Australians at War Film Archive

Rupert Howes (Ron) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 31st March 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1827

Tape 1

00:45 **Can you just tell me a bit about your childhood and where you grew up?**

Yes, well my mother and father were divorced when I was very young.

01:02 I was probably no more than five. I had a younger brother, he is two years younger than me. And we went to live with grandmother first up, then my father eventually came and lived there, too.

Where did you live?

01:30 Penfold Sydney.

And was it difficult for you growing up in the Depression?

Yes, very. We were quite poor. My grandmother, she had a husband at first, and he died soon after. He was probably only seventy eight when he died. And my grandmother died when I was about fourteen.

02:02 She was sixty eight or so. In those days, people died early. And I went to school, Penfold Public School, and after that I went to Croydon Park Technical School.

02:30 **Can you tell me a little bit about the first school that you went to?**

Enfield Public School….Enfield was the first town in Australia to get a public pool. The very first in the whole of Australia. And at the age of thirteen, in 1933,

03:01 I went into a swimming carnival and I won the breaststroke championship. No training whatsoever. The only swimming I'd done was in the Cooks River. But also, by the same token, nobody else had done any training either. These big pools were quite new.

03:31 That was the very first one. And I won first in breaststroke, second in backstroke, and the third in the diving. And those that came the first and second in the diving, they became Australian diving champions…

04:00 After that, when I turned fourteen, as I said, my grandmother died. And then we discovered my father was already married again, and he'd had a baby. The baby was probably about six months old. So I had a stepmother.

04:31 So after my grandmother died, I went to live with my stepmother and my father. I didn't enjoy that very much. She was a young person, I think she was twenty six, and she probably resented two kids, fourteen and twelve, my brother and I. We didn't get on. We didn't get on well at all.

05:00 So I went to work. Without the intermediate, I didn't get that far, just secondary school. I went in the army for a while, when I was sixteen. I was in the army, and I was sent to Seymour in Victoria, the First Australian Corps Signals.

05:30 And I got flat feet, I couldn't stand on parade, so I went to the doctor and I was immediately discharged for flat feet. So I put my age up to twenty one, I think. I was actually sixteen, but I put my age up to twenty one. But anyway, I was discharged and then

06:00 after that, when I was nearly eighteen, I applied for aircrew in the air force. But my education wasn't high enough, but they gave me twenty word lessons…I had to go to night school to bring me up to intermediate stages…so I got up to intermediate stage,

06:30 which you have to do to get into aircraft.

What was Sydney like when you were growing up? Did you go into the city much?

I went into the city once with my father. At the time he was living with his mother, my grandmother, and

he took us

07:00 into the city to see the speedway. I used to climb a tree when I was very young…Enfield, I believe, was seven miles from the city. This tree was in a vacant block of land from where we lived. I climbed this tree…

07:33 It was a big branchy tree, and we got up very high and we could step onto another tree, and we could see the construction of the Harbour Bridge, as it came over from each side and eventually met in the middle.

08:05 I guess it was forty foot above the ground, and we stepped over from one tree to the other tree, it was very, very dangerous. But we saw the Harbour Bridge being made.

What did you think of the Harbour Bridge?

Oh, fantastic. It was really an incredible feat. At that young age, you don't appreciate the problem,

08:30 but after they built this bridge from each end, I believe, when it got to there, touching, they slipped a bolt through it. The surveying must have been incredible. But that's what happened. I believe the initial bolt went through from one side of the bridge to the other.

09:07 And the height of that thing…I've got a flight simulator on my computer, and it's very, very accurate. When you go over, you can see the walkway of the bridge, where people walk over, and that's three hundred feet above sea level.

09:32 I've got it on the flight simulator, and I have to be at three hundred feet to go under the bridge. And three hundred feet, my wife watched me the other day, and she thought I was going to hit the walkway of the bridge, but it goes under.

10:00 The amazing thing, as I said, it was built from either side and I watched the construction, when I was a kid, all the way.

What could you see? Could you see men on the bridge?

No, I don't think so. I don't remember that. It was seven miles into the city by road. But you sure could see the bridge. Even now, it's incredible…

10:38 It's amazing they can do that now, and the bridge was finished in 1933.

What did you do as a child for fun?

Well, we used to swim in Cooks River. It was muddy, like a cup of tea.

11:01 And that's when the it was full…We didn't have any money, I don't know how much it was to get into the swimming pool, but we used to get under the fence into the swimming pool. We'd hardly ever get caught. This pool, as I said before,

11:30 it was the first Olympic pool in the whole of Australia. I used to see famous people swimming there. Eddie 'Boy' Charlton, a very famous swimmer in my day, and Noel Ryan, on one of the big carnivals there. And Japanese swimmers. I can't remember any of their names….And a famous diver from Australia,

12:01 Harry Tickle, he came and opened a diving school in the suburbs. But anyway, they stopped people climbing over the fence and getting into the swimming pool. They put a layer of cement render on the top with all broken glass in it. And I suppose with a heavy towel, you could…

12:31 When they put the broken glass on it, we couldn't get into the swimming pool free.

How much did it cost you to get in?

I'm not sure. It was probably only threepence. But for a child, it wasn't very much.

Was it a fifty metre pool?

Yes, it was the standard pool that they've got now.

13:02 The next one built in Sydney was at North Sydney. Then they were built gradually throughout the country. But Enfield was the first Olympic pool built in the whole of Australia, and they'd have big carnivals there with famous swimmers from all over the world.

Can you describe the pool for me?

Well, it was a tiled pool,

13:30 and for diving purposes, the centre of the pool and the diving tower….The diving tower was initially forty feet. And they had two springboards either side of it. They were about ten foot.

14:00 Sorry, they were three metre boards, about ten feet. The top one was too high and they eventually took the top one off and used the second tower. And underneath the diving tower…

14:30 The diving tower was in the centre. Each side of it was swimming clubs for men and women, either side of that pool. And right behind the pool was the filtration plant. Very big for a big pool. The pool was tiled. And the diving, where people would land from the high dive, the pool came down in a V,

15:00 and it was sixteen foot six. The first time I went down, I couldn't swim to the bottom. But I did go down soon after, with a seventeen year old guy. I got on his back and he dived right to the bottom, and I remember it hurt my ears.

Did you dive off the top tower?

Yes, I did.

15:30 Yes, when the first swimming pool….three young people dived off the top. Ken Buckow, Danny Hyde… They both became Australian diving champions, and myself, I landed on my back. I didn't hurt myself though. I really believed that when you dived into the water it was soft,

16:00 and I thought from forty feet it was still going to be soft, but I assure you it was very hard. I had no idea that the water would be hard. I didn't have a clue. But anyway, eventually I learned to make good dives from the top tower. But when I went in the air force, initially you'd go to

16:32 Bradfield Park, Initial Training School. All sorts of subjects. Navigation, everything. And you were assessed then, pilot, navigator, wireless operator. And they used to have carnivals, too, and I went to North Sydney for a swimming carnival. And at that time, I was eighteen, I dived off the top

17:01 and burst my eardrum. It healed up, I was in the hospital for a little while. And later on, when I got scrubbed as a pilot, I had to go to a wireless school, which I got out of. I didn't want to do that. But I went to another swimming carnival, and I won the breaststroke even at that carnival.

17:35 I dived off the top, same Olympic pool, same tower, forty foot high, I dived off the top of that and burst my eardrum again. So that's about it…

Did your father talk to you about the war at all?

18:04 My father, he went to the First World War at fifteen. He didn't talk a great deal about that. He was far too young to go to the war, but anyway. My grandmother had six sons who went to the war. Six sons at the war.

18:31 And four of them were killed at the war. And the other one, he was badly gassed. I remember him…But my father was uninjured, and at forty he went to the Second World War, in the army.

And did he talk to you at all about it?

No, he didn't talk a lot about the war?

19:00 **Do you know where he went in the First World War?**

He was in France, but he didn't go to Gallipoli, no.

So what did you know of war, growing up?

I never thought a great deal about it. My father never talked about the war. Like I never talk about the war with my kids. They don't know anything about the war.

19:30 They never asked. If they asked me, I'd talk about it. But as far as I know, they never asked me about the war.

Why did you want to join the army?

As soon as the war started, I joined the army. I think I told them I was twenty two, and obvious I wasn't twenty two, but at that age you don't need permission, so they accepted me as twenty two.

20:02 **And how old were you really?**

I was sixteen. I was born in 1922, and the war broke out in 1939, I think.

Do you remember the day the war broke out?

No. But because I was working in radio, I was put into Corps Signals.

20:35 And because, I told you, I couldn't stand up on parade, I went to the doctor, and he discharged me. I've still got very flat feet. But no problem in air crew in the air force. It doesn't matter. And the crowd I went through with to Crete,

21:00 they were nearly all Australians. That was another reason I was lucky. They parachuted in Crete.

The army guys?

Yes, and the mob that I was in.

What sort of training did you do before you left the army? You were in there for two years, weren't you?

I trained on radio equipment. I was going to be a signalman.

21:40 **So what did the training involve?**

Morse code, and the ability to tune a radio, all sorts of things. They were portable, carry them around, set them up, you had to transmit with them. I was sent to Seymour in Victoria.

22:01 I got the flu badly there, and I was sent for a week or two to Puckapunyal in Victoria. Because of my flat feet, I was sent home, and I worked at AWA [Amalgamated Wireless Australasia], making radio equipment for the army. But I did join the air force. I had to wait until I was eighteen, because my education wasn't up to standard. I had to go to

22:30 Randwick Racecourse at night-time, for night school. I had to pass all these lessons because when you into the air force, you go through an education in aircrew and then you go through all the doctors and specialists and everything.

23:01 And my blood pressure was high. They didn't knock me back as such, but they sent me to a Macquarie Street specialist, and he was an honorary wing commander in the air force. Wing Commander Wilcox. And he decided my blood pressure was caused by anxiety

23:31 about getting into the air force. That's what he decided, so they accepted me. I went to Initial Training School. The very first morning on parade, we heard about the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbour, just then. And I remember a couple of American planes, they must have been here in Australia, obviously,

24:00 but a couple of Aerocobras came over while we were on parade. It was on the 7th of December, 1941. The 6th or the 7th was when Pearl Harbour was. So you had to go on a course for at least three months, I think.

24:33 And you'd go before a selection board and they would select what you were going to be. I was selected as a pilot, and I was posted…And all your friends, they go to different places. Some went to Benalla, in Victoria, that was also an Initial Flying School. The FTS as they were called.

25:10 And my wife's brother was there. I had known his sister, but his older sister, and she found out that I was going into the air force on the 6th of December and she told me her brother was going in and to look him up.

25:30 That's how I met Fred Manning. And he eventually took me home…It turned out that we both lived in the same street. By this time, my father had gone into the war and I was know living in the army, because I couldn't live with my step mother. She, by this time, had two children.

26:04 My father had gone into the Second World War, so I lived with my auntie, and her husband and her daughter. Her daughter was about eight years older than. And Fred Manning, from Initial Training School, took me home to his place, and his younger sister, Betty, she was eleven.

26:38 When I came back from the war, she was sixteen and I was about twenty two, I think. And I started to go out with her and we eventually got married. Before we got married, my father had hotels

27:01 and he was having trouble with a manager at a hotel down in Yass. And he wanted me to go down and manage the hotel. The police, in each town, there is a licensing sergeant and he looks after the hotel…

27:33 **Can you tell me a little bit more about your training in the air force?**

Yes, I trained and I got successfully through One IFTS, on Tiger Moths at Temora. Now, some of the people on the course were posted to Canada to do further training.

28:00 And probably a quarter of the course were left behind, waiting for a posting here in Australia. Because by then the Japs were in the war…I think, my idea, they were reluctant to send many ships out of Australia to go to Canada,

28:30 because Canada was part of the Empire Air Training Scheme. So anyway, Fred Manning, my wife's brother, he was sent to Canada and also my other mate, Ron Howard, he was also sent to Canada. I was left behind to do further training on Tiger Moths. Aerobatics and things that weren't in the normal course,

29:03 waiting for another posting here in Australia, which I eventually got. I was posted to Uranquinty on Wirraways. And at that time, towards the end of the course on Tiger Moths, at the FTS, everybody was asked whether they wanted to go on a single engine plane

29:30 or a multi-engine plane. Multi-planes, to start off they were two engine planes, to start off with. And you

got our request. And I selected single engine planes, that meant Wirraways…And my wife's brother Fred Manning and my friend Ron Howard,

30:01 they selected multi-engine planes and they were sent to Canada. In the meantime, while I was on leave between posting from Elementary Flying Training to Service Flying Training School, which is SFTS Number Five, and it was in Uranquinty, which was a place close to Wagga.

30:35 You'd always get leave between postings, so while I was on leave I was down at Circular Quay, and I saw all the American aircrews had nice leather jackets. I offered this American five pound for his leather jacket. He immediately took it out and gave it to me. So I took it with me to Service Flying School,

31:03 and the first day I didn't wear it, but the next day I got on fine. The first day I flew a Wirraway just like I'd been flying them all my life. Straightaway, no trouble with them. They landed a bit faster, but basically the controls were the same. There was a saying, we had been told on

31:30 Elementary Flying School, all trainee pilots must have been told this. If you can fly a Tiger Moth properly, you can fly anything. That proved to be the case, because they told me the take off speed and landing speed for the Wirraway, and I had no trouble with it, right from the word go.

32:00 The next day I wore this leather, and I've got no doubt at all the instructor thought I was a (mon- UNCLEAR), which I probably was and he gave me rough time, and I'm a nervous type of person. If I was given a rough time by a driving instructor, I'd muck it up. So I wasn't flying good,

32:31 so he eventually told me to meet the flying instructor at eight o' clock tomorrow morning to give me a check out. Scrubbed on or scrubbed out. I remember when I was told that I was getting the scrubber

33:00 off the chief flying instructor I was terrified. I didn't sleep all night. I really mucked it up. I deserved to be scrubbed. But anyway, while I was in bomber command over there, there was a lot of free time during the day, and they had such a thing as a 'Link trainer' which was equivalent now to what they call a flying simulator. But a 'Link trainer,' you go and pull the hood over

33:31 and the flying instructor watches you, and where you fly it draws a graph…We used to fly this thing, while I was in bomber command, in all my spare time. And the sergeant in charge of this thing…The pilots had to spend a certain amount of time in this, and they hated it, they didn't like it.

34:00 But I liked it because he told me I could fly it better than some of the pilots, not most. And consequently, after the war, I bought an aeroplane myself. Then I bought another one, a better one. I had a low wing monoplane and I got permission to land it on Yass Racecourse.

34:30 I had to clear trees and power lines and everything like that. And of course, if you flipped it over, it was low wing, you were going to hit the ground. And it was always on the cards, because you could always put a wheel into a rabbit burrow, if you were coming in…On a plane like that, it's about sixty five miles an hour when you touched down.

35:00 (UNCLEAR) and if you did flip over, the wings are going to hit the ground first, so it was much safer.

How did you get over the disappointment of not being able to be a pilot?

I was horrified. It was a terrible disappointment. Very, very disappointing. But looking back now,

35:32 like I said, I volunteered to be a dive bomber pilot. As I told you, when you leave Elementary Flying School you got the option of multi-engine planes or single engine planes. In every case, I think, people got what they requested.

36:00 When I went, early in the piece, right from the word go, they asked me whether I wanted to go on fighters or dive bombers. After you get over the initial training, take offs and landing and that, you go into a different type of practice. They asked very early, very early. So I volunteered to go into dive bombers.

36:30 I don't know of any returned dive bomber pilots, so that leather jacket was lucky for me.

What did you like about flying when you first started to learn on the Tiger Moths?

I just loved it. There was a lot of skill. The Tiger Moths were so sensitive. You flew it with slippers on at first,

37:00 because with regular shoes, you can't feel so much. But the Tiger Moths were very sensitive. I can remember our flying…When you'd take off in one direction, you would pass over a railway line.

37:30 There was grass for the take off and so forth, but (UNCLEAR) affected by the sun shining. But you could actually feel the two railway lines in the plane. The hot air rising from the…it was incredible. You hold the joystick

38:01 in a Tiger Moth with two fingers and your thumb, not with your hand, because you've got to feel the aeroplane. I remember distinctly these two railway lines, the double track, you could actually feel the bumps. You wouldn't feel that in a bigger plane

38:30 because they're probably hydraulically controlled, the ailerons, and I didn't spend enough time in Wirraways to experience something like that.

How long were you on the Tiger Moths?

I spent a couple of months after these other people were posted to Canada because waiting for…They gave us further training for such things

39:00 as rolls off the top, loops….Aerobatic spins and…Initially after you learn to fly and land, every now and then, as standard practice when you're flying, the instructor would cut the throttles right off, make a forced landing.

39:30 It was totally unexpected. So you've got no motor and you pick a paddock and you take it down. I didn't have any trouble with that at all. I remember on one occasion…The instructor would never let you land. It would get the stage where he knew you were going to land and then he'd gun the throttle back on and he'd take over and take it back up again.

40:06 But on one occasion, he went crook on me because I didn't pick the best available paddock. It was better maybe because it was longer, maybe it had less obstructions, some of these things had trees around them.

On that initial training, what were the other men like?

40:35 Wonderful, good friends. Some of them are still friends. Some were killed of course. Some became airline transport pilots after the war.

41:00 Some didn't come back at all. One guy got up to the rank of wing commander.

Were there any accidents in training?

Yes, there were.

41:30 Because the regular field was so crowded, they had satellite fields. They'd take you out two or three miles away to some paddock and you had to take it in from over there. Once we were there, a fellow named Stebbard and someone else, they came in to land together, and they landed on top of each other…

Tape 2

00:34 **You were telling us about the accidents you had in training?**

I've never been in an accident myself, but in this EFTS, we were at one of these satellite 'dromes, because they were too busy having everybody at the main aerodrome, and a person named Stebbard,

01:01 he landed on someone else, and one of them was killed. I remember the surviving guy wasn't hurt all. I remember they sent him straight back up again. We were horrified, but by experience that is the best thing to do. So he went straight up. Now,

01:30 when I was at ESTS, the Wirraway had a dangerous habit…I wasn't there long enough to experience it myself, but one of the dangerous habits that the Wirraway had was when it stalled…When you're coming into land and you're at near stalling speed anyway, you're just above stalling speed, and to land an aeroplane

02:00 you do stall it, but you stall it on the ground. No doubt, you've flown a lot and on bad landings they've stalled it a few feet higher and you feel a drop, that's a bad landing, they've stalled too high. Perfectly safe. A perfect landing is when you stall on the ground. In a Tiger Moth, because of what is called the tail drag,

02:30 that's a three point landing. These commercial planes have got tail lands, they don't make two or three point landings, they fly onto the ground, and stall when they're on the ground. I started off by saying that the Wirraway had a nasty habit. When it stalled, it used to flick, and someone was killed

03:00 at Service Flying Training School, but they stalled it a little bit above the ground. He had a canopy over him, but his head hit the ground. The plane flicked. So that's one of the bad habits of Wirraways. A lot of planes have got bad habits that you were warned about.

03:33 **What were the barracks like that the first training school you went to, with the Tiger Moth training?**

They were much the same. Same type of huts at Bradfield Park. In those days, you were not used to figures like this,

04:01 but we were told I think they cost six hundred pound each, and I thought that was a dreadful price. Amazing. It was just like a shed, with windows and floorboards. They weren't on the ground, you'd go up steps. The thing about the difference between the army and the air force, the air force had proper beds,

04:32 wire beds, but you had mattresses and pull ups and things like that, that you didn't get in the army. You had those rough old blankets for sheets. When I was in the army, I was in tents when I was in Seymour. army tents, because they wore had just broken out and they didn't have anything. Just tents, awful. They had floorboards on the tents, I think.

05:03 **Was the army training hard?**

No, it wasn't hard, but I had difficulty if I had to stand on parade for two long, which you did a lot in the army, my feet used to ache. And I used to complain about it. When the doctor saw it, I was out, but that turned out to be a good thing.

05:30 I think I told you my stroke was a good thing, too. After I had minor stroke at one stage, and my cholesterol was checked, bloody pressure and everything, my cholesterol was very good.

06:00 It was three point three. My wife's was five point five, but mine was three point three. Normally very good. But I was given Pravachol tablets. Because I had previously had a stroke, they put me on these Pravachol tablets, to keep my cholesterol right down,

06:30 it was low anyway, and various people told me…At that time, people were having trouble with anti-cholesterol tablets in the States. Their muscles were wearing away and some people were dying, and I was told by various people that if you've got low pressure

07:00 I shouldn't be taking cholesterol tablets. But anyway, since then my doctor told me this is something different altogether. Anyway, I stopped taking them and I had a minor stroke which affected my vision. Now, my vision with both eyes, peripheral vision, I can't see anything…

07:30 (BREAK)But anyway, the cardiovascular specialist, Dr Singh told me, I was bumping into all sorts of things, he told me to look slightly the left, about thirty degrees to the left,

08:01 and I can walk around shopping centres and miss all the trolleys, and don't have any trouble at all. I'm not allowed to drive a car, but I could drive a car, I think. I do it without even thinking. If I'm going that way, I look thirty degrees or so to the left, and don't have any trouble whatsoever. I don't drive,

08:33 but I can land the plane on my flight simulator very well. And of course, as my licence has been taken away from me, if I drove a car and I'm in an accident where it is completely the other person's fault, and I'm driving without a licence, I'm gone.

09:00 You could lose your house if you kill someone or wreck a Rolls Royce or anything. You wouldn't have a leg to stand on. I feel that if I had to drive a car, I wouldn't have any trouble whatsoever. I'm quite sure of that, but anyway…

It must be difficult to lose that?

Yes, well, I have got to depend on my wife to do everything. But I'm absolutely sure I can drive a car.

09:33 Now I can drive the car into the garage and back it out. I've got a weight lifting training platform down there, which my car drives on top of it, so when I'm training, I've got to put my car out. Sometimes she reckons I'm smelly after the training so she says "Don't you get back in that car. Call me and I will put the car back in."

10:04 **Back in the army, you said that when you stood for very long, it hurt your feet. Was marching a problem, too, with the flat feet?**

Not so bad, but I wasn't in the army for very long. And that turned out to be a good thing, too. I was telling you about these Pravachol tablets,

10:31 I was told to take them last thing before going to bed, but anyway, because of the advice I got, I knocked them off and had this minor stroke, which affected my vision. Which turned out to be a good thing, too. It could have been a major stroke that I had, not something that just affected my vision.

11:00 So I'm very happy, you see, that I had this minor stroke, because it quite easily could have been a major stroke. If I hadn't had this stroke, and left off taking these tablets, goodness knows what could have happened to me. So it turned out that this minor stroke, was the time they gave me a brain scan, and this tiny bit of cholesterol,

11:31 I believe was no bigger than a head of a pin, it's lodged in the back of my brain. Nothing whatever wrong with my eyes. My eyes are fine. But the part of my brain affected my vision in both eyes. So the major stroke and the minor stroke turned out to be good thing. Even the leather jacket,

12:00 that turns out to be a good thing.

Tell me about the leather jacket. Why did you want to buy it?

They looked great. I think I showed you a picture of the standardised rubber flying suit, neck to knee. It was a terrible looking thing. In the summer time you put the leather jacket on, and that was fine. The Americans had them issued, and I believe recently, my wife's brother in law,

12:32 he was a P38 pilot, and in the last couple of years in the States, they have advertised for these original issue leather jackets, because they are relics, I suppose. And they were giving them brand new things,

13:00 and all this money. They are worth a great deal of money, these original leather flying jackets. Five pounds, and I haven't got a clue where it eventually went.

What was the American pilot like that sold it to you?

I don't even know that he was a pilot. He was a nice guy. I just saw him,

13:33 and I offered him five pound. He peeled it off immediately. I didn't talk to him anymore, I didn't see him anymore, that was it.

Why did your instructor not like you wearing it?

Well, he thought I was a bit of a mug lair…

14:00 I've got to admit, I probably was, but anyway, that's what I did. Because I was scrubbed as a pilot, I originally wanted to be a dive bomber pilot, and see from there I would have gone on the Vengeances that they had here in Australia. After a month or two, after the Wirraways,

14:30 they gave me dive bomber practice on Wirraways and so forth. But I'm interested to know if there are any dive bomber pilots still alive in Australia. Or any that actually came back even, but I don't know of any. My ex-air force mates, in recent years, they don't know of anybody either.

How did you find out you were scrubbed?

15:01 He told me straight away. It was dreadful. They had me working around, gardening, picking up weeds. They treat you dreadfully, while you were waiting to be transferred to somewhere else. There was no such thing as gunner. There was wireless operator air gunner,

15:30 but I was very clued up on wireless, because it was my hobby and it was my trade. I was working in wireless before I joined the air force. Between the time I got out of the army and…

So what happened to you when you left the army?

16:00 As I told you, I put my age up to twenty one, I think, when I went into the army, I was only sixteen. When I got out of the army, without telling them anything, my age was now twenty two. So I was discharged from the army, I had experience with radio wiring, I went to AWA and immediately got a job. They readily employed someone out of the army,

16:32 and I was a wirer anyway. And I was on pay, instead of what I would have been entitled to, which was about thirty shillings a week, I immediately got over five pound. I forget the exact figure, but compared to my mates I was quite rich. And eventually after that,

17:06 I applied to aircrew in the air force. My age wasn't right to get into the air force, seventeen I suppose by then, and also it took a while to be called up, my education wasn't high enough…

17:32 But it was good enough to be accepted providing I went to night school, and I used to go to Randwick Racecourse, several nights a week. I had to pass these initial sixteen lessons, then another twenty two lessons which I completed before I was called up to the air force…

What sort of courses did you have to do?

18:01 **What were you learning?**

Well, math and physics, science and English. They were the four courses that I remember. You had to pass all those subjects to be eligible for the air force. You had to have the intermediate standard. I wasn't the only person doing this course. There was other people all the time,

18:30 and good instructors. There was no trouble with that.

When you were first scrubbed, did you feel angry at the instructor for pushing you into the deep end?

No, I think I realised it was my own fault, but I was awfully disappointed. It was my own fault. I mucked it up.

19:00 He got quite mean, while we were flying. And I was nervous, and I got affected by that.

19:34 That's what happens, I was like that. I remember one of my close friends. He became an airline pilot,

and he was still here on the Gold Coast, he became an air superintendent with an airline in India, so he was a big shot. He used to get so far up in the flying game, he's the same age as me….

20:00 (UNCLEAR) It used to make you tired, the flying. You get up early and go to fly…It's tense. Not so much tense, you're concentrating all the time. And you go to lecture. One day there was lectures in the morning and another group would be flying, and you'd go to lectures in the morning,

20:33 and be flying in the afternoon, and the other people would be doing lectures. This particular guy, a lesson by the assistant chief flying instructor, a fellow named Lester Rain. He was a big shot in aviation both before and after the war, and this friend of mine Ron Howard, the next number to me,

21:00 because of our names, he was asleep in class. And this guy was flying perfectly well, told him to come for a scrub ride, and it didn't worry him at all. He flew right through the scrub of course, no trouble at all. He was a different personality.

What was he like, the instructor, was he aggressive or…

21:34 He was very nice the first day we flew, he told me I was doing very well. But the next day I wore the leather jacket, so he got…

What sort of things did he do?

Oh, shout. He just got mean and I couldn't do anything right. He upset me and I started…

22:02 He was quite (UNCLEAR). If I had passed the scrub course with flying colours, the instructor would have said what's the idea of being so nervous for. I would have scrubbed me, too, very bad. I was completely a wreck. I didn't sleep at all that night. I was quite nervous.

22:33 But that's it. Like I said, it might have been for the good. Or the jacket.

What did your mates say to you after that?

My mate said…On that course, I wasn't the only person that was scrubbed.

23:02 I can't remember…They sympathised with you. But I had to do gardening and all sorts of things, pick up weeds…awful.

How long did that go on for?

Actually, I could find it out because I've got a

23:30 pilot's log book here. A few weeks. There has got to be another place for you at a flying school.

So where did you go after that experience?

24:00 After I got scrubbed on the Wirraways, I was sent to a wireless school first, and I didn't want any part of that. I approached the CO of the place. I said, "Look, I was a pilot, I'm very disciplined now and I want to get into the war as soon as possible. I don't want to do that course." So I got off that quite simple.

24:30 I had been to a few lectures. I wasn't in the slightest bit…In fact, on a bomber plane, I would have rather have been the rear gunner, than even the pilot. I'm quite convinced if I was on a bomber, I would rather be the rear gunner, because it's no good

25:00 being real good as a pilot on a bomber, if the rear gunner doesn't see what is coming and you get shot down. So I'm still convinced that I would rather be a rear gunner on a bomber, than any other member of the crew. No doubt about it. And as a rear gunner, I felt I was invincible.

25:32 I thought I was invincible, because from time to time, you would get combat with other fighter planes. And eventually after I finished my tour, you're taught attacks. When a fighter approaches you, you're armed with camera guns. You've got a camera gun, he's got a camera gun. Regular pilots, you just call the pilot up. (UNCLEAR)

26:09 And it's all done at quite a high level. But after I was finished, I was a sergeant and I was made an officer on the squadron. When I was finished I was sent to a gunnery leader's course.

26:32 I felt because of the training I'd done on the Link trainer…Every spare moment I used to go and fly the Link trainer. And I got really expert. That also, later on, saved my life. I told you about those couple of aeroplanes…

27:09 The training I did on the linked trainer definitely saved my life. I used to fly from Yass quite often. I used to take various people, sometimes my wife, some other people that worked for me in the hotel. On one occasion, I took the girlfriend for the best footballer in the town,

27:31 who was picked to play in Sydney for Combined Country to play the Sydney team. She wanted to go down to see her boyfriend play. I was going to Sydney, But he used to go to the city quite a lot, and I think he was already in Sydney. So I was going to Sydney, and I took this

28:00 Fay Judd. I still occasionally talk to her husband now and then, on the phone, every couple of weeks, every three weeks I so I ring them up. They still live in Yass. And anyway, I got caught in fog over the mountains. When you're over the mountains in cloud, it gets turbulent. Quite turbulent.

28:31 So if I go up any higher in my plane, I end up in the traffic. At that particular time there was no jets around, there were propeller driven DC3s, they were the regular planes the airlines flew, propeller driven two engine planes. So I go up too high,

29:02 I'm in the traffic of main aircraft, so I'm in this cloud, down below. So I decided to fly out to sea. Cloud, and it got turbulent, and if I hadn't had good experience flying in this Link trainer, I would have crashed for sure.

29:37 So I was able to fly out to sea and come down lower and lower until I could see, so I flew to Mascot or Bankstown. Because of the training I did, that saved my life.

30:00 **What was this instrument like, this Link trainer?**

They're like a regular aeroplane. In fact, the gyro which you didn't have in the Tiger Moth, a gyro horizon, a gyro compass…In actual fact, I got so much turbulence

30:30 these instruments started to spin, so I was in a spin, so I caged these instruments…the gyro compass spinning around and around like this, I pressed a button and it caged them, locked them, and we were regular flying with air speed and the artificial horizon, I got myself out of the spin, and I flew out to sea.

31:00 I got down low where I could see. Usually the clouds come down over the mountains, but they don't usually, unless there is a fog, they don't come down over the sea, I realised that. I flew tentatively out to sea and flew down until I could see and flew to Bankstown or Mascot, but it's in my log book anyway.

31:37 So this thing, there is no doubt whatsoever it saved my life.

So when you decided to go to war, where did you want to go?

You don't get any choice, you are just sent.

32:07 **I was interested in what happened after you asked to go to war. Can you talk about how you ended up getting to the war?**

Well, if you join aircrew in the air force, you knew you were going to war, there is no doubt about. You are going to the war, even though some people requested to be instructors,

32:30 and they got out of going to the war. But they could, at any time, also be sent to the war, too. But anyway, they always needed instructors first.

So did you ask to be an instructor?

33:02 No. I was going to tell you, after I got scrubbed as a pilot. I went to the wireless school first, and the wing commander was in charge of the whole school, I told him my position

33:30 and that I was terribly disappointed, and that I would rather just go to the war as a gunner. And he sent me to a gunnery school, where I got a lot of gunnery practice firing at drogue targets, which were big white windsocks tied behind a plane. You fire bullets at it, and your bullets have got paint on them,

34:00 and they reckon them…Different people firing at this drogue, and they can record the number of hits you got, real bullets flying through it, but the bullets had paint on them, and another person firing at the same drogue, he'd have a different colour paint,

34:30 so they'd know who hit what. That's one of things…So I eventually got shipped to America on a boat. I remember the boat was only seventeen thousand ton, it wasn't very big, but it sailed by itself. Each day,

35:00 you get various duties on the boat. You're a sergeant then, you're made a sergeant after you finish your gunnery course. Various duties, as a lookout, one of the duties that I had, up in the crow's nest.

35:30 Other days someone else might want to go up in the crows nest, and you might man one of the gun turrets, for instance, as a lookout. They had a regular crew on the boat. It was an American ship and it was sailing for San Francisco. And I remember on this ship, they had a lot of psycho prisoners from New Guinea,

36:00 they were American. Occasionally, they'd escape up onto the deck, they were loonies. I don't know if they were the real loonies they made out they were. Anyway, they'd capture them and put them down somewhere below the deck, in cabins, or locked up somewhere.

What sort of loony things would they do?

36:41 They acted like…Well, as soon as they were up on deck, they would take them back down. But there was quite a few of them, I believe,

37:01 from the islands and New Guinea going back for discharge or hospital. They were removed from the war zone. There is no doubt some of them were fakes, there is no doubt about that at all. But they got out of the war. You'd get people doing such things as shooting…even from the First World War, they'd get out

37:30 by shooting themselves in the foot. Have you ever heard of that happening? Various people making out they were psychos. No doubt some of them were real, but there's no doubt a lot of them were fakes.

So what was the ship like? Can you describe it?

It was terrible, terrible. It was only seventeen thousand ton, and it had to be blacked out, especially of a night-time.

38:00 Down in one of these hammocks, and you couldn't breathe. Every now and then someone would open a port hole, but then someone else would stick by the regulation post…Someone else might open a door somewhere where a light was coming through. But it was awful, awful. The meals were quite good…I remember every day we used to see

38:30 a ship out on the horizon. I believe the horizon for a six foot man is eight miles, so we were up on a ship, so the horizon….Each day the ship was there. But one night, when I was up in the crows nest, we saw a fire out where that ship was, and we called the ship's officers and so forth.

39:00 But that ship was torpedoed and the next day it wasn't there. Day after day it was there, it took a long while to go from Brisbane to San Francisco. And the Pacific is named the Pacific for no reason at all. It is normally as still as bath water, it is amazing still.

39:32 In that time, I no doubt got my sea legs, because when we got close to San Francisco, the sea became incredibly rough, incredibly. And up in the crow's nest, sometimes I was right over the water, hanging on. I felt perfectly safe up there. But sometimes the ship,

40:00 the waves were so big, the propeller shaft would come out of the water, and it was spinning like mad, then it would crash back into the water on the next wave. And there was always a chance that the propeller shaft could break when it was going full bore and crashed back into the water. But it didn't break. It was so incredibly rough.

40:30 But as I'd been so long sailing on a perfectly still sea, I didn't get the slightest bit sea sick. But before that, I did get sea sick. So we went to San Francisco, we passed Alcatraz Island. We went in a Pullman train over to

41:03 New York, I think, or it might have been Boston. We might have gone by further train up to Boston, to a big camp. It was a camp like nothing I'd ever seen in Australia. I believe it held seventy thousand people, all camped. And it had what is called a PX, where you could buy everything cheap.

41:30 No tax. And the PX store had everything you could buy. You could buy clothing, underwear, cigarettes, ice-cream, anything you could think of. No tax whatsoever, very cheap.

Can you describe what the camp looked like when you went into it?

All I can remember is that the food was wonderful, and it was very, very big.

Tape 3

00:32 **Can you tell me about the American soldiers on the ship? What were they like?**

They were very good. I can remember very well an American padre on the ship. He was about…I think he would have been about thirty five and he spoke six languages. He was very good. I remember saying to him,

01:03 "I would love to live on a Pacific Island," and he pointed out to me that I did live on one. The crew were very good. But I told you about that ship that was on the horizon every day, and I saw this fire, big flames.

01:30 **Had those soldiers on the ship been to war themselves? They were going home, weren't they?**

The crew of the ship, they were merchant seaman. And the other soldiers, most of the people on the ship were going home for psychological reasons, they were psycho.

02:01 Or troppo as they called, troppo. I have no doubt in the world that some weren't genuine. We didn't see much of them. They would come up on the deck occasionally, but as soon as they realised they'd escaped, and where they were, and they would take them away again.

What were you going over to do?

02:36 It turned out we went to San Francisco, and after that we got on a Pullman train and went across to Boston, and to this camp in Boston. We got leave and went down to New York for a week. We got leave passes, and it was great in New York. I went up the top of the Empire State Building.

03:06 **Did you go out in New York to dances or anything?**

No, I didn't go to a dance. I was amazed at New York shops were still open, I remember them being open at three o' clock in the morning. I booked into a hotel room…

03:36 Anyway, I didn't go out with the girls in New York. I think I was there a week, I don't know. I saw New York. And back at the base, at Camp Myles Standish, they used to bring

04:01 busloads of girls in for dances. And I was going for a girl for a little while, and one of my friends from the ship, on of the Australians. I remember kidding these girls, they thought we had a funny accent. We told them we only learned to talk English on the ship coming over. They were intelligent girls actually,

04:31 because they both worked in a bank. Anyway, they believed that we learned to talk English on the ship coming over.

They didn't know anything about Australia?

No, nothing. I remember while I was in the…The Australian air force uniform, as you know, was blue.

05:03 The American air force…They didn't have an air force at all at the time. They had either the Army Air Corps or the Naval Air Corps, they were flyers, but they used to wear regular army uniforms and they were all officers. Every pilot was definitely an officer in the American air force.

05:42 **You were telling about the girls that you met at the camp?**

There were two girls we met, and there was one I went with on one date, I think. They were wonderful girls, but we did kid them that we learned English on the way over on the boat,

06:02 and they believed us. They didn't know anything about Australia. They probably got Australia mixed up with Austria.

You were saying that your uniform was blue and it was different…

It was different to any other uniform at the time. Because English, Canadian, New Zealand, they had a grey uniform.

06:36 It was quite a lovely uniform. But what I was going to tell you, while I was in New York…When you go overseas, you get Australian patches that you sew on your uniform. When you come home, you take them off again. But when you go overseas, you very proudly get the Australian patches.

07:00 So when I was on leave in New York, from Camp Miles Standish, a girl came up to speak to me, "Oh, are you from Australia?" And she asked me if I knew Laurie Halls. And believe it or not, I actually knew this person, because it turns out, he was in the flying school…

07:32 Yes, I knew him. But it turns out that he was in another batch that had gone through a couple of weeks before I was in New York.

So what did you do at that camp? Did you do further training?

No, it was a staging camp. When we left there, we went by train, I think, down to New York in a big convoy,

08:00 and went right up to the North Pole, to dodge submarines. Quite often in fog, and we'd see icebergs and everything. We went on the convoy towards safety against submarine. Big ships…

How many in the convoy?

Don't know, but it was big.

08:31 They don't tell you those things. I went so close to the North Pole, I was still on duty up in the crow's nest, too, and I'd see icebergs, big icebergs that had broken away from pack ice up north and they'd drift down. I can remember it getting slowly dark,

09:06 and then within five minutes it starts to get light again. We were so far north, that's it is like. When you're right up there, it can be dark for six months of the year, totally dark. But I remember that.

How many people were on that ship with you? Was it a big mix?

Oh, there were all sorts of people. Americans and everything

09:30 going to the war. There were all sorts of people on that ship. It was quite big…I remember I was playing an American gambling game, and it was a very interesting game, and I won quite a lot of money. And I

gave it to one of my friends on the ship,

10:02 another Australian, “Don’t give me this back again until I get off the ship. I don’t want to lose it.” I gradually talked him into giving it back, and I ended up losing the lot. I had thousands of dollars, which was a lot for a young person. But I ended up losing it. He got sick of me pestering him to give it back,

10:30 “I’m going to win more!” And after a while you start to chase the money you lost. Anyway, it’s all an experience.

So what happened when you got to England?

Then we were sent to…

11:00 Brighton. There were big hotels, big luxury hotels, but they had all been stripped. There were all wire beds in there, and cheap mattresses, and everything was concrete floors, but I was in the Grand Hotel. Eventually, Margaret Thatcher was in that hotel when it was bombed, since the war. The same hotel I was in.

11:33 I was sleeping in the Grand, and eating in the Metropole. There were a lot of Australians booked in there. And you stayed there until you were sent to an operational training unit then.

12:00 The operational training unit was on Wellington bombers, twin engine things, which they used as the first stage bombers in the early days of the war, before I got there. And then after that, after a certain amount of training, you go onto the conversion units, where the bombers were the Sterlings. You’d get crewed up. It turns out the pilot I was allocated with…

12:30 I was on a mixed squadron. He and the bomber were the only two Australians. The navigator and the wireless operator was English, the mid-upper gunner was Scotch, but we called him English, same thing And it turned out the pilot Tom Webster, was the fellow I knew at the Initial Training School here in Sydney, Bradfield Park actually.

13:04 The Initial Training School before we got allocated to…He didn’t go to the same Elementary Flying School, I don’t know where he went, but he did his Service Flying Training in Canada. Anyway, you get crewed up and you stay with that crew all the time.

What is the process of getting crewed up?

I don’t know who allocates you,

13:31 probably a wing commander. I believe if you didn’t like it, you could object once, if you didn’t like someone in your aircrew. You could ask to be re-allocated, but we didn’t have any trouble. So we stayed with the same crew all the time.

What did you do at the training before you were crewed up? What were you learning?

14:00 In my case, gunnery. It was what they called Fight Affiliation. You get up in the sky with your pilot, and a camera gun, instead of real guns, and a fighter attacks you and you’re taught evasive action. So if a fighter attacks you, they usually come from behind, or underneath, and when you see them, when they’re close to you,

14:31 you turn in towards them and dive down. To shoot a gun, you’re going a certain speed, they’re going at a certain speed, no stationary of course. At all times, they had to shoot in front of you. Bullets take a certain amount of time to travel to a target, so

15:00 the guns are aimed where you are going to be when the bullets get there, that’s always the case. We were taught this evasive action. I got to thinking I was invincible, I really did, providing you saw the aeroplane. At a later stage, after I finished my operations, I was sent to the Gunnery Leaders School, where the best pilots

15:30 and the best gunners do this course. The best fighter pilots in the air force are sent there. The planes are usually flown by staff pilots. That’s people wanting to get their hours up before they get into combat, and sometimes they weren’t very good. So I got to learn that I wasn’t invincible.

16:03 All the time I thought I was invincible, I thought ‘If I can see the fighter…’ And also, sometimes, against the ground they were very hard to see. A fighter plane, spewing out exhaust and they come from underneath, and your silhouetted up against the sky,

16:32 they can see you easy. So any time I realised I couldn’t see well, I’d tell the pilot and get him to weave. And he’d weave like that. Any fighter plane that approached…But anyway, like I said, when I got to Gunnery Leaders School, I was up against the best pilots in the air force.

17:00 Ones that had a lot of kills and so forth. Back at the (UNCLEAR), two engines. But anyway, they had to fly against the slipstream of these propellers.

17:33 The prop on a fighter plane has got a carne on the end of it, called a ‘spinner.’ It’s like a cap, shaped like

a carne, it held all the screws and everything that held the prop on. Because it was shaped like a cone,

18:00 it reduced the drag. All planes had that. I had planes at Gunnery Leaders School, with camera guns, so close to me that I thought they were going to chop me in half. As close as from here to that chair away. I couldn't drive a car that close to a wall without fear of hitting it, and these people are doing over three hundred miles an hour,

18:33 and you're doing evasive action, and they could follow you all the way down. Amazing. I didn't think it was possible. Then I got scared, because I thought these guys are going to kill me when I've finished a tour of ops. When you're on a tour of ops, you expect to be killed. You don't expect to survive.

19:00 The tour was thirty trips, and it seemed impossible that you could do thirty. And you accepted the fact. But when you got through, and these guys are going to kill you when it's not necessary, I started to get scared. I thought, after this, I was on my way home. I wanted to come home. But it proved to me I wasn't invincible,

19:30 and at night-time it would be worst still. Because we used to do this fighter affiliation, and at night-time, the instructors, the gunnery leaders…By the way, the American equivalent of this school was called Top Gun.

20:01 Remember Tom Cruise in that picture, and he was going to Top Gun school. The gunnery leader school they had in England was exactly the same type of thing. But anyway, at night-time, you would go into a room and they'd have both your films, yours and the fighter pilots, and they'd assess at once who shot who down.

20:32 It was very good. But anyway, you had low level dogfights, which I never had on the squadron. They didn't risk you crashing all these fighters…I did quite a bit of fighter affiliation while I was on the squadron. Also on the squadron,

21:00 occasionally you'd have a thing called a 'Bullseye.' And a Bullseye was a mock raid over a town in England. You'd go over a town, and they had barrage balloons, searchlights and fighter planes there, stalking you, English fighter planes. So I've been on a few Bullseyes.

21:30 These barrage balloons had a radio beeper on them. And once over Manchester, we were amongst the barrage balloons. That scared me, because these barrage balloons, it would come through everybody's headphones these awful loud beeps. So you wouldn't know where to turn. So if you hit a barrage balloon, a big steel cable

22:00 holding this helium filled balloon up at several thousand feet, down amongst them. Anyway, we got away from them. I don't know how, but we did.

Can you describe who is the on the plane when you're doing something like that? The crew?

A full crew, everybody's on the crew, and we used to do…

22:40 Yeah, we'd do moonlight cross countries where you look for various rivers, over England, of course, to see whether you could find your way in the moonlight. We had all sorts of good training.

What was your crew like?

23:04 Very good. The pilot and the bomb aimer were the only two Australians. Once when we went back to England, we went to Scotland, and this mid-upper gunner, the Scotch, he lived at a place called Bathgate, and it was a little town between

23:30 Edinburgh and Glasgow, either side of Scotland. Edinburgh's on the east coast and Glasgow is over on the west coast. Bathgate was somewhere near Lockerbie, where the plane went down. It was very close to that. We actually saw that plane that crashed, 747. We actually saw it from the roadway, down in a paddock.

24:00 It was still there when we went in '91, I think. And I went back to this town and asked for him, the mid-upper gunner, but we couldn't find him, nobody knew him. So all our crew survived,

24:30 without a scratch, really. And the pilot, he used to live at Ulladulla, that's down the south coast of New South Wales. He moved somewhere down near Wollongong, and he was the manager of a car spare parts. He was walking to work one morning, at seven o' clock,

25:02 and a car jumped the road and knocked him through a plate glass window, and he lost his leg. After that, he recovered and he was quite happy. And one morning he woke up, this was a couple of years after,

25:30 and he had a red spot before his eye, no pain or anything. He went to the local doctor, the same day. The local doctor immediately sent him to high surgery at Sydney, Woolloomooloo, same day. The same day he had his eye out. He had cancer in the back of his eye, and they took his eye out the same day.

26:00 And he died a few years ago. He got very sick. So he survived the war without a scratch, and then had

bad luck after the war….

26:30 The very first raid, you don't go on, the pilot goes for experience, and then we were on a raid, they gave you what's called a 'Milk Run.' By that time, Lancasters were flying at twenty six thousand feet. We were on Sterlings with a full bomb load. A full bomb load on a Sterling, you couldn't get past fifteen thousand feet. It never happened to me,

27:00 but quite often they were over the same target at the same time. Lancasters at twenty six thousand feet…But the first trip we were on was what was called a Milk Run. And that was mine laying on the Friesian Islands. There were twelve planes on it. Three from our squadron and twelve altogether. Four from New Zealand, Seventy Five Squadron….

27:30 I was in Three Group. They were all bomber squadrons, and you were divided up into groups, so I was in Three Group. And Three Group had twelve planes on it altogether. We had three and didn't lose any of them. But Seventy Five Squadron lost three, out of our planes.

28:01 It's only twenty two miles across the Channel. The Friesian Islands are a group of islands that run from Germany down past Holland and France, down to Spain, I think. Anyway, they used to try and drop mines between the islands and the coast. Now a mine has to be dropped

28:31 from a very low level because they can't drop it from a high level because it would burst, and not work as a mine. It would probably explode if it was dropped from a high level. They were dropped to trap ships and blow up ships. So they were dropped on parachutes. And a mine has to be dropped below four hundred feet.

29:00 Certainly not above four hundred feet, because there is all sorts of winds and drift. So anyway, I remember down these Friesian Islands, I'm sure they had guns on them. Flak ships, they were things like a barge with a lot of anti-aircraft guns on it. I remember seeing a flash of flame from the ground, and immediately

29:30 I saw a Sterling burning in the water. Immediately. Like that. So that's an easy trip, that was the first trip. I certainly wasn't brave, but you get…nervous before you cross the enemy coast and after that,

30:00 we went on targets, you get nervous approaching a target, but over a target you seemed to be so busy, you seemed to forget about the fear.

How did you deal with that fear?

You couldn't deal with it at all. You've been scared I suppose, you're just scared. In fact, I remember you'd get scared

30:31 when you're crossing the enemy coast. You're flying across the Channel for quite a while. I've been to Kiel, the Kiel Canal, I've been there five times, and that was all the German navy there, and flak ships and fighter planes and everything. On one occasion, we went two nights running

31:00 because the reconnaissance plane would go over the next day and found out the mines that we dropped landed on land, instead of the water, so we had to go back again.

What did you do on the mine laying trips? What was your job?

I was the rear gunner all the time. I never ever changed, I just looked after fighters, that's all.

Did you get attacked very often?

31:30 **We'd been attacked five times. And on one of the trips to Kiel we were attacked by two…And they were against the sky. Could see them quite clearly. Junkers 88. And I was bit shocked to see how close they got to me. I shot one of them down. But in all, we got attacked five times.**

32:03 **What was the feeling when you'd shoot them down?**

Well, you're busy. You're not scared. When you're busy, you overcome your fear. Your fear goes away. You're doing something. But you were a bit apprehensive in the briefing,

32:31 when they told you where you going….I will tell you something funny. Our wing commander, he was in charge of the whole squadron. Squadron leader, you would assume it means he's in charge of the squadron, but the squadron leader is usually only in charge of the flight,

33:02 and the wing commander is in charge of the squadron. Group captain is in charge of the wing. Anyway, one day in briefing…The wing commander has come in with us, he's just flying in the second dicky seat. Normally he didn't fly at all. He was a pilot, but he just came along.

33:30 I was told…You never had parachutes. You had parachute harness, you had to go to parachute room and get a parachute. I was told to take a parachute for the wing commander, because he was driven out in a staff car to the aeroplane. We go out to the aeroplane, the ground staff are there, they've been sitting around on the grass for quite a while, and the pilot gets in

34:00 and runs the engines up. The wing commander comes out in the car and he is dropped off… “Where’s the wing commander’s parachute?” “This is it here, with my parachute.” I flew without a parachute…

34:30 I forgot. I forgot to get his. You see, you never had the same parachutes. The parachutes were always folded and repacked, probably every so often. I don’t know if it was after every trip. But there was room for a parachute

35:01 in the gun turret. There was just no room. It was on a little rack outside the gun turret, and the gun turret has got hydraulic control, you can move it anywhere, up or down…And you can move your guns up and down to. But to get your parachute, you had to swing your turret around, grab your parachute and clip it on and swing your gun turret around and bail out.

35:33 It seemed impossible to do, but I never had to do it. The pilot sat on his parachute. We were at that aircraft for probably an hour before that wing commander came,

36:00 not with the crew bus that went around and picked up everyone. We were at that plane, at the dispersal point. All the planes were dispersed around the aerodrome. The ground crew that looked after the aeroplane, armourers and engine fitters and

36:32 engine repair and fitters for the airframe, all these guys, we had probably six on our ground crew. Anyhow, as I said, the crew bus dropped us off. They dropped a lot of people off at their various planes. We were there up to an hour before the wing commander came out in his staff car,

37:02 driven by a chauffeur, dropped him off at our aeroplane with his harness on. “Where’s the wing commander’s parachute?” Nobody knew until after that I gave him mine. I was scared to say…His staff car had gone. The car that dropped us off was gone, and our plane was ready to line up for take-off.

37:36 So I didn’t say anything. I should have been scareder on that trip without a parachute, but in any case, if your plane caught fire you didn’t have much hope, with a parachute on or not. You’re full of bombs and the wings are full of hundred octane fuel.

38:02 The fighter planes all had cannons, and they used to aim for your wings. So having a parachute probably didn’t make a great deal of difference.

When you were shooting at those planes, and one went down…

Look, it all happened in less than a couple of seconds.

38:31 Those contacts weren’t long.

How did you know where to shoot, to be effective?

Well, you’re taught that. You aim in front of him, so he flew through it. Always in front, always in front. If you aimed at the plane, by the time your bullets skewed…

39:00 The gun sight was like a bull’s eye, a radial circles around it, slightly luminous so you could see it. You just aimed in front.

And was there an excitement when you managed to get a hit?

No. We never ever hit. Now, one thing I’ve got to tell you,

39:31 the Germans had excellent radar. And they had radar that would hook onto a plane, and radar beams travelled at the speed of light, and the speed of light is a hundred and eighty six thousand miles a second. For all intents and purposes, that is instantaneously.

40:04 So a radar can lock onto your plane like that. And they had a big searchlight called a ‘Master Beam.’ And it was so intensely bright, it looked blue. Now a master beam obviously had so much power it couldn’t be kept on for very long, so

40:30 a master beam, because of the radar, came onto an aeroplane, like that, it just switched on. And the aeroplane starts to corkscrew…But if an aeroplane got caught in a cone of searchlights…I never saw a plane escape a cone of searchlights. As far as I can see, it never happened.

41:00 We saw a lot of planes…But they all got shot down. They never escaped the searchlights. Because, supposing the searchlights caught you at Strathfield and you weaved and done everything and you got out of that range, the searchlights at Burwood would lock on, and the other searchlights would turn off.

41:36 Once you got caught with the cone, the master beam would turn off because it would burn out apparently, it was so powerful, so intensively hot, it had to be turned off. It would only be used by the radar to lock onto a plane. We had certain things to fool the Germans, of course…

Tape 4

00:41 Every night, on a raid when we got onto Lancasters…Most of the time I got onto Sterlings. When I got onto Sterlings, they had just about finished bombing raids. They didn't have to fly so they were ideal…

01:03 They were ideal for mine laying, absolutely ideal, because the mines had to be dropped below four hundred feet. They were dropped on parachutes and the parachutes would drift. The Sterling was a very rugged plane, and very manoeuvrable. So it was ideal for that. When I first got on the squadron, there was an Australian on that squadron

01:32 and he was in England at the start of the war, and he joined the Royal Air Force. He wasn't in the Australian air force, but he was on the squadron, 218. His name was McAllister, and he was from Swan Hill. So many Sterlings had been lost on bombing raids that after twenty two trips they told him he was finished, he had completed his tour.

02:01 That came from group headquarters, the air marshal. Group headquarter had an air marshal, not a group captain, so that's how things got changed in the air force. The squadron leader would not lead a squadron, he would lead a wing, and the wing commander led a squadron, and the group captain led the whole base,

02:33 and the group was usually an Air Marshal, or an Air Vice Marshal probably. A bit two inch band on his cuff. And the braid, they called it a poached egg, I think, around his cap. A gold braid around his cap. A big shot.

Did you have much trouble from anti-aircraft guns while you were laying mines?

03:03 Yes, there was always…In fact, I suppose…They said crews welcomed anti-aircraft fire because that meant there weren't any fighters there.

03:31 I don't want to get too far ahead in the story, but we never saw a plane escape from when he got coned in searchlights. They'd get out of the range, but not of the searchlights. The searchlights had a range, but then they'd be picked up by another. If they approached from Stathfield, and got out of it, they would pick you up at Burwood or Ashfield.

04:01 And they could lead him all the way to Bondi, in these cone, of different groups of searchlights. Nobody ever got out, that I saw. So we decided, with the crew, that if we ever got coned in searchlights, we were going to bail out. I don't care if the air force knows that, it would have been sensible. But I never really saw a plane get out of searchlights. I was at the back, but the people in the front…The bomb aimer

04:30 used to (UNCLEAR) the pilot. There was only one pilot in the crew, until it approached the target then he goes down to the bomb bay, and he can direct the pilot to exactly where he wanted to fly. So we were going to bail out. But we never had to bail out.

Did you sit down and talk about that?

05:00 We discussed it yeah, we discussed it. Even now, it seems a sensible thing to do. If you weren't captured by the Germans, you were going to live. Anyway, there is no point getting killed unnecessary.

05:33 **Did you say three planes went down in that first mine laying expedition? Three of the New Zealand planes?**

Altogether there were twelve planes and they lost four, out of twelve. Seventy Five Squadron, New Zealand Squadron, they lost four planes out of the twelve planes they sent.

06:00 We didn't lose any. We had four, but we didn't lose any.

Did you see them go down?

I remember seeing this plane, the flash and then the plane down in the water straightaway. Don't forget you lay your mines and then you're out of there. Once your mines are dropped, you don't hang around.

Do you remember your reaction to seeing that plane go down?

06:35 It's suddenly gone, and burning in the water. See I don't remember whether you turned around and went back, or whether you flew over France and Spain and went another way. Quite often you did that.

07:00 You certainly didn't go the same way back. I'm almost certain we didn't turn around and go back the way we came. But I don't know for sure.

How did you lay the mines? Can you describe how that happened?

The bomb aimer did that. They were all hooked up with parachutes. Just release them. The ground crew hooked all these things up.

07:30 **How big were they?**

Once again I don't know. But the mines had an anchor on them, with a chain, and an anchor to keep them down. They wouldn't float on the surface. They were probably magnetic mines, but I don't know. They were just mines.

Can you describe where you're sitting as a gunner, and what the gun look like?

Four guns….

08:09 It's four guns remotely controlled by hydraulics. You can move the guns up and down, and you can turn the turret in any way you like.

08:32 **And you were the rear gunner. Where did you sit and how were you positioned?**

I told you before, but when I was on bombers I would rather be the rear gunner than anybody else on the plane. Although I would have liked to have been a dive bomber pilot. As a rear gunner, if there was any action by fighters…

09:01 No doubt, a lot of people were shot down by planes that the gunners didn't even see. For instance, the Germans had a plane called a Dornier 17, and it had the nickname, the Wurlitzer. It had cannons in the back of the plane, behind the pilot and he had periscopes

09:31 and he could fly under a plane and shoot it from underneath. Wurlitzer, that's what they called it. That's what this German nickname for it. Dorniers had these things, and the pilots could shoot the plane…

10:00 One German pilot shot down seven four engine planes in the one night. Major Schnauffer. They captured him at the end of the war, but he was awarded the Golden Oak Leaves and Cross Swords and Diamonds … to the Ritter Kreuz.

10:31 Now Ritter Kreuz means Knight's Cross. And if you can get higher than the VC [Victoria Cross], that was the highest German decoration that you could get. Golden Oak Leaves and Cross Swords and Diamonds to the Ritter Kreuz. Big decoration there.

11:01 This guy, Major Schnauffer, he shot down seven British planes in the one night.

What were they like, the German pilots?

I think they were extremely good. And you'd hear a lot of things about them. For instance, I read about an Allied prisoner

11:30 shot down somewhere, and he was taken prisoner, and the German aircrews protected him from the civilians. A lot of their places were firebombed, we used to carry incendiaries. It was terrible…On one occasion,

12:00 before you went on a flight, all the crew would go to a briefing, and the briefing was carried out by an intelligence officer. I never saw any intelligence officer who had been in an aircrew at all, but they were brainy guys in civilian lives, no doubt. They were solicitors or lawyers or something like that.

12:30 But I remember, I think the very last trip, the intelligence officer said, "Tonight the target is Wilhelmshaven…" It's burned into my brain what he actually said. He said, "As far as we know there is no military objectives there. But it's an old town and it should burn well." I was horrified.

13:02 I was generally horrified that a man could say that. We had all these big incendiary bombs we carried, most times. Incendiary bombs, they're wicked things, really. That wasn't one bomb. There were a whole lot of bombs loaded up in 'angle irons.' Angle irons they use in gardens,

13:32 regular angle irons. Whole lots of angle irons wired together with fencing wire, and all these little bombs were in there. Little bombs. So when they were dropped, they would spread everywhere. Awful. So on one occasion, I flew with another crew and we often used to carry a blockbuster.

14:02 A blockbuster were a lot of incendiaries, clusters of incendiaries, as I remember they weighed five hundred pounds, each cluster. And a blockbuster weighed eight thousand pounds, that's what a Lancaster would carry, these cluster of incendiary bombs plus a blockbuster.

14:31 I flew with another crew one night, because I was made an officer and I was an assistant gunnery leader, after a while, and a gunnery leader is like everybody they got leave. I had to allocate the crews… Quite often, gunners get colds,

15:00 and they wouldn't let you fly with a cold, because your eardrums would burst. And you had a scoreboard, everybody in a crew, and if you didn't fly because you had a cold or something, you had to make up your trips when some other gunner got a cold. I remember I had to allocate some people to fly with crews

15:34 that didn't have a full crew, and I flew myself. I went to this other crew and they had all sorts of trouble. Their generator packed up, and they were…a bad crew. They were chatting on the intercom all the time,

everybody could hear what goes on on the intercom.

16:00 (BREAK) One thing I told you, we never saw anybody escape from searchlights.

16:30 It wasn't easy for the Germans to get us in searchlights, even though they had this excellent radar and this master beam, the bastard beam, it was instantaneous. If the radar got you, and the searchlights travelled at the same, one hundred and eighty six thousand miles a second, it's instantaneously. But anyway, we had a device a 'Window,' Which was strips of tin foil,

17:00 and every plane had it, and….the bomb aimer, he dropped it down a chute. There was a chute on the plane, they dropped this down, and it fluttered down to the ground, and all the planes dropped this all the time. And it was very hard for the radar to pick out an individual plane. Very hard, indeed.

17:30 So it was great protection this Window. This Window…it was cut to a half low frank [wavelength] of German radar, so it would send out a very strong signal, and they couldn't pick out a plane, but if only one plane was dropping it, the plane would be in front of all this stuff.

18:00 The plane was at a constant altitude, also. But you got mutual protection from all the other planes dropping this stuff, so it worked. So that's why you weren't caught in searchlights very often. If there was a lot of flack going up, you could take it for granted

18:30 there was no fighters. Because the Germans weren't aiming at each individual plane, because of this window. What they were firing up was called a 'box barrage.' Once you got into it, it was no good weaving or anything like that, because you're prolonging the time you're in this box barrage, so it's best to put your nose down a little

19:00 to get more speed and get through it as fast as possible. No good at all, weaving. So if there was a lot of flack, which means it was a box barrage, there wasn't any fighters, because they were going to hit them, too.

A lot of people has described that flying through flack as one of the most terrifying experiences…

Well, everybody's different.

19:30 I certainly used to get scared before I approached the coast. Nervous. You were flying over water for quite a while. You expect searchlights and flak and everything, so you're nervous then. And then when you're approaching the target. Once you're over it, you're there. It's not going to get any worse,

20:00 and you were busy. You were very busy, and you forget about being scared. But that's how it happened. I think most people would be the same.

Can you describe the briefing a little bit more? Did that happen all the time?

All the time, and you got a debriefing when you got home. Debriefing, where you had a cup of coffee, and you sit around and you described everything that happened. They interrogated every crew member,

20:30 but not as a crew. They'd interrogate them all, in different briefing offices. So your story has got to coincide, and that's probably the reason for it. So if people came on with wildly different stories, from the same crew…

What would they interrogate you about? What would they ask you?

They'd interrogate you about the amount of flak, whether the target was successful, and

21:01 the fighters you would encounter, and things like that. Now when we got into the Lancasters…I was going on main targets. They developed a thing called 'Pathfinders.' A group of planes, with all these people who had done at least one tour of operations before they got on the Pathfinder.

21:31 Experienced crews. And they used to drop flares, a group of flares, green, red and blue, as I remember. And they would drop these flares as near to these targets as possible. But these flares, they were probably on parachutes, too, and they didn't all land where they were supposed to.

22:03 And then usually, after a while, they'd have a master bomber. And a master bomber was always a group captain and he was in Mosquito and he flew very low. It was very dangerous. They were given a code name. So the Germans would try to send a false message up to the master bomber.

22:30 They had a code name, and they'd change it if there was One and Two. So quite often the master bomber was shot down. The code name, for instance, might have been 'buzz bomb.' And he'd assess where all the flares were landing, in the case of the target.

23:00 So he might tell you to ignore the red and blue flares….and apparently if the green flare didn't land on the target…This is an example, he would tell you to aim slightly to the left of the green target. That's where you aimed your bomb for. That's where the bomb aimer aimed the bomb.

23:32 So if it was indiscriminate, where the bomber went over and let their bombs go, God knows where the bombs would land. So they had to have a Pathfinder crew, and they had to have master bomber. And the master bomber, I understand, was always in a Mosquito. And that was a very, very fast plane, twin engine. Get in and out of it real quick. And probably no German plane to catch it at all.

24:03 Towards the end of the war, they had a rocket plane called an ME163, but it only stayed in the air for seven minutes, it would out of fuel. And it didn't have landing wheels, it used to land on skids. So it was highly dangerous for the pilots. And they had a jet plane,

24:31 but they didn't use it, according to books that I've read, because of Hitler wanted to have these things as a revenge, to use as bombers instead of fighters, fortunately for us. He wanted these things, but they were towards the end of the war.

What was the accommodation like back at the squadron?

When I became an officer, it was very good.

25:03 We even had a WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] as the batwoman. Not for me as an individual, but she ironed your clothes and put your shirts out, polished your shoes, all sorts of things…

What was she like?

She was nice. Helen, I remember quite well. A nice girl.

25:30 But it was different when I was an officer.

Did you have a room to yourself?

Yes, I did. I had a room to myself. When I was a sergeant, I was sharing with another crew. Nissan hut. But it was quite good.

Can you tell the story about the Nissan hut, where you came back and your clothes were packed away?

26:04 Well, after my first raid, it was only a mine laying trip to the Friesian Islands, it was only a very short trip, and came back and went to the debriefing, and then back to the hut, all my gear was missing. The pilot's gear was missing. And after a while…

26:30 The other crew had taken our gear, but we got it all back. But if we had of been shot down, the service police would have gone in and taken everything, because it would have been stolen anyway. I don't mean they would take it to keep, but they would take it for safe keeping. So this other crew, an English crew, they were all very experienced and had been on several operations.

27:01 I've got no recollection after that first trip, but they were certainly there all the time. In the winter time on a squadron, it was extremely cold. As you saw there was ice and snow on the ground, and the trees…

27:30 The water used to get frozen in the trees, and by early in the morning, it was nice and clear and by two o' clock the sun would melt all this stuff and it would drip everywhere. Miserable. And one of the bad, bad things,

28:00 the water used to get frozen in the toilets. Awful. That was one of the bad things, nothing could be done about that.

How many times would you go up on a flight?

Look, I'd have to refer to my log books. But there were sixteen planes.

28:30 We used to lose, on average, two planes every night. Every night, two planes wouldn't come back…But we'd quite often get leave, every six weeks you'd get leave. You could go anywhere you liked with the free pass. And you used to have food coupons.

29:00 The bomb aimer and I used to go to London, and for some reason or another, the pilot used to go to Grantwood to get a girlfriend. He had been there before. But you could go anywhere. You could go to Scotland if you wanted. A free train pass. And free food coupons.

29:30 We discovered early in the piece that if you stayed in a hotel more than four days, they wanted all your food coupons. So we used to book into the Strand Palace, stay there for three days, keep all our food coupons, then go somewhere else, only for a night I think. Then go back to the Strand Palace again. Didn't have to…They had such things as powdered eggs.

30:03 Powdered eggs for breakfast, on toast. They weren't very good. But Betty and I, when we went back to the hotel, it was one hundred and twenty pound a night at the same hotel. And I believe that the prices were fixed when we used to stay there. We probably got coupons to stay there.

30:32 It was ten shillings a night, I think. And we stayed there. But immediately the war started, the government fixed the price of everything. Nobody could put their prices up…

What was London like?

I got to know London very well. I walked most places.

31:01 I went to dances in London. Covent Gardens, there was a big dance there every night, free bands. Brighton was good, too.

Can you describe the dance at Covent Garden?

31:30 They were very good. I got friendly with an American girl in the army. She was a private and I was an officer, at the time. You'd think the British would be very strict with protocol, but they weren't. Anybody could go out with anyone else. Officers and…

32:01 This girl was very worried in London. I couldn't work with her side by side, I just couldn't, because the American Service Police would pick her up. She had to walk like she was not with me at all. Funny, I did receive a letter

32:30 from her when I got back, but I didn't answer it, I was with Betty at the time, but she had been made a sergeant, she was back home. She was a very nice girl. Lovely. Covent Garden, there was a lot of Australians. You could go to Australia House.

33:02 The Boomerang Club. You could go into Australia House any time while you were on leave in London. It was near St Paul's Cathedral. And you could read things about Australia. They had Australian newspapers there, and magazines. It was very good. There were all sorts of Australians there that you had met on course,

33:30 and at Bradfield Park, that you hadn't seen since. One guy that I met there, he was on Sunderlands, and he sunk the first German U-boat of that year, his crew had. He was on Sunderlands, he was a gunner. And he said something … (BREAK)

34:10 **Can you tell me that story on camera?**

If you want me to. I met this gunner that I met on the ship, I wasn't in training with him, he was on the ship that I went over to America on. and he told me was on Number Ten Squadron of Sunderlands,

34:31 and he boasted that his crew sunk the first submarine of that year, probably 1944. And they machine gunned the crew. I said, "You machine gunned the crew?" And he said, "Yeah, we got the lot." So I believe it was policy to do that, because they didn't want the crew to form up again and get back on another crew

35:00 and sink a lot more ships. The idea was abhorrent to me.

What did you say to him when he told you that?

He could see I was shocked, but it didn't seem to bother him. They were apparently told to do that.

35:36 You never hear of things like that. You used to read in the paper in England…You used to read about all the schools and hospitals were bombed. And it implied that the Germans did that intentionally… (UNCLEAR).

36:02 And a funny thing, this was certainly luck, but I've taken Betty around St Paul's Cathedral, and it didn't get a mark. That's luck you know. I've seen stereoscopic pictures…I've been to Cologne several times, that's in the Rhine Valley, and that was heavily bombed. I'm not religious at all, but that Cologne Cathedral wasn't marked.

36:34 I'm not religious at all, but you must think that there is someone up there looking after things like that, because it sure wasn't intentional. We flew over Cologne and we dropped our bombs. We just bombed, because in the Rhine Valley, there was a lot of munitions and all sorts of things there. We didn't try to avoid Cologne.

37:00 Apart from our crew, there were a lot of other crews…But it's amazing. And one other thing that amazes me. As you know, Lindy Chamberlain was arrested for murdering her baby, and she claimed all along that a dingo took her baby. She saw a dingo after the baby, and she reckoned the dingo took her baby.

37:34 And some forensic expert came out there and examined her car. We actually saw her car on a caravan trip around Australia. We saw her car near Gosford. But anyway, this car had stains in side this car, and the forensic expert woman came out from England

38:00 reckoned that was foetal blood. And it turned out it was anti-rusting spray, sprayed on the car. And I thought 'Wow.' Anyway, Lindy Chamberlain…On a caravan trip around Australia, I climbed Ayer's Rock. And a lot of people have been blown off Ayer's Rock.

38:30 One or two people have committed suicide off it. Well, eventually after we came back from this trip around Australia, and Lindy Chamberlain was in jail in Darwin, more or less indefinitely, and a guy committed suicide by jumping off Ayer's Rock. People saw him, they saw where he landed. You know he landed with a yard of that baby's jacket.

39:00 They found that jacket because this guy jumped off Ayer's Rock, and Lindy Chamberlain was immediately released. I don't know whether this jacket had teeth marks on it, but I know that Lindy Chamberlain was released, immediately because a man committed suicide. Now, Ayer's Rock is eight miles right around, the circumference of it.

39:32 And this guy had landed within a metre of that jacket. I've seen stereoscopic pictures of Cologne Cathedral well after the war, without a visible mark on it, and it makes you think that something is up there, looking after people.

But even in those conflicts that you were involved in,

40:02 **you had no religious connection? Did you pray?**

I told you earlier in the piece that my parents were divorced and I went to live with my grandmother. Her maiden name was Murphy, so she was a Catholic.

40:30 So I was sent to a Catholic school, all sorts of religion. They'd pray before playtime, after playtime. They'd pray before lunch, all the time, so…I did a bit of saying prayers…

41:18 While I was on the squadron, and trips with other people, I did thirty eight trips. I flew with other crews at other times, but I used to fly the linked trainer every chance I got. Pilots were required to fly it, they didn't like it, they'd rather fly the read aeroplane. The Link trainer was a little box with wings on it, it moved and everything like that. And headphones and full instrument panel. You'd be set a course to fly by the sergeant in charge…

Tape 5

00:41 **Can you tell us a bit more about the operations you did, leading up to D Day? What kind of things did you do before you went out on an operation to prepare for an operation? Did you have any special rituals?**

No, I had been a weightlifter at home,

01:01 but not competitively. But occasionally…Every air force base had some sort of gymnasium, and occasionally they'd have weights, and I used to train with weights.

So before you actually went out on one of your operations on a flight, what did you have to do before you went out?

You were told, you had to attend briefing. Out of the blue,

01:31 you were told, briefing might be three thirty in the afternoon, all the crews that were picked for that particular operation. Not every crew flew on every operation from the one squadron, because they might have flown the last night, or the a couple of nights previous. So you would go with your entire crew. And a briefing officer was there, and an intelligence officer,

02:00 he would be with the wing commander of the base squadron, and he'd tell you, with a big map on the wall, "Tonight's the target is…" And he would point to where the target is, and describe the target. And they'd tell you what sort of searchlights and radar they got, and whether you could expect enemy fighters.

02:32 And always, always, a raid never went direct from the base, because the German radar, once they occupied France, Holland and Belgium, they could pick up planes as soon as they took off from the coast, I assume. I'm pretty sure…So you never went straight to the target. You'd look like you were going somewhere else, and then you'd change course,

03:01 that's why you needed navigators. We flew at night-time, only at night-time, until after D-Day. But after D-Day, after they reduced the strength quite a lot, we did a few daylight operations. But all the British bomber command, they had excellently trained navigators.

03:30 Because, as I said, you didn't fly direct to the target because the Germans would obviously would know where the target was going to be. You always flew all different directions, and that of course was all laid out for you, and the navigator had to instruct the pilot where to turn, what height to fly, everything like that.

04:06 **So what about you personally, before you took off on an operation, what did you have to do to prepare for that operation?**

Not very much at all, because it was your duty to keep your guns clean, because they had always been fired, even though you didn't meet any enemy aircraft on raids, say.

04:34 Your gun has been fired the night before you flew, because you test fired them on the ground. So with

the heavy damp over in England, they would all corrode, because there were gun powder marks on all the barrels,

05:02 and you'd have a thing called a cleaning rod. And you'd have a piece of flannel,

05:31 it was called 'Four By Two.' It was cut four inches long and two inches wide. And this cleaning rod was a stainless steel rod with a handle on it, and it had a hole in the end of it, like a needle. This was a big thing, so it had a big hole. And this four by two went through this thing. You folded one inch and poked it through, and then

06:00 it was four inches long…So it was like that, on the cleaning rod. And that was another occasion…where I could have died. I'd left my guns probably one day before…I had the job to clean them, but I didn't clean them. We cleaned them all the time. Everybody was responsible for their own guns.

06:30 You didn't get the armourers to do it. Armourers loaded the guns, but you were responsible for cleaning them. On this occasion, I obviously left the guns just one day without being cleaned, I hadn't been flying, so I went into clean them and I poked this in, and it was like, in this gun barrel,

07:01 it was like I was trying to jam the thing through something that was lined with sandpaper. I'm forcing and forcing, and it wouldn't go through. It goes through to the…place where the bullets fire, then you pull it back out again. And the four by two folds up the other way.

07:30 So you do that two or three times. But anyway, this time I put it through, and as I said, I hadn't cleaned them for one day, and it was exactly like sandpaper, it was jammed. And I forced it through, with all my body weight on it…I put my shoulder to it. There was a handle around this thing, stainless steel…

08:01 You know how hard an ordinary needle is? Well, it was the same sort of thing, but it was a quarter of an inch wide, tapered slightly down towards the needle. The first operation you cleaned it, and then you put a bit of oil on it and you did it again. But anyway,

08:30 this occasion, I forced it through hard, with all my weight on it, and I am strong anyway, this thing broke, and it whizzed straight past my head like that. It would have gone straight through my head and out the back. It was jammed into the gun, and it was stainless steel, exactly like the material in a needle,

09:01 very strong steel, but it was a quarter inch thick. I suppose I'm lucky. It didn't even cut me, but I felt it go past, and I fell up against the gun turret. So, sometimes you're lucky…

Speaking about luck, as you continued to do operations were you at all concerned about how much luck you could have?

09:34 You know, it seems like you're exaggerating, but I'm not exaggerating, because other people are going to see this thing who have been on aircrews and they would know. I expected to die. I didn't expect to get through thirty operations, because there was terrible casualties on the first trip I went on.

10:01 The very first run. The mine laying trip. So you don't expect to get through. And when I was in America, on the way through, I got in my change a silver dollar, it's a very big coin, and I thought that was my lucky charm. I always carried it. You get to believe that…It got lost, and I was actually scared that night, only that night,

10:30 but nothing happened, so I thought it was silly, believing in lucky charms. But I got to believe it was luck…

So you always carried it with you?

I lost it, I can't remember how many trips. But it was certainly on many trips, and then for some or another I lost it. I don't have a clue where I lost it. Someone might have stolen it, but I was scared when I didn't have it.

11:03 **So how did you get through that first time without it?**

I don't know…I was a bit scared. But after that, I realised that lucky charms were nonsense. I know I didn't worry about it after the first time. But I was actually worried…

Were you religious?

11:30 **Did you think about God at all?**

I went to a Catholic children's….So I'm not a bit religious. When I went to a Catholic school, because of my grandmother, she sent me, but because of the things they taught me, we had to pray before playtime, and after playtime, before lunch, after lunch, when you were leaving, just before school starts…

12:00 And anyway, I was saying prayers on operations, but I'm not religious. But later on, I got to thinking there must be someone up there…We've seen St Paul's Cathedral and there was a lot of buzz bombs around there, and there wasn't a mark on it. Betty and I have been to London since the war and we've

looked around.

12:30 And as I said, I've seen stereoscopic pictures of the Cologne Cathedral. That was right in the Rhine Valley, and that was bombed tremendously. Nobody aimed for the cathedral, but they didn't aim to miss it either. They just dropped bombs on Cologne and evaded the enemy fighters or flak or whatever. This cathedral, I believe it took six hundred years to build. And there wasn't a scratch on it.

13:01 It makes you think that there is somebody up there looking after these things. The amazing thing is I still think, and I haven't thought about this for years, but I'm telling you about it…It's amazing. Cologne was in the heart of the Rhine Valley and it received tremendous bombings and I'd tell you for dead sure, nobody aimed to miss the cathedral.

13:30 That just wasn't so. You dropped your bombs and got the hell out of there.

So what was the scariest thing about going out on those operations?

Well, I'm repeating myself…I used to get scared, uptight, nervous I suppose…I would probably get nervous in the briefing room…

14:00 when they told you where the target is. And you'd certainly get a bit nervous after you've crossed the water and you are going to cross the enemy coast, where you know there is flack and searchlights. Nervous there. Then you wouldn't get nervous again until you got close to the target. After the target, well, it's not going to get any worse and you were all right. And you were very busy over a target. But I got scared…

14:36 I was a tail gunner, and I used to do plenty of practice with fighter planes. They were told to come to our squadron and we'd go up, and what was called fighter affiliation, we had camera guns, instead of machine guns.

15:00 Sixteen millimetre guns with the camera loaded, and when you pull the trigger, it took the picture, and the fighter planes had that, too, and we were taught all sorts of evasive action. I really thought I was invincible, providing I could see the plane. But after my tour of operations, I went to the Gunnery Leaders School, and at the end when I was allocated to a squadron,

15:30 I was automatically a squadron leader. That was the ranks that a gunnery leader got. I did the course and a refresher course, and the war finished. I finished my tour of operations, I was sent back here, did this Gunnery Leaders Course, sent back to Australia to train on Liberators. And while my ship was in Sydney Harbour,

16:01 after coming back from Europe, via the Panama Canal, which was fantastic…But so intensely hot…

(BREAK)

We all used to stay at the Strand Palace Hotel.

16:31 It used to be ten shillings sterling a night. When we went back it was a hundred and twenty five pound a night, for a double.

So when you were feeling nervous on operations, what did you do to calm your nerves?

You couldn't do anything. Every trip I went on,

17:00 they gave us…I haven't thought about it before, but they gave us little tablets. And they were called 'Wakey Wakey' tablets. But since then, a bomb aimer that was on our squadron, not in our crew, he was a chemist in Macquarie Street, in Sydney, and he's told Veterans Affairs that they were Benzedrine or Dexedrine tablets, and

17:30 I was admitted to the air force with high blood pressure, and these things were very, very dangerous if you had high blood pressure. They probably made you…lose your fear, made you…There's something in them…I'm not as brave as I seemed to be. I never honestly, right to his moment,

18:01 I haven't given that a thought. That was probably something to calm your nerves. But they called them Wakey Wakey tablets. We thought they were necessary, because one of the trips I went on to Stettin, that was on the other side of Berlin… I've since been back to the same place, it's now called Koszalin. It's a part of Poland now, it used to be called Stettin, in my log book.

18:31 I didn't notice until I went there as a weightlifter. But I had been there and bombed the place.

So after you had been on operations, did you need to calm your nerves? Was there anything you did at the end of an operation to relax?

No, I didn't feel that tired or anything, and I could sleep okay. We used to go to briefings,

19:00 and everybody was there, and happy again and…

So how did you and your colleagues deal with some of the planes not coming back from those operations?

Well, they were always bringing new planes into our base. We used to lose, on average, two planes every night. Every night we flew, two planes wouldn't come back.

19:32 In fact, one of the crews, a friend of mine, he eventually did come back, because his plane was shot up, they bailed out, and the French Resistance looked after them. Got them back to England. But after that, they never had to fly, especially over Europe.

20:00 A fellow in Sydney, named Arthur Levy, I believe he is still alive, but he used to march in the Anzac Day march with the Caterpillar Club. Well, this before nylon and all the parachutes were made of silk and caterpillars produce silk. And if they bailed, they relied on caterpillars. So they used to have a badge,

20:30 Caterpillar Club. But it was for people who bailed out on operations. And it was a special group in the Anzac…Still is, no doubt. Though a lot of these people would be over eighty now, so there is going to be fewer and fewer.

So this friend of yours, when he came back actually having survived, what was it like to see him again?

He was at the base, he didn't have fly…

21:00 It wasn't just the one friend. It was the whole crew was back.

But up until them coming back, you didn't know whether they had survived or not?

No, we didn't.

So what was it like when they turned up again?

It was wonderful.

21:30 **So when crews did disappear, when the planes didn't come back, were there any ceremonies or anything held for those who were lost on operations?**

No, never. I told you about the first raid I went on. The Milk Run. The pilot had already been on a raid with another crew,

22:02 for experience, before he took his own crew on a raid. The first raid was just across the Channel to the Friesian Islands. There were twelve planes on that, and they lost four out of twelve. And our squadron had four planes and they didn't lose any at all. But Seventy Five Squadron had four planes, and they lost three of them.

22:31 No doubt, that wasn't an easy trip for them. Three out of four, horrifying. But you didn't really expect to get through. When I got to over twenty five trips, I was pretty certain…and you got a bit more cautious, thinking 'Gee, I might get through this.'

23:00 But before, you didn't expect it. I had great fear of being badly burnt. I will give you an idea of someone who was badly burnt. John Gorton, our ex-prime minister, he was a fighter pilot, he was in a Hurricane I believe, and he was terribly burnt. Now I don't know whether he got burnt in the plane and still had to land…

23:33 John Gorton had a horribly…But he was a fighter pilot during the war and he was burnt. Just imagine him being burnt and having to land a plane? Maybe he crash landed, I don't know.

24:00 **Did you ever observe any other people on your plane showing fear?**

Look, if you turn the camera off and I'll tell you something…(BREAK)

Can you tell us that story from the beginning?

Okay, one particular raid I went on, the navigator couldn't find the target,

24:31 he just couldn't find the target. The pilot and the bomber, they both sat in adjacent seats in the front of the Lancaster, and they couldn't find the target either. And eventually I saw from the rear turret, because we're going this way, from the rear turret I saw flames through the cloud fifty miles away behind us. And I told them,

25:00 and the navigator realised that that was the target. And the bomb aimer immediately said…he said something like, "I'm going to jettison the bombs, because you're flying against the bombing stream, you're going to be late over the target when everybody is gone. Suicide for sure."

25:31 It would have been suicide for sure, and I believe the pilot was right, and I think I would have done the same thing. I fortunately didn't have to make that decision, because I was the rear gunner, sitting in the back, listening to the conversation. And the pilot said, "I'm going to jettison the bombs." And the bomb aimer said, "If you do, I will report you."

26:00 He insisted we fly back, and the pilot didn't want to be accused of cowardice or anything like that, so

we actually bombed the target from the wrong direction and got away unscathed. Amazing. That was scary. And all my life, this bomb aimer's name was George Leek. At the time, this George Leek,

26:30 he was older than the rest of us. He was twenty seven when we got on the squadron, he was about twenty eight, I suppose. It was an odd experience. I always regretted I didn't tell the story, now I'm glad I did. I'm glad you insisted I tell it.

Do you think the pilot saved your life that day?

The pilot? No, he did what the bomb aimer told him, too.

27:00 We did bomb the target against the bombing stream. There were planes coming up at the same height. We used to fly at twenty six thousand feet. Here in civil aviation, if a plane appears in the sky, (UNCLEAR)…radio control here keeps them all separated. Planes flying

27:30 north and south, east and west, they fly at different levels. They fly at a thousand, plus five hundred. They're well separated by radio control…traffic control in the airports. They can keep track of all aeroplanes, at all times, by radar.

28:00 They know precisely where everything is, at what height. But a bomber stream has all lights off, no lights on anywhere, and this time we're flying against people coming away from the target. That is scary.

So why is that so scary?

You see, you're talking about…It wasn't only our squadron over the target.

28:35 There could have been up to a hundred planes over the target, and you're one plane flying against a hundred planes all at the same time. It is almost suicide. And by the time you finally get over the target, everybody is gone, nobody is there, you have it all to yourself. It was almost near suicidal.

29:02 You see, the bombers have got protection by strips of tin foil they drop out. It was called window, but everybody was dropping it in bundles, and the radar couldn't determine which was the plane, which was the sheet of window. On the screen, they got hundreds of blips, it might have been thousands, I don't know.

29:30 **Because I can't imagine what this scenario was like, and it's hard for me to really understand, what was it about that operation that put you in a situation that was different from other operations? Why were you flying against them? What had happened that made it different?**

The navigator had missed the target. See, it's very difficult to be a navigator. For instance, you took off from a base in England.

30:00 And you flew towards the target, but you didn't fly directly towards that target, because right from the word go, the Germans occupied all of Belgium, Holland, France…And when you took off, you flew in a different direction to confuse the Germans, otherwise fighters would be waiting for you all the way along the route. It would be suicidal,

30:30 you wouldn't be able to do that. So they flew a pattern, a zigzag, all over the place, before you finally….right to the last minute, would the Germans be able to guess where the target was. And that was absolutely essential. Absolutely essential. So to miss that target, with that precise navigation…Now the Americans had it different, the Americans only flew at daylight

31:00 and they only flew with a lead plane, and they got their protection from fighters, by multiple machine gun fire. Their guns had fifty calibre bullets, which is half an inch, and we had three oh threes, which were a third of an inch. But the American guns,

31:30 because of the heavy calibre, they would fire slower, but much heavier armour to pierce, and then the bomber would bring it down…In the line-up of bullets in the magazine, there was tracer bullets, so you could see where the thing was going, there was an armour piercing bullet, to pierce armour and there was an incendiary bullet to set fire to fuel tanks and so forth.

32:01 There were about five different bullets, all in order. So certainly when you fired your guns, it was like a hose. Because of the tracer that you fire, you can see where the things are going. And the Americans had that…Bullets from a fifty calibre machine….

32:33 almost as big as a cigar. Big thing.

So how common was it for navigators to miss the targets?

Our navigator was very good. It only happened with us once, we couldn't find the target.

33:00 I actually saw it because of the flames through the clouds. It was about fifty miles behind. Because of the time that had elapsed, the navigator immediately said, "That's it." He knew it without seeing, because they go on the speed that you're flying and the time that's elapsed. He knew…

So then it was a dangerous situation to have to drop the bombs in having passed by the

targets?

33:36 If you had jettisoned…The pilot had the controls. The bomb aimer had the controls to select the bombs that he wanted to drop and he drops the bombs. He tells the pilot on the intercom precisely where he wants to the plane to fly, because there's

34:00 Pathfinders that have been there before, and they've dropped target indicators on the targets, and the master bomber's….red flares lit up like phosphorescence on the ground. There was red, green and blue. The master bomber was always a group captain, flying a Mosquito.

34:30 He flew down real low, until which of the target indicators were the closest to the target. For instance, I remember them saying, "Not the red or the blue, but bomb slightly to the left of the green target indicators. And that should hit the target."

35:00 You didn't drop your bombs indiscriminately because you were seeing the target.

What was the sensation like in the plane after dropping the bombs?

There was certainly relief because you got rid of a whole lot of explosives that could blow up if you got hit. Your plane was much, much lighter and you flew faster and higher. Just dropping your bombs was a hell of a relief. You close your bomb bay doors

35:30 and there is less air resistance, and you head for home. As I remember, that wasn't even (UNCLEAR). The navigator was working hard all the time, on a night flight.

Can you tell us about preparations leading up to D-Day?

36:00 **(BREAK)**

…you get through tour of operations on a squadron in about five or six months. We had thirteen months. Because a lot of the time we were taken off operations because it was no good training for something, when we didn't know what for.

36:30 And having us get killed after we'd done three quarters of training. So we were off operations all the time. In my book, it's just got special training, that's all…

37:13 Well, on the 5th of June, at about eleven o' clock at night, we were over the docks in the south of England, and it was lit up like…

37:30 Have you ever been over a city at night-time and seen all the tennis courts and swimming pools lit up? Well, it was like that. Naval docks with all the ships lined up for the invasion. But they needed all the lights. We were flying backwards and forwards over the tops of these things. We set off on the 5th of June…Our plane had two full crews

38:00 and except the gunners. Only had myself as the rear gunner and the mid-upper gunner, who belonged to the crew. Everyone else had a double. Two pilots, two navigators, two bomb aimers, two wireless operators. Everything was duplicated except the gunners. So, with our special training,

38:30 all we were doing from our base and in various directions, we were flying….The navigator couldn't see out of the plane. He was using special radar equipment developed for this trip. It was called GH. There was Gee equipment, three transmitters in England, and they were spaced various distances apart

39:01 in England and sent out beams in the one direction. The navigator, he had, not just for D-Day, he had a little screen, a cathode ray tube, and he had a map with all these reticules on it, where he intercepted these beams, and he knew precisely where he was because of these various beams,

39:33 that were sent out all the time from one direction in England. And this special equipment we got… Only our squadron and one or two other squadrons got it, it was called GH. It was an advanced sort of thing, and if you had to, in the middle of a fog, or the middle of the night, you can fly up and down a road

40:01 indefinitely. So these planes were dropping…the two bomb aimers were dropping piles of window. Now Typhoons are a very fast type of fighter plane. They came after the Spitfire and the Mustangs. The Typhoons had been over France days before and knocked out most of the radar.

40:33 They knocked it all out with rockets. It was left at there, purposely. So the Germans would think 'Ahh, they missed that.' So, the invasion fleet went down that way, and we went across there. We were flying out at precisely two hundred feet

41:00 and the pilots used to change over so precise. The pilots used to have to change over every….They'd just swap. They didn't change their seats, they just swapped the controls. These two navigators, one looking over to see if the other one's correct, and the these people just dropping this stuff down the chute. Now these bundles of window, I believe there was eleven strips in the bundle,

41:31 they'd drop them down the chute, I think also it would be every half a minute. So it was designed to land in the water, and off the radar screens when the next light was dropped. There would be two lights

in the air at the one time.

Tape 6

00:32 **Can you tell us about the briefing on D Day?**

They told us what it was for, and as well as our planes that were actually in the operation, they had another three fully trained crews flying up and down…Because what we did was absolutely essential. They couldn't afford to lose any one of them or the thing would fail.

01:00 And I believe we were spread out over fourteen miles, that's what I read in one of these books. But anyway, there was another three fully trained crews flying up and down in England, to replace one of us if there were any that had to drop out, shot down, whatever reason.

01:30 And there was another two fully trained crews sitting on the base, that didn't have to go anywhere, but they weren't needed. There were two crews in each plane, too. Except the gunners, there was two crews in each plane. Anyway, what we were doing,

02:00 we started off the invasion fleet, flew out a little distance dropping this window, then back again. We were flying out from the coast a little way, dropping this window,

02:32 a precise amount of window, and it was timed so that when one lot of window was in the water, the next lot was leaving the aeroplane. So that's why you had two bomb aimers as well as two navigators. I understand the two navigators were keeping an eye on each other, it was that precise. And the pilots, they had to fly accurately, they'd get fatigued. So every half minute, they'd change over. They had to stay at precisely two hundred feet,

03:00 which is not very high, because if they suddenly appeared to shoot up two hundred feet or so, they would give the game away. They had to be precise. It was very accurate flying. Tommy Webster did this. And the main person on this raid, I read later on, was Group Captain Chesire, VC, he was doing the same thing.

03:30 Not with our squadron, but he was there doing it, too. Anyway, the idea was that this tin foil gave….the impression of a ship,

04:00 and by the time it got down in the water, there was another lot on the way. So the Germans got the impression that there was a convoy moving across the Channel towards France, at a rate of seven knots. When we got very close to the coast, searchlights came on. It was nearly dawn then.

04:30 And they were only scanning the water. Not once did they come up in the air. Not once, they just scanned the water. No machine gun fire, no anti-aircraft fire or anything like that. And we were almost on the coast when we finished, then we went home, back to base, back to debrief, back to bed. And then, the Americans sent over a whole wave, in DC3s,

05:00 dummy parachutes. Wooden figures. They tipped them all out, and the Germans were really confused. That's why the D Day was a real success, and that's why it was kept secret for twenty years. They may have wanted to use it somewhere else. It was brilliantly planned. And our squadron was

05:31 congratulated by the Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower. He congratulated our squadron by letter.

At the beginning, can you explain what the atmosphere at the briefing was like?

06:03 We weren't tensed up about it, we were happy about the invasion. But the invasion was kept dead secret. It's like the elections, you never know when the election is coming on.

You all left during the night?

Fortunately, I've got a log book, so I've got the exact time.

06:30 I remember the invasion fleet… And the surprising thing, and it still surprises me, there must have been all sorts of things being loaded on, they couldn't do it in the dark, so it was done at night-time so it was a blaze of light. You wouldn't believe it. Especially when the whole of England was normally completely blacked out. You couldn't have a light in your car. If you had a car or a motorbike, you had to have a hood over the thing with slots in it.

07:03 Like a tin can with slots in it, facing downwards. You couldn't see it from above.

What was the debriefing like when you came back that day?

I can't remember. I won't be telling any lies, but I just don't remember. But it was wonderful.

07:32 **When the whole operation was over, did you have a celebration at the mess? How did you**

everybody celebrate?

I don't believe so. Because pretty soon we were on more raids…

08:00 Straight after D Day, I might have been on another raid, I don't know. I'd have to look…(BREAK)

08:38 I didn't fly again until the 23rd of the 6th…

So you had a few weeks off?

Yeah. And all the green writing in there, the red writing is night-time flying. The black writing is training and day time flying,

09:00 but the green writing is day time operations. We could do that then, because I believe the Germans were completely short of fuel. The fighters were pretty useless…

Can you explain more about what was happening in the air, when you were going over on D Day?

09:30 **What could you see, from your position?**

Nothing. The more I think about it, the more I think there has got to be more credit to these two pilots. There's planes flying at the same height, doing the same thing, going in the same direction, and you'd never sight each other. They were spread over fourteen miles.

10:00 You had to make turns all the time. You would go out like that a certain distance, dropping window, coming back, not quite to the same point…We were progressing across the Channel at seven knots, and everybody else was, too. It was amazing that nobody slammed into us. Because there were two planes at two hundred feet,

10:30 and if they even touched even other they'd be in the drink straight away. Two hundred feet is nothing.

So you could see those other planes?

No, I didn't see a thing. But the searchlight came on when we got close to coast. It amuses me that the people manning the searchlights never knew, for an instance, that it was a decoy.

11:00 They were looking for ships. They were scanning the water and there was nothing there. It must have been amazing to them. On their radar, they had all these ships coming and there was nothing there. The Typhoons knocked out all the German radar completely out, unopposed, when they got there.

11:33 **So what was your target that day?**

We didn't have a target. There was no such thing as…Special training, we didn't know what for. Special detail. It was kept secret all those years. Twenty years it was kept secret before someone wrote up about it.

12:00 **So what happened when you got over there and the searchlight came up, and the decoy worked…**

Well, when we got virtually right on the beach, our time had finished. We turned around and went home. That was it, there was nothing for us to do anymore.

12:30 **So you were specifically there as a decoy?**

That's all. Just as a decoy. And they expected us all to be shot down.

Who expected you to be shot down?

People in Bomber Command, I suppose. They expected all these planes to be lost.

13:00 What it amounts to, they didn't think it would really succeed as well as it did. It succeeded fantastically.

When did you hear from the pilot that it had been a success?

Not from the pilot. As soon as we got home, we knew the invasion fleet…When we got home the invasion fleet had landed.

13:30 Now, when I did the Gunnery Leader's Course, and I was eventually sent back home to be a gunnery leader on Liberator bombers in the Pacific somewhere…But while I was in the harbour, on the ship that brought me home, by the Panama Canal, the war in Europe had finished.

14:01 The Germans had surrendered, capitulated, finished. Now, I got a lot when I first came home. Disembarkation leave. When I went back, they gave me a bit more leave again, probably another week or two, and then…

14:30 The Americans, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Tibbets dropped the Bomb on Hiroshima, and soon after they bombed Nagasaki with another atom bomb. Before I was sent to Kuttabul, to do the, this extended

training, the war had finished. It actually finished when I got to Temora to train on the Moralia ….

15:01 They didn't know what to do for a while, I wasn't in the air. Now some people, including a fighter pilot that I knew, and Fred Banning that I knew, he didn't go back on leave, he didn't go back after his leave…So during the period

15:30 that he was on this extended leave, they brought in the interim air force. But I'd already been discharged…I would have joined the interim air force, but he didn't join the interim air force, he didn't carry it on for quite a few years. He became a pilot with Qantas, then he was on 747s. But he drank himself to death.

16:01 He died in his early sixties, Freddy.

When you were in Europe, did you hear anything of your father?

My father? Oh yes, my father, like I told, he got married again and he came back from the war. My father was in hotels, and he had a hotel…

16:33 in Goulburn. When I came back from leave, I stayed with him and his wife in Goulburn. I've got two step brothers, both alive. But my father and my step-mother are now dead. My father died because of smoking. He didn't live to be sixty. He was fifty nine.

17:00 He used to smoke three packets a day. I hate to see people smoking. Terrible. My father and my younger brother died through smoking. My brother died at sixty four, from stomach cancer…definitely through smoking.

17:30 (BREAK)

18:00 …must be a very, very addictive drug, Occasionally in the air force, they offered me cigarettes, but I didn't like it, so I never got addicted to smoking.

What did your dad do in the Second World War?

I'll tell you…In the First World War, he was Cavalry, Light Horse. In the Second World War he was a transport driver.

18:31 He was forty when he went. He was in the Middle East. In France in the First World War, didn't go to Gallipoli. His mother, my grandmother, had six sons and a daughter, and four of her sons were actually killed at the war. And an uncle that I had, he died because he was gassed during the war.

19:00 All the time I knew him he was TPI [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pensioner].

Did you hear from your father during the Second World War? Did he write to you?

I can't remember….Actually, I remember writing to my father,

19:30 and I told him…I couldn't talk about D Day, but D Day was actually on his birthday. He was born on the 6th of June. I said, "I flew on your birthday." During the war, if you wrote something in a letter, you know what they used to do, they'd cut the section out with a razor blade…

20:11 Because they mentioned things they didn't want mentioned.

What sort of operations did you go on after D Day?

I was on Lancasters by then, and it was regular targets.

20:30 **Can you describe some of those raids? Do you remember any specific raids you did after D Day?**

Did you record what I said about the last run I went on Wilhelmshaven, when the intelligence officer said, "As far as I know, there is no military objective there. But it's an old town and it should burn well." I was horrified, but that's what he said….

21:09 **Did you end up bombing that town?**

Oh yes. We dropped firebombs on it, incendiary bombs. Terrible things. And as I told you, incendiary bombs were made up in angle wire, about that diameter,

21:32 and all these little bombs, I think they were one and a half pound, each little bomb, incendiaries, all inside that. When they were dropped out of the plane, they must have split open, and all the bombs went everywhere. Awful things. We drop things on targets…

22:01 For instance, 'delayed action bombs.' So people were forced in an air-raid shelter, and the bomb might go a week later, purposely. That's the type of things that we did and you don't hear about, but that's true.

What was the strategy in that?

To demoralise the people.

22:30 See, otherwise if they just dropped the bombs, or incendiary bombs, or blockbusters, when it was all over they'd sound the all clear and they would come out of the air-raid shelter, but this time they couldn't. With these things, they couldn't. Because they would go off…They could go off weeks after. They were Delayed Action Bombs.

23:02 Now another occasion, I had a motorbike during the war, and motorbikes were very good actually. I think I brought it for about two pound ten. But to ride it at night-time,

23:30 you had to have this hood…It's like a jam tin over the front of your headlights, with slits cut in it, and the slits pointed down at an angle. From above you wouldn't see anything. I haven't told you about leave. Every six weeks, aircrew got one week's leave.

24:01 You could go anywhere you liked in England. And the bomb aimer and myself used to go to London. On one occasion, when I had this motorbike, I rode it all the way to London. Quite a long way, and my hands were frozen, you've got to grip the handlebars like that, and it was quite painful.

24:30 When I got into London, looking for somewhere to park my bike, an air-raid came over, buzz bombs. And believe it or not, I was still on my motorbike and the whole of London, I'm the only person in London, I couldn't see anybody. Everybody's gone. Usually they'd go down into the nearest underground.

25:01 In fact, if you travelled anywhere in London, there were all these people sleeping in these undergrounds, with blankets and everything like that. But this buzz bomb came over, and everybody got out of the way. I was amazed how slow I was, I didn't want to leave my motorbike, I was wondering where to park my motorbike.

25:30 But anyway, that was it. I was in the Strand Palace Hotel, where most Australians went. When the buzz bombs came over you would hear the air-raid sirens first. Then these things would come over, and they'd start firing at them, guns were going everywhere.

26:03 And then gradually you would hear the noise. Each buzz bomb sounded like a hundred motorbikes with no exhaust. And because of the jet powered engine, they had a ram jet engine, they made a terrible noise, coming closer and closer to you. You'd get under the bed in the hotel…

26:30 The beds were very good, there was a mattress on the bed.…But you'd hear these buzz bombs coming, getting louder and louder. And how they used to work, they ran out of fuel. They'd just glide in, hit the ground and go off. So you hope it goes

27:00 and it gets closer and closer to you, and you hope it keeps going. Your heart is in your mouth while this is going on. And all these people who were essential services, like telephone operators and people who worked on the railways, they used to give them leave out of London, because these buzz bombs were terrible. They'd go night after night…

27:33 So these people who were in the essential services in London, they used to give them leave to go to another city for a while. And after that, they had the V2s. Now the V2s were rocket propelled.

28:00 They'd go very high and very long range. And they were designed by Werner Von Braun. He was the guy who eventually went to America, and made the space program in America possible. And some of these people that worked in Peenemunde in Germany went to Russia, they were captured by the Russians.

28:30 And the Russians, for a while, were more advanced than us in space. And somebody said that was because their Germans were cleverer than our Germans. So that was the Germans doing these things. I was telling you about the V2s. When they went off, you were safe. You know why?

29:00 I told you about the speed of light? Sound travels at seven hundred and eighty miles an hour. If you've ever been to a cricket match and you're back in the stands, you can see the batsman strike the ball, quite clearly, and a second later you can hear the whack of the bat.

29:34 But anyway, when a V2 went off, it's already landed, and the sound… Sometimes, you would hear the sound of it coming after one went off. I was in London so I heard plenty of V2s explode. Not close to me, but I've heard them go off.

30:00 **What were some of the things you heard after those raids?**

Well, the fighter pilots, some very brave fighter pilots discovered…The thing about the V2s, I think they had about a ton of high explosives in them, just the V1, not the V2, just the V1, the flying bomb.

30:30 To shoot them down, you were shooting at something that was loaded…Kerosene is what propelled them, but it was loaded with a ton of explosive. To shoot them down, you were risking blowing yourself up, too. Your plane is flying behind it…Anyway, some brave soul decided that they could tip them over. The Typhoons were faster than a buzz bomb,

31:00 they can fly faster, and also if they were up in the air, they could dive bomb them. You get a lot of speed when you dive. And some brave soul decided he could get underneath it, bank and tip the thing over, and of course if it tips over, the gyroscope that kept it on course would tumble and the thing would crash. And that's what they did. But the first guy that did that was very game. But they used to shoot them down as well.

31:30 **When you were on the ground you experienced bombs coming down, did you ever think of the people on the ground when you were in the air? We've had other pilots talk to us about not thinking about the people…**

No, like I told you, a couple of times I was just horrified when the intelligence officer said what he did about Wilhelmshaven,

32:00 but no…I did know that when people had been bombed, and Germans were brought down, farmers attacked them with pitchforks and put them in the fires, and that used to happen overseas, too. But you can imagine a man and all his family,

32:30 and all his brother's family, being killed because they lived…during an air-raid, and an Allied pilot or aircrew parachuted down…You'd be lucky if the army (UNCLEAR), instead of civilians. They've always told us that. Hope the army catches you.

33:06 **When you were in Europe, did you hear much of what was happening in the Pacific?**

Not a lot, no. When you were on leave you would go to the movies in Leicester Square. Gone With The Wind was still running. It was running in Sydney when I left, in two movie houses, in St James and the Liberty Theatre in Sydney,

33:32 it would run at two shows at two movie houses for eleven months. But in London, it was still running, and I actually saw General Eisenhower in a staff car, in Leicester Square, but there was some other movie on, a war movie, that he came to see.

34:03 If you went, you would see newsreels of the war. All you would see was the damage done to Britain, the schools and the churches and the hospitals, and the hospital ships that the Germans bombed. I'm quite sure they were bombed accidentally. They wouldn't mention

34:30 all the wharves that had been blown up, the ammunition dumps, they wouldn't mention that.

What was your opinion about the Japanese at that point?

Well, we were taught horrible stories about the Japanese, how cruel they were to people, so we hated them. But we sort of admired the Germans. I'll tell you one thing I know, because I was there, I've never read it,

35:00 the Germans were bombing London continuously with the V bombs. In Christmas, 1944, they stopped for a couple of days. There was none. There was definitely none, they stopped over Christmas, before they started again. For definitely at least two days there was no bombs at all. You don't read about things like that, but it was true.

35:34 **So you thought in some ways they were a better enemy than the Japanese?**

I'm quite sure. One of my most admired commanders of the whole war was General Rommel.

Why was that?

36:02 He was on the enemy side, but he was never accused of any atrocity. When you read about Allied prisoners and the Rats Of Tobruk, how they were treated by Rommel. And there was a German fighter pilot, Erich Hartmann, he shot down three hundred and sixty three planes.

36:30 How about that. And there was four German pilots who shot down over two hundred planes, so they were pretty good. I don't think we achieved anything like that.

The people above you, your superiors, who of those people did you respect a lot?

37:00 Well, the wing commander in charge of squadron, he was a very English guy, a double barrelled name, Wing Commander Fenech-Wilson. But he had been in Canada and he married the heiress to the Pepsi-Cola fortune. He was a good guy.

37:30 When I went for a commission, my CO Fenech-Wilson sent me to see the group captain, who was in charge of the whole base. He recommended me to go on to the group headquarters, to Air Vice Marshal Harrison. And he had an adjutant, who amounts to his office boy,

38:00 he was a squadron leader, and he was okay, but…I was a flight sergeant at the time. But when I got to meet the Air Vice Marshal Harrison, who was in charge of all of three group,

38:30 that is Seventy Five Squadron and all the other squadrons, he was a big shot…Well, I was only talking to

him for less than five minutes, and I sat on the end of his desk. He was so down to Earth. He was a regular person, not pompous in anyway.

39:00 And he was the biggest shot of all. On our squadron, the King and Queen visited, Queen Mary, King George wasn't it? They came to visit our squadron. I didn't see them. They apparently came to the group captain's house and had a cup of tea. I remember they gave

39:31 the ground crew permission to wash down all the planes…hundred octane petrol. They washed down all the planes, so all the ground staff were issued with new uniforms.

Tape 7

00:37 **Can you tell us about the end of the war and where you were and what happened?**

Well, when the war ended, I was on a ship returning to Australia. I was actually in Sydney Harbour…

01:09 when the war in Europe finished. And I had done a Gunnery Leader's Course, and I was to go on a refresher course first, then go to a training unit to train on Liberators

01:34 to fight the Japanese in the Pacific. So after coming back from overseas, you get a certain amount of leave, I got quite a bit of leave. But while I was on holidays, waiting to be posted to Tocumwal, where the Liberators were…The base commander,

02:00 Wing Commander Billy Brull, he was the base commander of Tocumwal. The base was an amazing place. It was done up…from the air it looked like a town. All the accommodation for the crews and everybody, and all the administration buildings, from the air it looked from the town, but was an air force base.

02:31 But while I was on leave, waiting to go to Tocumwal, the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. And then a week after, they dropped another bomb…So I still went to Tocumwal, but

03:00 they didn't know what to do with us. I didn't get to fly on a Liberator, except the trip back to Mascot, where I was to go to Bradfield Park and be discharged, and that was it.

Do you remember the day that the war ended and what the mood was like in Sydney that day? What the atmosphere was like when people realised the war was over?

Fantastic. I went to a night-club with Betty.

03:31 She was the sister of my friend who I was in the air force with, Fred Manning. I got home just in time to be groomsmen at the sister's wedding. And we went to the Roofeld nightclub at Kings Cross,

04:01 and it was a big celebration. It was crazy…

Can you tell us how it was crazy? What was going on?

Well, it was the end of the war, total war, both enemies had been defeated. After six years, and people had been suffering rationing and all sorts of things,

04:30 for that time, all sorts of restrictions. It was all over.

What was going on in your mind that day, what were you feeling?

I don't know…But I was in electronics. My wife's brother and I

05:00 started a radio business. This was way before even black and white televisions, but you couldn't buy radios. And we started manufacturing radios and selling them.

Did you have any trouble settling back into civilian life after the war?

Yep. There was quite a bit of trouble. I went to work for a while.

05:30 I offered my services to a fellow who had a business, who I used to work for once. He had a business in Kirribilli in Sydney. I went to work for him, for a week, for nothing, to get a bit of experience repairing radios and stuff, which I did. I started this radio business with Fred Manning.

06:02 And my father had a few hotels, but he had a hotel down in Yass. And he was having trouble with the manager. The police apparently in each town, the hotel licences were controlled by a licensing sergeant, and because of the licensing sergeant, those people had to leave.

06:30 There were fights. Apparently this nice little bloke who managed the hotel, he used to be a jockey, with a big blonde wife and she was continually flirting with the customers and there was all sorts of arguments, so the police…So I managed this hotel.

Why do you think it was difficult for you to settle back into life after the war?

07:02 Well, I actually liked the war. Dreadful thing to say, I know. The war wasn't all bad, there were a lot of good times. Everybody must have told you that before?

Some people have. What did you like about the war?

07:35 Well, one thing about being in aircrew in the air force, you weren't sleeping in muddy trenches and ditches, like they were in New Guinea, being bothered by leeches and cockroaches. I used to go and sleep in a nice bed, with sheets and everything. That was one good thing about it. And the officers mess was very nice,

08:00 it was very good. It was like a gentlemen's club. Anyway, you go on leave and you had a good time.

What about the relationships you had with other people, was that important? Your relationship with your mates on the crew?

Look, probably because the Americans had so much money…

08:30 You got the impression that the English and the Americans didn't like each other. We never flew, especially before D Day, we never flew in day time whatsoever. But we used to see the barrages and the Fortresses going over. And I used to get a burst of delight out of saying "There goes the guys who are winning the war for England."

09:00 You'd get a good-natured bite. But I got the impression…It was probably because the Yanks had so much money, better uniforms and everything. And the girls used to go for them. The British airmen didn't like that.

09:30 **So when the war finished, what was it that you really missed about it?**

Well, all your mates and everything…You'd miss all the mates you had, everywhere. You'd miss the advantage that the uniform gave you.

10:00 **What was the advantage that the uniform gave you?**

I don't know…I'd say it was an advantage being in an air force uniform.

Was it that the girls were falling all over you?

It sounds like I'm exaggerating. I told you before that…

10:31 For some reason or other, our pilot never went on leave with us, but he had some attraction to a small city in England called Bletham. He used to go there, every leave, and I never did understand why. And the bomb aimer and I would mostly go to London and stay in Strand Palace Hotel.

11:01 I was telling you before, we used to have a week's food coupons, which if you stayed in the hotel more than four days, the coupons had to go to the hotel. So we used to stay three days, keep our coupons. We would go to a place in Marble Arch in London…

11:30 There was an old woman, we used to call her 'Ma.' I said old, but she was probably in her late fifties, I suppose. She had all sorts of steak and milk. And we used to give her all our coupons for one meal. You could stay somewhere else for one night, and then you could go back to the Strand Palace again. They never pressed it. They got by.

12:00 The meals weren't crash hot. The staple at breakfast would be powdered egg. You don't see it now. I don't know what powdered egg was, but it was done up like scrambled eggs, and toast, and regular things like corn flakes. Milk was very hard to get, fruit was very hard to get. I saw in a shop,

12:30 a banana, way back then, for thirty shillings sterling. And peaches, a few apples. I think they used to grow in England, but fruit was very scarce. I had another mate, he did his tour of operations, he's still alive here on the Gold Coast but he's got something wrong with him. He's in retirement village.

13:05 He finished this tour of operations…What he used to do, he used to is fly a lay light Wellington. That is a Wellington which back in the fuselage had a regular Ford V8 engine in it, and it used to carry a big searchlight underneath, and they were searching for submarines in the North Sea and the Irish Sea.

13:30 That's what his job was. And he had a…device with a code name called High T. Now what High T was, was a little transmitter with a microphone on it, on a buoy, and they dropped it in the water, and they had radio direction finding and they'd drop various things, and it had a microphone in it,

14:00 and the submarines engines going, even the electric engines of the submarine, that they had to use underwater, they could pick up the noise of this and then they could fly in with the light and drop depth charges, that's what they used to do. So he's finished this tour of operation…I saw him once on leave in London, he was my mate. He was at the EFTS with us.

14:33 After his tour of operation, he used to ferry planes out to the Middle East, English planes, and out to

various places. And believe it or not, he used to fly out to the Middle East with seedlings from England. I don't know where he got them from. He'd fly out with seedlings and he'd bring back fruit.

15:01 Instead of his parachute, he had to fly without a parachute. That might sound crazy, but that's what he used to do.

And he used to bring the fruit back to you guys?

No, he used to bring it back and sell it. I didn't find out until I saw him again after the war. He would get seedlings from somewhere in England, pay a lot of money for them, sell them on the black market in the Middle East,

15:30 and he used to bring back…there was plenty of fruit in the Middle East. He had to do it without his parachute, bag. They used to sit on their parachutes. So he used to take the fruit back in the dish where his parachute would sit under his seat.

When you look back on your own war experience, what is it that you remember most about it now?

16:01 **What is the most significant memory for you about the war?**

Well, it's an awful thing to say, but it was probably the most enjoyable time of my life. I felt I was something. That is about it, I suppose. When I was in operation in bomber command, I felt that I was invincible.

16:30 When I went to Gunnery Leaders School against A pilots with camera guns, I found that was a false impression. These guys used to fly Mustangs, Spitfires…There was a famous Canadian pilot, he wasn't there when I was there, this was just before, the course before I got there, in Yorkshire in England, this Screwball Burling,

17:00 he was the top fighter ace in England. The best fighter pilots, the best gunners, in the air force were sent there…They had these guys flying so close to me, I could have touched their whirling propellers and they followed me around a corkscrew. And I thought 'These crazy guys are going to kill me when I am going to go home.'

17:35 And what we used to do, as well as what we used to do on high level stuff…fighter affiliation, you against the fighter, and so we were doing all that time, at the Gunnery Leader's School, we did advanced stuff

18:00 down amongst the trees. Down amongst the trees…And they were told not to go below two hundred feet. But I've often looked up at trees…scary. It was scary when you thought you'd finished the thing and you were going to go home.

Was there one particular moment when you thought

18:30 **'This is it. I'm not going to make it.'**

I think lots of times at this school because, on operation, until I got to about the twenty fifth trip, you don't expect to come home. You don't expect that you are going to get through. Hardly anybody ever did, so you don't expect it. When you got close, you think 'Well, I might make it.'

19:02 After that you get cautious, and probably fatigued. These guys, I thought they were going to kill me, unnecessary, they were crazy.

Did that situation create any resentment between you and the pilots?

19:30 No, I think they were doing it to everybody. I found it scary.

Did any of the other crew members talk about them feeling the same way?

They weren't crew members. I was completely away from my crew. There wasn't a soul I knew at this Gunnery Leader's School. Nobody.

20:00 **Did anyone else you knew talk about feeling the same way that you were feeling?**

I don't remember. I just don't remember. I suppose they would have been…If they weren't scared, they were crazy. A train moved with over twelve hundred horsepower, with whirling propellers, coming this close and you're doing evasive action.

20:30 It's amazing they didn't run into you accidentally. Not on purpose. But they could have accidentally run into you. But after you were doing that, at night-time, the gunnery leaders on this course, and the pilots, instructors, you can go into a little room and watch the combat on a screen. And they'd award who shot down who.

21:00 **So what do you think it was that gave you the strength to get through all those operations and those very, very frightening situations?**

Well, the consequences of saying you don't want to go,

21:30 because some people didn't, were much more horrendous than getting killed, I think. You get your papers stamped LMF, Lack of Moral Fibre. A person I and Fred Manning trained with, he was a pilot, for some reason or other he got scrubbed,

22:00 and he was fitted up with a Canadian crew…And for some reason he ran his plane off the end of the runway, and his plane landed in a lake. That's one reason, and he nearly drowned in the lake

22:30 because he was locked in the gun turret and all the hydraulics were off. But anyway, when he flew on operations very early in the piece, he got shot down, and he bailed out. He got picked up and brought back to England, got leave, and then he didn't want to fly. They sent him on some sort of leave again. Still didn't fly. And they sent him back home. And when I came home, he was working in the stores department

23:01 at Bradfield Park, he'd had all his rank taken off him, he was just an LAC [Leading Aircraftsman], and he was a flight sergeant, and he was going to be discharged LMF. Awful. But anyway, that's one person I know, but there was a lot. They reckon in that book, if the medical officer got a bit lax in letting people

23:30 go off ops, it would spread through the squadron like wildfire. So they were very strict. I've heard of cases, where…The crew took off from England, flew up and down the Channel, they were tracked on radar all the time,

24:01 they took notes of where they'd been, and they hadn't been anywhere, and they landed and they were all court-martialled, the whole crew. Not someone I know of, but someone people know of, that's the story.

So when you look back on your own time in the war, what do you feel most proud about?

24:30 I felt I was very lucky, but once again I enjoyed my time in the war. I've been a master weightlifter for quite a few years and I've been a world championship and everything and I've been all over the world. That time had finished now, because the last time I went I didn't sleep and I had high blood pressure and I had to pull out.

25:03 What happened, I can't sleep on a plane, so I took sleeping tablets. It was a long way between Brisbane and Los Angeles, and we had to catch a flight a few hours later to go to Savannah, Georgia. So on the plane, I asked Betty for the sleeping tablets,

25:32 and she said the carry on bags, "they must be in the hold," so I couldn't sleep. So, we were delayed quite a while. First of all, the delay was in New Zealand. It went from Brisbane to New Zealand first, and it was an hour and a half delay.

26:03 I thought I'm going to miss the flight between Los Angeles and Savannah, Georgia, and believe it or not, it says…when you buy your ticket, "If there is a delay anywhere, the airline is not responsible."

26:30 But I was scared I was going to miss the flight, but I didn't. But when we were delayed in Los Angeles, to go to Georgia, we had been travelling for a long while on no sleep, it was eighteen mile away from the hotel, the airport, got a taxi, the taxi driver took us, we got to the hotel at twenty past one,

27:00 and I hadn't slept for four days, not slept at all. And because of that, I couldn't sleep at all. We got our big bag and unpacked it, and they weren't there either. She had left them at home…

27:45 **You say the war was the best time of your life. What was the single thing about it, that made it that?**

The mateship that you got in the air force was incredible. We're still mates.

28:00 Someone from such a long while ago, wonderful, wonderful, that's one thing. On our squadron, believe it or not, this medical officer, he actually came back to our squadron reunion on Anzac Day in Sydney every year. There's fewer…some of those people were dead in their sixties.

28:30 But there's a German who comes there, he lives next to one of the bomb aimers on the squadron. He was a chemist, in Macquarie Street, Sydney. He lives in a big house in Avalon, next to a German fighter pilot. And at one stage

29:03 the Manly Daily got these two people together, about going to the reunion, and they got their log books, and they were both up, he was a night-fighter pilot, they were both up over the same target at the same time, during the war, on a given night. Not in my crew. But that was amazing. Arthur Levy, he was a good friend.

29:30 And I believe this German pilot, at one stage managed one of the suburban RSL clubs in Victoria. German fighter pilot. That's very good.

Is Anzac Day important for you?

I've never been in the march in my life,

30:01 but I've gone to these reunions when I've been in Sydney, but now it's a long way to drive….So I haven't been going for several years. I usually ring my bomb aimer

30:32 the day before Anzac Day and have a talk to him and find out how he is and so forth. But there are fewer and fewer of these guys left, and if they are they are certainly in their eighties.

What do you think it was about the friendship, the mateship, during that time that was different to friends that you made outside of the war?

I suppose you're doing the same thing and you're tied together

31:01 for a long time, and that's it. Even the flying school, there was a lot of people… I will tell you something about SFTS. There are a couple of fairly well known people…One of them was a fellow named Kim Anderson, and he was the son of the people

31:30 who make Anderson's seeds. Later on, after the war, he became the Governor General's pilot, and the Governor General at that time was the Duke of Gloucester, in 1945. He was the pilot of his personal plane flying him everywhere around the country. Another person on the O.T.U. a fellow named Fred Hanson,

32:04 he'd been in the police force, and he was probably a couple of years older than me. He was flying Wirraways, and he went to the war. After the war, the police commissioner of New South Wales, his name was McKay,

32:30 and he opened all the police boys clubs in New South Wales. They were the first. Gymnasiums, libraries and everything for young people. McKay's idea. And McKay decided to buy an aeroplane for the police. It was an Anson, I believe. And guess what? He picked Fred Hanson to fly the aeroplane, and he was a constable and he went back to the police force. But he made him an immediate sergeant. That's a quick promotion.

33:00 I believe it takes fifteen years to become a sergeant in the police force, but McKay made Fred Hanson a sergeant. And while I was in Yass, running the hotel for my father, a policeman down in Yass, a good guy, named Mick Hennessy, he was in the police barracks, police training school with Fred Hanson and he knew very well. He said he would end up being the police commissioner,

33:30 and he was. Because he could fly an aeroplane, he was promoted from a constable to a sergeant, just like that, and he maintained that seniority all the way up.

34:00 **You were one of the people who helped to win the war, do you think we have won the Peace?**

Well, with the Germans certainly so, and the Japanese. The one that is going on now in Iraq is different altogether. So far, they certainly haven't won that peace.

What would you say to a young man who was thinking about going over to Iraq now?

34:33 **What would you recommend to that person about whether they went to war or not?**

I wouldn't attempt to tell them to go over, that is something you've got to make up your own mind about. You either want to do it, you don't want someone to tell you, you should go. No.

If someone was going to war, what sort of advice would you give them?

35:01 Well, everything is entirely different. I don't know. I wouldn't have any advice at all.

Do you ever dream about the war?

No. I used to, but I don't know.

What did you use to dream?

Nothing very important. I never dreamt I was going to be killed or anything like that.

35:35 Occasionally I dream now, but the dreams don't make any sense. Something about some people I know, but they don't make any sense whatsoever. Very often if you don't relate a dream first thing of the morning, then you forget about it.

36:00 Some of the things I've dreamt about just don't make any sense whatsoever.

Is there anything about your experience in the war that you haven't told us that you would really like to tell us?

I told you about the buzz bombs, they used to be scary…

36:32 And I told you about the Germans stopping the buzz bomb attacks, for at least two days over Christmas in 1944. They definitely didn't come over.

Can you imagine for someone like myself who wasn't there, the way you describe what happened, it must have been quite frightening, and there was a high casualty rate.

37:00 **How is it that you can actually enjoy that experience? Even though there was this incredible fear and risk of death?**

Well, it is pretty easy to explain, I think. People going down a big dipper, they get scared, and they pay to get scared. People do bungey jumps off tremendously high things on a piece of elastic rope, and

37:30 they actually pay to be scared. The fear of being scared, it's an adrenaline rush I suppose. Thinking back on these tablets we received, I think there was something in those that made you forget your fears, I think. And there was something

38:00 recently about the pilots being given some sort of stimulus. But anyway, look, even a cup of coffee, I don't drink coffee at all, but I had coffee when I was in weight lifting contests, and to me that is a stimulant and that is not illegal because everybody drinks coffee. I think that it gave me a great help.

38:30 But I'm sure that there was something in those tablets that made you forget your fear. They were called Wakey Wakey tablets. And this chemist, he reckoned they were Benzedrine or Dexedrine, and apparently very bad if you've got high blood pressure. I got a hundred percent disability pension. They weren't going to give me a disability pension before,

39:00 until we thought about these tablets that we were given. I got letters from the crew and other members of the squadron to say, "Yes, we were given these." Now, where Fred Manning was, that's my wife's brother, he wasn't given those things at all. So, purely the MO, the medical officer on our squadron… I've spoke to other people who were also on bombers, and they weren't given those at all.

39:30 But….They were probably bad, but I haven't got a doubt that they saved my life. Because at the least they stopped me from going to sleep. Because one particular trip was eight and a half hours…

Do you have a final comment that you would like to say to all Australians?

40:04 No, I can't think of anything.

Anything about war in general, about life?

I'd say something about the war in general. The civilians…especially the people in England, and the Germans, too, it must have been terrible.

40:31 I know we were dropped Delayed Action Bombs, that is terrible. Certainly it demoralised the people. Because otherwise, you go down in the air-raid shelter, then you receive the All Clear sounds, they sound All Clear all the time, you come out, you go back to sleep and it's all over. But with Delayed Action Bombs, that is not the case.

41:02 You go out the front door in three days time and a bomb blows up. It blows your house up in three days time, or a week's time. Some of these bombs, they were so heavy, they would actually bury into the ground. One thing I admired about all the people in the whole of the war, the people in bomb disposals.

41:30 That was a marvellous thing that they did, incredible things. They were thinking of all sorts of things to trick the people who tried to disarm bombs, and yet they had to disarm an unexploded bomb. Because if it landed in field, they could blow it up intentionally. But if it landed in the middle of the city, they had to be disarmed. I would never be game to do that…

INTERVIEW ENDS