just left the wheels down.

Yes. Only whenever you did, if you did a cross country or something, it would be two of you, so you'd get the other bloke to wind the wheels up, and that was a hell of a job. And you had to wind the damn things down when you came into land. A lot of turns.

Was it a two pilot operation?

It was when we were training. We would

24:00 go off on a cross country. One would be the pilot and the other would be the navigator. And the pilot would be in charge and tell the navigator to, “You wind the wheels up,” or, “Wind them down.” And when it became your turn to be navigator, you did it, you did the winding.

So you learned how many times you had to go around?

Too many, too many. But the Canadians were smart enough, though, when they produced their Ansons later on, they produced a hydraulic

24:30 undercarriage, which, I’m sure would have been better. Sure would have been much better. We never had that advantage.

Were you enjoying life in the service at this time?

Yes, I was, enjoying life, and looking forward to everything. And had some friends, we were all doing the same sort of thing together, so, yeah.

Did you miss home at all?

I think we were beyond that by then.

25:00 Missing home, the trip across the Tasman and New Zealand, and the trip to Panama I think got rid of our home sickness, because we were going further and further away. I always claim that I’m one day older than anybody else my same age, because I had two Wednesdays crossing the line, when we were heading east. Because I continued on, when I

25:30 came back to Australia, I continued going east, so I’ve been all around the globe. Does that make it fair, that I’m one day older?

I’m not sure, I’d have to think about that.

Not in hours, but in sunrises.

How many hours did you do in the Anson?

I don’t really know, I think it was about, it might have been 70 or 75, maybe less.

26:00 I don’t know, I’ll have to go and check.

What was that mainly doing?

It was circuits and bumps, of course, navigation, cross country, solo cross country, just turns, and also night flying. Didn’t do any aerobatics.

26:30 **Get your instrument rating.**

Yeah, you had to do your instrument rating for nighttime. Yes, we had to do that, we had to do that for our wings test, too. We had to do a night instrument take off and landing, and what else did we do in the Anson? The aerobatics, Farnham, this fellow that flew

27:00 our instructor, he flew, a chap by the name of Coates and myself, he flew us round a loop one day in the Anson. He just flew the Anson all the way around in just a perfect loop. He was a great pilot, he really was. It was reported, he used to be one of the grog runners, during the, what do they call it in America, during the, when they had a

Prohibition?

Prohibition. Yes, they

27:30 used to fly the grog down from Canada down to America.

At the time, were you receiving any letters from home?

Yes we were getting quite a supply of letter, our mail service was quite good. I sent back booklets and magazines and things and we got back in,

28:00 didn’t get any newspapers, but we got letters back, yes. It was quite good. It’d be a month or so.

Any letters from your girlfriend?

Yes, continually. Yes, and I wrote to her. As a matter of fact, I’ve got them all, or she kept them all there, just to remind me of her.

How often were you corresponding to each other?

Oh, once a week, I suppose. Or maybe more sometimes, well not more,

28:30 maybe less, sometimes when some reason or another there’s a break. And then we’d catch up. We, or

when the aerograms came in, well that made things much easier, those photographic things, I don't know whether you've ever seen one, its, they used to photograph the aerogram and process this to a film and reproduce it somewhere

29:00 and cut if off and give it to you. It was an easier way of getting them, so it wasn't very big, it was only a quarter size paper, but it was enough.

Any telephone communication between Australia and Canada?

No, we didn't have any.

Was it possible, though, in those days?

Well, I suppose it would have been in urgent circumstances, but we couldn't, no, I don't think it was possible, unless it was an emergency, but even then, I doubt.

29:30 whether you'd get it. You'd probably send cables. That would be nearly as quick.

What did you get up to on your time off?

Oh, people would come, as I told you, they'd come to the gate to welcome us and see that we were cared for. And then, weekends, particularly, they'd invite you to their homes. I went to a place where

30:00 a fellow was breeding foxes for fox fur, and he had them in long kennels. And they were vicious animals, we were warned not to get close to them anyway. But they were, they had silver fox and all sorts of foxes there, but they just bred them for their fur, which was amazing. Other people would take us to their homes in Moncton, and just entertain us. Went to a

30:30 bowling alley on one occasion, didn't like it very much. Noisy damn place, it was. I hadn't realised how noisy a bowling alley can be. But when you've got about 8 or 10 alleys, and they're all bumping and thumping. Also the manager of the local radio station took to Peter O'Connell and myself, we'd became very pally,

31:00 to his studio, and we recorded a, made a record which we sent home. Each of us made a record and sent home. I've still got the record here.

What's the recording of?

Just us speaking to people at home. It's on a vinyl, but I think the sound's all ruined now, I don't know how you could ever recover it. Can you ever recover that sort of thing?

On vinyl, I think if it has been stored okay, I think they could do it, yeah.

31:30 Could they? I must try it.

Have you got a record player?

No, I haven't got one, no, not any more

Oh, it might be worthwhile checking it out.

Yes, I would. I'll try it. I've often thought of taking it into the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] in Newcastle and asking them "Whether they could do anything with it?" But it's there, and I've still got it. I'll show it to you after.

Okay, well, I'm keen to have a look at it, but I'm sure they could do something with it. And how did Canadian women take to the Australian

32:00 **pilots over there?**

Pretty effectively. They were, again, there were dances around the place, and we'd go to them, yes. They were all very pleasant and, yes, took kindly to us. One of the lads there, Hawkins, Harry Hawkins, he used to fall madly in love with any pretty girl he saw,

32:30 but he nearly got married in Moncton. We saved his life by taking him to England. But, yeah, he did fall madly in love with little Judy, I remember. But we'd, wouldn't do too much, just around the town, again, went to the golf club on one occasion. By, taken out by the, fellow who owned the radio, ran the radio

33:00 station and he introduced Peter and I to Teacher's Highland scotch. Yes, really introduced us to it. The next morning, I had to do a cross country with Russ Cumberland by name, poor unfortunate, he was the pilot, I was the navigator. He reckons I nearly asphyxiated him. Anyway, we survived the trip

33:30 and got back again, yes. Teacher's Highland Cream, I'll always recall.

You didn't get personally distracted by any of these Canadian girls?

No, I didn't, although, no, I didn't. Nearly once, nearly once.

What happened then?

Well, I was taking her home and I was, you know, and I give her a kiss or do something and she slapped my face. So that was, yeah, I told Win about that. She thought it was the right thing for her to do. I didn't.

34:00 I don't know what I did or said, but, anyway, that was it. Now, they were very attractive, the Canadian girls, and of course, their language, their speech, or their, not their speech, their, they were softer in speech than they were, than the Americans. They were.

34:30 quite pleasant to listen to and talk with and do things with. Yes, Canada was very pleasant.

And after you received your wings there, how, you must have felt quite proud at that moment?

We did, yes.

35:00 I traded my Australian slouch hat for, to the photographer to take photographs of myself receiving the wings, and the group of boys. I reckon it was worth it, because I could always get another one of those. So yeah, no, and then we had four days leave before being posted to Halifax for overseas. And Peter O'Connell

35:30 and Bob Fagan, Peter Elliot and myself went in to the hotel in Moncton, we stayed in that and just drank and slept and misbehaved.

Did you all make it through the training?

Yes, we all made it though the training.

Were there any training accidents, though?

There was only this Canadian fellow. He was the only bloke, and he survived, he was just injured but he

36:00 didn't kill himself. No, it was very fortunate. But since the training, and going, being spread about, it was a different story.

Out of all those people you graduated with, how many finished the war?

Well, there's two I know of. Oh, three, three, Harry Hawkins, Bob Fagan and Peter

36:30 Elliot. Harry Hawkins, believe it or not, the one that used to fall madly in love with everybody was, he finished up as Chief of the Rhodesian air force. He went to Rhodesia for some reason or other during the war, and met up and fell in love, and married this coffee planter's daughter, so when, instead of coming home, he went there, and he

37:00 stayed in the Rhodesian air force, and he finished up CO for the Rhodesian air force. Bob Fagan lives just out of Tamworth at the moment, Peter Elliot died some time ago, and myself, yeah.

So all your close colleagues survived the war?

Yeah, they were the ones, yeah. Yes, the people that, they weren't with me, when we were, we actually fought four different wars, so

37:30 they were, Bob Fagan was flying light aircraft doing communication work, and diving, jumping in and out of foreign countries, Hawkins was doing coastal patrol, and Peter Elliot was on heavy bombers, and I was on light bombers. We all did different things.

Where did you embark on your convoy crossing the Atlantic?

We embarked

38:00 from Halifax, and we finished up at Liverpool. And we finished off, we started, we finished up with about 27 ships, and I'm sure there was about 50 or more when we started. So they used to, yeah, you'd hear an awful thump, it was very, always at the back of the convoy. But we had three American

38:30 destroyers escorting us, this was before America got into the war. It was only a matter of days, and they were the old three stacker, and the last day when we'd been out far enough from wherever it was, and they left us, this was before the storm started. And they drove down the lines of the convoy, and they were playing the Andrews Sisters, singing this song

39:00 Working for the Yankee dollar, and rum and coca cola. I always recall that. This blasted Americans going past and running away and leaving us to our own devices. Working for the Yankee dollar, and that's what it was.

Did you have much to do with Americans when you were in Canada?

No, nothing at all. Didn't even see one. Oh, there were a couple of the, sorry, a couple of American boys from Canada, from America were

39:30 on our course, and they had joined the, they had joined the RCAF, Royal Canadian Air Force, before America got in the war. I don't know what happened to them, whether went back into the American air

force, or not, but they did that. One of them was from the Deep South, down in Georgia, we were always razzing [teasing] him about the fact that he didn't

40:00 know where the Mason-Dixon line was. They were good blokes, but they were very insular. We'd ask them to draw a map of the world or something, and "Where's Australia?" They'd draw America fairly well, Canada wasn't very big, Hawaii was a great big spot, New Zealand was somewhere between Hawaii and the west coast of America, and Australia was just somewhere over there, it wasn't very big, it was over there, but their knowledge

40:30 wasn't, their worldly knowledge wasn't great. At least we didn't think so. We used to give them, muck around with them.

You felt more worldly than them?

We did, yes, we did, yes. We felt that we were much more aware of what was going on in the world than they were, because they knew as much as they wanted to know about their own particular state or something, but, very little else. We kept on

41:00 reminding them, there was another part of the world.

Tape 4

00:30 **Let's just start there, actually, you were mentioning that you were on the Atlantic, and you heard about Pearl Harbour. How did that news, how was that news taken?**

Well, rather surprising to say the least. But I think with a lot of relief or wonderment as to what had actually happened. We had the barest of information, all we knew was an attack, and didn't know anything about it or

01:00 whatever, until we got, I think to England before we found out what was really going on. And then we didn't really bother too much to find out precise situation.

That same day, there were attacks in Malaya that started the Japanese advance in the Pacific. Did that change your vision of the war as an Australian?

It did, because when we were at Bournemouth, we, the Australians that were there,

01:30 had made an effort, and they arranged to see White, Air Commodore Tommy White, he was our member of parliament at one stage, and expressing our view, or people talking for us, expressed our view that we wanted to go home to Australia. And he told us in no uncertain terms that, "We will fight the enemy, wherever he is," and, "You certainly won't be going home, you'll be standing here

02:00 and fighting him here. Here in England." That was his message to us to wanting to go home to Australia to fight the war.

Did you talk amongst yourselves about that?

Only the desire to do that, but once we were told we couldn't, well we couldn't go on with it.

Did you feel that essentially they were right? Was there any difference between fighting the enemy there or in Australia?

Didn't think there was any difference at all. Or that it was probably a good thing to get

02:30 this over and then we go back there. Not realising how close they went out here.

As that war began, did you start to get news from the front in Singapore?

Very little, very little news indeed from the Pacific area at all. Very little. I think the Americans probably got more news than we did, but we weren't associated, or had any contact with them, so we

03:00 didn't know.

Was there any anxiety about your friends and family at home?

Well, I suppose there was, but I can't recall anything particular or special.

When you arrived in England, you joined the 223 squadron?

No. I didn't join 223 until we got back to Egypt from Kenya.

So what happened when you arrived in England?

03:30 We were just in what was a pool of people being sent here, there and everywhere. And it just so happened that there was a chance for us to, a call for a draft to go to the Middle East, and I put my

name down, and we got on it. It was cold, bitterly cold and miserable. Wanted to get out of the place. And that's, yeah.

04:00 **So, when you say you were being ferried around the place, where you staying in barracks?**

No, we were billeted in places, houses and things. Well, we weren't billeted so much as there was a room, we were given a room. I remember I had one, had to go down the steps and into a room down there, and I had a gas heater and the damn thing wouldn't work, and it was cold.

Was this the first time you'd seen England?

04:30 Yes, first time I'd seen it.

What were your impressions of the Mother Country?

Very impressed with it. Impressed with the green, greenness of it. But also as I mentioned before when this Constable Pitt took us for a walk around London, that was the greatest thing of all. And then we were on a few days leave with a Mrs Hutton down in Gloucestershire, Tewksbury and she was an archaeologist of some sort, and she then

05:00 took us around churches and all sorts of places, pointing out how old they were and all about it. It was a most interesting just to get a bit of history.

Was the war ever present in England at this stage?

Yes, it was, there was bombing now an again and things. At Tewksbury out in the country, there wasn't any there. But they used to always refer to him as Mr Hitler all the time. She was the wife of

05:30 a judge or something if I recall. Fellow had recently died.

Did you get on well with the English people?

Yes, yes I think we did. Had no problems with them at all, because there was no reason, just got on well with them. Things were restricted, food was limited and the type of food you could get. Welsh Rarebit, cheese

06:00 on toast, got sick of that. Haddock for breakfast, and the smell of it in the barracks when you came in – oh yes, got sick of that too. Anyway.

When you signed up to go to Egypt, did you move straight away?

I think it took a week or two to get us organised, but we moved pretty quickly, and we headed off

06:30 in a very big convoy, it was. Even had a battleship and cruisers and aircraft destroyer, aircraft carrier escorting us, that's how big a convoy it was. I think it was replenishment to the 8th army, mostly army people on board. There was only a small group of we airmen.

That was a trip round Africa?

Yes,

07:00 we headed off from, where'd we leave, Liverpool, yes, we left from Liverpool, and we went , didn't stop till we got to Durban. We unloaded from Durban, were on the Strathaird, and we unloaded from that onto the Mauritania, and the Mauritania picked up so many thousands of troops, and we were amongst them and straight up to Port,

07:30 to Suez and then we went inland to a place by the name Abu Sueir alongside Ismaliah.

Was the journey by ship an eventful one?

No, there was nothing eventful about it. I think the only major event, as far as we were concerned, they had a boxing contest on board and there was a lot of, it was all army with the, exception of,

08:00 about I'd say, about 30 or 40 of we air force. Amongst them was an officer from Western Australia, whose name escapes me at the moment, now, but he apparently, or he proved to be a damn good boxer or fighter, and he was put up against this, pilot officer so and so was put up against sergeant so and so from, big English army fellow, and of course, he was

08:30 going to be murdered. It didn't turn out that way, he finished him off pretty quickly, the Australian – which we all thought was great. And that's about the only eventful thing that happened to us.

Tell us a little bit about the relationship between army and air force?

Oh, we had very little to do with them. Only time we only really came in contact with them, was on occasions such as that

09:00 when we were together in a group on board a ship. But, well, the army, we just, they weren't where we were, and so it didn't matter. Except up in the desert, it was a different situation there, we were virtually, we were part of the army.

Was there a rivalry at all?

I don't think so, I don't think so. They accepted it, the other, as much as,

09:30 "Okay, you are here, okay." That's all there is to it.

Did you have any nicknames or vice versa for one or the other?

Only calling them Poms and Swatties and, you know, no, that's about all. Jocks, of course, the Highlanders. No, nothing really.

Was there any nickname for an air force pilot, or and air force officer?

No, I don't think so, I don't think they realised who,

10:00 because we didn't wear wings when we were up in the desert at all. We just had our ordinary battle dress uniform, battle dress on, and you could be anybody. So it didn't matter to us, so there was no inference or taken out.

When you arrived in Egypt, through the Suez, what was that like?

Well,

10:30 it was very educational, it was hot, full of flies, and sand everywhere. The Egyptians themselves, not a, or where we were around Abu Sueir were not a very impressive sort of people. Whilst we had them there as our servants on station doing this and that, we

11:00 had, that's the only sort of contact we had with them. We ignored them most of the time. We, oh, there was an army, Australian Army group up the way from where we were, and we got to know them. And they fortunately, were able to put us onto some Australian beer, which we managed to go and get. So, yeah, there was some field engineers, or some such thing. They were quite nice blokes – we thought.

Do you remember what type of beer

11:30 **it was?**

Yes, it was that, is it Cascade out of, yeah, Cascade out of Tasmania. I don't think we'd seen it at all, but it came in huge big crates, there were 12, more than 12 dozen in this, or there was 12 dozen in it or whatever. It was all there for the army purposes, but we managed to get hold of some. So we had it in our mess for a while.

Did the Australians

12:00 **that were there, have a very good reputation amongst the British?**

I think so, I think they did. We had a, there was a British fighter, Beaufighter squadron on Abu Sueir where we were, and we'd organised a tennis game, match or game, or something or other. And the Commanding Officer, fellow by the name of Staimford, came across and played with us,

12:30 we lowly sergeants. But he was the fellow that broke the world speed record many, many moons previously. But he was a very pleasant guy. He came and played and got beaten, went home again, and flew his Beaufighter.

What were you doing there? What was your squadron doing there?

Nothing at all. We're not a squadron, we're just a group waiting to be, we'd been that way for so long, a group waiting to go somewhere, or be posted somewhere.

How did that feel, to be in this?

Oh, we were getting

13:00 frustrated, we wanted to do something and go somewhere. Oh, we had the opportunity of going up into the desert and escorting Italian prisoners back again, but I don't think we wanted to do that, well, none of us wanted to do that. That was offered to us.

Did you have any planes?

No, we were just there. Nothing at all.

How did you pass the time?

Cricket, tennis, trips up to Cairo, trips up to the

13:30 army mess up the road. That's about all. Sleeping, eating.

Tell us a little bit about trips into Cairo?

Cairo the first time, crowded. Not knowing where to go, or what to do, and we wandered around and we found a bar somewhere. The first thing, we found a bar, and then somewhere to eat and, you know. And

we came, we

14:00 used to hitchhike everywhere in Egypt, and everybody, and particularly service people would pick you up straight away. So we went in and out in the one day. I'm sure that's the first trip we ever did there. But the trams round Helicopolis, Heliopolis and the very attractive little girls around Heliopolis, Greek extract, and all

14:30 be about 15, 16, 17. We were always told, "Well, you want to have a look at them when they were about 30 or 40." Bit different in size and shape. But they were dark, olive skinned and things.

How did the locals view the service people?

Some of them didn't take too kindly to us, because some of the service people treated them as though, well, why have them about sort of

15:00 thing. No, there was, I would say, conflict between the local people and the service people. They avoided each other where possible, or whenever was necessary, only ever get together.

Did that occur within the group of people you were in?

No, because we had little outside to do, or we weren't, it wasn't necessary for us to go outside. The fellow who was in charge of

15:30 the washing in our camp, Boss Ross, they used to call him, the head man. He in his village next to where we were – Abu Sueir village itself – he was a top ranking fellow in there, and he invited a couple of us to a wedding there, one occasion, a feast, and it was quite remarkable. You sat down, or you

16:00 didn't sit down, you squatted down a big long table, which was filled with food, mostly goat and stuff like that. But, yeah, it was a strange operation. The bride never appeared, the groom did, the bride didn't, and after a while, because there's no liquor there

16:30 lot of chanting and singing, and then it was all over sort of thing. But to this day, I don't know where the bride is.

And where did you move to after Egypt?

To Kenya.

And how did the order come through to get to Kenya?

Well, for us to go back when the Germans started to get a bit anxious to get to Egypt, they got us out of the way. Sent us down there for more, for training to get us equipped on these

17:00 aeroplanes.

And, so you went back around the Cape?

No, just down the Red Sea, and into Mombassa.

In Mombassa, you finally got to the planes?

No. No, I went to a place by the name of Nakuru, where we did our service, operational

17:30 training. On a Blenheim to start with, and then on a Baltimore, and then when that was finished, back to Egypt. Well, we went back to Egypt, would you believe, by flying back. We flew up the Nile River, we landed on the Nile. On two separate occasions, spent the night there, and eventually got to Cairo.

Can you explain a little bit about the Baltimores?

Yes. It's

18:00 **Just describe the Baltimore aircraft for us?**

Well, it's a very narrow constructed body on it. Has an observer navigator in the front part of it, which he has a quite a brilliant view out of the front of it. Up behind him slightly is the pilot, and behind him again is the wireless operator, and then there's a small, there's a gun turret behind him.

18:30 And that was the four people on board. We had four fixed mounted guns in the wings firing forward. We had four fixed mounted guns in the tail firing directly backwards. That's in case when the turret swung across the tail, you wouldn't shoot your own tail off. And then the wireless operator had two free guns underneath. We carried two thousand

19:00 pounds of bombs, that was six 250's and flew in formation. It was a very fine aircraft. It cruised at about 280, 300. On one engine, it generally outperformed most aircraft that flew on two. It was generally well received, well behaved, and a great aircraft.

What kind of operations were they being used for?

19:30 Close support to the army. We were virtually the long range artillery of the army. We'd bomb the

Germans the other side of what is known as the bomb line. The bomb line, goodies were this side, and the baddies were that, and we would bomb specific targets the other side of the bomb line. We would bomb in squadrons of 18 aircraft, boxes of, three boxes of six

20:00 flying in Vic formation. So you had one box, two boxes, three boxes. It was 18 aircraft, and you'd go in on your target, and as you approached it, the leader would identify the target, waggle his wings, and you'd spread out. You'd up until then you're flying on close formation. You'd spread out slightly, and bomb doors open, and you'd bomb on him. When he let his first bomb go, the rest of them would go. And that's what was developed and known as carpet bombing.

20:30 A whole lot of them used to do that. But to follow that up, we were not the only squadron. There was 55 squadron, our sister squadron, it was an RAF squadron, and there were three South African squadrons. One with Baltimores and two with Bostons. So in fact, you had 5 squadrons of aircraft coming in on the one target. And that's how the carpet bombing developed, and followed through all the way

21:00 through the desert.

Were these tactics designed to not meet any opposition in the air? Was there ever any opposition in the air?

Yes, there was opposition in the air. Anti-aircraft fire as well as fighters.

And how did you deal with fighters?

Well, the bloke in the turret would have to deal with that. And we never flew straight and level, we were moving all the time. And that was, our only defence wise. Once, our speed helped, of course. We used to bomb at about 280,

21:30 and after we got rid of the bombs, we'd put our nose down and go like hell for home, and that would increase our speed considerably. No, we depended on, oh, we had fighter escorts. They used to stay there, except when the flak got too much and skid away and leave us to our own devices. But, no, that was it.

Were they fairly reliable aircraft?

They were very reliable aircraft.

Did they have any

22:00 **weaknesses to speak of?**

Swinging on take off, its, two powerful engines, it had. Six, or, seventeen fifty horse power each, and if one got in front, when you were opening the throttles, if one got in front of the other, you were liable to swing and more oft than not, the inexperienced fellow would over correct it, you know, and you'd get a bigger swing. The thing was to make gentle openings with your throttle, until you got your tail up, and then you'd

22:30 control the aircraft run with your tail.

How long did it take you to get the hang of flying these in Kenya?

Not all that length of time, we didn't have that length of time. We only, I think we only did about 12 hours, 14 hours on the thing. I'm not certain, but it's not very much, I know.

Did you experience those problems with take off at the time?

Initially, yes, but you soon learnt that you took it easy until you got your tail up, and away you went.

23:00 **How did the crew form?**

Well, we were told on one occasion, each of us were doing all our own ground lessons of course, all the time, and sometimes we were all together. I palled up with an Australian wireless operator, air gunner, matter of fact we played cricket together, that's how we got up, and we had this day on

23:30 which we were to crew up. And the idea was everybody was to get together and select whoever they wanted to, provided the bloke wanted to come with you and that was it. So I said to Cliff, "You select your gunner Cliff, because he's there with you, and find out who you want, and I'll look for an observer, bomb aimer." And so, we got together, and I found this wistful looking pilot officer standing there,

24:00 nobody talking to him, so I went over and talked to him, and he finished up as my bomb aimer. So that's how we got together.

Did your crew work out well?

Yes they did. Extraordinarily well. Extraordinarily well.

Can you explain a little bit about the different roles of the different members of the crew in a Baltimore?

Yes, the observer/bomb aimer had to find his, find your way there, when you were leading a squadron, he, you found your way there.

24:30 Kept you aiming for the target, even if you, you know, had to direct you onto the target in a evasive, sort of method. The pilot had to fly the aircraft, and of course, keep, as a lead aircraft, you had to keep your eye out on what's going on, and avoid flak, where necessary. Fighters, you didn't worry too much about, because you had

25:00 support, or cover fighters, and your air gunners should do something about it. The wireless operator, he kept wireless contact until you got over the bomb line, and then he dropped down to his two little guns down under the hatch there, and then the gunner, he was up there with all eyes, and depending what side of the formation he was on, to keep that clear or do whatever. We were all connected to radio,

25:30 so you can talk to each other if necessary.

Who was in charge, how did the hierarchy work on this plane?

Pilot always. He's the captain of the aircraft, no matter who it was.

And what did that responsibility involve?

Being responsible for the aircraft and the crew, and carrying out your duty – doing what you had to do.

Did you feel you were looking after your crew in a way?

Yes, yes,

26:00 getting them airborne, and getting them back on the ground again, yeah, I always felt that was my real duty. What happened up there was, you know, in the hands of a lot of other people.

Were you also the highest ranking person in the crew?

No, I wasn't the bomb aimer was, he was a pilot officer, I was a Sergeant, Cliff was a Sergeant, and Cyril was a Sergeant, so no, he was the highest ranking and continued that way

26:30 all the way through it, until we finished operations.

Did that ever pose a problem?

No, no, not at all. It was a great advantage, as a matter of fact, because Jack was able to, as an officer, he was able to censor our mail, so we used to get Jack to sign our mail for us, it was never censored, so that was one very good advantage, or great advantage to it. The other was, oh well, I don't think it

27:00 any real problem at all with it, or any real advantage. It was just that we got on well together, we knew what was going on, and did what we had to.

Did you at any time adopt a particular aeroplane, that the crew called its own?

Yes.

Can you tell us about that particular plane?

Yes, I finished up with, after, when you are first junior on the squadron, they give you whatever aeroplane was free or available,

27:30 and eventually, after you had a bit of service and been there for a while. I finished up with one FA342, P Peter. And Peter, we flew 42 missions together without a bit of trouble at all. It was great. And it was sad when I had to depart with him, because at 240 hours flying it had to go back for a full service, so they

28:00 took it away and gave me another one, which was called Peter too, so that was all right. But Peter 342 was the first one I had really to myself, and I really had a, was attached to it.

Were you able to do anything to make that plane a personal one, to make it your own?

No, no, not really, because other people might use it. Yeah, they, if, when I wasn't flying, somebody else would fly in it. No,

28:30 all we ever did was put the bombs on the side of it. There was 42 of them on it when it left.

Did it have its name written on the side?

No, it just had the big P on the end. That's all we had on our aircraft, was the identification letter, whatever that might be, A, B, C or whatever.

Did you, had you ever flown in formation before?

When we were doing training, yes. But when we got on squadron, it was very

29:00 necessary, the closer formation it was, the safer you were, and the more secure you were.

Can you explain how you form a formation, and how you keep your formation, how that works?

Well, the leader takes off and settles down. We used to take off in the desert, in a row of 18 aircraft lined up, right across and the leader would take off and then everybody would follow him, with the dust blowing in the right

29:30 way, not to cover the aircraft taking off. The leader would take up straight away, and number two would form on this right, and number three on his left, and they would fit in fairly closely to the wing, putting their wings within about 5, 6 metres of each other, and then 4, 5 and 6 would do a similar thing, but 4 would drop down and slightly behind

30:00 number one. That would be one box, and the other box would form up by itself somewhere and slip into formation and, yeah, that's the way they've got their V formation. But when you're number 18 in a box of 18, it can be very hairy on some occasions when you're on the inside of a turn, you're practically falling out of the sky, and you're stalling. When you're on the outside of a turn, because you've

30:30 got to go farther and faster, you've got everything pushed forward, you're flat out, but they were just minor problems. But apart from that, when you got going properly, away you went, and it was great.

Did you fly in all different parts of this formation?

Yes, yes, you'd always have to. Except towards the end, when there was, the commanding officer wouldn't fly, whenever he flew, he always insisted on having one of

31:00 two of us with him, or the both of us with him. One of us flying two or three, and was in those positions for the last 10, 12 operations I did, but prior to that flew anywhere. Except in the last box, you never flew, not we experienced people, you left that for the new chumps.

Did the aeroplane at the front have a particularly special role?

Yes, he had to lead and identify the target, and bomb the target,

31:30 and when he opened his bomb doors, that, everybody moved out slightly, and they watched, the pilots used to watch, and he'd tell his observer, "Number one bomb's gone," and he started bombing. And that's how the whole pattern went out, and that's how they did that carpet bombing.

You mentioned one commanding officer, did you have a number of commanding officers during this time?

Well, you had two all together. One fellow, he left us

32:00 round about April of 42, and another fellow joined us, and he was still there when I left in mid-December 42.

We might, maybe tomorrow go back and talk a little bit more about what happened when you trained on these planes in Kenya, I'm sure Rod will have a question about that, but I just want to move onto, you've flown the planes up to the Nile?

32:30 **Was that a magnificent experience?**

It was magnificent. It was a flying boat, and I'd never been in a flying boat, but take off was an experience, you'd be sitting there with the portholes, and the water was, you know, as you're going through the water, or the waves, I should say, were up to the level of the porthole, and then you'd float up there, and it would be floating in these big comfortable chairs and you'd just float along. And landing, same situation,

33:00 you'd get out of it, and you'd go and sleep in a comfortable bed, and the next day, the same thing happened. It was, they flew over a lot of desert, of course, but you used to pick the Nile up every now and again, but it was wonderful. Really was.

Was there much action going on at this time?

It was all further up North at the time, it was beyond Cairo, we were way below Cairo. From Khartoum up where we, we virtually followed the Nile straight up from Khartoum.

And where were you headed?

33:30 I was headed for 223 squadron then, that's when we first went to the squadron.

Can you explain that time that you first joined up with the squadron?

Well, my welcoming to the squadron, was, it was all tented, and they had a big tent for the commanding officer, not, the headquarters, and the day we arrived there, our crew arrived, there was this one

34:00 lone Baltimore beating the thing up. Nearly flying in and out the front door of it, really, but welcome to 223 squadron. When we finally got there and got settled down, we were allocated a tent and we built, put that up and built it, went to the sergeant's mess, and found, I asked, "Whose been flying?" when I found someone to talk to, "MacGuire," that's right, "MacGuire, he wants to get

34:30 posted." I said, "Well, he'd done the right thing, he'd be on his way." I think he was thrown out the next day. He'd had enough, he'd been on operations for a long while, and they wouldn't do anything, so he decided to take this in his own hand. He just beat up the headquarters tent, which I thought was very good.

Do you know what happened to him?

Well, he left soon after, that's as far as I know.

You must have thought this squadron was insane.

Oh, I think he reckoned, there were ways of getting

35:00 off, and ways of having to stay there, but, no, that was our welcome to 223 squadron..

Was that situation common, someone who'd had too much?

No, no, oh someone who'd had too much, yes, but not doing that sort of thing.

How would you generally see that manifest itself, if someone had had enough?

Oh, going sick and, or getting someone else to substitute for them. Getting somebody else to fly for them,

35:30 well, not fly for them, but somebody to, with a pilot it was more difficult, but some, one of the other crew, someone to substitute for them.

Was there ever any talk of LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre] in the squadrons?

There was talk of it, yes, but it was considered to be the end of the line, complete end of the line. And irrespective of whether you had it or not, it was not mentioned or pushed forward.

36:00 **Did you or any of your crew have any particularly hard times in your entire service in the desert?**

Yes, we did. You mean in operational?

Well, not specifically in difficult operations, but in the same kind of way, having difficulty dealing with it, having had too much?

Towards the end, up in, we were reaching the stage where, I think, if somebody touched you on your shoulder, you'd jump a bit, but,

36:30 no, apart from that, your nerves were at a bit of an end, you wanted to avoid, as much as possible, anything at all. Yeah, that would be about it.

What was morale like in the squadron when you arrived? Obviously this one officer had a bit much, but

Yeah, it was good. Only thing, there was quite a division between officers and non-

37:00 commissioned officers, that was clear. When I arrived there, we'd been there about a week, and we had a severe dust storm. It lasted for two, three days. At the end of the dust storm, rain came, and we had a, virtually had a flood which was ridiculous, to think, in the desert and you had a flood, of course the water couldn't get away, and we had nothing to do. Most of the time, we'd lay in your tent and

37:30 pulled our blanket over our head, because you just couldn't, you couldn't see, you couldn't do anything. And the dust was so fine. The aeroplanes were covered in dust, and we had a job of cleaning them. And we had, used a lot of fuel for, petrol to clean them. And when that job was done, the sergeant in charge of the transport pool, said to the other sergeants in the mess, "What about running into Cairo and having a

38:00 what do you call them, a sauna?" So he arranged a truck and the whole of the sergeant's mess jumped aboard. In we went. And we had this, that was, we had this sauna and got cleaned up and you felt as if you were new again. And when we arrived back at the camp, the commanding officer was there, and he, and this fellow, Hawgin, and he really told us what he thought of us. He expressed the view that

38:30 as far as he was concerned, non-commissioned officers were expendable, and that his attitude he was going to adopt. Could have charged us all with desertion, or some such thing, and yeah. That was the feeling on the squadron.

Did that relationship improve?

No, didn't improve whilst he was there. He wasn't there much longer, because when we got up the desert a bit further, he made a horrible error himself. And

39:00 he was quickly got rid of, and we got this other new fellow in altogether, and he was a real gentleman.

We will talk about this a bit more later, but there were officers and sergeants and non-commissioned officers. Did you meet a ground crew that worked with you at this stage?

Yes.

Did they stay with you the whole time?

Yes.

Can you tell us a little bit about your ground crew?

Well, ground crew are Eddie, and I don't know. Anyway, they wrote to me after I left the squadron and all.

39:30 They looked after my, two of them, fitter and engine fitter, they looked after the aircraft when I finally got P342, they looked after it as one of their own, yeah. That's the way. Always good blokes to get on with, and no problems at all. Understanding their language at times was a bit difficult.

Where were they from?

Well, one was from Wales, and the other was Scotland, so it was, anyway we got

40:00 on well together, that was the major thing. We could understand what they meant.

Was that generally true of most of the aircrew and ground crew in your squadron, they got on pretty well?

Yes, they did, yes, because they knew we were all interdependent on each other, yes. No problems at all. And they were vitally interested in what you were doing, where you were going, what happened, you know, this and that. And when they'd lose one of the aircraft, which happened quite frequently,

40:30 they were as upset as anybody else.

Did you form a new group of friends when you arrived in 223 squadron?

Yes, I did, there was, you know, people I had not known before. There was nobody on the squadron that I had known before. Yes, it was a new group altogether.

You mixed well with them? Did you mix well together?

I think so, yes. Yes, we did. Enjoyed each other's company.

41:00 There wasn't much to do, apart from doing your job, moving camp, cursing and sweating and digging trenches to particularly when they come over and drop a few bombs at night time, it was amazing how deep your slit trench got the next morning. Yeah, now we were in the, we'd moved up into Tunisia, and our tents

41:30 were white, they'd been white in the desert all along, well they'd been sunburnt and things, because we'd pitched them there, and that night Jerry [Germans] paid us a visit, and we reckoned he could see our tents from where he was, so the next morning there was a lot of changing around on colouring our tents and things. It was quite an amazing thing. We no longer had white tents.

Tape 5

00:30 **Morning Bob.**

Morning.

Again. We might pick up where we left off yesterday, but there was a couple of things I'm interested in, there's training on the Baltimore. Can you tell us about the time you first you climbed into a Baltimore?

Yes, when, at operational training, after we'd flown the Blenheims, when we first started down there, we flew Blenheims Mark 1 and Mark 4s, and we crewed up on them,

01:00 got our crews together, and we were doing things in the Blenheims. And then, pilots had to do their conversion course on the Baltimore, and that consisted of the instructor getting into the pilot's seat, and the pupil standing up behind him where the wireless operator was, or is and the pilot would take off and you'd have earphones on, and he'd talk to you about what do you do, and we had to learn the cockpit drill beforehand,

01:30 anyway. And he just showed us, you know, we just stood there and watched him do it, and take off and next thing, we were thrown in the seat, and he said, "Righto, go." That was it, that was the only instruction we had on it.

Can you explain the cockpit layout of the Baltimore?

Well, the throttles are on your left hand side, together with the pitch controls, yes, they were there too. All your flying instruments directly in front of you

02:00 with the standard flying instruments, artificial horizon, air speed indicator, height and what have you. And on your left hand side, on your right hand side was the fuel controls, selectors, you had to, and they had three points on them, two outer tanks and a main tank for each wing. Undercarriage control was immediately down there, flap control

02:30 situated on the hand side. And generally, I know, it was the first aeroplane I had flown that had foot brakes on your pedals. Prior to that, you didn't have any of that rubbish.

Where were your armaments controls?

On the yoke on the control column. To load the guns, you had four

03:00 handles in front of you, sat down on a pedestal in between your legs and you propped the guns with those, you propped them up the other way.

What was the weapons on the..?

Well, there was four forward firing guns, four back, that's for firing through the tail, the back to, when the gunner swung around to follow the, anything across there,

03:30 his guns would cut out when he passed the tail, otherwise he'd shoot his own tail off. And we had four fixed guns that used to come into operation there. And he had two point five guns in his turret and the wireless operator, had two point three guns free down in his little hole.

That's an unusual feature, isn't it, that the tail configuration?

Yes, it was, I don't know of any other aircraft that had it.

Can you explain in a little more detail

04:00 **how that worked?**

Well, as the turret swung across in an arc from say, left to right, if it was at level, he's holding his guns, if someone were to attack you straight up your tail, the only way to get him, would be with these four guns that you had fixed in your tail. And they were fixed to fire through the air, and the turret was to take over anything on the side.

And that would be automatic, it would switch

04:30 **between the turret and the tail?**

Yes, soon as he cut across there, hopefully it would cut out, otherwise there'd be problems. Now it always did, yeah.

And they didn't move around, they just shot straight back?

It was just straight back, yes, they were fixed. They were like the ones in the wing in the front, they were fixed. You had to aim your aircraft at what you were shooting at.

And the Baltimore was a single seat pilot, and you didn't have anyone else helping you?

No, it was all you. You had to do everything,

05:00 yes.

So the first time you flew it, there was no chance to get a chance to fly it before you actually got in and had to take off.

No, all you could do was have a ride in it, and have a ride where the navigator was, or ride where the wireless operator was, that sort of thing.

So did your instructor get out of the plane when you first?

Yes, he got out and said, "Righto, are you feeling happy about that?" And in you go. And, bang, away, it was all yours. Bit ropey to start with, you

05:30 bounced about and did that. Took quite a while to get to the stage where you were doing three point landings of course, always wheels in. Anyway, later on, when I was an instructor myself, they changed the situation around to the fact that the instructor sat in the navigator's seat in the front, and they had, they were just flying controls there, flying controls and throttle, and you had nothing else. And you, if anything went

06:00 wrong, that's what you, but you took him off, well, you didn't take him off, you had him in the front cockpit on his first circuit, and after that you put him in the back and you just rode shot gun on him.

Pretty hairy [scary].

It could be, yes it could be, it could really be if some of them were, I had a couple of very hairy ones where that, where the engine quit on take off when you're just about a couple of hundred feet

06:30 up. And fortunately, I took over then, and the single engine, with one engine the Baltimore will fly on one engine, perfectly all right, so I came back and landed. It was all bought about by this fellow incorrectly selected his fuel cock set. You had, it had a sort of a ball bearing thing, you moved over and selected from one to the other. He hadn't selected it properly.

07:00 **Are there any, can you just describe the Baltimore for us, from how you get into the plane, and take us through the plane and how many crew are on there?**

Well, the navigator had a small ladder up the front, when he went into his compartment, his, the floor of his compartment dropped down so that he could climb up and pull his, the floor back up where he sat. And that was in a

07:30 Perspex outlook there, he could see, you know, his observation was very, very good. And the pilot seat directly behind him, and it was slightly more elevated over the top of his, and that elevation continued on down the back to the turret, then it dropped away towards the tail. Now the wireless operator and, he was directly behind the pilot, and then the turret was directly behind him. It was a compact aircraft,

08:00 and very capable aircraft, it was very good. Fully aerobatic, I've tried it out myself. Rolls and loops, yeah, no problem. Beautiful. And we used to fly right around it, no problem. I wasn't exactly the best of them, I supposed, but at least I did it.

How many crew?

Four, four including the pilot, yeah. Yes.

Where were your crew from?

08:30 I had, my wireless operator, he was from Australia, here, and the navigator, and gunner were Englishmen. They had, one was from Bedford, the other was from Scarborough, I think, it was in England.

I think you must have mentioned yesterday, about crewing up, did you?

Yes. The fact that we, I asked the wireless operator, Cliff, for him to

09:00 select his gunner, because he'd be with him most of the time. And I'd known Cliff through playing cricket, and being with him a couple of these places we'd been dumped in. And I got to know him, and we got on well together, and then I picked up this insignificant looking pilot officer standing by himself, that nobody wanted to talk to, so I went over and talked to him, and asked him "Would you be prepared to join me?" He said "Yes" and we got

09:30 on famously together, the four of us. It was great. He was an officer of course, and he got promoted later on and we all remained sergeants for a long while. Made no difference.

And what bomb load could the Baltimore carry?

It could carry two thousand pounds, made up of six 250's or two one thousands, or whatever you could make two thousand pounds up to.

10:00 **And what, how many, could it carry passengers?**

No, just the four crew. Oh, you could fit an extra body in with the wireless operator, but it would be, was very cramped and he'd just have to sit there, he wouldn't have any parachutes or anything.

How many hours did you get on the Baltimore before you had to go operational?

Before, I had about, I think it was about 22, 23 hours on it, before

10:30 I had to go into operations on it.

Was there any training on bombing?

Yes, we did. In Kenya, we did training on that, and we got marked for it too, as to where your bombs fell, and whatever, yes. Had to do a bit of dive-bombing with it and also level bombing. But that, level bombing depended on your navigator, or your bomb aimer. Dive bombing was yours.

Can you describe how you dive bomb a Baltimore?

You'd, well, you'd,

11:00 you just roll it over slightly to whichever, right or left, you were approaching it from and get it down to a dive of about 40 degrees or so, which is pretty steep, and when you were about 500 or more feet from the ground, you'd let your bomb go, and level out, and go.

And you had a sight that you could do that with?

Yes, you had a gun sight, yeah. Just an ordinary fixed gun sight,

11:30 because you'd have to use that for your guns on the wings.

What were the guns on the wings used for?

Well, basically, if, as on one occasion, we were attacked by a, quite a large number of enemy fighters, and I was flying number two on the flight commander, and he, and when we were flying in formation, we used to fly a very tight formation. People may not realise this, but

12:00 our wings would be a matter of about 4, 5 feet apart, the wing tips. And we were attacked by Messerschmitts and Mackies, and all sorts of things, and when you're flying formation, you have to concentrate on the leader all the time, you virtually forgot what was going on around you, although when you see a burst of flak, it used to wake you up. On this particular occasion, a Messerschmitt shot up underneath us, obviously trying to get us from

12:30 underneath, and the leader fired, squadron leader fired his guns. I didn't fire mine. And he wanted me to assist in later on in claiming a probable shot down, and I said, "There's no possible way I could do that, because I was watching you, and I couldn't see what was going on." I don't know how he expected me to fire my guns, because you just didn't have a chance, it was all over in a flash of a second. He wasn't very happy about that, and I'm

13:00 sure he was looking for some commendation as a result of it. He moved me from that flight from A flight to B flight. That's how we got on with that. He didn't approve of my not backing him up.

Did you have a gun camera on the plane?

No, no we didn't. No, we carried, in Italy, we carried a photographer from the RAF, he was

13:30 official photographer and lots of his photographs have finished up in the British war museum. He used to fly with us in the back of, and poor old Cliff could never use his guns because he'd be sitting in his seat in front of his wireless, and the cameraman was down his hatch below, taking his pictures or what he had to do, so yeah.

Did the, when you were in training, did you find that the Baltimore had any vices or things you had

14:00 **to watch out for?**

On take off, it had a tendency to swing, because that, until you got your tail up and off the ground anyway, and had control off it, you tended to, or some people tended to use their brakes too much, and they'd open the throttles unevenly or to the extent they wouldn't be lined up straight or some such thing, and give a, develop a bit of a swing, and they'd start to overcorrect it, and they could get into a lot of trouble

14:30 that way. But the, a major thing was to keep your feet away from the brakes, and try and use your throttles, but if you had to use your foot brakes, well fair enough, you have to. But throttle was the major thing in it, I thought.

Were you prepared when you were to fly that plane into battle, once you'd finished training on it?

Yes I, very happy with it. It was a

15:00 beautiful aeroplane, it really, really was, I think, it's an unknown aeroplane, is a pity, because it was used extensively in the desert. The South Africans used it right from the very beginning, the Brits used it when it became a Baltimore, it was originally a Maryland, it developed from a Maryland, which had a rather different outline to it, but the same characteristics about it, the same four place

15:30 seats in, four place crew. But it was used together with the Boston. The Baltimore and the Boston were the desert air force, bomber force. Yeah, and it was a great aeroplane. People who flew them and understood them, have a great deal of confidence in them.

What was the range of the plane?

Range, we had a range, of about, in flying time,

16:00 about three and a half hours, without any long range tanks or something. That's into battle conditions and back again, because you'd be in fine pitch when you went into, when you got near the bomb line and over that, and your fuel consumption would go up, and that, until you got back, and then you got into lesser fuel consumption as you got away from the place.

What was the primary role of the Baltimore?

Close support bombing,

16:30 carpet bombing, that was the primary role of it, yeah. Developed it in the desert there, with these boxes of 18, these 18 aircraft in three boxes of six that flew in close Vic formation, they just bombed on the leader, and they covered a great area, you know, and just covered it completely, because there's 18 by

six, how many is that,

17:00 250 pounders coming down in the same sort of area, it would be a mile by, a mile squared, I suppose I know, but it wiped out anything on it, and living, or attacking armoured tanks and transport and troop concentration, that was their job.

Did they develop that in, did you develop that in training, or they developed that?

No, they developed that in the

17:30 actual desert itself, it was just about Alamein time, the Battle of Alamein, just before then, that's when they developed it. They used to bomb in Vics of three at one stage, they'd go out in a box of nine, three threes, and we made up more aircraft, and they added on an extra three on, and finished up making it 18. But it was developed, the whole

18:00 theory of it was developed there.

Did you have any armament, sorry, armour that protected you?

There was a, at your back, you had a steel plate as far as we were concerned. The observer had one, the wireless operator didn't have any, and the gunner didn't have any as far as I know, no.

Was there any contingency for, if you were injured, that somebody else could take over?

There were, there was a dual control in the

18:30 front with the, where the observer was, it folded away, and got back, just flying control that was all, he had nothing else. I wouldn't like to be in the aircraft if he was there, because I don't think that many of the observers were very qualified at flying.

Did you train up your observer or your bomb aimer to take over in case you were injured?

No, I didn't. We just accepted the fact if something went wrong, well, we'd all look after ourselves.

Were you trained

19:00 **to bail out of the Baltimore?**

We were shown how to, yes, we, the crew, the observer could drop his hatch and go straight down through that, the gunner and the wireless operator could go out the back hatch, and the pilot, once he got rid of, once he was sure his crew was out of the way, he'd have to go over the side, the left hand side of where, as he came in, because you walked

19:30 up the wing to get in. He'd have to go keep down, because the tail plane at the back was, unless he got away, he'd be decapitated or wrapped around the tail plane, because, so he had to be careful. Fortunately, I didn't ever have to do that.

Can you tell us about your first, where you were first deployed to?

Well, the first one, well LG, landing ground 96, 86, at the,

20:00 anyway it was on the road to Cairo to Alex road, Alexandria road, just off the road, and was just desert, flat desert, and there were quite a lot of squadrons based there. There was our squadron, and our sister squadron, 55, they had Baltimores, and then very close to us, not very far away were the fighters, the Kittyhawks and things. And the first deployment was to,

20:30 no, I didn't have any there in Alamein, it was only after Alamein, when the Germans broke and started to go, we, well we knocked off then, well, the squadron did, when I say, we, the squadron did because they'd been operating very, very hard, very difficult conditions there for quite a number of days, and so they had a

21:00 break, and, of course, I was part of it. And it wasn't until we went further up the desert, through a place by the name of Ben Gardane, it was, up near the other side of Tripoli on the way through to Tunis, that's were I had my first operation up there.

How, can you tell us about that operation?

Oh, well, you're apprehensive, of course, and I was, naturally enough, being

21:30 the newest member of the whole lot you're flying number 18, 17 or 18, I forget which it was, and you were the tail end Charlie in the whole thing, and we, of course, you were, in that particular part of the country, we used to take, we were fairly close to the water. We'd take off across the water, and fly at fairly low level, the whole 18, and then we got towards the enemy coast,

22:00 and climb up to about 6, 7 thousand feet, in formation.

How low was low level?

Well, I would say, being the last I was probably the lowest I'd be about 50, 100 feet above the water. And, bit hairy, holding in formation, and staying that way, and being a sprog [new recruit], and not knowing too much about what was going on. And you'd do this climb up with full throttle, flying pitch, and away you'd go

22:30 up to 6, 7 thousand feet, and that's when the ack, ack, and the odd fighter about would have a go at you. You'd level out, and, or you'd get to that height, and start weaving and then drop your bombs on the target if you, or dive down again, and back to base, and that was it.

Can you tell us specifically about your first operation, from that, walk us through?

First one was, getting

23:00 off the ground, as I say we were apprehensive, the whole four of us were apprehensive about the whole lot and what would go on. Crossed the water with no problem, but climbing and when the flak first started to come at you, these black puffs at you, wasn't very comfortable.

What did you think they were?

We knew they were flak, we were aware, we'd seen, or been told about it.

23:30 And indeed when the flak is close, you could hear it, you'd hear it go off.

What does it sound like?

Like a big crack and a bang, it wasn't a bang, so much as a crack. Like somebody cracking a whip, or something like that. Yeah, that's it, it got close, but climbing up through this stuff, and that's when the, if there were fighters about, that's when they, but my first operation, there weren't any fighters, was just

24:00 heavy flak, and we got away with it and dropped our bombs and came home – felt very comfortable.

Did you lose any aircraft?

Not on that one, on the second one we did. Fellow near me, he was, fellow by the name of Cooper, he was, I was flying 16, no I was flying 17 and he was flying 18 and he was on the left hand side, he got shot down.

24:30 He was there, and then he wasn't, it was just.

Did you see him get shot down?

Well, yeah, we were flying in formation, I was looking across to the leader and he was there, and I was there, and yes, you saw him get hit. Well, and he didn't explode or anything, he just said, he was there, and then he dropped away. And the fellows sort of said, "There he goes, he's on fire," and that was it.

Any radio calls from him?

No,

25:00 nothing at all, just, went in, you know, a whole lot of them were lost.

What were you, where were you attacking then?

We were, the, attacking the German army on the Mareth Line, or in that area, I'm not quite. Yes, it was the Mareth Line area. Where they'd come to a halt, they'd retreated all the way back through the desert, and came to this, they used to stop

25:30 every now and again and put up a defence, and drop back and do this, and this was their final large, well their largest defensive line, before they started to drop right back into Tunisia. It was recognised, even Montgomery recognised it as being one of the hardest.

Did you know him, the person that was shot down?

Yes we knew him, he was sergeant with us,

26:00 just knew him, was another bloke. As I hadn't been on the squadron all that long, I hadn't made too many friends, you know, too many close friends. But later on, the longer people stayed, or the longer they survived the closer you got to them.

And how did that, did that shake you up very much?

It did, yes. It was seeing the first one, it did, it was a bit of a frightening experience, but you forgot about it. You had to.

Why?

26:30 Well, you couldn't dwell on it, it wouldn't get you anywhere, and it would only, you know, make you nervous and build your tension up, but you couldn't concentrate on what you were doing anyway.

As this stage, what was it, you were flying out of LG [Landing Ground]?

No, we'd moved on from there, LG 86 was where we were before we moved up into the desert, after we had our rest. This is,

27:00 the squadron was stood down after Alamein, and that's where they were, LG 86, the rest period. The rest period, that's when I joined and the rest period consisted of formation flying and demonstration flying, we had the, some, the King of Saudia arrived one day, or King of somewhere or other, Arabia or somewhere, he arrived, and we had to put on a demonstration for him, so the two squadrons

27:30 had to take off and form up and fly around and boxes of 18, and come back and land and showing off to let him know what we looked like, that's the sort of thing we were doing.

So you were reinforcements into 223 squadron, is that right?

Yes, yes. I mentioned to you about my first day, there this fellow Mac, Mac somebody that beat up the

28:00 CO [Commanding Officer], the headquarters tent, yeah, I suppose, I was, when he left I was probably the one to, had to take over. We had 18, no, we had 22 aircraft on our squadron. And we had 21 crew, aircrew on, so it was always just, we always had, no, no, I'm sorry,

28:30 other way about. We had more aircrew than aircraft. So it was 22 and 23, so there was always one extra crew about the place.

Did the old hands talk to the new people?

Oh yes, yes. They tried to scare the daylights out of you, of course. Tell you all the horrifying tales about what's wrong and what isn't and things.

What did they tell you?

That, how bad it was, and how intense the

29:00 ack-ack [anti-aircraft fire] is and the, all those sorts of things, yeah. They just, well, let you know it wasn't just a game. Which it wasn't.

Were they genuinely helpful, or were they just trying to?

Oh, yeah, they were, this was on the odd moment when they'd try to rouse you up a bit. But they were generally helpful in what to do, and what not to do, and how to do it. They were

29:30 good, they were good fellows in that regard, they were always helpful. Everybody was always helpful to each other.

Had they suffered heavy losses up to that stage?

They had suffered quite a few, yes, it wasn't exactly heavy, but it was quite a few. When I say quite a few, there'd be, oh, I suppose, think, in the last, in November period of the actual battle itself, I think they lost about 10 aircraft, and 10 aircrew. It was over a period of about

30:00 12 days, 10 to 12 days.

And that's when you found them, how was their morale at that time?

Oh, high. It was high, because they'd beaten, because the Germans had pulled out, and they'd gone. Their morale was high, yeah. They were tired. They were tired. Because they used to do 2 and 3 operations a day. And I knew that, as a matter of fact, I understand that 223 squadron was responsible for the

30:30 holding of some, or, the Germans made some break in our lines somewhere or other, and 223 and 55 squadron bombed continuously all day, this particular break and they claimed that was one of the things that helped break the whole line. But they were telling horrific stories of they'd come in after a bombing raid and they'd sit in their cockpit whilst they refuelled up

31:00 and bombed up and they'd taken off again. I don't quite think this is so, they might have to get out of the aeroplane, but anyway. That's what, that's the sort of thing they'd tell you. Hair raising stories which weren't quite true.

How long were you at LG 86 before you were?

About, we got there in November, the end of November, and we left in end of February.

That's when you were sent up to support the advance?

Yes,

31:30 went up there.

Did you, so, where were you deployed, where did you go to after?

Went to a place known as Ben Gardane in the Gulf of Tunis, it's down the bottom of the Gulf of Tunis, near where the German army had pulled up at, they'd called the Mareth Line. It was a line of defensive, virtually on the boundary of Libya and Tunisia. On the

32:00 border of, I think, that's where it all happened, well, that's where they stopped.

How close to the front line were you?

We were a matter of about, well, our operations used to take about an hour and 30 minutes the whole lot. Form up, take off, bomb, come back, land, an hour and 30 minutes, so wasn't that far away.

Can you describe the airstrip and the camp for us?

Well, the airstrip was, it's flat country, naturally flat

32:30 country. We were living in tents, the boundary of the airstrip or air field was, there was, in that country, the rocks, what rocks were there were fences, or made of fences, and there was fences about 3 or 4 feet high deliminating the, somebody's property and we were operating in what was a fairly large field on one side of

33:00 the fence, and our tents and everything else were the other side. But not as close as that, they were dispersed quite a lot. It was just a flat bit of, well, desert country. It was not, just dusty, not really interesting.

Did you have a clearly defined airstrip, or was it just one big area?

No, just one big area. One big area.

33:30 And the, it was bounded by these rock fences. That's where I had the misfortune of running into one on one occasion, on taking off. We were due to take off, and depending on the wind, we'd line up echelon port or echelon starboard, so that when the dust rose from the earth, the aircraft next to you wouldn't get

34:00 it, it would blow away.

Can you describe echelon port and echelon starboard for us?

Well, it's lining up so that your, was right and left to be echelon port and starboard, lining up left or right of the leader, and this particular occasion, we were told take off, lined up to the right, but the wind was blowing so that the dust, on this occasion, would blow away from the aircraft that

34:30 would, following the leader. But my particular section leader, he lined up on the wrong place, instead of lining up to place us down on the, away from the dust, he lined up the other way. It was all right for his number two, because they'd, we all rolled together at the same time, we were supposed to have clear air. But by the time they started to roll, he rolled, and number two started to roll forward, taking off, and the dust, I

35:00 got the whole lot of the dust.

Did you realise there was something wrong before you lined up?

I realised that, but, he, being the squadron leader and the bloke next to him a flight lieutenant, I thought, "Well, a mere sergeant was probably wrong anyway."

Why do you think he made that error in lining up?

Don't know, never have found out, although they, the commanding officer and the flight commander held an enquiry into it, and they were going to blame me for it, but they exonerated me eventually,

35:30 to admit to it. But as a result of this, I started to go through the dust, and started to swing, the aircraft started to swing, the Baltimore started to swing, and I started to correct it, or brake, or do something, and it got to the stage where I was doing about 70, 80 miles an hour or something. And I realised that it was just hopeless, so I just throttled back, and to keep the aircraft on the ground, tried to, closed the throttles off completely, pulled the control column back

36:00 and just sat there, and next second, I was through this brick fence and pulled one blade on, and it came to a grinding halt and dust and everything settled down, and I think I moved the quickest in my life, I got out of my seat, opened the Jack in front of me, the navigator's escape hatch, went back and opened the escape hatch for the gunner and the wireless

36:30 operator, and sat back in my seat before the dust settled. I had them all out and settled, I was waiting for everything to blow up, but it didn't. It would have blown up if we were.

Did you have the tail off the ground at this stage?

I did have the tail off the ground when I was swinging, yes, there's no doubt about that, because I was swinging about. It was only after I closed the throttles the tail was on the ground and I was obviously not in line, what would have been the take off line, I'd

37:00 swung to the left.

And the command structure didn't allow you to actually radio and say that you were in trouble and could we, you didn't feel you were in a position to radio and

To say to them, "Well, you're lined up the wrong way?"

Yes.

No, well, I probably, had I had more experience I would have said so. Or done something, or taxied around to get in front of them or something, but I don't know, I was a junior there, and I was the sprog in the outfit, and that was it. The worst

37:30 feature was, a brand new aircraft. It had only been delivered to the squadron the day before, and here I was, K it was, K for Killer. And the fellow who owned K wasn't very happy about the fact that I had bent his aircraft rather severely.

I'm just wondering, the other, you were an Australian pilot, flying in a British RAF squadron. Do you think that influenced your decision not to speak up

38:00 **at that time?**

Probably did, I didn't have the confidence to speak up, I suppose. Probably, brand new, shiny nosed and all that, but I, yes, I probably didn't have the confidence to do so. Had I been with Australians, I probably would have said something, or hopefully that would never have happened. I mean the squadron leader would have done the right thing,

38:30 but you know, it was not to be.

How did they organise those sort of take offs en masse?

Well, used to line up 12 aircraft, no, it was more than 12, you'd line up, you'd have a line, depending on the wind, this occurred when we were at LG 86, there would be six aircraft, and then they'd put a

39:00 spare in, and six more aircraft, and another spare, and six more and another spare, so you had 21 aircraft there. And when the leader started to roll, everybody started to roll, except for the spares, in case, they'd only drop in if one of the aircraft dropped back on take off, but the whole 12 of them, 18 of them used to take off in a line and they'd be up in the air in a matter of, you know, a couple of minutes,

39:30 and it wouldn't take them too long to form up and then they'd start climbing, and away they'd go. And the fighters in the airfield not very far away from us could see this happening, and they'd be off too, and they were up there to act as our escort, and that was it. And this is what went on at Alamein and that's when I, after that, I joined them, and that's the practice we

40:00 used to do these formation take-offs and practice, and this was from November through to February. When we moved up into the other part of the, up into Tunis area, the strips weren't wide enough, or we couldn't get airfields wide enough for 12 to take off, we used to take off in threes, and that's how it all happened, yeah.

Why did you have to take off altogether?

Well, it was much easier, and so they could get up there, because they had to be in the air, and it was

40:30 quite an amazing sight if you see 18 aircraft there, then on the opposite side of the airfield, 55 squadron would be doing the same thing. So you had 36 aeroplanes in the air in a matter of minutes.

Can you describe that for us?

Well, it was an amazing sight, to be quite frank. But, they used to get up, and then it was a matter of when you're airborne, getting into position, your section leader, would have to

41:00 move into some position, because okay, the leader would set up there and away he'd go and start doing a climbing turn or some such thing, and his number four, his two and three would come up alongside him. One would have to dive down underneath him, and come up the other side. And his four and five and six would get pretty smart into position. The same sort of thing happened with the second box and the third box.

41:30 The only thing with being in the third box, and you're doing a climbing turn, you're either hanging on your propellers being the last bloke down there, and everybody else is turning in towards you, or if you were on the outside of the turn, you'd have everything pushed forward to stay with it, but that was the only drawback to that, until everybody settled down to a cruising speed.

Tape 6

00:30 **Okay, can you explain, I'm just, why, and I know that's what happened after you took off, but,**

you took off en masse, so that you could form up quickly, is that correct?

Yes

What was the necessity to form up so quickly?

It was to get to the bomb line and come back again. This was developed at that time, because of the pressure that was on the fighting at the time.

01:00 At the front line, they had to get in and do as many operations as they can within daylight hours. And that's the way they did it, and they did it very successfully. And when you get two squadrons, two RAF squadrons, 55 and 223, and you've got three South African squadrons doing that. You can imagine it was virtually a continuous bombing all day long. It's

01:30 against the troops, and that's what they wanted.

Were you making up tactics as you went along?

Well, I think these tactics had been developed earlier, and just modified. Well I don't know about the modification, but no, they just continued to use it until they got up into, up into the Tunis area, where 18 aircraft were too cumbersome, to manoeuvre

02:00 against the flak and the fighters. We broke it down to two boxes of six, so it was 12 aircraft, and we carried that on through to Italy, through Sicily, and into Italy too. But that was the last of the 18s was in the Alamein area, and the first of the Marathon Line after that it was broken down into two boxes of six.

And you were, this was, what type of aircraft were involved in those 18

02:30 **boxes?**

Well, there were the Baltimores and the Bostons. 55, 223 had Baltimores, one and there was a South African squadron had Baltimores, and two South African squadrons were Bostons, so there were five squadrons all together.

And you had also fighter support?

Yes.

Can you talk about the fighter support?

Yes, I used to have the Kittyhawks, there was Australian Kittyhawk squadron, three squadron used to

03:00 escort us on occasion. They had their identification CV [Curriculum Vitae] on the side of the aircraft, we always recognised that. There was 450 squadron, that was an Australian squadron, but they came in later, no, they were there at the same time, yes. 125 was an RAF squadron, two RAF squadrons and two more South African squadrons. So there were six squadrons of

03:30 fighters, and there were five squadrons of bombers.

How did fighter support work for you on one of your operations?

Well, they would normally be a top cover, there'd be one, I don't know how many but there would be, but there would be a top cover and a close cover for us. Top cover was supposed to knock them off before they got to the fighters, opposition fighters before they got to us. And close cover was to

04:00 engage them when they got to us, so that was the basis of it. And as they went on the Kittyhawks became less and less available to the RAF squadrons, that's English squadrons, and got Spitfires, so the Spitfires took over from that as top cover, they had more manoeuvrable, climb faster and do all sorts of things better. We always felt more comfortable with the Spitfires and

04:30 Tomahawks, I don't know why, but that was the way it was.

Can you describe a particular operation where the fighter, you saw the fighters in action protecting you?

Yes, we were at, Trapani Milo, was a German Italian aerodrome, on the tip of, on the western tip of Sicily, Sicily, yes, and we

05:00 took off and we were to bomb this aerodrome. Our squadron and 50, for the usual five squadrons, we'd call them the Balbos, each squadron would take it in turn to lead the bunch of five squadrons. The Balbo came from the name of the first Italian to fly a group of aeroplanes across the Atlantic Ocean, he was Marshall Balbo or some such. He flew 5 or 6

05:30 seaplane type Italian things across, and this was long before the war, not too long before the war, but that's what we named the thing, a Balbo. We're going in a Balbo, and we were number three or number one in the Balbo, we were the leaders or whatever. And this particular occasion we were, and we took off, and a friend of mine, or one of the boys, Australian he was, he was leading our squadron. And

06:00 we were escorted by the first American Negro squadron that they had produced, or went into action,

and that was I don't recall the number of their squadron, or whatever it was, but they escorted us, well they picked us up. And we took off, and

06:30 towards Sicily, but they came from a different direction and joined us. And they were flying along, there was about 30 or more of them, and then we noticed a couple of their long range tanks started to fall, and when that happened, we thought, "Well there must be problems ahead," because they were getting ready to fight. So we went in there, and we were attacked by 60 or, it was reported to be 60 or 70 Messerschmitts,

07:00 Mackies and all sorts of things, and this was the occasion when I was flying number two on the squadron leader who claimed he shot a Messerschmitt down, but that never happened. But, we had a successful bombing raid there. We lost two aircraft that time, two shot down, but the fighters claimed, the American fighters claimed more than that, so we felt it was rather satisfactory and so on.

07:30 **Did you see them attacking the Messerschmitts, the American fighters?**

Yes. Well you couldn't really, well, I couldn't anyway, my crew probably could but as I say, we were flying in tight formation you had to concentrate on the bloke there, because if he wanted to turn, you had to go with him wherever he is, you had to be part of his aircraft, virtually, you were flying that close together. You could, just couldn't, could not concentrate. You had to concentrate all the time.

And was there much

08:00 **radio chatter from the fighters?**

No, well, we didn't hear any, we didn't hear any at all. But they were on their own sort of frequency themselves, we had our frequency. But there was very little said as far as we were concerned, at any occasion.

And are you talking to your crew through the intercom?

We were available to talk to them, yes, but they'd only tell you something, if there was something going wrong. You know, there was something

08:30 happening or they wanted your attention or some such thing.

Were you in radio communication with the lead aircraft?

Yes, yes, they were always there, if you wanted, you'd have to press your button, intercom or outside, you'd have to change it. But we had occasions when the leader, when I was leading the squadron on one occasion, and of course, you are listening out to the fighters to see what they had to say.

09:00 The leader of the squadron did that, the other fellows didn't take too much, you more or less stay on intercom with your own people, own aircraft. But we were, one occasion heading for Messina Straits to do a bombing thing, and we'd taken off and climbed, and we were climbing then about, anyway, we were doing about, oh, a normal Baltimore climb, and the leader of the fighters called to us and said, "Slow down, we can't stay

09:30 with you," because they were having to weave, and they were carrying long range tanks as well, so, we were pushing them a bit, so we had to slow down. And whenever I came across any of them, I reminded them of the fact that they used to have to slow down to stay with us. Supposed fighter escort.

This was Australian pilots?

Yes, this was 3, or 450 squadron, for us, yeah.

Did you go across and see them very often?

No, not very often, I once at,

10:00 we were at Giardini in Sicily, went across to see them once and when we were in Foggia in Italy, went across to see them once, but, no, they were, well in those, in Giardini, it was quite a trip across to get to them, because we were further away. And Foggia, it was so damn cold and miserable and wet, we didn't go very far.

Before you took of on a mission, say, especially

10:30 **in the desert, were there any rituals that you followed?**

No, not really, in order to get the squadron, we had a drum of a wheel, a wheel drum of a vehicle and that used to hang on a piece of timber with an arm on it like a hangman's noose or something. And in order to get a squadron together somewhere, you'd get hold of a,

11:00 something metal and hit this thing, and it would make a hell of a gong would go off, and that meant when the gong went off, you had to go and assemble, and you' be briefed on what was going on. They had a blackboard there, and on the blackboard, they had the names of the pilots and positions they were to fly in, and this is the way we used to. We knew, there'd be an op, once the gong went, there'd be an operation on, of some sort, even it was a dummy raid, or something like that, this is

11:30 we're in the desert, at Alamein area. And we'd assemble there, and be told "What was going to happen, and what position we were flying in" and then we'd repair to our aircraft, or be taken to our aircraft, and away we'd go. That'd be the only ritual that went on.

Did you carry any lucky charms with you?

No, I never ever did, I never ever did. I think I wore a scarf, a knitted, a very finely

12:00 knitted blue, dark blue scarf that I'd had when I was at home, had been knitted for me by, I can't recall who, but it really, was one of these closely knitted, I think it must have been on a knitting machine or something. It was very, very nice, and very warm. And I used that, that's about the only thing I could say, but I wouldn't call it a lucky charm, but I used it frequently anyway, or whenever I could I think.

12:30 **So you were pretty much on standby to go into battle fairly readily in the desert, is that right?**

Yes.

Can you describe that waiting around for us, waiting to go into?

There was no major problem with it, you know, when I, early on, very apprehensive when, until you got four or five operations under your belt, yes, you didn't know what to expect. But

13:00 by then, you had learned what to expect. And, no, you just accepted it as another job, but the first four or five, yes, it was rather hairy, you didn't know what to do, or, not that you didn't know what to do, but you were anxious to get it on and over with and out of the way.

How did you deal with the possibility of getting shot down and not returning?

Never thought of it, you know, only hoped

13:30 that if it was going to happen, it would be nice and quick. But, Trapani Milo, one of the fellows that was shot down, he had an Australian ladders, a wireless, he was English pilot, but he had an Australian ladders, or wireless operator, and he was the only one who got out of his aircraft. And he finished up as a POW [Prisoner of War], and he came back to

14:00 Australia. I don't know what happened to him after that, but saw him go down. No, you didn't think too much of it, you shoved it out of your mind. When you did lose somebody, "Well, okay, he's gone, that's it, let's carry on."

What if you knew them quite well, though?

Well, yes, it was just, drink a bit more grog. Get over it, that's all.

14:30 **Was there anyone who particularly affected you at that time, who didn't come back?**

Yeah, there was one fellow. He virtually blew up, McClure, McClure, yes. He wasn't in my section at the time, he was in another section, another box. I was in one box and he was in another one.

15:00 And he got a direct hit, and virtually blew up. Yeah, he was a, I felt his loss, yes. Bit morbid about it for a while, but, anyway, you got over it. Had to.

You were particularly close to him?

Oh, close as you could be I suppose in the circumstances. Used to, well, there was nothing very much to do in the place, when you're stuck out

15:30 in the desert. The only thing, used to sit and talk, or not sit and talk, or in the mess at night time just sit at home and talk about you. What you were and what you were doing and all of this, and get your mind away from where you were and things. Of course when mail came, it was an exciting day, we were always excited about mail and always being told to write home and all this nonsense. And we were writing home, yeah. But you'd

16:00 try to be as normal as possible

Did you write home to his relatives, after he was gone?

I wrote to his parents, but got a reply from them, and that was it, I never wrote to them again.

And what did you tell them?

I just told them what a great fellow he was, and how unfortunate it all happened, and I said, "You can be assured it was quick," but you know. It happened that, yeah, he was there one minute, and he wasn't the next.

16:30 No, I didn't say it like that, but I tried to make it as pleasant as possible. To say there was no hope, because they used to post you first of all, even if you were so, they were always put down, as missing, and then it would be confirmed within a couple of days whether it was killed in action or not, because they weren't sure precisely what happened. But there was no doubt about this. He just blew up.

17:00 I imagine, although I don't suppose, they probably would have given the "Your son has been killed in action" or something. Some people like when Smith survived, we didn't know who of the crew it was, parachute that went down. So it could have been any one of the four of them. It happened to be him.

What happened in that incident?

Well, that was

17:30 a case of there was four crew and only one came out. So you couldn't select who it was, we didn't know, it was just a parachute. And so the four of them were posted as missing. And it wasn't until, I suppose later when the records came through from the POW camp that they realised it was Smith who got out of it. And we only realised that when the war was over, and we found out that he was a

18:00 POW.

Did you see McClure's plane get hit?

No, I didn't actually. I didn't see that. But I heard another frightening episode. We were flying around Mt Etna, bombing some German troops in concentration. I was leading my box of six, and my number two alongside me, he received a direct hit. And that was frightening.

18:30 He was there, and then he wasn't. Because as a leader you did have a chance to look around. But when you were flying two and three, you had to concentrate solely on your number one. But we were flying along there, and then, it was just this huge burst of flame. But it was a direct hit, and away he went. That was really frightening. Yeah. It's not much fun.

19:00 Not much fun at all.

When you got back to the airfield, would you often wait to see what aircraft could, had made it back or would you return in formation, or?

We came back in formation, or we'd be in formation all the time. And when you weren't flying, you'd always, you'd hear them coming back. And you'd walk out, and no matter what you were doing, you'd go and count them to see how many was there –

19:30 always check. You know you took off, and formed up, you flew away and you came back. In formation all the way. It was only after you left the target, and I was saying we used to fly a very tight formation going into attack. It was only after you left the target and you were on your way home, you used to relax a bit and then move out rather than move, fly in tight formation, and when we came back to base, just to

20:00 show the other fellows down below we were pretty good, we used to get in tight formation. Yeah. Show offs.

When you were flying over some of the, can you just describe the battlefield from the air in the desert?

It was very difficult to identify, as a matter of fact this reminds me of the fact

20:30 our commanding officer, Mr Hawgin, the fellow that tore strips off us when we went into Alexandria and had a sauna or bath after the sand storm. And this was up in, when we were at the Marathon Line, when we used to fly across the sea at a hundred foot climb, bomb drop down and come home. He, as a leader was responsible

21:00 for the targeting, so he let the bombs go on, and we all bombed on the leader. And this particular instance, he bombed the headquarters of the 51st Highland Div [Division], instead of the Germans. And when he got back, when we all got back and landed, there was a station wagon waiting, the group captain's station wagon was waiting, and

21:30 hauled in, and apparently got into it and from then on he disappeared. He was posted off the squadron immediately. And we got a new commanding officer, who was a great fellow, bloke. But that was an instance when wrong identification of target, because when you're coming in as we were doing in those days, from the sea, every wadi or gully looked precisely the same. And that was the battlefields, the gullies and wadis

22:00 and things about the place there. There was no distinct line. It had to be identified first as to what you were bombing, and troops, if you had to be extremely careful as to where the front line was. We had reference points of course, map references as to where the, our foremost troops were, and beyond that, it was safe to bomb anything that moved. But we had a specific target, always to bomb, and it was just

22:30 wrongly identified on this occasion. And we had, we later met up with some of the blokes from the 51st Highland Div, and we were a bit nervous about meeting with them. Because they knew that we RAF blokes gone, had bombed their headquarters place, or where their headquarters, or whatever their advanced place was. And after we got to

23:00 talk to them, and admit to them that, yes, we were responsible, they didn't take it as hard as we thought they would have done, because we didn't kill, we only killed about four or five, that's how destructive

we were. But four or five they thought was a good idea, because they didn't approve of then anyway. So we got out of that one fairly safely.

That must have been a real worry for you, to bomb

23:30 **your own troops.**

It was, it really was, it was only when we got back we were told. It just left a very empty feeling. Collateral damage they call it these days. They didn't in those days.

What did they call it back then?

Bloody stupid errors, yeah, stupid errors. I think that's why they gave us, gave up us

24:00 racing across the ocean at 100 feet and climbing up. We used to climb to a height and then go in from there. Stay at the same height so they could identify precisely what they had to bomb. Was only trained to avoid fighters and ack ack, but we used to do this screaming across the ocean business. Yes, Mr

24:30 Hawgin, he finished, up, he was a Wing Commander then, and he finished up as a Wing Commander at the end of the war, so he must've been slotted into some position somewhere away. I don't know why, but anyway, that was it. But the fellow we got, he just, he came out with the 1st Army from the landing they had at Casablanca. And he had been flying Bostons and he

25:00 came and joined us, his name was Peter Le Cheminant, and he was a Jersey Islander or something. Extremely was a nice fellow, had a slight impediment in his speech, but he was very good. He eventually finished up as chief of the RAF, chief of the air, Chief Marshall Sir Peter Le Cheminant. Which was something, to have known him, and been with him, and that. And, he was the fellow that would never, they used to only

25:30 have to fly when they wanted to, they didn't have to fly everyday. But he wouldn't fly unless he had Hutt or myself flying. Two or three on him. One of us at two, and the other three, or the other way around. He always insisted on that. And he had another fetish that he painted his, hubs of his aircraft wheels red. I don't know why, but anyway they were red. He was a very nice bloke, particularly nice.

26:00 **As an Australian in a British squadron, did you feel you were treated as an equal?**

Oh, I, when Le Cheminant came, felt no doubt about it we were. But I'm not quite certain that when Hawgin was there, and also his senior flight commander, fellow by the name of Leon, he was a South African. And I don't think we Australians were held in the highest of esteem by

26:30 those two. But they, after he had gone, Leon didn't last very long, he went back, he expired his duties, and he went back somewhere or other, I don't know where. But I don't think that he thought to highly of we Australians. But after that it was different, we had an Australian flight commander, then that would, made a difference. And the other flight

27:00 commander didn't worry, the other flight commander was, he was a Brit who didn't take too kindly to Australians. I finished up as, he finished up as my chief flying instructor down at Shander when I went back as a flying instructor. He was there, we didn't see exactly eye to eye. That didn't matter.

27:30 **Was there some sort of particular personality problem or**

There was, because…

…incident that provoked that, or?

No, there was an incident that provoked it. I'd been, well I progressed from being a sergeant to, I became a warrant officer in Sicily. I had been a warrant officer for quite some time, and when was back at, as a flying instructor, I was still a warrant officer. I'd been flying,

28:00 an instructor for about six to nine months, and I thought, "Oh, it would be great to have a commission," because in the RAF you're treated far better as a commissioned officer that you are as anybody else. So I applied for a commission, I had to be interviewed by the chief flying instructor and the chief instructor, so I went to this interview, and when it was all over,

28:30 I thought I stood, my flight commander recommended me anyway. And I thought I'd done enough in any case. And when it was all over, I, Mr Chubb had ruled me out, because I lacked experience. And I thought it was a bit rough, bit bloody rough, as a matter of fact. So, I decided, well, I'm going to take this up.

29:00 I went up to the Australian headquarters in Cairo and saw the, one of these squadron leaders up there, some high, a high ranking bloke, anyway. I went and told him the story, and he said, "Good God, they can't do that." And I had a commission within about a month, of being sent, but went through the Australian people and they recommended it. Mr Chubb got quite a shock when I came in as a pilot officer.

Back in the desert, was there, the

29:30 **sand storms and everything, did they create problems for the aircraft or your flying?**

Yes, we had one huge sand storm that lasted about three days and then it was, oh, it wasn't very pleasant, and we were at 70 OTU [Operational Training Unit], the same thing happened. I was, flying Marauders, instructing the Marauders, and this, the westerly was blowing up, and it was obvious

30:00 it was going to be a storm come, and we blokes who had a bit of experience, we asked whether we were going to continue to fly. We called up our, the control tower, and we said, "We're flying still?" "Yeah, flying's still on." And we took off, and as I took off, the roll of dust and cloud, you could see it coming, it was just rolling in, you see in pictures of sandstorms. So I called to the tower and said,

30:30 "I'm returning to land," and no, I wasn't allowed to land, because there was another aircraft coming in. So by the time I got around the sand storm had hit us, and you just couldn't see a thing. So I climbed up a bit, and then suggested to them that they line up the aircraft, and stack them so that, you know, we had a chance to know that we were all at different heights, because there's four or five Marauders dozing around the sky. And

31:00 they wouldn't do this, so I finally got around and selected the runway that I was coming in on you'd identify. And I touched down and running along the runway, and a cross runway was in front of me, about 200 yards away. And another fellow cut across my nose, and I thought, "Good God." You know, could have finished up in a huge mangled mess. That was all a bit hair raising. And that was all because of the sand storm, you know.

31:30 **Describe the operations as you progressed forward. You started support operations in Sicily. Can you talk a bit about those for us?**

Well, Tunis, our squadron, we were, well not, an amazing thing was, on the 12th of May this year was the 60th anniversary of the last bombs being dropped on German troops in Africa,

32:00 and we were the squadron who did it. And, but I was in, there were two boxes of six, and I was in one of the boxes of six. Nobody realised 60 years ago, the last of the war, the Germans surrendered the next day. But yes, from there, we moved into bombing Pantelleria, an island that was between Sicily and the mainland of Tunis,

32:30 Tunisia, and the Germans and Italians had an aerodrome on that, and they used to use it as a fighter base to attack, and we, when we started to bomb, or when I say we, the desert air force, the Balbo, started to bomb Tunisia, Pantelleria, and we continued this for some time. And, I don't know that, I forget the date now, but once again, we were

33:00 fortunate enough to be the last, dropping the last bombs on Pantelleria, I don't know whether it was by design or choice by 223 squadron seemed to have been selected to have done a few of these things, but I've got a photograph of the last bombs being dropped on Tunisia, and the landing aircraft, and we flew over them as they were approaching the island before their invasions. When they got

33:30 there, they'd surrendered, they surrendered everything. From that, we moved to, well we had a bit of a rest, we were always having rests, and we moved to Malta to bomb, when the invasion of Sicily took place. We moved, before we moved to Malta, we did a couple of night time operations on Sicily, which was unusual for us, because

34:00 we hadn't bombed at night time, it was a solo effort, we just went out there and tried to create alarm and despondency amongst the populace. We didn't know, we were just told to bomb targets of opportunity and not being used to, knowing too much about night time flying and bombing, we were stooging along quite happy and merrily, heading and we got to the coast of Sicily, and Jack told me that,

34:30 "Steer this course," so I steered this course. But he'd made a mistake, he took me straight over the aerodrome, and when we first got there, all hell broke loose. And it was shot and shell came from everywhere, and it was a bit frightening at night time, all the colours and bangs and things. But there's Wellingtons bombing the same aerodrome as we were stooging across it. So we departed there rather rapidly and left the place to the Wellingtons to do that, and

35:00 we carried on and dropped our bombs on the first occasion, in no particular spot that I could really recall. And the second time we went out about two nights later, we found a cross roads in some village, in, it was quite moonlight, and we found this cross roads, so we used that as a target, we bombed the cross roads of this village. That was our night time operation, our contribution to the night time

35:30 war. We much preferred to be daylight, you could see what you were doing. Malta, we moved to Malta, and we supported the army in Sicily, as they were moving up the east coast, we were supporting them from Malta. And we flew in, we did quite a lot of operations out of Malta. It was great to get to Malta, and see the Maltese and what they had put up with. Malta

36:00 itself is, I don't know if you know anything about it but, it's just a huge rock anyway. And they had air raid shelters dug into the rocks and quite deep. There were a few patches of arable country, but not many, the people were poor, unfortunates, they'd been, hadn't been treated all that well, there'd been lots of bombing raids and lack of food and that. It was pretty rough to

36:30 see them. We were stationed, well, our billets were across a, at a place by the name of Sliema which

was across the harbour from where we were, the aerodrome, and one particular day, I had off, I wasn't flying I went down to have a swim in the harbour. And there was a young lad there, diving down, and coming, diving in the water, and the water was beautifully clear. And after he'd done a couple of dives

37:00 like this, pretty close, I said to him, "What are you trying to do?" He said, "I'm trying to get that fish down there." And you could see a fish just down there, and I said, "I'll do that for you," big brave, blonde Australian. I went to dive, I had to give up, I couldn't get down, it was so deep, the water was so clear. As far as I know, the fish is still there, and the poor boy is hungry. Poor kid

37:30 was trying to get it. That was just a story of Malta. We suffered a couple of bombing raids in Malta too, but no major problems. Then to Sicily, we went to a place, Giola to start with, a small place on the coast of Sicily, we had a landing strip there, and we started to do this bombing raid, bombing from there. Then we moved to Giardini

38:00 which is the Plains of Giardini, near Mount Etna. It was from Giola, my mate got, this aircraft blew, a direct hit alongside me and we were flying out to Giola at the time, yes, frightening.

Did you have any services for him after? Did you have any ceremonies for crew who didn't come back?

No,

38:30 no, no ceremonies at all. No, nobody cared too much. Well, no, that's wrong, no, there was just nothing you could do. What could you do? Just remember them as they were.

What about their personal effects. Did you?

Well, the service police took over straight away.

39:00 Took it, lord only knows what happened to that, but they just took it away. We didn't have many personal effects. A kit bag, and probably, clothes in it, and writing material, and that's about all. Didn't have too many personal effects. You used to leave your kit bag, your major kit bag, your C bag, the big white one, was always stored somewhere,

39:30 somewhere other than where you were. Because you used to leave all your major, whatever major equipment you had, in that.

Did you leave behind some sort of note, in case you didn't return? Some message?

I wrote a letter to my parents. My father gave it back to me, I don't know where it is now, but I wrote a letter to him, just in case, I marked on it, 'Only to be opened on the occasion of my death',

40:00 and but he had opened it anyway. But, yeah, I had a note, written a letter to him, told him. And also to Win, I had written one to her, I don't know what she'd done with it.

You'd sent them off already?

Yeah, I had sent them off already. Yeah, just in case. 'Only to be opened in the event of my death.' It was marked right across it and sealed.

Did you think that was probable?

Well, it was just in case, you know, it was

40:30 just in case it did happen. No, I didn't think it was probable, I just hoped it didn't happen, and it didn't.

How do you keep up optimism under those circumstances? What kept you going?

I don't know, I just thought, well, probably just doing your job and knowing that you were contributing in some way to

41:00 getting out and getting this thing over and done with. You know, every time you went out you did something that probably helped you get closer to that day when you didn't have to do it any more. I, well, my crew, all of us, we were bits of guinea pigs, because until we were involved in this, the tour of operations

41:30 was round about 50, in the desert, it was 25 at one stage, they increased it to 50. 50 operations. And then they didn't do anything about that, until, we were, as I say, I think we were guinea pigs, we were into 78 before they stood us down. By that time, we were pretty exhausted, tired, nervous, and just,

42:00 now it was getting to the end of our

Tape 7

00:30 **We'll just talk about nicknames. We were just having a chat about that, let's just discuss that. When you moved into an RAF squadron, you would have been exposed to a whole different range of slang?**

Yes, yes.

Can you tell us a little bit about that?

As I mentioned, Clark was known as Nobby, and there was always a Geordie, you had a Geordie there, a person that came from Geordie. And Jock, of course, you ran

01:00 across them, and what did the Welshman, Taffy, Taffy it was, Taffy the Welshman, yes. They were those, they knew better than we did, we had to get used to them, to all their names, there was a Geordie, we didn't know until it was explained to us they came from up near Newcastle

01:30 area, things like that. But others we had some sort of inkling as to where they came from, but there were a number of them it had to be explained to us, because that's how they were known amongst themselves. Particularly the ground crew fellows, they used to talk like that, and you'd never get, well not, rarely you'd get a surname, and they all be known by that.

What about the Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, did they have names, have

02:00 **names for you guys?**

Not really, only I was known as Curly, naturally, but, no, I think, most of us, oh there was a fellow by the name of Murdoch, whose name was Doc. No, most of them were called by their Christian names, unless there was some reason why you would not be.

Did you have any popular jokes or songs or anything within your squadron?

02:30 Yeah, oh, within our squadron we did, yes. We had a thing about, you're testing my memory there, we had, "Walty threes go out in nine each day, and ME 109's come out to play. We had a rendezvous." Oh, I get lost, it was about gunners

03:00 pride of fighters was, sounded like a last goodbye, and something along those lines, yes. But, yeah, songs, yes, we had lots of songs. But I've got copies of them anyway, and the rest of them, well, they are not unpublishable, but they're, but we used to in the

03:30 theatres in Cairo, when the, prior to the show starting, they'd show a copy of King Farouk's photograph, with all his medals and things on and the national anthem would be played, and I'm sure it was developed by the AIF blokes who were, but we carried on the tradition, because most

04:00 of the people in the theatre were servicemen, and when this started, there was, on the parody, they sang was "Old King Farouk, with his jackals and his dogs, owner of the pyramids and syphilitic wogs, they're all black bastards but they dearly love their king, isa quise quise katear mongarear bardin." And that was, yeah, they used to stand there and sing it, it was rather

04:30 rude as far as the local populous was concerned. Not that I think there was many local populace there anyway.

Did you join in?

Yeah, of course. It was just natural, you just did it.

Was there a second verse to that one?

Yes, there is a second verse to that one. "Oh Farida, oh Farida, how the boys would love to ride her, they'd pull down her pants if they had half a chance isa quise quise katear mongarear bardin."

05:00 And if you want to know what that Arabic is, "Isa quise," you're very good, "Mongaria" is food, and "Bardin" is later. So, "You were very good, we'll have some food later." There you are, you got the whole verse of it now.

Farida was?

She was the Queen of Egypt. And talking of the same gentlemen, there was an establishment in

05:30 Cairo known as the Officers and Sisters Club, which you had to be an officer or sister to go to it, and I wasn't an officer at the time, I was a warrant officer. But we used to never, we put on a badge that we were a pilot officer or something, and another chap, Ledbetter, he was a flight lieutenant, he said, "Come on, let's go to this place," so we, I put the thing on

06:00 and we went to this place. And we were enjoying some quiet, our meal and some, and beer, and all of a sudden, the waitress started to run about and clear the place, and they wanted us to move, and we refused. We said, "No, we're not going to move, we're going to stay here and eat and drink," and it wasn't, soon after, in came his majesty himself, surrounded by a couple of bodyguards or whatever

06:30 they were. But they'd cleared the place out for him. But he also had a couple of very attractive English

nursing sisters with him, so I think that might have been, I don't know where Faryda was that night, but she certainly wasn't with him.

Were you impressed by the sight of the King?

No. He was just a big overgrown, well, he appeared to us to be an overgrown, overfed

07:00 fellow. And we didn't have a very high opinion of him at all. I think mainly bought about by this famous performance in the theatre.

That was something that you say carried over from the 1st AIF.

I would not be at all surprised, because, yes, the opinion of them and it was probably a great shame, because there were a lot of good fellows amongst them I imagine,

07:30 but, he was just another wog, you know, it was derogatory. Got pushed aside, and that was it.

Was there anything else during your stay in Egypt that had been established by the Australian soldiers 20 years earlier?

No, not that I can recall, not that I can recall. No, I can't think of anything particularly.

08:00 **Do you think that they had influenced the Egyptians' respect for you, you guys one way or the other?**

I think they may have done so in as much that, I don't know if it was respect or the fact that they were wary of you, rather than respect. I don't think that they had much, well, whether it was respect or not, I don't know, but they were very wary of

08:30 approaching you or doing anything with you. But they were very easy to whip into a mob. Myself and another fellow, we were in Cairo on one occasion, always Cairo, and the fellow we were with, the streets were pretty crowded and that. And I accidentally knocked,

09:00 I was talking to my mate here, and as I was walking along I knocked this Arab here, this Egyptian, and he reacted. And I said, "What's wrong?" And he said, "You hit me," or knocked me or something. "No I didn't, I just unfortunately, sorry I did it." But he wouldn't take this, and in a matter of minutes or seconds had a group of fellows around him and then some British soldiers came to our assistance, and we virtually had a

09:30 riot on our hands, within a matter of you know, they just came from everywhere. We were smart enough to escape, we left the British soldiers and the Egyptians arguing among themselves. It was all over just an innocent, well I suppose I should have been more careful but I wasn't but, this is how it could easily happen.

Were there riots?

No, I can't say there were riots at all.

10:00 Before, I'm, this is only hearsay, before Alamein, before the battle of Alamein, Egypt wasn't exactly the most pleasant of places. People had told me they had to be very careful, because they were, because the Germans were so close, they were sympathetic towards them, and they thought they might get through, but they didn't.

10:30 **What about later on when you moved to Tunisia? Did you have leave around that area?**

No, the only leave we got was when the war, when peace was declared, when the Germans surrendered and then peace declared. Montgomery, for reasons best known to himself, I think it might have been his religious upbringing, he, we never had any

11:00 liquor throughout the desert at all. Liquor wasn't supplied to us. So when we got, whenever we got to a town or close to a populace place, we used to try and get some of the local vino [wine], or whatever was available. So, myself and three other fellows took a 1500 weight vehicle from our squadron, the sergeant in charge of the motor pool, it was, and myself and

11:30 another fellow. And we went into, we got some money from the sergeant's mess, and went into Tunis to buy some liquor, and we bought all sorts of funny liquor. Wines, vino mostly, or wines, and we sampled a few, of course, to make sure they were okay, because the driver had, he'd sampled too many. On the way home, he rolled the vehicle. We fortunately

12:00 survived, without, we got a scratch or two, but the grog was spilt and broken, because they were wooden casks, you could imagine, couldn't you? All the vino, and our tears. We saved some, I know, because he had some. It was amazing, some of the fellows could get drunk on half a, and we had pannikins we didn't have glasses, but you know, half a pannikin of red wine or whatever it was. But we got a bit back to

12:30 the squadron, and that was all.

What did you get up to in the mess hall on those occasions?

We, when we did have some liquor there, they'd drink and, then they'd start singing all these bawdy songs, you know, just something to do, or we'd play darts. There was always a dart board. We had a, something I didn't mention, on 223 had a

13:00 duck, Donald was its name. Had it in the desert, and they used to put a saucer down with beer in it, and they'd fill it up at night time on the counter there, and we'd get this blasted duck drunk. Finish up lying on its back. We thought, we didn't know, but one of the fellows who always reckoned it was.

13:30 When we moved on from one spot to another, we'd fly, so when it came moving from where we were at Alamein, up to Ben Gardane, and further up there, this fellow would say, "I'll take him in my aircraft." So that was okay, so he was a very well behaved duck, it wouldn't run away, and used to people handling him. Put him in the aircraft with the wireless operator and away they went. And when they got up

14:00 to height, the pressure on his bowels, the duck let go everywhere. That duck shit, you have no idea. Anyway, poor fellow had to get a reo of, a 44 gallon drum full of petrol to wash out his aircraft to make it sensible, to make it reasonable again. It was then, when we got into that area, it was round, oh to Tripoli, I think it was. Anyway it was round about there that, when we discovered

14:30 it wasn't Donald after all, because we'd fed it some green grass and that, bloody thing laid an egg on us. So that was it, so Donald was there. We had it all the way thought to Brindisi in Sicily, in Italy, and Jock Kirdy the Sergeant, he had it out, and he had a bit of string round its neck, and a long trail of,

15:00 about 6 or 7 feet of it and he used to walk around with this, and take the dog, the duck for a walk. And this was great, until some hungry Italian got it, and Donald disappeared off our squadron. Somewhere finished up in his pot. They tried to get another one, they got all sorts of things, it didn't work. But the first occasion when Donald was taken for a flight was an occasion. The pressure was far, far

15:30 too much.

The image of a duck being flown in a plane.

Yeah, that's true.

How did that tradition start, do you know? Was the duck already there when you arrived?

It was already there when I arrived. And the tradition of putting beer in the saucer for it was already there too. I don't know where that came from.

What did the duck do when it had its fill of beer?

It would just, you know, drink it, and then finally, after it's had, as I say, a few saucer fulls,

16:00 it finished up on its back. With its, you know, lying there. Drunk. Drunk duck.

Was there one particular airman who had a, who looked after the duck?

Yes, the fellow that took it in the aeroplane, chap by the name of Annis, A double N I S, Sergeant Annis, Sergeant Pilot Annis. He had a hell of a job with his aeroplane afterwards, though.

16:30 **And talk a bit more about flying in the desert. Was it more difficult to fly in that formation with 18 or in the two boxes of six, or was there no difference?**

It was more difficult to fly with 18 aircraft because you had to hold three boxes together, you couldn't let them wander around. Whereas, when you were flying with two boxes of six, you had a chance, okay, to move around, you didn't have to be so precise as the 18s. The 18s

17:00 you had to be precise and you had to be in, constantly aware of what you were doing.

Could you take us through one of those operations from beginning to end? What would you be focussing on throughout that operation? Starting at the beginning, you'd get into the aeroplane?

Yes, you'd get into the aeroplane, and everybody would settle in, and you'd start up and taxi out to where you have to be. And you line up and the, when it was time to go, the leader goes,

17:30 and we'd all take off. Get into formation. Climb, when you climb up to your height, you'd already been briefed on what height you were going to go, and what height you were going to attack. Climb up to that height, and then we'd look around anxiously for our escort. That'd be the first thing you'd do, look around for your escort. They were there, or they'd meet us at a rendezvous somewhere, and we'd rendezvous with them, and then we'd head off, and as we approached,

18:00 well, say, we were attacking from Tunis, Tunisia, into Sicily… as we approached the coast, we could see, or that's when we became quite alert, you'd be more alert then, and you'd close your formation up, and tighten everything up, and everybody would be aware that you, they have to be on their toes.

What would you be looking for in the pilot's seat at this stage?

Well, at this

18:30 stage, as the leader, the, and you knew your target, you'd be looking for identification of a particular land spot or your navigator would, you'd say, "Jack, can you identify anything?" or you would say, "What's that point over there?" or this, and once we'd identified that, he'd say, "Right, well, we've got to turn 20 degrees to the left," or something. And we'd eventually line, well, not line ourselves up so much as, but know where

19:00 the target was and how we were going to attack it. You couldn't fly straight and level into the target, you had to weave, and in doing that you meant, not your aircraft, so much as, all the other aircraft had to follow you in formation. That's not an easy task when you are doing a, and it's always wise to keep changing your height slightly, you know, up or down, when you weave to the right, you dive slightly, and coming up

19:30 the other way, you pull up and keep it constant height of whatever you were aiming for your bomb, bombing run. Identify the target, and when you know your target would turn right onto it, or turn left onto it, and he tells you that, and he says, he lines the target up and he says, "Right, level now," and you level, so "Bomb doors open." He'd open, we'd operate the bomb doors. And he'd say, "Right, number one bomb gone," and that was

20:00 it, and once he counted the six away you'd either pull up and get away. By that time, all the others should have done the same thing, because then it was your turn to take the squadron away. Take them, whichever way, you'd either dive away, or climb away, or whatever you were going to do. Because this time, the flak would be pretty thick, and if there were fighters about, that would be the time when they'd be into it.

Can you describe that moment when you let the bombs go?

Well, you'd feel the

20:30 weight from the aircraft, you could, when the bombs were going, you'd feel there a bit of a lift on the aircraft. But, apart from that, you were anxious and looking about the sky, in case there was an attack coming, or where the flak was heaviest to get away from, or whatever.

What kind of noises could you hear?

Oh, the flak bursting, you could hear that, and when you hear a real crack, you knew it was close. But otherwise when you'd hear a thump, thump sort of thing, you

21:00 knew it was about. On these Balbos that I told you about earlier, when we got up into Italy, an American squadron of Bostons joined us, and they joined us in this Balbo of 12 aircraft. And on this particular target, running in, they were leaders. And they hadn't had much

21:30 experience, unfortunately. They rode in the first box of six, and we were following them and we were weaving, even when we were not really on target. And these blokes just go straight in, straight and level at a certain height. And bang, the first three bursts of flak bought three aircraft down. For the rest of us, it was a terrible

22:00 sight. Bang, you'd see it happen. All because they were inexperienced, and didn't know what to do. When that happened, of course, the other 12 aircraft, 12 of the aircraft scattered all over the sky. And you didn't know what was going on, so we carried on in our usual way, but it must have been really, you know, devastating for them. But it was such a foolish thing to do. But they hadn't learned or hadn't been told, or hadn't been instructed or whatever

22:30 **What did they do wrong specifically?**

They flew straight and level into a target. Typical American, you know the famous bomb sight where they used to drop a bomb in a barrel, from whatever height. Well, to do that, you'd have to fly straight and level for at least, a certain stipulated time of 30 seconds, or a minute or whatever it was. Well, you just, in our situation when you were carpet bombing, as we were, you never stayed

23:00 still as long, as much, well, as little as humanly possible. And that was the great difference between, that's why they virtually gave away bomb aimers and that when they got into the real stuff in France and Germany, when they were flying Marauders in there. They learnt how to carpet bomb, and they only had one bomb aimer in the whole situation. Or a back up one

23:30 anyway, I believe.

When you're flying in formation, and the front of your formation gets shot away, is it every man for himself? What happens there?

No, you close up. Never, that was the only time I've ever seen the front of the formation taken out. The bloke that I'd said blew up alongside me, well it meant that the number five down below, he moved up alongside me and we came back with a

24:00 box of five, instead of a box of six. And that's how it happened, there was 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. So when

there's a fellow taken out, or anybody taken out, you'd just fill the space and stayed in formation. You never, once you broke up formation, you became a bit of a sitting duck to everybody and everyone would try and pounce on you.

24:30 **Give us a second, for the modern air force to pass over the top of us.**

Yes.

Does this happen often the planes coming over? I guess you don't notice it any more?

Yes. I tell, you'll get another one in a minute.

That's all right. On that specific occasion, when the Americans got shot away at the front, you broke up, and then what happened?

Well, we carried on. They didn't, they went all over the sky, got and

25:00 did, I don't know what they did, but we carried on and bombed the target.

In your own box?

In our own box of twelve, and then we had other squadrons behind us, of course. It was only at that particular occasion they were the leader of the Balbo, and I don't know, they thought, "Might be showing us how to do it." It was unfortunate. I think it was the fact that, and the Americans I met and saw flying

25:30 they were good pilots, they were good blokes, but the training they got left something to be desired.

You mentioned a black American squadron. Is that the one that got shot down?

No, no, they were a fighter squadron, the American black squadron, and they, that was their first actual operation in the war. That American black squadron.

Were they good fighter pilots?

They

26:00 were damn good. They were damn good, and they were damn good the day that they escorted us, because they were the only ones there, and they did a damn good job.

Can you talk a little bit more about what they did?

Well, they were, we were attacked by, I think it was 60 plus enemy fighters, and there were two squadrons of us, so there were 24 of us. So they had about 30 or 40 of their aircraft, so it was a real

26:30 get into it sort of situation, and they claimed quite a few victories, I believe, you never really knew how, or how many. But they did a very good job, they kept the fighters away for, kept them away as far as possible. Our fellows, our gunners, used a lot there, it was the turret they used with two point fives in it, yeah, two point fives, they were good hard hitting

27:00 sort of things. If they could get onto something. But, no the American Negro fighter squadron, were as good as any escort that we'd ever had.

Can we just go back to that operation in general? Getting attacked by that many fighters must be very frightening.

Well, it was, it was. Particularly when the flak's coming up amongst it. They didn't come to, they were a bit wary about the flak, but we had to ignore that.

27:30 But they were more interested in, well, the American fighters were able to get in amongst them, but kept, I think, kept them away from us as much as the flak did.

Can you describe that engagement from your point of view inside your own plane? Where were you in the formation?

I was number two on this squadron leader bloke, and I was concentrating on flying. I, all I could, my fellows were telling me,

28:00 gunner particularly, that when he fired his guns, he'd say well, "Fighter on the port side," or something, or "Coming up low or high." And I got a bit of a picture there, but you could still see, whilst you were watching your leader there, you could still get a vision of the rest of the sky, and occasionally you'd see something flash by. And this particular day I, that's when the

28:30 squadron leader claimed the fighter shot down, I swear I looked into the cockpit of an ME [Messerschmitt] 109, as he pulled up underneath us, I could just see directly into where he was going. Just one of those quick glimpses you get.

Can you describe that moment?

Well, it just, I was in close formation watching everything, and all of a sudden, this thing came up and

you know, of course, you looked away and I reckon it was there. It was just

29:00 so quick, and I was just, yeah, it was there. Really, you couldn't see, when I say you looked into his cockpit, you could see the frame of his cockpit cover, and that, you knew it was a Messerschmitt, the squarish wings, and things, and the squarish cockpit cover, but yeah, it was a Messerschmitt, and it wasn't all that far away from us.

Were they feared fighter planes?

Yeah they were, they were, very good aeroplane. And the

29:30 109 were as good, well, a lot of people say they were as good as the Spitfire. For this performance that developed was pretty good, yeah.

When you are in an engagement like that, the pilot's still in charge of the aeroplane, but there's not much you can do, is there?

Not a thing.

How do you feel when you are a pilot in that situation?

I don't know whether you've got any real feelings at all. You're just on edge, you know, if

30:00 anything goes wrong, you've got to act, you act instinctively, you don't think about it. You just, well, you're trained to do things, and if anything did go wrong, fortunately it didn't. Oh, on one occasion, yes, we were running over a target in Tunisia, and I got an engine shot out, 1 engine, bang. And I was arse end Charlie

30:30 that day, so I was 16, I was 17, number 17. And the squadron pulling away, normally we knew, after we'd bombed, and this fellow, I got hit just after we'd bombed, and I lost this engine. So Scotty said, "Righto, we'll fly on one engine." I said to my crew, "I'm going to take it down to the sea," or we had to head out to go out to sea,

31:00 "And fly home on one engine." And we did exactly that, flew, of course on, as I said the Baltimore would fly on one engine, as well as a lot of aircraft will fly on two. But, yeah. And that was an occasion. When, I landed, my ground crew wanted to know what was wrong with the engine, and I said, "Well, you better find out." But it was dead, it was feathered

31:30 and that, as if it had been shot out. So "We'll fix it," and when I saw him afterwards, he used the, he was very forthright in what he used to say, but he used the F word [fuck]. He said, "The f'er is, the f'ing f'er is f'ed." And I knew precisely what he meant, he didn't say one word of English.

When, that moment, when

32:00 **your engine gets shot at, what happens in the plane?**

You check, first of all, you as the pilot, check to see what's happened as far as your engine controls are. And you immediately, when I was hit, with that engine I lost power and immediately went that way. I corrected that and went into the single engine performance, or procedure, which carried on and did it. But

32:30 the fellow, I said to the blokes, "Okay, it's all right, we're on one engine, we're going to make it," so that was it. And so that, they checked, and the only comment made was when I got down to, we flew over a German army camp, as a matter of fact, and saw the blokes down there. They couldn't believe we were flying over, and, we were diving and going as fast as we could. They didn't expect us, and they were, but, when we got out to sea

33:00 and heading back along the coast, going back, Cliff, my wireless operator, air gunner at the back, said, "For God's sake, get up a bit higher the foam is coming in." I was so scared, that I was down as close to the sea level as I could, but I think I wasn't quite as close as Cliff thought I was. He reckoned I was too close.

How much communication would there be within the plane on the trip back from an operation?

Not very much at all. Very little. Very

33:30 little indeed. We, and particularly in and around Italy, they, we had a radio fix, to tune the radio into a certain wavelength and we'd pick up a station, we'd fly on and beam into that station and we had one of those in our the aircraft. And

34:00 we used to listen to the British overseas program, entertainment program. We'd often come back from Italy, when we had about an hour's flight to do, listening to Bob Hope and Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra. I always remember Hope calling Crosby the moaner,

34:30 and Sinatra the groaner. That's right, used to, "We've got the moaner and the groaner." That's what we used to listen to that sort of entertainment. Not all the time, but on the way back when you knew everything was all right and tune it in and listen to that, because there was nothing else to do.

What's the atmosphere in the plane at that time?

Relaxed, relaxed. Very relaxed, but as I said there was hardly any comment about anything. Except on one occasion

35:00 when I landed, we were at Brindisi at the time. And we'd been on away on operations, I think it was to Casino, or anyway, we'd been there and came back and it was a bit taut, and we were a bit taut and tight and I don't know where, what position, but I was in amongst the box of six, and I landed, and

35:30 as I was landing, running along the runway, Cliff said, not Cliff, Cyril said, "You better move a bit, the other bloke's nearly on our tail," and I said "Oh, forget about him." And Cliff came in and, "Oh, don't go picking on Cyril like that. He's only trying to warn you." And that was the only time I think that we ever reached the stage of having words about anything.

If you're communicating within the plane

36:00 **how does that work? As far as the…?**

Well, you had your microphone strapped to your mouth. The whole thing there and you either, well, I had a button control on my, on the yoke that you used to fly, but you were listening all the time, someone, somewhere would press their microphone switch, and they'd talk and it off, because the noise with the interference was there, yes.

Did you know immediately

36:30 **who was speaking, or did you need to use call signs?**

No, no, you knew. Well, normally you recognised them, well, there was only four of you, so you recognised their voice immediately.

They would have all had different accents?

Yeah, well, Cyril was an east coast bloke, and Cliff was of the centre of England somewhere.

Was it more difficult to fly as Tail End Charlie? You mentioned

37:00 **that was where you were when you got hit.**

Yes, it was more, because you had to, you were, the slightest movement of the bloke up in front, you imagine 18 aircraft, the fellow in front who's leading goes like that and that's reverberated up there and you're doing a steep turn. And same as on the inside. His movements all related back down through the whole lot. And that's how it reacts.

37:30 That's why when I was instructor, I used to get very annoyed with, at pupils who couldn't fly steadily because they couldn't understand the action of it, whatever. Can you stop that a minute?

Tape 8

00:30 **Bob, you mentioned that, toward the end of one of your operations, you had one or two, sort of, stern words within the aeroplane. Was that as close you came to having a fight within your aircrew?**

Yes. It would have been, it was a, yes, it is there's not doubt about that, indeed, Cliff was the peacemaker, or whatever. I was tired, and it had been a rough operation.

01:00 Well, it had been a long one, we'd flown from Brindisi to Casino, I think, bombed Casino, and heavy flak, and active flak, and yeah. It was just one of those things, I just blew up and I was told pretty swiftly to leave him alone, or, you know, relax.

In Brindisi, how many operations had you flown by this stage?

Oh, about, I'd say about

01:30 50, something like that.

Was that beginning to take its toll on you?

I think it would have been, yes, because the trips from Brindisi, were about the longest we had to do. They'd be about two to two and three quarter hours, to do a trip, and you were over the bomb line for quite a while, and for reasons I can't understand, we were sent

02:00 to bomb Monte Casino. And why, you'd never know, but we were there bombing Monte Casino, long, long before it was ever captured. But, flying over Italy itself, the mountain, we had to cross a mountain range, and they were about 12, 13 thousand feet, and we found that troops on the mountains were firing at us with machine guns,

02:30 which, well it wasn't very comfortable. I'd prefer to keep that stuff down on the ground, where we could see them.

How did you deal with the fatigue?

Sleep, drink mainly. Talking about drinking, getting into Brindisi, we moved from Giardini in Sicily to Brindisi, we were the first people to be there, as a matter of fact, the

03:00 Germans had only pulled out about four, five hours before us. And we arrive there, we had no fuel, no bombs, nothing at all. So, I don't suppose it was a great spectacle, but we also had been supplied with invasion money, the Lira was pretty well thought of before the invasion. I'm sure that when they gave us, when a Lira was worth, they used to give us 10 to

03:30 one, anyway. We'd get 10 invasion money for one, invasion Lira for one Italian Lira. So we had pockets full of money. The second day we were there, we arrived, the squadron landed in Brindisi, and we were allocated, we went into a barracks for the first time for a long while, and next day, the squadron

04:00 itself, the major portion of the squadron descended on the town of Brindisi, which we had to go across the harbour mouth, by a little boat affair, and get into the main street. And with our pockets full of money, we discovered champagne. And at 11 o'clock in the morning, I think the whole of the squadron was pissed in the main street of Brindisi. Because champagne was only worth about two or three Lira a bottle, but to them it was worth much more.

04:30 Yes, well, we had our fill of champagne. We had nothing else to do, we didn't have any bombs or petrol, or anything, so that was it. That was a sight to behold, I imagine, yes. Champagne, real champagne it was too. Wasn't the stuff you get today.

How were the Italians treating you?

Wearily. They had, up until then, it was the strangest thing, we invaded on what,

05:00 the 3rd of September. The 7th of September, I think it was round about that time, they had a rest day, and they got away from the Germans. The next day, they joined us. Which was a strange situation. At Brindisi airport, aerodrome, where we were there were these Mackie fighters, two thousand and ones they were, Mackie two thousand and ones, they'd been firing at us over

05:30 at Giardini and that, and here they were, they were our allies, they wanted to escort us, and we said, "No way." Didn't know how trigger happy they were, but anyway. We weren't very keen on it. But the Italians themselves avoided us, the amazing thing, when the war stops like that, or their part of the war stops, a number of young adult males appear.

06:00 We were, I was going to say virtually hundreds of them, but there was a great number of them, just appeared from everywhere, who had been soldiers or somebody or other few days before, in civilian clothes, and they were everywhere. Everywhere. I was orderly officer on one occasion at Brindisi, I'll tell you the story of this one too, and I was told to see that everybody from the

06:30 squadron, including airmen, everybody were back in the camp by 11 o'clock or 12 o'clock, whatever it was. So I went across to town with the orderly sergeant, myself, and we went looking and there was nobody about, and then we went, we were told to go and look at this brothel to see if there was anybody there. And the place was sort of a castle affair, had two giant doors that opened up so carriages could get in.

07:00 And as you went in, there was a stairway that went up either side, came up the top and like that, and there were, there was queues of fellows lined up all the way up to the cash register up there. The woman operating the cash register was taking one and a half Lira, and so we followed the line along just to make certain none of our squadron was there. We got there as the door opened, and here's

07:30 this woman. And all she had on was a pair of high heel shoes, and a fellow in the background pulling his trousers up. But that was one of our sights of the brothels of Italy. But there was no, none of our squadron anywhere near it, so it didn't matter.

Was there many of those kind of establishments set up?

Oh, imagine, yeah, everywhere. Well, Italy, they were everywhere.

Had they been set up for the Italian soldiers beforehand?

Oh, yes, yes,

08:00 I'm sure, yeah, I'm sure. And there was a great danger about VD [Venereal Disease] there too. There was a lot of talk about the Germans leaving people with VD there, and whether it was true or not, I don't know. But we had, well, we didn't have them, but there were three Australian padres, you may have heard of these fellows, Davis, Mackay, and somebody. One was a

08:30 Catholic, one was a Church of England, and one was a Presbyterian. And they were with the fighter

squadrons, the 450 and 3 squadrons virtually through the, and they used to go in early on in the place, and clean, or find the clean ones and establish where they were or whatever, and they'd pass the word around to their squadrons down there. But we never, the only time I ever came across them, when we were

09:00 in Giardini, they came across from the fighter squadrons and delivered us Australian comfort parcels, it was the first Australian, the first and only Australian comfort parcel we had, and they talked to all the Australians on our squadron, indeed, there was about 14 or so, and they wrote to every one of those parents, yeah. One of them, each wrote and said he'd met us, and we were well and fit

09:30 and what have you. And no, that was great, that was really, really wonderful. And when my eldest son Geoff was confirmed in the Church of England, the fellow that confirmed him was Davis, the one of the bloke, he was the bishop then, or something or other, so anyway, it was some connection.

10:00 **Did you ever get tested, had medical examinations for, to control VD?**

Yes.

Can you explain how they worked?

They regularly, well not regularly, the performance there, the MO [Medical Officer]would come and check you out and see that everything was all right and that. He checked to see who was or wasn't. But I must admit, that when I say regularly, they were once every six months or so. But nobody, never,

10:30 managed to win the jackpot, that I knew of anyway.

Where those inspections looked on fondly by the troops or otherwise?

Well, you know, it was one of those things that had to be done, so let's get it over with, so, yeah.

After you were in Sicily, and you went to Brindisi after that?

11:00 Yes

Where did you go after that?

We went to Foggia, which was further up the Italian leg of Italian, up Italy, and there was a great series of aerodromes there, and great big flat plain, and Foggia was, American fortresses were a few miles down that way, and there were fighters around and we were here, it was a

11:30 huge virtually airfield. But, they weren't connected to each other, they were isolated. But there were a lot of them, a lot we operated there, and we operated on the metal runway. They'd discovered, or they'd made metal runways, so it was mud and slush, and this or dust, and this was the type of runway we used. And the first we'd come

12:00 across it anyway.

What kind of operations were these airfields set up for?

Well, ours was set up for the same thing as we were doing – close support. The other ones, the fortresses down the way, they used to fly up from there to Wiener Neustadt, Vienna, up the Adriatic up to there, then across the country, and bomb and then come back down there. But the crazy part about it, I think,

12:30 was the fact that the German fighters would have a field day with them, because they could attack them as they went up and land and refuel and so. And coming back they could do the same. They used to get, oh, decimated, I remember a huge number taking off one day, they'd take a long, long while to climb to height, and we'd be, they'd be round there, and away they'd go. Then they'd come back and all sort of dribbles

13:00 and engine failures, flying on two engines or whatever. But I don't know, it was a situation that appeared, that if they had, say 30 aircraft, they took off and they lost 10 of them, the next day, there'd be 50 aircraft again, and they just had the same, able to reinforce them so rapidly. I don't know where they all came from, but it appeared that way to us, anyway.

13:30 Not that it happened every day, they went up there, but it did happen.

Did you have anything to do with the Americans?

No, not very much at all to do with them. Only hitching rides with them in trucks and that, that was all. No, nothing to do with them, to be frank.

How was the relationship between the RAF and the US Army Air Force?

Good, as far as I know. Good, there was no problem, you know, we'd see each other and

14:00 there'd be no problems with it at all as far as I'm aware. Whilst we were in, at Foggia, we were in the sergeants' mess, we had stacks of bully beef, and we used to go and trade it for wine mainly, secondly

for animals such as fowls and ducks and things, and we got a pig. And

14:30 this was October we were there, and we fenced this farmyard in, and we fed it all the scraps, and of course the pig grew big and fat, and things and Christmas was coming, and we all looked forward to the chickens and ducks and there was going to be a, one devil of a great food, feed. And Taffy, our

15:00 cook, claimed that, you know, we came and we wanted to know whether he knew how to butcher a pig. And I was president of the messing committee at the time, and he said yeah, he knew how to do it. And I said, "All right, what do we want?" We had to, we got a 44 gallon drum and put a tripod over the top of it, and filled it with water, or nearly filled it with water, about three quarters

15:30 or half. Then we lit a fire, this was coming on Christmas Eve or sometime and we lit a fire to boil it. I tell you, if you haven't tried to boil a 44 gallon drum full of water, I know what it's all about. It took so long, and so long, and eventually we got it to a stage where it would be good enough to scorch or clean the pig. So it came to catching the damn thing. And we were sliding about in the mud, and we eventually caught it

16:00 about four of us, and we held it down. "Come on, Taffy, you come and kill the pig." He came there with a knife, and he started to saw its throat. Ever heard a pig squeal? God, it made a hideous noise, so much so that, we had some Yugoslavs on the squadron, who were aircrew and one of them came running over, "What's going on?" He said, "No, no, no, no, no," and he got hold of the knife and he just went like that, and he pulled it out of its jugular vein and that was that.

16:30 But God, I don't know how the hell we would have killed the pig without that, old Taffy cutting it across the throat. Squealing pig. Anyway, it was a good bit of pork to eat, it was great. We eventually had a great slap up Christmas luncheon, we even invited the officers across that night, to, fed them with grog and food. I'd been stood down then too, I'd

17:00 done my last operation. I arrived back and landed. Not thinking of anything other than, you know, "Okay, I'm home." And the commanding officer wanted to see me, and I thought, "Oh, God, what's happened now? Something's gone wrong." Because I had led the squadron on this particular raid, I thought perhaps I'd hit the wrong target or something. He called me over and he said – into his tent. And we, he said, "Well

17:30 I've got some bad news for you." I thought, "God, what's wrong, you know, this is…" He said, "I'm afraid you've got to stand down. I can't fly you any more in operations." And it was the greatest relief of all time. It really was, you have no idea. Went back and promptly got, you know, drunk on vino. The crew were just as happy, I think we'd reached the end of our tether, we were

18:00 jumpy and nervous and. We still did our job without any trouble at all, but we had just about reached it.

Had you been waiting for that message to come through?

You just hadn't thought. We had reached the stage where "What are they going to do? Keep us here until they kill us, or what?" So we just hadn't done anything about it. Just accepted the fact we were there.

What were, you mentioned there was a 50 operation limit. What were the regulations at this stage?

18:30 There wasn't any. There was, I think we were, guinea pigs. They kept us going, I don't think anyone else has ever done that many daylight close support operations. Anybody, ever.

What happened then? After you got drunk, you woke up the next…

The snow was about, and everything was snowing too. Oh, we just didn't do any, I did a few more trips, I did a few more air tests, and flying around to enjoy

19:00 myself, but, no, we. After Christmas, we were posted off the squadron. They kept us until Christmas and we went to Taranto in Italy, and by landing barge from Taranto to Bizerte, is it Bizerte, anyway, back to Tunisia. And there, my crew, three of them they were posted to England,

19:30 and I was posted to Egypt down there and posted to Operational Training Unit, and that's where I finished up.

Did you miss home?

Yes, quite a lot, and it got to the stage where, like I was wondering when I was ever going to get there, get home. Of course other people were

20:00 appearing to get there, although all of us had been, all Australians had been on the squadron all finished up at 70 OTU as instructors of some sort or that. And they eventually got a posting home, but for some god forsaken reason, which I can't understand, I was never lucky enough to be amongst them. But anyway I did a flying instructor's course soon after I got there and we,

20:30 I flew everything that had wings on it down there.

And you talked some little about that instructor flying instructor job. I believe you were instructing on Marauders?

Yes

Can you tell us a little about the Marauder?

Marauder, yes. It's a beautiful aeroplane. It was built solely, sole purpose aeroplane, built as a medium bomber. It carried a huge bomb load of about 6,000 pounds. Two,

21:00 2,000 horse engines. A very small wing, very heavy wing loading on it. Well designed and well armoured. And it was good flying speed, but it had a dreadful reputation, and it was known in Florida, down at Tampa way.

21:30 One a day into Tampa Bay – they used to put, when they were training down there, they used to put at least one aircraft in every couple of days. People handling it couldn't handle the horse power that they had, 2,000 horses is a lot of power, particularly when you're approaching to land at 145, 150 miles an hour. Take off was about 135 or

22:00 something like that. It would cruise at about 280, but it was heavy wing loading, stalled, vicious stall when it stalled. It would whip over on its back in a fraction of a second. You had to fly, that's all there was too it. You had to command it, not it command you. But I enjoyed the Marauder, the Baltimore I loved, I enjoyed the Marauder, yeah.

What about

22:30 **the students you were training, they must have heard about this reputation, how did they take to the Marauder?**

Well, most of the blokes that we were training at that time came from South Africa. A few English lads, but most of them came from South Africa. And they were cleaning out the training schools in South Africa, fellows had been training, had been instructors or training down there for a long, long while, and they sent up a, "There's a war on, and you're going to go up there somewhere," there was others who weren't of course.

23:00 Most of the fellows who came to us were fairly experienced flyers. Some took to it fairly easily, others didn't, but the majority did. And it's a matter of learning to handle the aircraft. We only lost a couple whilst I was there. One fellow, I think it was the instructor's fault. We had to show them and teach them how to

23:30 single engine fly the thing. So you'd be flying along, and you had to have at least eight thousand, nine thousand feet under you. You fly along, and as an instructor you cut one of the engines on them. Say, "All right, what are you going to do?" And then it was up to, and you had to put a lot of trim on, immediate rudder trim, which was above your head, you had to wind that on immediately. If you wound that on the opposite way that you should, it would only increase the drop of your wing.

24:00 But this fellow, I'm sure, Jack Holt was his name, he was South African. He was showing off or something, I think he tried to do some single engine flying over the base at about four thousand feet, and somebody wound the trim on the wrong way, because he just rolled over, and went straight in. But that was one, another fellow took off and had a runaway, runway propellers. Both the propellers were electrically controlled

24:30 and you had to be extremely careful with them, in controlling them and somehow or other, he overran the thing and it was just, the pitch of the propellers started to increase and increase to its absolute maximum, and it couldn't really get any lift at all, or flight and he went screaming across the great bit of lake, and he finally finished up in a great plume of smoke over the other side. And then there was pupil crashed into another

25:00 staff, crew of staff pilots and they were killed, and we had to go down and pick up their remains. That wasn't a very good exercise, but we did that. But I had a prang in one of them, I was, we were doing circuits and bumps, just circuits and bumps, and the fellow was getting very near his solo experience

25:30 and we were running in on to this strip that we used for circuits and landings. And he was overshooting, and I said to him, "Do you intend to land?" Of course, he'd reached the stage, where you didn't do much talking to them when they reached the stage of solo. He said, "Yes, sir," and I said, "No you're not, you're going to go round again." And with that, he opened his throttles fully, and his second pilot who was, normally sits in where

26:00 the instructor sits, he pulled the pitch control, for some god forsaken reason right back to fully course, and then we were left with about 50 feet, at about 100 miles an hour. There was just no way we were going anywhere, we just went crash into the ground and, yeah, bent the aeroplane severely, and the second pilot got a great cut under his chin, which I think he deserved, and the other fellow was a bit shaken, as was I, but anyway.

26:30 **What did you do, as the instructor in that occasion?**

Well, what I do is pull your control column fully back, because you've got to settle onto the ground

somewhere to get the nose up, so that you don't go in nose first and just hope like hell but we didn't have enough room, we just went in nose first.

What did you hit?

The ground, very hard. It was a runway, yeah. So we were, he was going to land a long way up, and with the Marauder, when it lands, it takes a long while to

27:00 roll out. But he just wasn't with it.

Were you injured at all in that crash?

My back, yes, I did injure my back. I spent a day, a day or something in the base hospital, in the station hospital, and I just bruised and shattered or something, yeah. That was one, that was the third, the second one I didn't tell you about that. That was in

27:30 a Baltimore. Pupil taking off, doing circuits and landings again, rather dangerous stuff, these circuits and landings. Two hundred feet into the air, both engines cut, there was nothing but the maker's name. So had no alternative, but you can't turn back, because if you do that, you stall. It landed straight ahead with the wheels up, and did that and bent the aircraft rather badly.

28:00 Got shaken about again. Everybody was all right. We, fortunately enough, we finished up, where we finished up in the desert, we, there was a big gully, we stopped about 10 yards from it. Had we gone a bit further, we would have gone over the edge, but we didn't, so it didn't matter.

Did you ever work out why the engines had cut?

Because the fellow didn't select the petrol cocks properly. And he

28:30 had just turned them on to what he thought was on, it wasn't on properly, both of them. He put the booster pumps on, they were pumping fuel in at a pressure rate for take off, it just pumped enough fuel to get to about two, three hundred feet.

What an incredible amount of responsibility for an instructor in this situation, because one simple mistake could make you fall out of the sky?

That's right. That's exactly, that's why you had to watch them carefully.

How did you deal with the

29:00 **responsibility of that job?**

Oh, I didn't mind it. I took it on all right. There's, one thing was, I was in command of the aircraft. And I was a warrant officer at the time, and many of these fellows up from South Africa, they were captains and majors and also they had army rank in the South African air force. One group there, they, a lot of them spoke Afrikaans, which is a guttural,

29:30 Dutch sounding language, and I had told this crew, these two fellows, I said, "In my aircraft, when I'm in charge, you speak nothing but English. I want to know what you are saying to each other." "Yes, yes, yes." And the next day, we were up there, and we were doing something or other, I was showing them something to do and away it went, and they started to yap in Afrikaans, and I said, you know

30:00 "Righto, I've got it." And I took it and I turned it around, flew it back and landed and marched these fellows into the flight commander's office, and told him precisely what had happened. He said, "Oh, right." That day they were posted off the station, they didn't appear any more, but that was a very formal, hard lesson for the rest of the South Africans on the base, they knew that English was spoken and not

30:30 South, not Afrikaans.

Had you changed a great deal since you first set out to join the Empire Air Training Scheme?

I think so, yes.

Can you talk a little bit about that?

You mean after I got out of the air force?

Well, by the time you were nearing the end of the war as an instructor? Your life and your experiences and…

Yeah, had changed you completely, yes. I was no longer a callow youth, who knew little about life, and

31:00 as a matter of fact, when, yeah, we weren't. Well the Australian attitude, because we were isolated, we were very insular, and the world was a very big place, and of course, we were thrown into this, particularly in Canada, where we grew up rapidly, and again in England, and then we moved into the war situation.

31:30 We grew up and became more secure in ourselves, and more worldly wise and things, yes. We were quite different.

What other qualities had you learnt in your time in the desert?

How do you mean, what?

Well, you were more secure, you were obviously able to control men?

Oh, yes, yes, that's true enough well, you're put into a position of command, well, you took it and you did it. And,

32:00 yes, I wouldn't know too. Okay, I grew up, knew how to command, knew how to expect respect, and give respect and yes. You sort situations out, and say things that you were not prepared to say or do before, and, as I've said, I've

32:30 had a few with superior officers on occasions, and I meant them.

Did that carry over back into your civilian life, when you went back in to join local government?

Could have, but, what it did mean, when I came back, I. First of all, I wanted to fly with Qantas, which I was told by a very senior man there that it would be far better if I went back

33:00 to local government, because you had too many four engine pilots out there. So I did that, I was determined to get on and get somewhere in local government, so I did all the study that was necessary to get the qualifications and looked for positions. Which I successfully managed on a number of occasions, and finished up where I did.

Do you think you might have finished up in a different place entirely, had it not been for the war?

Yes,

33:30 I doubt whether I would have wanted to continue in local government, because I was just a junior clerk, typing and answering phones and doing nothing much else and growing up slowly. No, I probably would have gone and done something else. I don't know what I would have done, but I probably would have, yes.

When the war ended, you were posted back to England initially?

Yes, they, that was, upset me enormously, I was posted home. My home posting was England, which I thought was a bit unfair. And I went, again by ship to, from Port Suez to Port Said to England, and went on leave. And I went and stayed with a fellow from my squadron who was flying in

34:30 Germany at the time on Mitchell bombers, similar sort of thing to a Boston. And his family lived up in Carlisle, the other side of Carlisle, so he, I'd been invited to go and stay with them, which I took the opportunity of doing so. And his, he had married, and his wife had a baby I think the day that when I arrived there, or the day after.

35:00 Anyway, I was there when he came home from Germany, and I saw him, and I went back to the Strand Palace Hotel, which I'd used as my address if we were in London. When I got there, was a telegram, leave extended to the, whatever it was, another 14 days. "Oh God," so, you know, I had another 14 days, so I, we mucked around London, mucked would be the operative word.

35:30 Cricket was on, I went to the Australian cricket matches they played there, and there was a group of us used to meet, and go to Codger's Hotel, which was a famous hotel for Australian airmen in London, used to drink there. Fellow, Hawkins, I finally caught up with him, and you know, Harry Hawkins and

36:00 another bloke, and lie like a silly log. Every morning we'd meet in the bar, and Harry would introduce a "Share the wealth" campaign. We'd put our hands in our pockets and bring everything out, put it down, divide it three ways. It wasn't until the second day, I realised that I was a sucker, these fellows were, we were having. Anyway that was, we enjoyed ourselves.

Having seen your

36:30 **friend come home from Germany, and seeing his homecoming to England, what was, can you explain how that made you feel?**

Yeah, feel very jealous of the situation of him, you know, jumping in his own aeroplane, he flew it across and landed a few miles up in the airport and came down and saw his wife, yes. I thought, "Goodness, how easy is it? Now, fancy him being able to do that and I'm stuck here." It wasn't

37:00 until I found a squadron leader in the air ministry who managed to get me transferred back into the RAAF, and that was it. Don't know why the devil I was attached so severely, or so effectively to the RAF, rather than being. But, when I got back in the RAAF, I, by then the prisoners of war were coming back, and they had priority in getting ships home and things, so I had to wait my

37:30 turn. You wouldn't believe, I came back on the Dominion Monarch, and we went, we pulled into Suez, and we loaded four or five thousand New Zealand troops. They were going home too. And we went from Suez to Wellington, we passed Australia, we had a glimpse of Wilson's Promontory one afternoon, as we passed. Went to

38:00 Wellington, we were greeted by the Prime Minister of New Zealand, told us what a wonderful job we had done and all that, which was great. From there, we went to Littleton, which is Christchurch, they unload some more New Zealanders, then we came back home. And we came back to Sydney, there was about 50 or 60 of us, we were the only ones left on board. And

38:30 we arrived one morning, came under the Harbour Bridge, into Darling Harbour, and the Dominion Monarch had come in nose first of course, so they got some tugs to turn it round so it could get out the right way. And there was a band on the wharf playing. And of course there was a westerly wind blowing, not of course, but there was a westerly wind blowing and we were on the, looking over the side, we had to move around from one side to the other when the boat

39:00 turned round. We got there, and the first music we heard was the Stars and Stipes Forever. So we began to wonder where we were. And when the gangway was put down, a WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] walked up to the gangplank with some, obviously papers for somebody or other. She was about five by five or something even bigger than that, looked up and called out, "How are youse going mates?" And we thought, "Oh we're home, we are definitely home."

39:30 So that was welcome to home. And the thing was, the Dominion Monarch, with the exception of the Atlantic trip, I'd been on the Dominion Monarch from Sydney to Sydney. I'd done this complete circumnavigation of the world. Saw a lot of sea, I don't know why people want to go on cruises, I do not know.

A lot of Australian soldiers who served with the RAF or the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] in the Second World War, the experience made them a little bit more British.

40:00 Yes

How do you think the experience affected you?

Well, I had respect for the British to some extent. Not necessarily all of them, I have, maybe that's being class conscious or something. There was the Brits and the Poms. I classify them as. The Brit is a good guy, a very good guy. The Pom is like, a loud-mouthed Australian, I suppose you could put him down as.

40:30 But the Brits are good fellows.

And who are you?

Well, I imagine, I hope I'm a Brit, a Brit. But, you know, it comes, like the Australian situation, there's the loud-mouthed, misbehaving fellow there that you don't want to get involved with, and the other guys are good fellows. And I think that's the classification with the Brits and the Poms.

Tape 9

00:30 Including America, and I did a four months trip through America, British Isles, Scandinavia, Holland, and Israel.

We might mention that, just a bit out of context on the camera. We'll get back to that moment you arrived. The five by five WAAAF on the gangplank. "How's youse going?"

"How's youse going, mates?"

01:00 **What happened next?**

Well, we turned to each other and said, "Well at least we're home now." But after that, we were taken to Bradfield Park to be, receive our leave things, and my parents were there. And I was called out of the line, we were getting some money, we'd got some money, and I was called out of the line to go, and I went up there and

01:30 both my parents, my father and mother. And my father said to me, "I've got some bad news for you, Win's mother died, and the funeral's today." So that's the first job I had when I came home, was to go. The first time I saw her, she was in the mourning coach to go to her mother's funeral. That's after five years. That was my first sight.

What did you say to each other?

02:00 Just said, "Hello," that's all. Couldn't say, because there was everybody around the place at the time. Couldn't say much else.

We'll give that a second to pass over.

Yeah, we, it was upsetting. The only thing about that we, it was at Rookwood cemetery and we, my father we went to, we had by rail, and we went to Strathfield, and we caught a something or other but before going to

02:30 the cemetery, father walked. Well, he said, “Would you like a beer?” And I said, “Yes.” So we went across to a pub in Strathfield, was crowded, and I was standing there in my uniform, and the barman looked right across the top of them all and said, “What do you want?” I thought, “Yeah, that’s great, I’m home again.” Yeah, so that’s how we got two beers, ahead of the rest of them. The rest of them were in civvies [civilian clothing] and things.

03:00 They could have all been servicemen who had come back anyway.

Did you fit back into life again very easily?

No, I was restless. I wanted to, as a matter of fact I was very, I very nearly went back and joined the RAF. I had a chance at doing that, I very nearly did that. But I didn’t. I was

03:30 restless. A very good mate of mine, Johnny Bates, I used to see him a lot, but then I’d see, we’d go to all. It got to the stage of getting about, trying to meet people again, and in those days there was restrictions on liquor timing and that. And we got to know every pub in Sydney that opened, you know, one opened

04:00 from 10 to 12 and another from 12 to 2, and another from 2 to 4, or whatever, we knew them all. Which round about, and sorted ourselves out. But, yes, we were that sort of restless. Not quite knowing where we were going or what we were going to do. One of the fellows invited me to go to New Guinea. He and his father ran a gold mine for

04:30 the Bank of New South Wales, as it was in those days, at a place by the name of Biloela. And he said, “Come up here, you get a job with me.” And I eventually, I said, after I tried to get in the Qantas and things, when he said, “Go back to local government,” yeah. I made my mind up, decided I would.

What were you thinking when you made that decision?

I had to go somewhere. I was discharged

05:00 on the 26th of January, and I thought, “Well, I’ve got to go somewhere, I’ve got to get a job.” My job was available, so I went back and saw the old boss and said, “If it’s still okay with you, I’ll come and start here on such and such a date,” which I did.

Was Win still working for local government at this time?

No. She was in Sydney, she was working in Sydney. And she had had an expansive life during the war. And that,

05:30 in some extent, I had, you know, that’s one of the reasons why I was between that and this, not knowing quite what to do. Nor was she. So, yeah, we sorted things out.

Did your relationship resume easily or?

No, not easily, no. Not easily at all, it wasn’t hard. But it wasn’t

06:00 what I had imagined it to be. I’d imagined it would be, carried on where I left off sort of thing. I can’t say that, it wasn’t difficult, by any stretch of the imagination, but it was just. There was other fellows on the horizon as she was concerned, that was all. And I felt, well okay, let’s sort this out thing.

When you were stuck in the desert all the time and then in England after the war. You must have built

06:30 **up an imagination of what it would be like to come home?**

Yes.

Can you explain the differences between reality and your imagination?

Well, yes, what I’ve just said, that I imagined that I would just step in where I left off, and hoped that it would be so. But the realistic situation, it wasn’t. I should have realised that. I should have realised that, because, god, five years, you don’t sit in a

07:00 nunnery or anything. Perhaps I was expecting that, or in the back of my mind I might have been, or anticipated that. But that was, it wasn’t hard, it wasn’t hard. It was all sorted out.

What about your relationships with your other mates, who hadn’t gone to war or…?

Well, I didn’t know any,

07:30 didn’t have anybody, didn’t know anybody that hadn’t gone to war. I had three brothers and the three, four of us had all gone into the forces of some sort. My mother was a commandant of some pack of people at Ingleburn Army Hospital. My father was in the railways, that filled the family in. No, I, my

08:00 mates from Ingleburn, fellows I played cricket with and football, I don't think there's a one that didn't go to the war, I'm sure.

Could you all talk to each other about the things you had done?

Yes, when we came back, of course. Over a beer or two, it's amazing how your imagination runs riot at all, and the bombs get thicker and the ack-ack gets thicker and things. Yeah, it's amazing.

08:30 And how they'd do all the things they used to do, yeah. You've got to let them say this, otherwise they won't believe it.

Did you have any trauma associated with things that you couldn't forget or you couldn't stop thinking about?

Yeah, my, the bloke that blew up alongside of me, that. I still dream about that and it frightens me at night time. My prangs.

09:00 With the exception of the bloke that the engines cut out on, I don't think about that, but the other two I do, because they were a bit dangerous. And a couple of the operations we did were quite hairy, and I think about those.

Do they always come back to you in the same way?

Not necessarily.

09:30 Sometimes I'm there, sometimes I'm looking at it or something.

Did that stop after a while when you came back, your restlessness sort of disappeared, and you just got on with life. Can you talk a bit about that?

Yes, it did. It did, after I was married, I was settled down, it disappeared. Disappeared,

10:00 and I got involved in local government and studies and doing things and progressing. And it wasn't until I retired and years, a couple of years after I retired, I started to get them back again. And indeed I still get them, as a matter of fact, they do come on me, which is not very pleasant. But, we'll overcome that.

10:30 **Do you talk about the war much these days?**

No.

Talking about it a lot today, but that's unusual.

No, no, yes, I know it's unusual. No, not at all, only every now and again, something will crop up and you'll say well, something reminds you of a particular place or incident or something like that. Sometimes you say that or you try to emphasise

11:00 a point and tell somebody a long, harrowing tale that isn't quite true, but gets to a point.

You mentioned to me, I don't think it was on camera, but you mentioned you had a group of mates you used to meet with regularly from your squadron. Can you tell us about that?

They were the, we used to, on Anzac Day, particularly, there was four, four, five of us, we used to meet

11:30 regularly at the… we'd go in the march, there'd, one fellow Art Fidler who was on 55 squadron when I was on 223, but he came home here much earlier than I did, and he finished up flying Liberators back here. Ted Eagleton, was a, he was in Halifax bombers in England, he was with us in the Middle East, and then went back to England when

12:00 we went to Kenya. Oh, Harry Ashworth, he was a bit of a mystery man, he was an Englishman, but a gunner of some, I don't know, I think he flew Lancasters, I'm not certain, but flew in Lancasters. Chap by name of Jacobs, he flew in, what did he fly in? Hudsons, I think, something like that.

12:30 But we used to meet in, first off, early Anzac Days and then our wives got to know each other. And this, they were all compatible, got on well together, and we, all of us grew up with this group of people. Oh John Bates, of course, I'm forgetting John. And now I'm the only one left of all that group. They're all gone.

How does it,

13:00 **how do you deal with being the only one left who's shared those experiences that you can talk to about?**

Well, as a matter of fact, the reason why I'm talking to you is the fact that Art Fidler's wife rang me up and insisted I do it. Because in respect to myself and Art, because she said somebody's got to tell the story about the desert air force, the real desert air force, not the ones who went to Italy later on and trained to be part of the desert air force.

13:30 We were there, yeah, up and down the desert, yeah. No, that was, no that's certainly the way I feel about it.

Do you think your particular story has been a little bit overlooked?

I feel certain it has. Not mine, but, not only mine, but all of those people, the Australians who were involved in that. Australians have been recognised in all sorts of theatres of war,

14:00 in all places and under all conditions. But nowhere, nowhere has anything been said about the people who, after Alamein went through to the end of the show. Nowhere at all. They recognise the RAF and things, I even wrote to minister, what's her name, the, through the local member, pointing out that the, this was some weeks or months ago, pointing out that the 12th

14:30 of May was the 60th celebration, and indeed there were Australians involved in that, and was she sending a delegation anywhere, as I'd noticed she'd been sending delegations to all sorts of anniversaries and what have you. I didn't even get a reply. All I got was a telephone call from Borwin, who is the local member through whom I said was the message from, he said to me one day, rang me to say,

15:00 "The minister said, they're not doing anything about it." And that was it. Didn't bother to reply, but that's, I feel, you know, that's the sort of thing, that's. Could be a very good reason for it, because there's probably many Australians in a similar situation, not necessarily there, but somewhere else, maybe in Burma or somewhere, somewhere like that.

What do you think about all that fuss being made to remember certain things, and the way the

15:30 **Anzac Day is now celebrated?**

I think it's very necessary, it's very necessary to let the generations coming on, those that are coming on, what actually happened and when, where it happened and why and how.

How does it make you feel to see lots of young people celebrating Anzac Day the way they do in recent years?

I think it's a great thing. They, the youngsters have taken it, or the younger generation

16:00 has taken it much to their heart. Much more so than 15 years ago, 10, 15 years ago. There's some recognition or some acknowledgment of the fact that people did go and serve, and, yes it's there to be acknowledged.

Are you proud of your service?

Yes, I am. I was awarded a MID [Mentioned in Dispatches], my service.

16:30 Mr Montgomery, or General Montgomery mentioned me in his dispatches one day, I don't know what sort of dispatch it was, but anyway, I got that.

Are you proud of your squadron in general?

Yes, yes. Yeah, it was a great squadron, it came from nothing, and it finished up as being, I think, considerably the best daylight light bomber squadron in the whole of the theatre.

17:00 **How do you feel about war in general?**

Totally unnecessary, and it's like, if we were to have another Depression, they should take out all the economists and shoot them. Same with war, it ought not to occur. But then again, munition makers, armament people, well what are they going to do with the damn things when they make them?

17:30 I don't know whether you, there's ever a justifiable war, I don't think there is. But it could be, I could be totally wrong.

The same goes for the war that you were involved in?

I, yeah, I would, yeah, I say that, but it ought not to have reached the stage it did.

18:00 It should have been read earlier, he should have been stopped much earlier, in the early thirties and how he dominated the, how and why he dominated the German people. Ought not to have occurred, that should have been stopped somehow. I don't know how, I couldn't give you a reason for that, but it ought to have been done. Something ought to have been done about it. They should have been able to read this situation that was about to occur, much clearer and easier,

18:30 and people have the good sense to do something about it.

Looking back over your life since the war, do you think Australia has changed?

Australia, or Australians?

Australia.

Yes, it has. It's grown up considerably, it's taken a spot in the world on, in some places. I think

19:00 sportsmen have put us on the map, more so than, I'd say, our statesmen, yes, it has grown up.

Has it grown up for the better?

I think so, yes. The, we tend to say that, our group of people - when I'm saying our group of people, I'm talking about my bowling mates down at the bowling club - we tend

19:30 to say that we've had the best part of this, our life is better than the life of the youngsters of the future. But I don't really hold to that, I think the youngsters of the future have got the whole world at their feet. If they are prepared to get in and do something about it and not be pushed around.

I think, that's a good point as any to bring the interview at an end. Is there anything else that you would like to say, keeping in mind that this

20:00 **will be kept for a hundred years, is there anything that you would like to say to people in the future before we finish?**

No, I've been successful in my life and local government. I was a coroner at one stage in my life. I had some, that was rather unique and different, that was part of

20:30 a job I took, where I went to, the clerk was the coroner, so that was it. I was mixed up in civil defence. I've been in, I received an MBE [Member of the Order of the British Empire] for my efforts there. I was a member for some 14 years, I was seven years divisional controller of the Hunter area here. I'm sure

21:00 that with the assistance of some police superintendents that I knew here, we introduced police helicopter rescue, because I was member of the mess over at Williamtown, and they had had a helicopter there that was doing nothing, and I got them involved in our rescue work here, as far as State Emergency Services were concerned, particularly in flood time. They cooperated

21:30 wholeheartedly with us. We showed them how the helicopters could be used to pick up injured people and delivered to hospitals and that. They'd never seen it done before. I'm pleased I've been part of doing that. But the air force, I must add, there's a fellow by the name of Squadron Leader Williams over there, he's no longer there, I don't know where he is, he must take far more credit for that than I because he provided the services.

22:00 Yeah, I've been, no it's, life's been pretty good.

It's a shame we can't talk about all those things in as much detail as we talked about the war.

No, yes.

Thanks very much for taking the time.

It's my pleasure, and thank you too.

I hope it's a, it goes a little way towards correcting what may have been overlooked in the?

Well, I, when I get the transcript of it, you started me off on, dug up all these things

22:30 there, and I'll try and put something readable together. I already, I tried to do that before and I, when I well, I did it. I got a booklet that I gave to each of my boys a couple of years ago. They've been threatening that I should get on and do something about this. I did that, but I don't think that the document I put together there is as full as the, that stuff you bought out in me, and when I get a copy of that little, I'll be able

23:00 to fix in all the blanks, I hope.

Get everybody interested again. Thanks very much Bob.

Thanks Chris [interviewer].

INTERVIEW ENDS