

# Australians at War Film Archive

## William Scott (Bill) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1834>

### Tape 1

- 00:40 **To begin with, Bill, thank you very much for doing this. The archive wouldn't exist without you generously agreeing to participate. So from the office and us, thanks a lot for doing it. The first question, as I just explained, is a summary. What we need is just a summary of your life,**
- 01:00 **and to that... Briefly take me through where you born and grew up?**
- Well, I was born in the town of Dungog in the Hunter Valley, north of Maitland, small town, two to three thousand people. I went to primary school there. We had to in those days travel for secondary schooling in Maitland which was about thirty miles away, so that was a long day, especially in winter.
- 01:30 Following secondary schooling, I went to work in Newcastle as part of BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary] as a junior clerk. In that particular time, the war had started then. And after a while, I felt the need to get away from BHP and enlist so I made application with a friend of mine.
- 02:00 When I was nineteen and we had our medical and were accepted. We went into training in the air force at Bradfield Park in Sydney. From there we were both sent off for pilot training. My mate went to Temora and I went to Narrandera in this area here. Following Narrandera,
- 02:30 I went to Canada with the Empire Air [Training] Scheme, training on the prairies in Canada. From there we went off to England. My friend was trained as an instructor but I went to AFU [Advanced Flying Unit] experience in England. From there I went out to the Middle East - out to Palestine. There I crewed up and after training
- 03:00 went onto a bomber squadron in southern Italy. Following that experience I went back to Palestine to become a staff pilot with the Middle East Staff Navigation School and I was there when the European war ended. And I was in Egypt waiting to come home when the Pacific war ended. I returned
- 03:30 home and after a little while recommenced my employment with BHP in the office. Being a protected industry, BHP, not many people got away from BHP. So after a while, it was a sort of a job settling down, I heard about the teacher shortage. I had the necessary qualifications for that so I applied for teacher
- 04:00 training. That's in the primary level. After training in Sydney for a couple of years I came into the Wagga area teaching at a one-teacher school up in the hills from Tarcutta. From there I went back into my home area of Stroud at a central school. It was at a central school where I met my wife, who was teaching secondary. After a number of years we married and we went to
- 04:30 Grenfell up in the Lachlan Valley and spent time at a number of schools up there. In time, after a while I came back to Wagga, surprised, but came back to teach at two schools here before retiring. And we are still here.
- All right, that is a very succinct summary. Two questions I just wanted detail on. Where were you based**
- 05:00 **in southern Italy? What was the name of the place?**
- Foggia - it was the Foggia Main. It was the main aerodrome in a big cluster - because not - I joined a bomber - a RAF [Royal Air Force] squadron part of 205 Group. But in the whole area there we had the US 15th Air Force with about ninety heavy bomber
- 05:30 squadrons, which used to go out in the day time escorted by their fighters; they'd go way up north. It was quite concentrated, it was a very, not, well, special area, but very much congested. We would go out at that stage during night operations. But a very
- 06:00 significant point from my service there was that just before I joined the squadron, that Germany was on the way, the Russian were advancing from the east and in August Romania capitulated, the invasion of southern Italy occurred and therefore the Wellingtons didn't go as

- 06:30 far as they used to. We then concentrated on Italy [means France], Yugoslavia, supply dropping to the partisans and some trips down to Greece. That's what I did. And then towards the end of 1944, winter in Italy becomes very severe. We were living in tents, primitive conditions. And
- 07:00 the decision was made to start taking the Wellingtons out of service in that part of the world. And so various squadrons were finished, either disbanded or converted to Liberators, and by early 1945 that was about the last time the Wellingtons operated as bombers
- 07:30 in that area. As a matter of fact they were the, as far, I am fairly correct I think in saying, we were amongst the last to use the Wellington bomber, which is a two-engine medium bomber, in operations in the war. And the Liberators with us were the only Liberators to be used as night bombers.

- 08:00 The Yanks [Americans] wouldn't fly at night. That was left to the RAF [Royal Air Force] and the South Africans.

**Right so what you were flying Wellingtons right from your OTU [Operational Training Unit] onwards?**

Yes, I trained on them, flew them on operations, and it just so happened, my understanding is that the Middle East Staff Navigation School was changing from

- 08:30 the Yankee Baltimores, of which Aussie 454 Squadron flew in northern Italy and elsewhere earlier on, they were changing to Wellingtons. And what they were doing was sending experienced Wellington pilots and wireless operators to go to the school where four expired navigators had more advanced work,

- 09:00 so we would fly about putting into practice what they were supposed to do from their course.

**All right, we will just pause there for a second. Your growing up, can you tell us a little about Dungog?**

Yes, Dungog was at that time

- 09:30 quite a pleasant town, a quiet town. It had a butter factory and a sawmill, dairy cattle of course, beef cattle, timber in the area. But when I was a young fellow we became very much aware of the fact that Dad had been to the First World War. Not, he hardly ever spoke about it but there was a photograph of him in his uniform and various other group photographs.
- 10:00 He was a signaller in the 1st AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and he had spent about four years overseas, so that was an important part of his life. And he had been keeping company with Mum before he went overseas. So Anzac Day was always important to us. Dad
- 10:30 had been decorated in the battle of Passchendaele up in Ypres and he had survived the war, luckily, otherwise I wouldn't be here. But it was quite a quiet easygoing life for a while but Dad, Dad was working for my grandfather in a general store which he had built up, and Grandfather had diabetes.
- 11:00 Dad had got problems with gas in the First World War so the family was hit twice. Grandfather's business in the Depression gradually fell by the wayside. Dad got TB [tuberculosis] on his gassed lungs and he spent two years in a sanatorium. So
- 11:30 it was a real battle at home. When he came back he was involved mainly with drapery and mercery. He was a man that had to leave school when he was about fourteen because of difficulties with family. His Mother had died when she was twenty-nine so he had largely with the help of his grandparents brought himself up, so it was a struggle. Not that we kids were aware of it,
- 12:00 they kept a lot of things from us. So we had fun as best we could - very simple fun. We made our own fun - swimming in the river. And after Dad came back, my brother and I earned pocket money by going down to the golf club carrying the bags around. As Dad gradually got on his feet, I was able to
- 12:30 play a bit of tennis, which I liked. But as regards schooling, I haven't got great memories of high school because we'd have to leave town about half past seven in the morning, we would catch a train, leave by train to go to Maitland, and we would get home late in the afternoon,
- 13:00 often walk to home. Our house had two bedrooms. There had been three children [means four] - myself, I was the eldest, then a sister and a brother very close together. [William also had a sister, six years younger] Brother and I slept out on the verandah with blinds there, so we didn't have ideal conditions for what you'd called study and secondary work.
- 13:30 So we managed and actually it was when the war started I was seventeen towards the end of my high school days, when Dad said to me, "If you think I am going to sign papers for you to go to the war, you have got another think coming. It's a place for men and not boys." So I completed high school, thanks to him.
- 14:00 He and Mother went without a lot to get the whole family through high school. And I started working down in Newcastle. But I have got many happy memories of my life growing up in Dungog. A lot of

young people today would think, "Golly, how boring." My brother and I would go out and chase rabbits, for example.

- 14:30 Mum was always pleased if we could bring home rabbit carcasses to help with the food supply, not that we were desperate but anything like that helped. So that covers some of the points.

**Yep, I just want to ask you about some of the stuff you just brought up. Your dad you said that you were kept from learning about too much about his war experience? What did you**

- 15:00 **know about it growing up?**

Very little. We weren't told about his experiences and we didn't ask, that was important. Oh, we knew the importance of Anzac Day. Mother always, for example, got up and listened to the dawn service on the radio

- 15:30 because of the fact that Dad had been overseas for four years. There were people who she knew, including relatives, who didn't come back. Dad, because of his, I would say, his decoration, which was a French Croix de Guerre, he always led the march.
- 16:00 We kids always went along to Anzac Day, enjoyed wearing a medal or two of Dad's after that, and it was a part of our growing up. We knew a lot of the fellows at town, the men at town, that had been to the war and some of them were very fine men. So as regards the war, when we were growing up we really
- 16:30 didn't know much. We knew about names such as Pozières and Passchendaele and Baupaume and Bullecourt a lot. The words, we knew them, but they didn't mean much to us. I think that the men didn't want to tell us about many things that happened.

**Your father was against you joining up, I mean how do you think the war had affected him mentally?**

- 17:00 Well, he was against me joining up at the particular time because of my age. He was mentally a tough man, he had got a lot of Irish in him as well as Scots and English. He was a quiet man, but he was very sure of
- 17:30 himself in many ways. And I don't think he suffered at all. He was a man who got with things. I don't think he would have had a bar of counselling, for example, that they have today. But later on when I was nineteen and the Japs were in, I have laughed about it at times,
- 18:00 I said to him, and it was around the time that the Japs came in. I said, "I think it is time I enlisted," and he says, "I was wondering when you would make the move. What do you want to do?" And I said, "I want to join the RAAF and become a fighter pilot." And he said, "Well, I had hoped when you wanted to join, that you joined the artillery." And I laughed about that later on. But my younger brother
- 18:30 followed me in that he joined the air training corps and put in his application to join the air force and he went in not long after his eighteenth birthday, so Dad's thinking had changed.

**What was he like as a father?**

Very gentle. He wasn't a loving man from the point of view of giving you hugs

- 19:00 and things like that, but he was a very composed man. He was there when he was needed and that was as much as possible. He was very, shall I say, set back by his health. The amazing thing was that
- 19:30 he recovered and lived to seventy-eight, whereas his GP [General Practitioner] told him that he thought that he wouldn't survive his experience at the sanatorium. Whereas a brother that I am named after died when he was about fifty from war experiences like gas, so there is the difference. It is hard to tell what will happen.

**How did your father's sickness affect your family life**

- 20:00 **at that time?**

Well, it affected us greatly. I have often thought back and wondered how Mum coped. But she coped because I think she was helped a lot by people in the town. I have never questioned her about this. We sort of took things for granted in many ways. But

- 20:30 I think it was amazing how they coped when you read stories about others who didn't. But they went without a lot. Dad used to say, "If you can't afford it, go without." So they lived simple lives, although he became very much involved with the town. He served on the council for thirty or so years, he was mayor of the town during the war, he was a foundation member of the
- 21:00 bowling club, he did a lot for the ambulance service. In the early days he worked for the RSL [Returned and Services League]. He has got a street in the town named after him. So he was a man who got on with life.

**How about your mother, how did she cope during those years?**

I think with difficulty in that she went without

21:30 a lot, she had very little social life. Her life was devoted to the family, and in those early days there wasn't the transport. Dad, actually the first car he got was to help him with his business. Getting started, he started doing hawking in the district for a start, after a while he opened

22:00 a small shop down town. So it was a time when in the early days, there wasn't much money so they went without to a large extent. It wasn't until World War II that Dad received a pension of any kind to help him with his needs.

**Was the Depression something that affected**

22:30 **you and the area where you lived greatly?**

I am sure it did. Grandfather's business I mentioned earlier. He was a wonderful man, he was a very generous man, he was kind to people. I know when Dad was working with him he would say at times, "You're giving out too much to help people." And

23:00 Grandfather, I heard this comment, he said, "You can't see people starve." And Dad said, "No, but they will see you starve." But Grandfather became very sick and he died when I was fourteen, in 1936. He was sixty-six. I can't recall people in the town being destitute. I think we may have been

23:30 shielded from a lot. Maybe that town was better off than, say, down in Sydney, for example, the big cities. But there were a lot of people who lived frugally, but I didn't see anybody destitute if that is what you are looking for.

**Well what kind of help would people give each other, talking about helping?**

24:00 Well, I suppose they would mainly help in the way of food. People would grow things in their gardens, I assume. I know with our clothing, hand-me-downs were part of the deal. Mum laughed one time, she said my younger brother used to say, oh he wouldn't complain, but he said one time,

24:30 "When am I going to get something new? I am sick of getting hand-me-downs from Bill." So that is just one of those little comments, for all it's worth. But I think by and large the Depression didn't seem to me to hit the town as hard as it may have.

**What kind of food do you remember being on your table while you were growing up?**

25:00 Oh, that is an interesting one. The basic foods. Mum was a good cook, nothing fancy. We always took cut lunch to school because there were no canteens that I can remember in those days. But we took cut lunches, simple lunches, because that was

25:30 that was the way it went, largely. I remember (that was the kids across the road) who weren't as well off as we were, they used to have bread and dripping a lot of the time. But that was quite a big family, but they survived. We would, Mum loved to get some cheap fish at times. We would have the man calling out, "Fisho,

26:00 Fisho," and she would go out and buy fish. But it would be mullet, sea mullet, nothing like bream or the whiting that you get to know about later on. But I think she cooked scones and simple cakes and so forth. So we did all right.

**Was your mother,**

26:30 **what sort of personality did she have?**

Quiet, not outgoing, mainly because Dad was battling to make a living. Mum didn't join in any of the organisations such as church groups or, say, the CWA [Country Women's Association] and that sort of thing. She was a great

27:00 gardener, she loved to garden. So to a large extent her life was with family, the home, the garden. So she became... She wasn't a great mixer because she didn't get the opportunity. Where she was different from her sister, who never married. She got back on her,

27:30 she worked with Grandfather. She got on her feet in establishing a newsagency and the odds and ends that went with the newsagency. She was helped very much by good friends who were able to do that. That is, financially establishing herself. And she was a different personality altogether, simply because of the way they had to live.

**You mentioned the garden, can you tell us**

28:00 **what kind of garden you had around the house?**

Mainly trees and shrubs. She was a great one for putting in trees. Dad used to go crook at times if he backed the car into a tree or knocked something over. But he was... Back in those days you didn't have to pass stringent tests to get and keep your licence, but he managed. We actually had three blocks

28:30 in one in the town. In those days he got and built a house, he got the whole lot for about a thousand pounds, but that was a lot of money in those days. But Mum loved roses, so she had roses here, there and everywhere. Some fruit trees, you didn't have to worry about fruit fly in those days. And sort of larger trees such as coral trees, silky oak. It wasn't a flashy garden but she

29:00 had quite a lot in it, many shrubs.

**If you had to talk about your lifestyle as a kid, would you say you were town kids or country kids?**

Well being a small town, you were largely country kids. Swimming in the river was very popular, getting out of town,

29:30 going out after mushrooms; as I mentioned earlier, rabbits. But then as we got into our teens we were mainly, I never did get involved with say cricket or team games, I used to as I mentioned earlier carry a bag

30:00 for golfers for a while and hit a round at times. My brother and I developed a liking for golf in those days. I have laughed at times about how we went out of town and set ourselves up with jam tins as holes for hitting about. We went out onto a property. No hide, no Christmas cake, that was all right, we would hit over the dam and so on. But after the while the owners got a bit sick of

30:30 these kids out there and told us to get lost, so that finished that experience. But it was only a small golf course, in the town. Oh, out of the town on private property we'd have a hit around down there at times. And then I got to play some tennis, which I liked, with friends. But we were country kids.

**Were you a bit of a larrikin or were you very well**

31:00 **behaved? How would you describe yourself?**

I was a quiet type. I was never a larrikin, nor was my brother. I think if we had tried to do that we would have been put in our places quick and lively. We wouldn't have been knocked about at all, but Mum believed in a bit of firmness with a stick if need be.

31:30 I don't remember Dad ever giving us a whack. Although, I remember one time when brother got a bit cheeky with him and Dad told him to watch his Ps and Qs [manners] and brother gave a retort and said something about, "You can't catch me," but Dad did. He didn't ever do it again. So he wasn't treated harshly, but he got a surprise.

**Well, what sort of thing did you get in trouble for, as a lad?**

32:00 I don't know. That's a hard one. I must have been a bit of an angel. I can't remember. I suppose not doing as I am told. I think being the eldest, I was a bit spoilt.

**Do you remember what your brother had done on that occasion when your father chased him?**

No I don't, it is just that the fact that

32:30 Dad took after him that stuck in my mind, because he wasn't able to go too fast then.

**What about at school, were you a good student?**

No, I wouldn't call myself a good student. I don't have great recollections of what happened there. They had two secondary schools in Maitland.

33:00 One was the tech [technical school] and one was the high school. You would go to tech till the end of, or the Intermediate certificate. But I have smiled about it at times. The high school was supposed to be for the top dogs, you might say, scholastically, and the tech for the not so good, if you can put it that way. But I remember one pupil at the

33:30 tech, who left during his term there and went into the navy and ended up a rear admiral. I can remember other fellows who achieved very much in the hands-on part of life. Out in the country, becoming metallurgists and mechanics and so on. So I went to the tech for

34:00 start and Dad wanted me to finish off over at the high school. My brother was more of a scholar than I was, but when I reflect, some of the teachers to me didn't shape up. I can remember a maths teacher, all he did was... This was in the, oh, about fourth year

34:30 or so, and he would just fill the board with work and he would sit down and then he would give you the answers, and then at the end of the period he would walk out and that was it. I remember a language teacher, these are ones that sort of stick, he liked his grog too much, so that was quite evident. But there were good teachers there. But in those days there wasn't,

35:00 in my opinion, the personal help and interest that you get today. I think the schools are far better equipped and teachers trained provided they shape up to in comparison to our days. So when they talk about the good old days,

35:30 as regards to schooling, I don't agree with it.

**What were your favourite subjects?**

I think, I wasn't a scholar at maths, but my brother was. That is funny that in families. I liked more on the lay, on the English side.

36:00 Maths and science weren't my forté. Gosh, going back, what subjects did we have - history, geography, that is the side I liked. Language, the English language, not Latin or French. When I went over to high school I hadn't started the Latin or French, but my brother did and he lamented that later on, he said, "I'd rather have done the things that they did at the tech,

36:30 than doing French and Latin," so.

**What sort of fanciful dreams or ambitions did you have?**

Golly, fanciful dreams, I can't answer that one.

**Any ambition? Did you have anything that you wanted to do?**

37:00 Not, off the cuff. It was a case of getting a job that hopefully you were able to earn a living at. Dad didn't have any money to help any of us with university. I am sure my brother, who went into the Commonwealth Bank, could have

37:30 coped at university, and my sisters, I am speaking for them and not myself. But as far as the family was concerned, was get your Leaving certificate and then get a job, fit in where you can. So I didn't, I wasn't mechanically inclined, so it was... When I got a job

38:00 with BHP, it was a huge complex in Newcastle then. The aim was eventually to become an accountant or something like that, but that is do night study.

**Just coming back to your teenage years, what was the centre of entertainment for teenagers in around where you lived?**

38:30 Well, I mentioned tennis earlier. I liked tennis. As I said I didn't get into cricket. Some of the younger fellows played a bit of cricket but there wasn't any cricket in the form of teams, you just got together in a paddock, same as if you wanted to play hockey.

39:00 Sometimes we made our hockey sticks from bits of a gum trees branches and bung rules, and make up our own rules. Bike riding when you got a bike, brother and I didn't get pushbikes until we were well in our teens - they couldn't be afforded. So to a large extent you made your own fun.

**What sort of mixing did you**

39:30 **have with girls at that time?**

Very little. We had no parties in the house. We couldn't afford parties. So to a large extent the mixing with girls would be, well, we can't say much about school,

40:00 because the high schools were separate - separate girls, separate boys. No, we didn't really mix in groups socially. I suppose that affected a lot of people in many ways, by that. What am I trying to say. These days they seem to be crazy on parties, you have got to party this and party that.

40:30 That was just, didn't exist in my day.

**What about the cinema? Was that a big thing around where you lived?**

Oh yes, down at the cinema, it was owned by a man who was a plumber, he was the same age as my mother. He had the cinema which was a dance, it had a dance section

41:00 as well. So that was something that we used to do at times, go to what they called the 'Frolics'. You would have the dances and there would be an organised supper and that's when we mixed in with girls a bit. But oh, the 'Flicks' we used to called them became an important part of the social life in the town.

## Tape 2

00:42 **We were just talking the cinema. Can you describe what it looked like in Dungog?**

The cinema, well is was like a huge -

01:00 a very simple structure - what's the word - geometrical, word I want - like a big box. You would have your entry at one end, and you would go in and there would be the two sides built up at the back and down to the front which was flat, so the people up in the raised

01:30 part would look over those down the front. There was a stage where the screen was. That stage could be used for performances at times if a group put on a play or something like that, which I saw very little of. And at the back of that was the supper room.

02:00 So you couldn't get any simpler.

**Where was the dance hall? Was that nearby?**

Well, that was it, the lower part of the cinema. They'd have moved the chairs away and that would be the dance floor.

**And what would happen at one of those dances? Could you describe how they were organised?**

Oh, not greatly.

02:30 I didn't have anything to do with the organisation.

**But were there rules about who asked who to dance and what sort of dances happened and what you wore and that sort of thing?**

Well, one thing that was quite common in those days was that the boys would be in one group and the girls in the other group. I am sure you have heard that before. And you go and ask a girl for a dance and that would be it. You'd take her back to where she was. And

03:00 all boys had their favourites, I suppose, and some girls were popular. I don't remember any fights over girls. That might have happened some time but I don't remember it. Oh, they were happy affairs. There was no drinking, by that I mean alcohol. It wouldn't have been allowed.

03:30 So the organising of that, they were mainly associated with say church groups or groups that would organise their annual dance with that group or that group. Didn't have a lot them.

**How important was the church in your upbringing?**

04:00 Not very important, for the simple reason that my father was, his mother was the daughter of an Irish Catholic orphan girl. Came out in about 1850. There were about four and half

04:30 thousand orphan girls sent to Australia. His mother was a daughter of one of them. Dad got away from that religion largely because of the extreme difficulties of growing up in the coal fields. His father didn't shape up so the

05:00 grandparents brought them up. And Dad was nine when his mother died. He felt that the church let them down. So while he was a good living man, he didn't participate... Then following the war he didn't have a strong association with the church. He was actually married in the Church of England.

05:30 There had been difficulties in my mother's side with bigotry and what have you. And while they were very good living people, they weren't churchgoers. To a large, well it was difficult getting to the church. It was well over a mile away and they would have had to walk. But we as kids used to go along to

06:00 Sunday school. They wanted us to get a little bit of - what do you call it - religion that way. For a while I was in the Church of England Boys' Society, but the leader of that became a bit suspect with young boys and that folded. But the family got on very well with people

06:30 associated with the church. One of my grandfathers was strong friends with the Church of England minister. And later on, Dad was the same but he loved people. He didn't want any humbug about church. I remember one time in the early days when, after the war, when I was a kid there was

07:00 one returned digger who had the religious bug, I can say that happened. And Dad was doing something, mowing the garden, or mowing the lawn, and the fellow came along and ticked him off doing work like that on a Sunday. So he was told to get lost, in, in no uncertain terms. But, I would say

07:30 we didn't have a strong association with the church but I reckon my parents were better living people than a lot who went to church.

**What happened to the leader of this boys' club? Was there a scandal then?**

No, he just faded out.

**Was there some question about his moral standing or...?**

Dad simply asked me one time had he ever bothered

08:00 me. And I said, "No." Which he hadn't. So if anything happened it just quietly folded up.

**How far afield had you been away from your home in the period of growing up till the end of high school?**

Down to Newcastle;

- 08:30 we had a lot of relatives in Newcastle. Dad has some very close relatives to him in Newcastle and at times he would like to get down and see them, but that was only the occasional visit. A brother, the one that I was named after, was his favourite brother, but he was a bit of a rolling stone.
- 09:00 He had had the newsagency, publican, he was a publican for a number of times. For us to go see him when he was a publican, down at Port Kembla, that was a mighty job, a trip in the car we had. I remember one time in Sydney when the car hit the tram lines and it got all the shudders and the shakes and we kids were sitting in the back, thought this
- 09:30 was a little bit amusing and Dad wasn't quite sure where he was in Sydney so he pulled up alongside a tram and asked the tram driver, he said, "Am I on right road to Wollongong? Not the driver, the conductor. And the conductor looked at him and said, "God, you're not going down there in that are you mate?" And that didn't amuse Dad very much, but we got there.

- 10:00 No, we didn't go far, occasionally we would have a short trip over to the coast. Dad tried camping once, but he didn't do it any more because we didn't have enough comforts for Mum. Sleeping on the ground on makeshift bedding wasn't her idea of a holiday. So we didn't go far.

**What about Christmas, what would you do around Christmas time?**

- 10:30 Well in the early days we would always go up to Grandfather's, our grandmother, our stepgrandmother, because my mother's mother died when she was thirteen, but Grandfather remarried, so I had two aunts who were stepsisters to my mother. But at Grandfather's place, and this was when things were going quite well,
- 11:00 it was a real treat at Christmas time. They had fowls and ducks and Grandmother was a great cook and preserver and what have you. So we would go up there and it was a wonderful time. Grandfather used to put the brandy on the pudding and make his grand entrance; he was a bit of a showman that way. And
- 11:30 it was just family being together, and we liked that. Later on it became a much simpler affair after Grandfather's illness and death. And Grandmother didn't survive him for long.

**Leading up towards the war, what news were you getting about events in Europe and how closely did you as a young man follow**

- 12:00 **this kind of thing?**

I showed an interest in it. I knew what was going on, to a certain extent. But I don't know anywhere near as much as I know now. I did a great detail of research on what was happening, particularly as regards to the war. Are you going back to World War I?

- 12:30 **Well what did you know about World War I, I suppose?**

Not very much, I think I have said that before.

**What about the lead up to World War II?**

World War II I knew that, well we were very much aware of what was going on. Dad had an interest in it of course, so we weren't kept in the dark as regards to the problems over there.

- 13:00 And they were hoping that war wouldn't come and something would be done to avoid it, very much so.

**How did you get most of your news?**

Wireless and the newspaper.

**Was the wireless an important feature of your family life at that stage?**

Very much so. Very much so.

- 13:30 The wireless was in the lounge room, so the lounge room was the gathering place. So we would have the wireless to listen to, we would always hear the news and that would be an important part of our education as to what was going on. I don't recall being a great reader of the newspaper then, but

- 14:00 I took some interest in it.

**What can you tell us about the day that war was declared?**

Yes, I can remember it quite well. I was seventeen then and we heard it over the wireless. It was devastating Mum,

- 14:30 "Oh, not again." I can hear Menzies voice, "Great Britain is at war, so we are at war." Words to that effect, automatic, my, especially on Grandfather's side they were very patriotic, very patriotic.

- 15:00 I have wondered at times about Dad, with so much Irish in him. I have got a bit of Irish on Mum's side too. But Dad had very much influence, I think, by Mum's family in the early stage.

**So what was the various reactions then in your family? What was your mother's reaction?**

- 15:30 Well she didn't weep or anything like that, but she was horrified to think that it hadn't been avoided and that war was to happen again. So she had, as I said earlier, the Great War affected a lot of those people of her generation very much. Not only did they wait, but getting news
- 16:00 was much slower. Mum was a great letter writer. Dad turned out to be a great letter writer too, but we didn't know it - that we found out that later. There are a lot of his letters in the archives, but we only found them after Mum died. So I can't,
- 16:30 it is pretty hard to go back so far and so long in time and remember exactly what people said and what they did. But Dad was quiet, there was no throwing his arms up in the air and that sort of thing, no demonstration of feelings that I can recall.

**How did the patriotic streak in**

**your family affect you as a young seventeen-year-old at the time?**

- Well, I had no desire to go to the war. I hadn't mentioned earlier that when I was sixteen, in hindsight maybe I needed my head read, but Dad's reputation
- 17:30 and his standing in the town in the local town, what they called, was the Hunter River Lancers. They were the mechanised Light Horse. When I was a kid, the Hunter River Lancers used to ride the horses about and they would perform at the showground, for example, with tent pegging. But I had a desire to sort of get mixed in with these people, young man, so
- 18:00 I think because of Dad's reputation the local troop accepted me to become a member. So I got my breeches and feathered hat and so forth. I used to say it was all arse and pockets when I had this uniform on. I went out on camps, I learnt to use the Vickers machine gun,
- 18:30 fire a .303 rifle, and doing some drilling and what have you in the camps. And I thought it was great this happened. I had a fairly quiet life as I had mentioned before with no great team sports and so on. To get in with men that I knew and liked,
- 19:00 to me, was something that appealed, I thought that it was great to be in a camp, say, of a few weeks [means days], roughing it a bit. So that was one of the reasons why, that I was doing that, when Dad said to me when the war started, "If you think I am going to sign any papers for you, you have got another think coming."
- 19:30 He may have visualised me clearing out and starting to make a nuisance of myself, and I was only a kid.

**How much of that was just a desire to get out and rough it, and how much was it patriotism or for King and country?**

In those days, it was just getting out and roughing it, mixing in, there wasn't any patriotism. When the war started, at seventeen,

- 20:00 I had no desire to throw my hat in the air and say, "Whoopee, now I can go and fight in a war." That was the least of my thoughts at that stage.

**What did the British Empire mean to you?**

Well as a kid, my generation, we used to hear a lot about the Empire. At school, there would be the pledge, honour my God, salute the flag and all the rest

- 20:30 of it. I remember another sister used to thump out on the piano, "There will always be an England, for England shall be free and I fought for his dear old father and I'll fight again for him." And this sort of thing went on in those days with a lot of them. They thought the sun shone out of the royal family.
- 21:00 They thought the Prince of Wales was the bee's knees [wonderful] as some would say. But it turned out that he wasn't, in years to come. But that was the thinking in those days with a lot of people. They were very patriotic. Part of the Empire.

**So you were cautioned against joining up and you went to BHP, got a job after school. What about your mates?**

**Did many people your age join up at that stage?**

- Quite a number at that stage. Some of them, it is a bit hard to recall because I was at that age where some of them had moved on. Not so
- 22:00 much mates, as fellows that I knew. Around that seventeen or eighteen, some of them had already moved on a bit. I repeated fifth year at high school, but I know of some who moved on to different occupations. You had to - there wasn't much to keep people in Dungog.
- 22:30 And I know of some that I knew, it is quite incredible the number of people who joined the air force from Dungog, not from Dungog, who either grew up in Dungog, or partly grew up there. I can name six who

were killed but all over Europe, in the European area. And some of them had enlisted at eighteen.

23:00 **Can you tell us a little bit about the job, the first job that you had at BHP?**

Well I was working in a subsidiary of BHP, Rylands Wire Works, alongside the big Rylands Wire Works, was the Lysaghts. I am sure you have heard of Lysaghts. Lysaghts produced a different product.

23:30 In Rylands Wire Works, they produced wire, all sorts of wire, wire netting, nails, nails galore, any sorts of nails, fence posts, galvanised material. But the office was fairly large but it was separate from Lysaghts' office, separate from the large BHP office.

24:00 There were a lot of people in there, men and women. I was just a pen pusher [clerk], doing unexciting work. Well you would look around there would be lots of people sitting there, using different machines, the typewriter, and there would be the separate offices for the leading people in that organisation.

24:30 But I can't explain to you exactly the jobs that were done, they were clerical jobs.

**Did the war influence the make up of the people in the office at all?**

I wasn't very much aware of it

25:00 being an industrial city, although lots of people enlisted from Newcastle and area. But being part of the industrial complex, it didn't influence much in that they wanted to get away and join the fighting services. There was only one other chap and myself who was employed there who asked to be released.

25:30 **Was it a protected job?**

Oh yes, but I was only a small cog in the big machine. And when I requested permission to be released, the response was more or less, "No problems, provided that you don't do the same work in the services as you were doing here."

**And what was that proviso all about?**

26:00 Well, if I hadn't stated that I didn't want to do the same work as in the services I wouldn't have been released. I would have had to stay there. Being a protected industry it was only a simple matter to be released as regards paperwork. If you didn't get released my understanding was that you stayed.

**So what were your thoughts then,**

26:30 **over that time? I mean at first you said that you had no desire to go off and fight a war, how did your mind change?**

Well, that was earlier on. Once I started working down in Newcastle one of my very close mates from Dungog, his father was a returned man from the First [World] War, as was Dad, and we socialised a lot

27:00 in Newcastle. We would go to the beach. We got involved with the Church of England group at Waratah in the suburb we were in, we would have socials and dances there. It was quite a pleasant part of our lives. We played tennis there, there were tennis courts.

27:30 But after a while, my mate who was working in the insurance, New Zealand insurance business, he was called up to the CMF [Citizens' Military Force]. But prior to that we had become interested in joining up. We both felt that that was what, with our background that, was what we wanted to do.

28:00 So it was mainly the influence of our home town and people who we knew and not where we worked. So we talked it over, just the two of us, and we decided to make an application to join the air force. And that was the way we were thinking at the time - go into the air force. Even for me, even though I had spent some time

28:30 in the militia. At that stage I had reached the stage, I suppose, I had some interest in aircraft. After the war the Barnstormers used to come to the town and you would get a ride in an aeroplane if you could afford it. That happened with Kingsford Smith and other lot, that he came there. My brother was very keen on making model aircraft.

29:00 But I remember Mum saying, she laughed once, that on the journey of Kingsford Smith from Sydney, down to Sydney, Mum said as a little kid I sat on the back steps all day waiting to see Smithy's plane. But I didn't see it - he was more over closer to the coast. So I suppose from what I had been reading about the air force

29:30 and, ah, the glamour... There is no glamour, but I suppose we thought there was a bit of glamour. That was the way our thinking went. So we made application. Pretty tough medical to get into the aircrew, that part of it. You had to be on the ball as regards to your health and I thinking our country living helped that. But we both passed.

30:00 And we were accepted and we wore a little badge. I don't know if you have any people mention about that. You went onto the reserve, little gold badge with an eagle or bird across it, which indicated that you had enlisted and were waiting for call up.

**Had you ever been up in an aircraft? Did you go on one of those Barnstorming trips?**

No, I would have loved to but we didn't have any money.

30:30 **So what were the stringent medical exams? Can you tell us a little bit more about them?**

Well, basically, you had to be in good health. One of the devastating things for some fellows who applied and were tested was that they were colour blind. And if you were colour blind, no way, because you couldn't differentiate the colours,

31:00 reds, from greens and what have you. And if you were involved with the air force, flying, you were not in. So you had to be in good health, and of course most of those who applied for the air force were very young - in their late teens, early twenties. Anybody aged about thirty was an old man - they were lucky if they got in.

31:30 **So what happened then, once you had been given your gold badge? What was the next step?**

Well we continued working, we went along to the tech about one night a week, starting to learn Morse code, and a bit hard to recall. I think it was a bit of a joke in a way. A bit of first aid, Morse code.

32:00 But we would go along one evening and that's what we'd do. Keep us, I suppose, interested. But when you went into the air force you didn't know what you would end up doing as part of the flying - pilot, navigator or whatever.

**What did you learn apart from Morse code? I mean was there any interesting things that you didn't know about**

32:30 **that?**

As I said, I think there was first aid. When I think back I don't think it was concentrated at all, it was mainly to keep our interest up, "Now you have enlisted, we will give you something to keep your mind focused a bit." But one thing I do remember

33:00 in the offices, not long before I was called up to go to Bradfield Park in Sydney. You have heard and read about the Japanese submarines that attacked at Sydney Harbour? Well one night they had, they were supposed to be guarding Newcastle, Fort Scratchley. One night we woke up and

33:30 there was a hell of a noise - boom, boom, boom; the whole city was just about shaking. They were the guns of Fort Scratchley going off. And this was the week after the attack on Sydney Harbour, and there was a submarine off Newcastle taking potshots at the city. And when I went to work, I had to ride my pushbike of course, and I got over to the office and there was great excitement because

34:00 one of the shells from the sub [submarine] had gone through the office roof and it hadn't gone off. And there was a bit of joke in those days about 'Made in Japan', so there is something else made in Japan and this not very big shell had gone through the office roof. But it wasn't long after that I was called up.

**So where were you on that night?**

In bed.

**What did you, how did you hear about it when you got up?**

34:30 **Did you hear the noise, the guns?**

Hear the noise of the guns - it was deafening. I didn't realise that big guns would make so much noise - hell of a noise. So, but I don't know if they hit anything.

**What was the reaction then?**

Well, what the heck is going on? What is this all about? I don't know. I don't think... We would have heard, certainly heard something on the radio the next

35:00 morning.

**And did you see these shells?**

Did I see it? Wasn't very big, can't describe it really. I have often wondered who got that as a souvenir. That would have been interesting. If somebody at the works got it or it was taken by the army anyway.

**What was the damage?**

Only a hole in the roof.

35:30 Down on the floor where it hit.

**What about in Newcastle in general, was there other damage?**

Not that I can recall, there probably was some. But I think it was the excitement of the noise and the

fact that the Japs [Japanese] had had a go. But it made people aware that they were close if they wanted to be, and could be.

### **How did the atmosphere change in Australia**

36:00 **during those few months after the Japanese came into the war?**

Well, lots been written about it. As I said, it was only about a week after that that I got my call up and I went into initial training school

36:30 at Bradfield Park.

### **In the two or three months before that, though, Japan had been really steaming forward towards Australia. Was there a fear in the community as you saw around you in Newcastle?**

Well from what I have heard and read there was a fair amount of, well, unrest. I wasn't aware

37:00 of anybody associated with me getting into a near panic. I know that there was great interest in the boys overseas. You knew about the divisions that were overseas. The 1st, the 2nd AIF, the 9th Division, for example, and the

37:30 interest of associating with our own boys. I had a lot of contact with home in those days. I would get home when I could and get feedback from there. I have read since that there was a fair amount of uneasiness and panic, near panic with people. But I wasn't aware of anything that affected me personally.

38:00 **What did you find when you went to Bradfield Park?**

It was something that I enjoyed experiencing, I think, because I had had some experience with the militia, with the local troop. I liked being in with a group of fellows again.

38:30 I was getting in amongst people who had like interests. We started to do some simple lessons, once again, like aircraft recognition and I am sure first aid.

39:00 A little bit of Morse code that sort of thing. We had a lot of fun with, like PE [Physical Education] became important, we used to play basketball, bung rules of course. We didn't know anything about the real way of playing basketball. We would have PE. PE was important, I will never ever forget our instructor, we used to call him 'the screaming skull'. That is not a very common name.

39:30 But they were starting to try to knock us into shape. I remember a flight commander who I was associated with was a World War I flyer - his name was Manuel - he had a bit of a reputation - he wasn't one of our aces but he was one of the good World War I pilots. And he was a man on the land in his fifties, still flew his own aeroplane.

40:00 But he used to put us to shame on route marches. He was a tough old boy. And I remember that, it stuck in my mind. And there are other World War I veterans from the real flying corps who were at Bradfield Park and they fascinated us. But we didn't have... I suppose they were linked to different flights. So the one we got to know

40:30 was the one that was linked to us.

## **Tape 3**

00:43 **Just a bit more about the World War I fellows at Bradfield Park. What were they trying to do with you?**

I would say that they were our father figures.

01:00 I would say that part of the psychology of being in the air force, I am only guessing on this, but they were fellows who had a reputation that we may have not known a lot about. I used to look up to my father a lot and some of the other diggers in town - there was something special about them.

01:30 And, well, we called them old fellows I suppose, but they were only in their fifties or something like that. But we thought, I suppose, he was a flight lieutenant, I forget his rank, but Manuel was something special and I guess he helped to keep us focused because it wasn't a

02:00 holiday in Bradfield Park. We knew jolly well that we were being assessed, being summed up. So we to had to face the category selection board and they would obviously have something written down passed on. And that was when they would make up their minds as to whether you would be

02:30 trained as a pilot, navigator, wireless operator. They were the three major ones. The gunners came later. And of course the engineers came later but they were the three important ones. And I don't suppose everybody wanted to be pilots, but a lot did. So you didn't want to blot your copybook.

**So the fact that you had done further education and finished your schooling, did that help?**

- 03:00 I think it did. I also think something that helped me was that one World War digger that I admired very much had a cattle property out of town and he and his wife were great friends with my family, especially my aunt. And their son, they had a son and three daughters.
- 03:30 The girls were better horse riders than their brother, I am sure. I used to love to go out on their property and do horse riding and help with the muster and bring the cattle in, and when they would do some sorting and castrating the bull calves and that sort of thing. I thought it was wonderful out there. So, while I wasn't an expert horse
- 04:00 rider, I think the fact that I liked riding horses had something to do. It is hard to say. They didn't tell you what they were looking for, but they would ask you about various things that you had been involved with. I don't know if they asked me anything about my father, whether they had any records there. But like a lot of fellows I wanted to be a pilot, and also the mate
- 04:30 I enlisted with.

**So the category you actually went into, was that based on examinations or interview?**

A combination. They were finding out, not that they ever told us, I am sure there were things going on that we didn't know about. But it was when they would interview, we would have a group

- 05:00 and they would be asking questions, summing you up and thinking, "Now what will we do with this bloke?" Because they would have their numbers, they wanted so many for pilots and so many for navigator, so many for wireless operators, so it was a numbers game, wasn't it?

**Can you tell me about some of the fellows that entered Bradfield Park with you, their ages**

- 05:30 **and backgrounds?**

Now that's a hard one as regards to... Their ages were to a large extent in that young section, late teens, twenties, twenty-one, twenty-two. There were older ones, of course.

- 06:00 But they, and they came from all over the places, there were fellows from towns and cities, a real cross-section. But I don't think we spent a lot of time, what's your pedigree and that sort of thing, we just mixed in and made the best of it.

**So after Bradfield Park... Or, more to the point, when did you actually**

- 06:30 **find out when you'd become a pilot and made it to a pilot rather than anything else?**

At the end of our course at Bradfield Park the fellows were informed as to what was to happen. For example, I was given a leave pass and rail tickets and so on and told to report to Narrandera.

- 07:00 My mate Russ, I had enlisted with him, he went to Temora, you know where Temora is, so we split up then. I don't know if any of the fellows were sent to Narrromine, they probably would have, but that was an elementary flying school too. So we were given a leave pass, rail tickets, told
- 07:30 what to do, get on the train and get there.

**Ok, so you went to Narrandera, is that right, straight after Bradfield Park?**

Right.

**And what happened when you arrived there?**

Well we were met. It is a bit hard to recall everything, obviously. We got to the town by rail, buses took us

- 08:00 out to the station, which was along side the airfield, which is still there - civil air field - still in use. And we were soon organised into flights, allocated instructors and settled in. We were put into huts.
- 08:30 We were mainly divided up into alphabetical arrangement for two flights. I think there were only two flights, I am not sure. For example, two mates I came to know were Jack Ellis and David Sandell. But Ellis early in the alphabet and Sandell late in the alphabet and my name is Scott so I was with Sandell and he was separated from
- 09:00 Ellis. So it went on your name - alphabetical order sort of thing. And then we started to see if we could learn to fly.

**Do you remember your first flight?**

Yes, I was a bit nervous as a young fellow. I was lucky I didn't become scrubbed, that was the dread word -

- 09:30 scrubbed. The first instructor that I had was older than myself but not a great deal older, but he didn't want to be instructing. He was itching to get onto a squadron, he wanted to shoot everybody down I think. So he didn't have patience, and I wasn't exactly scared stiff of him, but I was scared of becoming
- 10:00 scrubbed. He wasn't exactly a screaming skull but he was hard to please, and that was a battle. At one stage he sent me up with the flight commander for a check and I passed that. I don't think I was his favourite pupil. But I was a bush kid, largely. However,
- 10:30 I got there. After a while he lost a bit of patience one day. He said, "I've got it." Then he took over and he went down chasing sheep and the mistake he made was to get back to the drome with a bit of tree in his wing tip. I don't know how he got on about that. He was damn lucky he didn't send us in and kill us, even though with a slow flying light Tiger Moth.

11:00 But after a while, I was given another instructor and that was great - he was more of a teacher.

**So did you learn anything off this first instructor?**

Yes, I learnt that instructing wasn't an easy job

- 11:30 because they had to strike some dill brains, people were not, who didn't have the necessary coordination and so forth. You weren't given a lot of time to go solo. You had to shape up in about six or seven hours, something like that, and prove that you were worthy of being sent solo.
- 12:00 But if you were scrubbed, that meant that you would leave the drome and be categorised as maybe as a gunner, to go on to bombers as a gunner or something like that. The instructors varied quite a great deal, some of them were quite up in years. They were fellows who'd owned their own aircraft, been
- 12:30 involved with flying, so they weren't all young men. At that early stage I was just unlucky to strike one who was young and cheesed off, as we say.

**You mentioned the word scrubbed, who was the first fellow in your flight or in your group that was scrubbed?**

That is an interesting point. I have thought back at times and I can't remember anybody being sent

- 13:00 away. I can't remember anybody from my flight or being told about anyone from the other flight. But it was a dreaded word, because of the alternative.

**Just coming back to your first flight, can you talk me through, you mentioned that you were a little nervous, but can you actually talk me through what happened on that occasion?**

- 13:30 Well, you had to learn about the simple controls and getting the feel. You had to, you would do it dual instruction, of course, really to take off, and you didn't take off too quickly and stall it, you had to do it smoothly and maintain control and you would do what they called circuit
- 14:00 and bumps. You would go around and that was all right and then there came the landing. And some people landed very badly. If you hit hard you would bounce high, that sort of thing. So and the aircraft would float and you had to get used to the effect of say the wind on it. Very important. But you soon picked it up if you had coordination.
- 14:30 In the early days you would be given coordinates; you would have to chase a light around. I don't know if you have seen anything like that. And you would have if you pushed a stick forward the light would go down, if you pulled the stick back the light went up. If you pushed with your right foot, the light would go to the right, with your left foot to the left. But then you had to coordinate them, because you had to
- 15:00 chase another light. And that light would go to different places, so you would have to work your hand and your foot together to chase the light. Well if you had no coordination you would get nowhere near the light. This sort of thing happened down ITS [Initial Training School]. So that is one way of sorting fellows out. However.

**Was it guaranteed that you would all go through?**

- 15:30 No, well you wouldn't all go through as pilots, as I mentioned about the scrubbing, that you would be taken off the course. But it is an interesting topic. Only records would show amounts of failures or what... But in the air force a lot of
- 16:00 trainees were killed and sometimes they took the instructors with them. And that would put an instructor on his toes, wouldn't it, knowing that this trainee could kill him. And some instructors I understand became screaming skulls when they were in the air. So, you would hear stories
- 16:30 at times, about fellows being abused. A lot depended on the temperament of the instructor. That's life.

**Were you abused by your first instructor much?**

A little, the number of times I brought my breakfast up over the side of the aircraft. That was embarrassing, I had to clean it up and I thought, "God, I won't last long if this keeps up." But it was just initial nervous reaction,

17:00 I suppose. If you don't get nervous you are not human.

**So in respect to the aeroplane, the Tiger Moth, can you talk me through the actual takeoff procedure, what you would do from getting to the plane?**

Well, the instruments were very simple - you had your throttle, the joystick, your rudder bars. You would

17:30 control the, the controls on the elevator and so on, on the tail. So you would nurse the aircraft because they were very delicate in that they responded to wind direction. So you would have to get to get taxied in and out and get to where you were going to take off,

18:00 and line them up, and then on the takeoff, that was where your coordination came in. Using your feet, holding it steady and then a gentle takeoff. You didn't want to be ham-fisted

**Ham-fisted?**

Well, heavy handed, you know overreact, over control.

18:30 You... It was a bit like nursing things gently. It amazes me these days with these Formula One [Grand Prix racing car] drivers that they don't crash a lot more than they do. But they develop skills that are needed, so that things happen as they want them to. But landing

19:00 was harder than take off because you had to get it down. One thing that they do at times when you are up flying, after you had become solo, that was a great achievement and fly around solo, but then during instructing you always had to be alert. A favourite trick of an instructor with a Tiger Moth was to

19:30 switch off, and then if you hadn't worked out where you were going to land that aircraft without an engine, in other words, glide her down and pick your spot, you were in trouble. So when you were down low and the instructor was right, then he thought you were going to make a safe landing. He would start it up again,

20:00 flick a switch and away you'd go. But, you had to be on the ball as they say and not daydreaming. But that was a small part of the training.

**Did you ever actually land the plane occasionally when that happened?**

No, it was just part of the training. It wouldn't happen often. In the early stages to see if you were awake. Didn't get up there and say, "Oh, isn't this lovely!" and

20:30 start dreaming about things. You had to learn to be alert.

**And instrument flying - what can you tell me about that?**

Well, with a Tiger Moth it was very simple. You would have air speed indicator, what you call - I think your horizon, that is for level flight, but instrument flying with a Tiger Moth was very

21:00 elementary to a large extent, you flew by the seat of your pants as they say. Instrument flying came later on when you got on more advanced aircraft.

**And your first solo flight?**

Oh, great!

**What were your feelings, can you talk me through that?**

Well, "I am on my own. I haven't got the instructor there with me." That

21:30 was good. You'd just fly around and do what they called the circuit, you'd take off, turn left, do that leg of the circuit and then the other leg going the other way, then turn and come down. It didn't take all that long, but it was quite an achievement.

**Were there any accidents there?**

No, not,

22:00 this is one thing that I look back on my time. I didn't see any at Narrandera but I know there were accidents. You only have to go to the museum they have built at Narrandera to see photographs of what had been crashes. But no, I didn't see any.

**Given that all these Tiger Moths are training**

22:30 **planes and fellows are learning to fly on them, what things were damaged or commonly went wrong with them during training?**

Well it was a delicate aircraft, as aircrafts go. If you landed too heavily you could damage the aircraft, the undercarriage.

- 23:00 You could go on your nose and do a lot of damage to the prop [propeller], you could damage the wings, you just had to make sure that you didn't hit anything even the ground. So that is basically what I think, if you fly safely,
- 23:30 you were in control. That's what you had to learn, to be in control.
- Now I presume there was obviously no control tower there. How was it sort of controlled, takeoffs and landings, and who had right of way?**
- I am not sure if we had the red and green lights. All airfields have got their
- 24:00 control tower. But at Narrandera, it would be a very simple thing. It's hard to take my mind back to exactly what happened. Control was to make sure that people took off safely and didn't run into anyone else and same with landing. And once you were up in the air you had to use your eyes and make sure you don't run into anybody.
- 24:30 So it was a simple affair, if I can put it that way.
- And did weather affect flights and what you did?**
- Well if the weather was dangerous, if I could you use that word, for example, strong winds, they wouldn't be instructing pupils
- 25:00 in the early stages of flying if the weather wasn't reasonable. If it was heavy rain, for example, although when I was at Narrandera it was the latter part of the year, we had Christmas there so it was very much summer time. I can't recall the weather upsetting us, but I am sure it would have at times. If the weather is... If they say, "Too
- 25:30 dangerous to fly today," you don't fly.
- And what did you actually fly in suit wise, did you have a parachute and what were you wearing and what did you have?**
- Oh, you would have your suit, your flying suit. For the Tiger Moths, the parachute, that would be, was your harness and you would strap into it and you
- 26:00 would sit on your parachute. Flying boots, gloves - because it would get a bit cold, could.
- So how long were you there for?**
- Oh, the best part of a couple of months. Sixty hours flying was the experience you needed,
- 26:30 doing different exercises in that flying. But sixty hours was about it.
- And what sort of exercises are you talking about?**
- Well, I don't recall any aerobatics; but you would have to make a recovery from spin, that was the dangerous one, if you stalled the aircraft and got into
- 27:00 a spin you had to know how to get out of it, otherwise you would keep on going, you'd have kissed the ground. You would learn to do stall turns - turning - being able to turn quickly on what they called a stall turn. But elementary manoeuvres - we weren't being taught to be good at aerobatics, for example.
- 27:30 So.
- So where did you go after Narrandera?**
- Canada. We received a leave pass, a notice that we were to report back to Bradfield Park, back at a
- 28:00 section called the embarkation depot. So you didn't need to be a real brain to know - a oh Canada - Empire Air Scheme. Although some fellows - one of my good friends, he trained in the course behind me and I didn't know him then. But he trained up at Bundaberg
- 28:30 in Queensland and he got his wings up there. Some got theirs in Australia and some got them in Canada.
- Were you still hoping to be a fighter pilot?**
- I was beginning to have doubts. Ah, interesting point that - When we were going overseas we reached Canada -
- 29:00 thirteen names - I remember this - thirteen names were read out and I was amongst them - to not to go over the eastern part of Canada where they mainly had the single-engine training, that I was to stay or go to the prairies, that was where they had the multi engines. But one of my friends,
- 29:30 who was sent over to the east - we were friends at Narrandera - he ended up in bombers in UK [United Kingdom]. So depended on circumstances, no doubt, where they wanted people.

**Before you left for Canada did you speak to your parents again?**

Of course, we had embarkation leave. They wouldn't send you overseas without giving you

30:00 your leave. So, this was the sort of thing that made the time spread out, waiting to leave on ships. The logistics of the Empire Air Training Scheme must have been huge – working out what to do here, who to send here, organising this and preparing for that and so on.

30:30 **Did your mum and dad give you any advice on what you were about to undertake?**

No, I was grown up – even though I was only twenty – no. What advice could they give me? I had gone a bit beyond being Daddy's boy sort of thing, so that was the way it was in those days.

**Just your dad's earlier**

31:00 **comment which was, "That war is not for boys, but for men to fight."**

Yes, he knew lots of boys in the 1st AIF, I think he didn't expect to come back, I know from what I found out later. He wouldn't even get engaged to Mum. So

31:30 I think it was just a case – if you go in, you mightn't come back.

**Did you take any personal possessions with you to Canada?**

Just a few. I took a photograph of Dad, I took a sample of his ribbons

32:00 from World War I. I wasn't superstitious, but I thought maybe if I had them with me it might be a bit of good luck. If he got back maybe I would. So – no I just took what was necessary.

**So what ship did you sail to Canada on?**

32:30 The USS Hermitage. United States – middle-sized ship. After, when it was time to leave we struck a time when no messages, no you would keep away from the phone, keep away from the post office.

33:00 We knew that we were on the move. So we were taken down by bus to Woolloomooloo in Sydney Harbour. Do you know Sydney? So that is where we boarded USS Hermitage – good old USA [United States of America]. They treated us like kings for a while. They didn't have a lot there but spoke to the navy fellows. Our first stop

33:30 was at Samoa. We were aware – it took us a week to do that – we were aware that subs were a danger but. But at Samoa they took on Yankee servicemen who were on their way home. The next stop about a week later was Honolulu. We were there for a couple of days.

34:00 I don't remember anybody getting off at Samoa. But we were divided into two groups and so one group went ashore one day and the other group went ashore at Honolulu the next day. That was an interesting experience – just being a sort of sightseer. Some of the Yanks thought we were boy scouts for a start – we were wearing shorts at the time. Some thought we were part of US Marines.

34:30 But we weren't that. But these were just a some questions we were asked by different ones. We had a look around it. It was interesting to have a look at that part of the world

**I mean, I take it you were in Pearl Harbour, is that right?**

We didn't see Pearl Harbour. We didn't have time to see to go and look at Pearl Harbour. But that was just the way it went in the war. There was places that you would like to

35:00 see but there wasn't time. When we got off on leave we were just under our own steam – get around as best you could. Some of the fellows would be met by people who would make themselves known and would take them to see places. But no, I didn't see Pearl Harbour. And I don't remember any of the

35:30 boys talking about having been shown to see it. In all probability it was off limits and if you could see it you would have only seen it at a distance.

**You mention the phase – that you were treated for Kings for a while – by the crew – treated like Kings for a while.**

Oh, the meals were great – except I didn't like sauerkraut – ever tried sauerkraut? Oh the boys –

36:00 it is like a specially treated cabbage. But it wasn't popular. But we were only a small part of what the ship could take. But after they loaded the Yanks on a Samoa. They were great gamblers – I was fascinated watching them. I didn't understand it but those gambling games, crown and anchor and Lord knows what. I had never seen so much money floating about.

36:30 But that is the way the Yanks were. Then once the boat was almost filled up at Honolulu, the meals seemed to go off. But we didn't complain, we were fed well enough.

**Accommodation when you got on board – what was it like?**

- 37:00 It varied – I think on the Hermitage it was – I know one trip we had later we had hammocks. No, now I remember the Hermitage – it was four-tiered bunks, they would be attached say to the wall. And you would have the bunk that would be
- 37:30 lowered and be held by chains, and you would pull it up in the morning. So there was four bunks – you follow me – economy of space. So that was a new experience but we managed. I can't recall how the top fellow got up – probably a case of scrambling up as best you could.
- 38:00 **And did the Americans do anything special when you crossed the equator?**
- No, we didn't have anything. No, I don't think we crossed the equator on the trip. No there was nothing about that – we went to San Francisco – we were on our way to Canada but we went to San Francisco –
- 38:30 nothing about ceremonies like that.
- Okay, so you arrived in San Francisco – what did you see?**
- Fog. I was on mess duty when we pulled into the harbour at San Francisco and when I got up on deck the Golden Gate Bridge was behind me.
- 39:00 I thought, "Sydney Harbour Bridge is better than that." But then we moved under the other bridge, the Oakland something Bridge, and went the other side of that and berthed and stayed on board that ship most of the day.
- 39:30 And then it was off ship to the wharf and get onto ferries. Go across the harbour to a railway station, then train to Canada
- So you didn't spend any time in San Francisco?**
- No, we only saw what we could see from the ships. And when we got onto the train it was
- 40:00 dark, or night-time, and so we went on up through Oregon, didn't see much until we really got well up towards Canada.

## Tape 4

- 00:42 **So in Canada, where did you arrive?**
- At Vancouver. In Vancouver we were given a day's leave and ten dollars advance pay and let loose.
- 01:00 And that was an interesting day. I was with my mate Russ and two other young fellows. We sort of palled up together. We were of an age – that's the age. A tram driver said, "Hop on and stay with me and I will show you."
- 01:30 So he explained places on his route and that was interesting. Then he gave us a tip, he said, "Hire bicycles and look around. Use the bicycles," and that was what we did. Beautiful scenery. Of course new scenery for us, new place, different climate so that was an interesting
- 02:00 day. We cycled about and reported back when we did.
- So was Vancouver your final destination for training?**
- Oh, no, then the boys who were going east left from Vancouver I think. But then we got on a train and went up to Edmonton,
- 02:30 which is the capital of Alberta, where we... It was a magnificent train trip, the scenery, the snow – a lot of us had been in the snow for the first time in the United States and Canada. So at times we would get off the train, especially going up, we were like little boys with snow fights, as you can imagine. However, we got to Edmonton.
- 03:00 Oh, God it was cold. There was snow all about. And fellows wearing long johns and so on for the first time. You can imagine twenty – young fellows twenty and so forth wearing long johns! But when you were nearly freezing you would wear anything. However, that was an interesting experience, a few weeks there at Edmonton. We met people – they are very hospitable the
- 03:30 Canadians – and shown about. Of course you split up, you were developing mateship with different fellows, like interests, so you wouldn't all be going around in a huge big group. You would go sometimes where people would take you. You would meet families who would become friendly.
- 04:00 And I think the Canadians were quite used to that now with the Aussie and the New Zealanders arriving. So it was an interesting place to be.
- So is Edmonton where you were going to do initial training?**

No, we were going to service training. No, initial training was on Tiger Moths, now we were to go to different place.

04:30 There was quite a cluster of places in the southern part of Alberta. You get down around Calgary, there was a service school at Calgary and there was another one at Lethbridge, which is fairly near. But I was in a group of nearly sixty sent to Macleod,

05:00 known as Fort Macleod. In the early days with their boxing on [fighting] with the Indians it was a military fort so it still had the name. There were Indians living about there on the reserve. But it had the name of Macleod, Fort Macleod. So they had the training facilities there with an airfield.

05:30 **Okay, so what was the accommodation like there for you?**

Large huts, two-tiered bunks. Very much central heating. It was adequate. It wasn't palatial, but it was adequate. Like lots of air stations.

**And what planes were they training you on?**

06:00 The Avro Ansons. They had the Avro Ansons out here. The early the Avro Anson even had a gun turret on it. It was one of Australia's front-line fighter [means bomber] aircraft. It turned out to be a bit of a joke. But it was the best they had and they were using them for training, of course. But they built a lot of Ansons which didn't have turrets and that sort of thing. They were training aircraft,

06:30 twin engine and that was it.

**Twin engines - how were they different from the Tiger Moth in respect to flying them?**

Well, very different. They had more instruments, two engines to control, bigger, heavier, not a fast aircraft, but quite adequate

07:00 for twin-engine training and that was a new experience. Which was where if you completed this course you received your wings and thought you were a pilot. But you still had a lot to learn.

**So how much of a step up was this training to the Tiger Moths, and what new things were being taught?**

07:30 Well, without giving you a rundown, you had to learn to control two engines, a lot of things were in the training manuals. Even if I looked at my log book, a lot of entries there are just numbers

08:00 and letters which refer to various exercises. You would have to learn to control the plane. If you have trouble with one engine it is a different feel. It is a bit like cars I suppose - if you have a very simple motor car - it would be different from a much bigger and heavier model.

08:30 Maybe not a good example or analogy as they say. But you would have to learn to control the aircraft if you had any trouble with it. Just flying experience, if I had a manual with me - you are asking questions that are a bit specific for the exercise,

09:00 but if I grab that old flying log of mine - log book of mine - that old tatty blue book there, I could refresh my memory.

**We will just pause for a second. I'll just ask you on that, exercises that you had to carry out - can you give me a rough overview of what they were?**

Well there would be exercise with navigation.

09:30 As I said, with this one you would have to have a list of what the exercises were. Now, I can't explain to you exactly because I haven't got a sheet here but there would armament exercises, navigation, there'd be...

10:00 No, I can't give you a rundown on them. I have here which to you would be gobbledygook, which to a large extent is gobbledygook to me too. I can't tell you what the exercises are.

**No, problems. Instructors, you talked a little bit about the instructors in Australia, what about in Canada?**

10:30 Excellent. I liked the Canadian instructors. I started off with the Warrant Officer Quirk and I got on very well with him. The Canadians, as far as I can recall, were great. The last instructor I had over there was an Australian, he had just - not long finished his instructors

11:00 course - and he came onto the station not long after Warrant Officer Quirk was posted off elsewhere. And my instructor then was Barry Brown and we got on famously, and so did Russ Jones with him. And good fellows, the Canadians.

**Now, the Australians sort of have a reputation of being larrikins and getting up to all sorts of mischief.**

11:30 **Did anything like that happen in Canada?**

I am sure that it did. I wasn't the larrikin type, if you could understand that. The fellows that I was with there were all young. We were mostly from towns

- 12:00 and what, we had a course to pass and we had to learn, we had exams, we had to cope with the various exercises that we were taught with flying and the aim was to pass that course and gain your wings.
- 12:30 We were fellows – at the end of the course there would have been a third of them commissioned off course. Obviously, some of the older fellows were aiming for their commissions and they were working for that. Larrikinism, I suppose there was a bit of it at times, but the town of Macleod was a very small town, a country town. The Australians and New Zealanders had
- 13:00 a good reputation with the locals. I don't think any yobbos and larrikins, real larrikins, would have gone over too well. And that is just my impression. The group I was with didn't go into town very much. We weren't drinkers, no doubt some fellows were.
- 13:30 I don't think alcohol was a big deal as regards to availability in the town. So I know one fellow I was on course with, he and I were a guest one evening for a meal and chat with a family and that was something special to just
- 14:00 be experiencing Canadian hospitality. The chap I was with didn't come back, I later found out from Bomber Command. But we spent a lot of time on the base. I had a lot of letter writing to do. I came from a family where letter writing was important. And so, and a lot of people wrote to me and I wrote back.
- 14:30 So that filled up a lot of time as well as studying and just relaxing.

**Did this small town of Macleod put on dances and social events for you fellows?**

There was a little bit of it. That's true. One, no they would have functions, I remember there was something like the

- 15:00 War Loans Function. One experience that we had was to, it was a standing invitation at the end of the course was to be a guest of the town of Nelson up in the Rockies [Rocky Mountains]. And we would go up there and spend two or three days with the people who really turned it on. The hospitality – we were met, greeted by
- 15:30 the band, allocated to a host. My mate and I stayed with a doctor and his wife and niece and a couple of her friends from the United States. So they treated us as if we were somebody special and that was the Canadian way. We weren't there very long when we were with
- 16:00 a group which was a first experience of a funeral. A group of Aussies went along to bury a young Canadian who had baled out over one of the lakes in the east and he had drowned. And we had to travel about fifty miles in trucks, and that was an experience with a thaw coming in and we got bogged once.
- 16:30 And one thing that stuck in my mind was that it was Mormons' service – you have heard of the Mormons? – so that service was conducted. And another experience we had was in the flight I wasn't in... They were doing night flying training and there was a heck of a stir one night. Two of the boys had collided, a nineteen-year-old and a twenty-
- 17:00 seven-year-old and they had crashed and that was the finish of them. So we had their funeral to be involved with, that was upsetting. But 'Welcome to the war' sort of thing. Lots of fellows died training. And a
- 17:30 another time was spit and polish when the Earl of Athlone who was the something like the, he was the Governor-General, visited, and that was a very special day. You could imagine how they would turn it on just as well out here, the old British tradition, spit and polish parade and so forth. No, they were interesting highlights of the
- 18:00 experience there.

**So just looking at flying, night flying, how difficult was that?**

Well, if you did... It was difficult in that you were in a new environment. You were taught to cope with it, though. You had to concentrate more on your instruments and be alert. I don't know what exactly went wrong with these two boys

- 18:30 but whether it was a collision on approach to landing, whether one hadn't seen the one and was supposed to see the other. But they were solo flying without an instructor, each on his own. I don't know about the ground control. I don't know. Something went wrong, whether it was human error. I think it was human
- 19:00 error.

**Do you feel because of the war your training was rushed?**

That is a bit difficult to answer. I would say time was important. You had to cope in the time that they

wanted you to

19:30 cope. I think it was adequate at that stage.

**You just mentioned before that you got your wings at that point but you still had so much more to learn about flying?**

Oh exactly, we were heading for England and flying conditions over in England are very different

20:00 from Canada because over in England there was a great difference in climate. When it comes to flying England is small, it was crowded with airfields. Bombers, bomber squadrons, airfields, fighters,

20:30 training, different sorts of training. There you had to go the next level up as regards to coping with conditions, you had to learn quickly, control the aircraft quickly, learn various skills. Working out where you were, just reading the countryside

21:00 from the air in daylight. You would quickly go from one town to another. Mate and I were on one exercise one day and we did get lost. "Where are we?" We couldn't work it out. We ended up landing in a field that wasn't our own, but that is the sort of thing that happened. You would have to learn

21:30 to map read visually, and that is only one of the things. And the weather, the weather was notorious for its difficulty with flying. So everybody who was a pilot went to England. My understanding was they went to an AFU - advanced flying. Learnt more about what flying was about.

22:00 To get your wings was only a start.

**Okay, you mentioned your first instructor in the Tiger Moths was eager to get to the war. In Canada, what was your thoughts and feelings about getting to the war?**

I didn't think much about it, really. I didn't worry about it.

22:30 Take one step at a time, sort of thing, so enjoy the experience, make the best of it. After all when you are a young fellow of all about twenty you were enjoying the experiences of the moment, you weren't getting yourself into a tizz about what was going to happen or may happen ahead of you.

**On your way to the UK you went to New York?**

23:00 Yes, before going across. I went in a group of eight up to Edmonton to say farewell to friends we had made up there. One of my good friends, Keith Pond, was in that group. He was commissioned, of course, he did very well. We said farewell

23:30 to Keith at Edmonton. He was going to do a different course, having been commissioned off course. That was the last time I saw him. He was killed out in the Middle East, where I was to go. But we had our train pass and away we went across Winnipeg. Out at Winnipeg - small world- we ran into one of our hometown boys who'd been trained as

24:00 a wireless operator, just by accident. Then we went on to Toronto. That was where we left the train. Had a quick look at Toronto, across the lake, Niagara Falls, magnificent. If you see it in the real thing it is quite an experience. But then on to New York New York - boy - people

24:30 everywhere. Experiences, restaurants, the Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe, the entertainment places. We made the best of our time there. It's quite a new world to go to New York.

**What was the people's attitude towards the war?**

25:00 Well that is a difficult question to answer. The Yanks were very much involved with the war at that stage. The Japs were their real enemy, as from the local people.

25:30 Although with the Americans, they were very much into the war no matter whether it was the European theatre or the Pacific theatre. And they were very friendly towards us. Even though it was interesting, some of the boys found out that some of the Yanks thought we came from Austria, not Australia. They weren't worldly

26:00 wise. But very friendly. Once we had to report to Halifax in Canada and there I waited for shipping across the Atlantic. And they used large ships to a large extent,

26:30 and I went across with a lot of fellows in the Aquitania, a famous old ship. There was the Aquitania, the Mauritania, but they went flat out. They left New York Harbour and their speed helped dodge the submarines, apart from the

27:00 navy's effort in combating the submarine, also aircraft. It didn't take us long to get across the Atlantic. We passed the Queen Mary going the other way. Didn't take long for her to get out of sight.

**And the accommodation on board?**

Oh, that was interesting. When you see those big liners with

27:30 the promenade deck outside. Well, the ships were crowded. The deck on the Aquitania was boarded in. We had... The group that I was with, we had two-tiered bunks out on the promenade. So we had heard about the cold Atlantic we soon found out how cold it was.

28:00 Icy cold temperature. But a couple of meals a day because of crowding so but it didn't take long to get across there.

**Was it a rough trip on the way over?**

Not, that I can remember, I don't remember anything violent.

28:30 The Aquitania was a big ship and she handled the seas pretty well.

**Were you given a life raft training or anything on board?**

No, no, you wouldn't have a chance - in my opinion. No we didn't have any lifeboat drill that I can remember.

**So where did you arrive in**

29:00 **England?**

Scotland. A lot of the ships, the big ships, berthed in the Clyde not all that far from Glasgow.

**And you travel down to?**

Right down to the south of England by train. And that was common with the Australian. Down to Brighton.

29:30 They had two big hotels down there - The Grand and The Metropole. They were used for accommodation.

**Okay, and what initially happened, since you obviously hadn't flown for a bit?**

You were given leave after a while, and this is where another long wait occurs. One of my mates had relatives in Kent and a few of us wanted to go together,

30:00 so they had a great scheme over there. The Lady Ryder Accommodation Scheme. And it so happened that a lady with three young daughters, she was a lovely lady, her husband was serving out in the RAF in India, and she accommodated us to be near our mate. And so developed a

30:30 friendship there. Our mate's cousin, she was a lovely middle-aged person and she took us around and showed us the sights. And a friendship developed, especially with the mate of mine who stayed over there as an instructor. So a lifelong friendship with that family. I saw the

31:00 family a few times on leave. But we were always welcome down there.

**And did you come into contact with air raids at this stage?**

A little bit. Once when I was down there there was a sort of hit and run raid. I think it sounded a lot worse than it was with the big guns going off, see the searchlights and hear the aeroplanes, hear some bombs coming down,

31:30 which must have hit somebody. It didn't last a long time. But I had a calm commentary from my friend's cousin and she had seen a lot and she was telling me, "That's such and such Scotty; well that is such and such Scotty." Well she knew all about it. Another time I was in North London and there was another small hit and run raid

32:00 but the big attacks by the German air force on England at that time into 1943 had finished had stopped.

**What was the general feeling amongst the people about the war at that stage?**

That is a difficult question there.

32:30 I didn't meet a lot of the English people to talk about things. They were very stoic, the people that I met, were - they had been through it, they knew what it was all about. Some of them hadn't really

33:00 experienced the difficult parts, not like what you call the West End and the parts of London that were heavily bombed. Many people in England were, from my experience, weren't great travellers. I trained in England about fifty miles from London and you would hear about people who lived there and hadn't been to London.

33:30 So, well, not like today where they travel everywhere, I guess, but that was the way it was.

**And training aircraft, what had you actually been posted to?**

It was, the aircraft that I went onto was the Airspeed Oxford, which was a very common popular training aircraft for the AFUs. It was something

- 34:00 similar in size to the Avro Anson but it was nippier, more sensitive, not as heavy to control as the Anson. So it had different characteristics. But it was an ideal aircraft in my opinion for training fellows on
- 34:30 the requirements that the AFU course demanded that you get used to flying in England. You would have people who had maybe been overseas for a while and didn't matter what their rank was. I understand if necessary they would do the AFU to get used to, which was really for the air force, and the front line
- 35:00 where flying conditions were so different. That applied to fellows that went from Australia, went from New Zealand to the air battle of England.
- You mentioned how different conditions were compared to, obviously, Canada and, obviously, also to Australia. What sort of weather inhibited you in regards to the weather conditions?**
- 35:30 Fogs, rain. I spent a winter in England; I did never look forward to another one. I don't like a fog that lasts a week, day and night - it is colder than the snow. The weather could change rapidly in England
- 36:00 and you had to be aware of that. Many aircraft crashed in England. They were... I am not speaking from my own experience, from what I know and what I have read you would have bombers going back from raids and they wouldn't be able to get into their own airfield because it was fog bound and they would
- 36:30 have to get somewhere else. So that was one of the main things that you had to become involved with.
- Can you tell me of an occasion that you got caught in heavy fog while flying?**
- There is one occasion with my mate George, he has got his memoirs in one of those books there, but we were up
- 37:00 together flying around. The weather didn't beat us, we just got caught by a little bit of weather but we weren't sure where we were. It was a bit embarrassing, we didn't get our knuckles dusted, but it's the sort of thing that you learn by experience, learn by experience. If you make a mistake, you don't cope with something
- 37:30 the best you could, what did you do wrong - you learn from mistakes.
- So this situation was embarrassing because?**
- Oh well, we got lost. People don't like getting lost. But it was just a passing phase. Next question.
- Were there accidents while you were training**
- 38:00 **amongst the other men?**
- No, that is one thing I am thankful for. There weren't accidents at the station where I was. Just call it luck, call it good management. In actual fact the station where I was is what they call a satellite
- 38:30 station. The main station was Kidlington and I went to Western on the Green. And when I arrived there, there were two fellows that I had trained with in Canada. So out of that nearly, in round figures, sixty fellows that I had been with in Canada, there were only two who were posted to that particular training
- 39:00 place in England. There were many AFUs. And so I largely met up with the fellows who got their wings out in Queensland.

## Tape 5

- 00:44 **Okay, you have just got your log book there, you just read me a list of things you did on the Airspeed Oxfords. Can you just read them out.**
- Yes, that is what I am reading out - you have got steep
- 01:00 turns, precautionary landing, landing without flaps, gliding approach and landing, gliding approach and landing with one engine, medium turns, low flying, and so it goes on. All dealing with handling the, getting to handle the aircraft so you were in control. That's what it amounts to,
- 01:30 to a large extent. And then there are some there with navigation, some navigation exercises, with numbers, steep turns and then single-engine flying and then various other things that are just given by numbers. So you become -
- 02:00 it is like handling a car. Think of the number of people who make a mess of handling a car because they do the wrong thing, they are driving it too fast in a turn - they are not judging this, not judging that, they don't look out for this, they don't look out for that, they don't concentrate - they think they are better than they are and so it goes on. You have got to learn to
- 02:30 become proficient in various things, cars.

**What special skills or particular flying qualities did you need to become a multi-engine pilot or a bomber pilot, do you think?**

Experience, skills from experience.

03:00 That is, building up your confidence to be able to handle that particular aircraft and learning about that particular aircraft. When we – one of the first things we did was handling the aircraft for the Avro Ansons was to get a manual – you have car manuals, you had aircraft manuals.

03:30 You have got to learn about the aircraft and each aircraft is different. So they put you into situations where you are taught how to manage different skills. One course I went to in Yorkshire was on a bomber station.

04:00 And that was intensive beam approach where you would be learning to fly the aircraft more or less blind, you would have a hood over you and so you would fly by instruments and you would be listening to beam noises. Such as beeps, beeps, dars, dars or what. And so you would have to position

04:30 yourself according to the signals that you were getting, so that in time you would get yourself down on an approach to land. And there would be signals that you would get from the ground and you would get yourself into a position where you could then land visually.

**Was this around the time of your AFU, this bomber course?**

Yes, this was

05:00 part of the AFU.

**It is a bit of a generalisation perhaps, that bomber pilots were reckless and fighter pilots were steady handed? Is there truth in that?**

Well I think, it is a bit hard to compare them. They are a different type of fellow in

05:30 some ways. Fighter pilots could be reckless and kill themselves. I can't speak much for fighter pilots, but a bomber pilot always had a crew and you had a responsibility towards your crew. Usually the pilot is the captain of the

06:00 aircraft. I know there were chaps who were reckless; I have heard some stories of them. I have heard the odd stories about fellows who were a bit that way inclined. But when they kill themselves, they kill their crew if they do something stupid or were irresponsible.

06:30 A bomber crew has got to learn to work as a team. You've got your jobs to do and you do them the best you can, and that comes into your training. Maybe sometimes the training could have been better. A lot depended on the flight commanders, the way they... This is getting to an operational training unit. The flight commanders were usually the fellows who had finished a tour of operations,

07:00 who knew, or were supposed to know, a lot about what might happen and what did happen.

**You didn't crew up until you got to Palestine, or your OTU was in Egypt, was it, or in the Middle East somewhere? Before we get to that, in England, though, was there any crew that you trained with at that stage?**

07:30 **Did you take bomb aimers up or navigators up?**

No, you don't do that at an AFU.

**In Canada the same? You never had any training with other chaps from other strands? It was always just pilots?**

Yes, that's right.

**A couple of things before you leave England, that is just why I held you up there. You said you got leave, what did you see of London? You mentioned going there.**

08:00 I saw the bomb damage. I had friends in London – I had a girlfriend for a while, I had met her at Bexley Heath. But we didn't meet all that often because the times of leave there weren't a lot. We would go to shows, go to the odd dance.

08:30 But as regards... And other times I would go down to Bexley Heath and met up with the people there. But seeing London, we only saw a small part of it. It was interesting to look at Westminster Abbey, St Paul's, Buckingham Palace, places in London like The Strand. We would go to see some theatres,

09:00 and London is famous for its theatres and we would see that at times. I remember one time when Flanagan and Allan, before your time, were great names from my parents' point of view, they were real characters. But as part of the performances this particular night, the chorus girls or whatever they were

09:30 went down to get fellows to take them up on the stage. And my mates pushed me out – I was sitting on the end – pushed me out so one of the girls would see me, took me up onto the stage. So I can say I have

been on the stage in London. But part of the rigmarole was they – and they had Yanks, Aussies and who knows what and a lot of servicemen. We took off our coats

10:00 and then in the movement around the coats were handed to different fellows so you ended up with... You could have ended up with a coat of an American or whatever. And then they left us – we had to sort ourselves out. One little comment, one of these – either Flanagan or Allan – very seriously said to me, “Good luck, Digger.”

10:30 So they were fooling around. But that was just a little aside. So it was interesting London but it had been knocked about.

#### **Where did Australians tend to congregate in London?**

An important place in London was the Boomerang Club, which was part of Australia House. There was another club called the Chevrons Club

11:00 and people would meet there, that’s Australians would meet there. I met by chance a couple of my hometown boys there. One was on Bomber Command – he was well advanced with his tour. And just by chance he was digging me in the ribs

11:30 in the Boomerang Club. And, oh we had a yarn. My mate Russ was with me and he was on leave after doing about twenty-four trips with Bomber Command. I heard a month or two later that he had been killed. So. So it was a good place to meet.

12:00 **How did that knowledge that you were going into a war and you might get killed, or your friends might not be around, how did that affect the way people interacted and behaved when you were on leave?**

Well to a large extent you have only got to read books about people’s experiences. They were out for

12:30 relief, a good time. Some of them would get on the turps [turpentine – alcohol] as we might say. That wasn’t my scene. I can remember one occasion at Christmas at AFU when I had too much; I didn’t enjoy the headache the next day so I couldn’t see much point in that. But they would meet up with friends. I will never forget

13:00 the atmosphere on the bomber squadron. I was up at that beam course and I watched a squadron of Halifaxes going off for a big raid and information (I have found out since that the friend from home who had dug me in the ribs was killed on that raid) and I was watching these fellows

13:30 go out. But when they’d come back, you see, the atmosphere on the bomber squadron was – where fellows were interacting when today you’re alive – tomorrow you could be dead. So they had some wild parties. And I saw a little bit of that happening in England.

14:00 But fellows in England would have their chance to go off and let their hair down, as you might say, after raids. But it depended on the fellows, what they wanted to do. Some had been wild boys, others would be very opposite. It depended on the characters.

#### **Did that atmosphere lead to a certain relaxation in moral standards at the time?**

I am sure it did with

14:30 some. I am absolutely sure it did. It didn’t cause me to drop my guard, if that is what you are inferring. The people I met were and were associated with weren’t that way inclined.

15:00 It depended what you wanted out of life at that particular time. That is about all I could say on that.

#### **How did you feel about the prospect of joining a bomber squadron and going into Bomber Command over Europe, which I guess was the most likely path for you to take at this point?**

Well, the chap I was just

15:30 mentioning, Jim English, he received a posthumous DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] and I remember talking to him and saying, “It would be great to have you as an instructor, Jim.” A pilot who had finished his operations, his tour of operations, could be sent to an operational training unit as what they call a screen, now it is simply a word

16:00 used for an instructor, and he would be involved with training of the crew. I just made that comment. I thought, “Well it would be great to have you as my instructor.” It was most unlikely to happen because of the number of squadrons over there and the OTUs, but it was just a thought at the time.

16:30 **Were you anxious or excited? How did you feel about going into this game?**

Well by the time, after a while, you are in England and you are seeing what is going on. You soon realised that this is serious. Bomber Command was likened to the losses in the Somme in the First World

- 17:00 War. It was horrendous for those who got caught one way or another. One of my friends survived a raid and he lost part of his leg below the knee and that finished him from flying. Quite a remarkable fellow. He received a DFC for the assistance he gave to other
- 17:30 wounded crew members. But you soon realise, even though you were an outsider, that the chances of surviving a tour with Bomber Command, a tour of thirty operations, wasn't good. One of my mates I trained with at Narrandera,
- 18:00 he was the one who was going over eastern Canada, he went onto an Australian squadron; he was lost on his third raid with his crew. Nobody knows what happened, they just disappeared, a very long trip. Another mate I was to go out to the Middle East with and he got chicken pox or measles
- 18:30 and missed that posting and he stayed and went onto a squadron in England; he was lost on his seventeenth trip. The Englishmen, there was five Englishmen in the crew. They parachuted out early 1945. POWs [Prisoners of War]. He and his wireless operator,
- 19:00 who came from this area, didn't survive. But they were lost, their aircraft crashed, they were lost and so the story goes on.
- I mean, so by this stage in the war, the odds, as you just mentioned, with Bomber Command weren't good, and it was pretty well known, so how did that realisation that you didn't have a lot of chance affect the way that you did things as a**
- 19:30 **twenty-year-old or twenty-one-year-old?**
- Well, I just kept on doing what I was supposed to do. I didn't panic or anything like that. It so happened that... I think I may have mentioned that I went out to the Middle East, there were twenty-one of us from
- 20:00 the AFU at Kidlington and Western on the Green were sent out. They were supposed to go... One of my mates, Cliff, he got sick and stayed behind and so that left us with twenty. There were fifteen Aussies, three Kiwis, and two RAF. There were plenty of others on the boats but of those fifteen Aussies, three were killed.
- 20:30 So that is an average of twenty per cent. I don't know what the average is for Bomber Command; I think it would be higher than that. But no matter where you flew in wartime there was danger, but the danger differed according to the circumstances. When I got onto the Wellingtons
- 21:00 squadrons, at a time when the fighters weren't plentiful, but in 1943 that was the last time they used the aircraft I flew, the Wellington, in raids against Germany. The fighters knocked them out to such an extent that they had been superseded, they were obsolete in England for the
- 21:30 bomber squadrons although they had been using them in 1943. So even though we didn't have out there in the Middle East, at that stage, where I operated and when I operated, the fighters had ack-ack guns and they had the good friend, the weather. The weather is a nasty
- 22:00 enemy at times.
- We will come back to the dangers of flying and the possibility of perhaps death and when we come to the squadron, but we will just move along in the story. You got news that you were going on a ship to Egypt?**
- Well we were going to the Middle East. We didn't know where.
- How did you get that news and what did you...? What happened?**
- Well, we talked about it.
- 22:30 We thought, "Well we probably have got a better chance of staying alive out there." We didn't know what we would experience but it was after a long cold miserable winter. Nobody amongst the Aussies was in love with England as a place to live and fly. So we took it as another
- 23:00 part on the way and we were closer to home, not that that mattered very much. So.
- So you put up your hand [volunteered]?**
- Well, we said, "Good, we'll go." But to a large extent you didn't control your own destiny. You went where you were sent according to the needs of the time.
- 23:30 Later on in the war over there they were getting so many aircrew that they were starting to find out that they had a surplus and fellows didn't fly as much as they thought they would. So that was at a time when our side was getting on top. But there are many aspects to that story.
- 24:00 **Tell us about that trip down to the Middle East, what was it like?**
- It went well. We had to report to Blackpool to start with. Blackpool is a holiday place in England. But we enjoyed what activities still operated; it was quite interesting to be in good old Blackpool.

- 24:30 Then we went up to Liverpool. Liverpool is the port. And we boarded a ship, Otranto, and that was interesting because we had to sleep in hammocks. So there was fun and games with boys getting used to hammocks, and some of them would fall out and you can imagine the language at times.
- 25:00 But they got – you got used to flying it, or using hammocks. But it was an uneventful trip. We went in convoy. At night-time we went through the Straits of Gibraltar and there was moonlight, so we saw all the famous rock, the silhouette in the distance. It was interesting just to see the lights of the places in Africa, because there was no blackout there.
- 25:30 We had left England where there was a blackout all the time in the night-time. A bit rough at times, going out there, some of fellows got seasick, but that's the way it goes, but it was a fairly uneventful trip otherwise.

**Did you call on any of those ports along the way?**

No, we went to Port Said at Egypt and

- 26:00 from Port Said a train down to a camp outside Cairo.

**What were your first impressions of the Middle East?**

Smelly, but I knew a lot about what Dad experienced in Egypt. But it is a new world when you get amongst

- 26:30 say the Arabs. The boats are met by what they call the poorer types in their bum boats trying to sell you this and that. The old diggers of both wars know about Egypt. But it was a case of going to a camp. We had a bit of
- 27:00 time to look about. We went out and had a look at the pyramids. We experienced a little bit of the better places where you could go to a decent place to eat, say. Looking at some places along the Nile, just being a bit of a tourist. But keeping out of the
- 27:30 worst parts of Cairo – you would get your throat cut if you were silly. We were then waiting to see what the next step was because Egypt and Palestine had quite a number of training places controlled by the Brits [British]. If you know anything about your
- 28:00 history, the British had and the French had quite an influence out in that part of the world. They weren't all that popular if you read the stories about the Arabs. But and their, let's say, treatment by the Brits, they were controlled to some extent by the Brits.

**Who was still there at that stage**

- 28:30 **in the war? Was there a large troop contingent?**

By the time I went out to Africa and Palestine the land war was in Italy, the British 8th Army had gone across to Sicily,

- 29:00 into southern Italy. The Americans had their army working up through Italy. The British 8th Army had the New Zealand soldiers still with them; they hadn't been brought back as the Aussies had. The Canadians were there, the Indian soldiers,
- 29:30 the Poles. I think the Gurkhas, I think there were some from Algeria. So the British 8th Army had quite a number of troops from other countries involved with them, so they had been moving up through Italy
- 30:00 and this was where I was destined to go. I didn't know it at the time, but that is the way it turned out.

**Were there still troops training in Palestine and in Egypt and the places you were?**

Troop training, not then – training with aircraft, yes. One of my mates that I went on leave with in England, lovely fellow

- 30:30 from West Wyalong, he was training on Kittyhawks down near the Suez Canal and he became a training accident. I have a letter from him up at OTU. I was later to find out that the letter was written not long before he was killed. But that was a training accident,
- 31:00 you see. And one of the fellows I left in Canada, Keith Pond, Keith ended up out on an Australian squadron, 459, operating at one time from northern Palestine, and he and his crew were lost attacking the island of Rhodes near Turkey.

- 31:30 **Where was your operational training unit?**

Palestine.

**What was the place called that you were training at.**

Qastina. It was south-west of Jerusalem, south-east of Tel Aviv.

**And what was the conditions like there?**

Quite reasonable.

32:00 Huts – just adequate buildings you could say – for sleeping, for mess, nothing special. Wartime conditions.

**And here for the first time you crewed up, is that right?**

Yes, that's right.

**Can you tell us**

32:30 **how that happened?**

Yes, from Cairo we went to Jerusalem and we waited in a holding centre there in buildings. I happened to just by chance meet a young English navigator

33:00 who had got his wings in South Africa. and he and other navigators after getting there wings were sent up to that area to be crewed up. So he was having a bit of leg problem at the time and I think I just met him by chance and I got to know him and so we developed

33:30 an interest if possible in being crewed together. We didn't know where we'd go and it so happened that pilots and navigators and wireless operators and gunners were sent to Qastina and when I got to Qastina, two things happened.

34:00 They found out that they had, or they knew they wanted some pilots, I don't know how many, just a couple of us or a few, to stay for the next course, so we drew straws on that and I had to stay and miss the next training course or get the next training course. They had one navigator too many. So

34:30 the navigator that I had met volunteered to wait with me. When the next intake came in, he went off on leave somewhere. So that was a bonus. When the next course came in there wasn't an Aussie amongst them. So here I am looking at these fellows, we wore the dark blue uniform, these fellows are all trooping

35:00 in the lighter uniform of the Canadians, New Zealanders and the Brits. So I thought, "This is interesting." However, it worked out all right. I had a partner then with my navigator and for a while they would let you mix in and sort of mill about.

35:30 It happened on all the OTUs. You would get your chance to look about and that happened after a while. I can't remember exactly but the first one was a wireless operator from Yorkshire who was about twenty-seven, he sort of

36:00 joined us – I can't explain exactly how – but chatting away – but navigator and I were happy with this fellow. He was a chirpy Yorkshireman, good. The next one we happened to meet up with was a bomb aimer who was a year younger than I was, so he was twenty-one, and he was from South

36:30 End and so he made the fourth. And then the last one was a small Canadian from Newfoundland. He was very quiet, I understand, in his civilian life, a timber man, a lumberjack as they would call them. He was older, about thirty.

37:00 He had really re-mustered from work he was doing in the air force into aircrew. And he joined us as the rear gunner. So we had the Commonwealth together – Australia, England, Canada.

**Obviously, you were a bit upset to see no more dark blue uniforms come in, but how did that matter in the end?**

Didn't matter, when I say upset,

37:30 I just thought, "Golly." There could have been a few, but it didn't matter, that was the way it went. Many crews in England were a mixture. It is like my mate Cliff Hart, who didn't go out with us. His crew were the five

38:00 Aussies, no, five Englishmen and two Aussies. And the two Aussies survived, no the Aussies were killed. When they were shot down, the five Englishmen parachuted out. My late brother-in-law from Sydney, he was a gunner. I didn't know him at that time. But he had a mixed crew.

38:30 He was shot down on the first raid. And they had a Scottish pilot who didn't survive. A lot of pilots didn't survive when aircraft was shot down. So there were many mixed crews over in England.

**Was there any difference in how everybody behaved, depending on their nationality or anything that you had to get used to?**

Oh yes,

39:00 you got used to their ways. The Yorkshire fellow was a chirpy fellow, and he nicknamed my navigator 'Governor', because he came from London. So he'd talk about Governor, so after a while then he

became known as Gov. And the wireless operator, he was

- 39:30 Ken Morris, he became known as 'Mo' not Ken. But they were a pair of characters together because they used to dig each other about their accents for one thing and it was good fun. The tail gunner was very quiet; he wasn't what you'd call a great mixer. But I don't think he was at home. He fitted in; he did his job.
- 40:00 And we got on well, from the point of view of that we accepted who we were and that was it. The bomb aimer, he was different altogether. He was a bit lazy, but he did his job. When I say a bit lazy, he was very casual with the way he went about things,
- 40:30 although he was all right with the job he had to do.

**Okay, we will break there.**

## Tape 6

- 01:00 **Bill, just coming back to your time in Palestine, did you meet the locals, the Arabs and Jewish people?**
- Just incidentally, mainly when we had a bit of leave, say Tel Aviv. But previously, at Jerusalem we saw quite a lot of
- 01:30 activity that is just civilian activity. For example, the Jews at the Wailing Wall. In the poorer parts where the Arabs were you wouldn't go wandering about there aimlessly. There was a fair amount of animosity even in those days with the Jews and the Arabs. That was obvious.
- 02:00 But nowhere near the trouble they have got today. I can remember one little, one young lad, saying to us one day. They have a smattering of more than one language. And I asked the young fellow what he was going to do when he grew up. And he said, "Fight the Jews." So it's just an isolated case, I
- 02:30 suppose. But it shows that there was a lack of harmony in many ways, for various reasons. A lot of it was religious. You go to their holy sites, you see the Dome of Omar, and both groups claim that as a holy site. It is a sad area, really, and to some extent it was then. But.
- 03:00 **A lot of the army fellows have said that the locals used to steal things from them. Did you have that problem?**
- Oh steal. The Arabs have an art in stealing if they can get away with it. That happened. I didn't have anything in the way of stealing from me, but a lot depends on your circumstances. When we were in Italy,
- 03:30 Italy had had, the Italians had had the war go right through there, so conditions were hard. They'd steal if they got a chance because they were lacking in good basics for many of them such as good food. In a way you can't blame them. If you were hungry, you'd do a lot of things to get food.
- 04:00 **Can you describe the layout for me of the base in Palestine, of where you at?**
- You mean the operational training unit? Oh, it was simply a matter of buildings, such as living quarters, mess; you'd have the officers' mess, sergeants' mess, NCOs' [Non Commissioned Officers] mess, areas
- 04:30 where you met; it was an austere flying camp with no frills to it. But it wasn't unlike some of the others I was on. But not like a permanent aerodrome. I think if you went there now, you wouldn't find an airfield there and some of those airfields were temporary,
- 05:00 some became permanent. For example, Lydda, in Palestine, I think is their main aerodrome now. I wouldn't recognise places if I went back now after all that time.
- When we last left off with Chris [interviewer], you were sharing with him about being crewed up and who the members of the crew were. Do you remember your first flight together as a crew?**
- 05:30 Not in detail. It was our job to get to know the aircraft. We had to spend... You don't just get into a aircraft and fly it. You have got to study the controls; you have got to learn procedures. Starting up, for example, what had to be checked. Too bad if you left some of them out; you were in trouble.
- 06:00 But that is difficult after such a long time to answer what we did. The navigator wouldn't have any navigating to do, that is for sure, because we would have gone far in those early experiences, were just flying about circuits and bumps close by just trying to get used to the aircraft.
- 06:30 Then you would start to learn various procedures from the instructors, and as I said earlier the instructors were known as screens, strange term, but they'd experienced squadron life and handling the aircraft, so they would teach you what they knew and

07:00 hopefully it was going to be helpful.

**So you were in Palestine at this point, how did you end up going across to Italy?**

Simply by being posted there. Once you finished your training on an operational training unit you were then posted to a squadron, in our case with the Wellington, it was going to a particular.

07:30 in my case a Wellingtons squadron. Some of the boys were to go, or did go onto the Liberators, which is a larger four-engine plane, American plane, which is known as a B24. Well they would have to be taught how to fly it and also get more in the crew. In a Liberator in most cases

08:00 had a crew of seven. They were going on longer trips by and large so they would do that particular training. But for me, I didn't know at the time that I was going to end up on a Wellington squadron but because I was going to fly Wellingtons, the same plane I had flown in Palestine, it was a case of being sent to a Wellington squadron.

**08:30 So you flew over there in a DC3, is that right?**

Yes, the DC3s flew off from Palestine, down to Egypt, along North Africa to Tripoli and then, I don't know why they went quite as far as Tripoli but they did. We were able to have a look around there and see a different part of the world.

09:00 And from Tripoli we flew up to Naples airport.

**And then Naples you went to where to serve?**

To the planes at Foggia. Very mountainous around Naples. Italy is a... If you know anything about the geography, Italy is very mountainous. You have got the Apennines going right down. But we were to go

09:30 right across to the eastern side to what they called the Foggia Plains. And there they had room for airfields. I don't think the German Luftwaffe used that area to that extent that the Allies did. But it was quite an experience going across some of the mountains in trucks. Makes you hold your breath when you sit in a truck and you look over the side and it's a mighty

10:00 long drop down. If you have seen photos or pictures of those mountain areas, some of the mountain roads are a bit dicey. I didn't look down too much.

**So what happens when you come to now your first squadron? How are you greeted and taken in? Is there an initiation or what?**

No, no you meet

10:30 different ones, crews that are already there - those in charge, flight commander and so on. But it was a very interesting area in Foggia because I was sent to Foggia Main - it was a main airfield. When the Allies went through there

11:00 we were 205 Bomber Group, which was collection of Wellingtons and Liberators. Six Wellington squadrons, two Liberators, one being a South African squadron, and there was another South African squadron of Liberators nearby. But the whole area

11:30 was so congested because the American 15th Air Force - their bombers were also stationed there and I brushed up my memory a while ago. The Yanks had eighty-four heavy bomber squadrons there so they had created airfields there. The Yanks don't muck about when they do a lot of things. They had their bulldozers,

12:00 they went through say olive groves, vineyards, where it was necessary. They established airfields in an area where it could be very dry or very wet. So with those airfields they had to use a lot of wire meshing over sort of crushed rock. I didn't ever see them working on this but I can

12:30 imagine they were at fever pitch to establish these makeshift airfields. Quite a cluster of them. And while I went onto Foggia Main with one Wellington squadron, shared with another. I was on 104 and the other 40, was number 40. The other four Wellington squadrons were on some of these makeshift airfields and sharing

13:00 them with the Yanks. And that would have been quite an experience. Because of the well of the summertime. It would be so dry and so much disturbance by aircraft movement. For example, many propellers, stirring up the dust. It was awfully dusty in that area. And you get the opposite when the rains come; you go from dust and dry

13:30 to mud and bog. And some of those aircraft, I know the Wellingtons at those particular fields were inclined to get bogged at times. Even the taxiways where you were away from the runway was very often a difficult place to negotiate. So we'd see...

14:00 I don't know if I am jumping ahead of you. But as we mainly in those earlier on night operations - the Yanks would operate at daytime and didn't fly at night. So the Yanks would be starting up early in the

morning at whatever time and all the testing of the aircraft and so forth. And later on

14:30 to take up, take off and form up and be met by their fighters further north. And then goodness knows where they would go on from there. They would go up into places like Romania, Hungary, even up into Germany in some cases, Austria. They'd come back, and then there would be times that they'd arrive back and the Wellingtons had started to get ready for the night trips.

15:00 So I didn't ever see any collisions, but it was a very, very busy area as far as aircraft movements were concerned.

**What did you and those that you flew with think of the American aircrews?**

They were very friendly, although I didn't meet many of them. They lived a lot better than we did. The Yanks were fed

15:30 a lot better than we were. As you can imagine they had the best of things in tins and all the various ways that they supplied them. But equipment was no problem for the Yanks. If a Yank had a beautiful flying jacket spare and you had a bottle of whisky, he'd give you his flying jacket for the

16:00 bottle of whisky man, no problem - equipment. But it was different for us.

**If you, someone did that, were they allowed to wear that flying jacket or they had to wear what the British supplied?**

Oh, they would have worn it. It would have been combating the cold when it came. Just... But I wouldn't say that was a frequent happening, but I saw it happen once.

16:30 And good luck if you could get away with it, I suppose.

**So when you came to Foggia were you assigned a plane or what was the situation with planes?**

No you wouldn't be assigned to a particular aircraft. Maybe some of those with higher rank and position would

17:00 manage a favourite aircraft. But each squadron would have its aircraft. The maintenance of the aircraft under the conditions there was a real challenge to ground staff. Well there were no sheds to put them in - they were out in the open. And therefore maintenance on them was a real challenge for the ground staff. They would get aircraft

17:30 ready and if you happened to be on a trip or operation one night, you would be assigned to a particular aircraft and hope it was in good order. You couldn't check everything, but a pilot would carry out certain checks - you would wander around - but it was just having a look at the tyres and seeing that they weren't flat, for example.

18:00 Just a general look around to see that simple things hadn't been overlooked. For example taking off the cover of the pitot head that let air in to help register the airspeed. Now, if you took off with the cover over the pitot head you wouldn't know how fast you were going. So, that is just a little example of what might be done.

18:30 **Was there an occasion where you did the walk around check of the aircraft and discovered that something was missing, the tyres were flat?**

Oh, not that I am aware of. There were times when a pilot might find or would find on takeoff that something was wrong. Might be a bit late then.

19:00 No, I didn't have any problems that I can remember with aircraft that hadn't been properly to my satisfaction made ready. To a large extent the ground staff were very conscientious and keen, especially on squadrons, to have their aircraft in good order as good as possible.

19:30 **Can you share with me going out on an operation from the very beginning of receiving word and then what would happen stage by stage up to the operation?**

Well you would have your briefing beforehand. We had a hut where crews would assemble and they would be told

20:00 or given information about the target. Your navigator would receive a separate briefing and information that he needed, the wireless operator would be brought up to date with anything that he needed. The bomb aimer, he would check his instruments up the front and do whatever he was supposed to do.

20:30 The poor rear gunner couldn't test his guns very well down on the ground but he would have certain things to check. So in the briefing before you'd go, there would be a crew briefing as well as individual briefings for particular responsibilities. The takeoff would be controlled from the ground

21:00 and you'd get the signal to take off and you'd get into position. You'd, after you took off, our forces weren't very large - compared to England we might have had sixty or seventy aircraft on a trip and it was simply... You were very close to the Adriatic Sea

- 21:30 so in most cases we'd head out over the Adriatic Sea, and then head up on our way and checking that everything was right. The pilot relied very much on the navigator for direction, heading, speed of aircraft.
- 22:00 Then if we had to turn somewhere, he would indicate where we had to turn. And that procedure went on until you reached your target. I might add that when I reached the squadron, which was later August, I had been delayed in Palestine during, helping with air
- 22:30 control. So where some of my mates flew in August, I didn't. I got onto my first trip right at the end of August, which was an initiation trip flying with a New Zealand crew who were quite well experienced.
- 23:00 And once you got near the target, depending on what the target was, it could be a railway marshalling yards and then in which case our Pathfinders would do the same as what the Pathfinders did in England - drop their coloured target markers down. And once they went down, we'd be fairly close,
- 23:30 you'd head in onto them. The wireless operator would be keeping an eye out in the astrodome, because you didn't have lights on at night. You were hoping that you wouldn't run into anyone else. I never did see that happen. But it was a hazard more so over Germany with Bomber Command. But once we had dropped the bombs,
- 24:00 in most cases at night, we would hold level for a while a photograph was taken to be taken back to be analysed by the photographic section, so you would have to be alert so you just wouldn't stooze along asleep if you were in a dangerous position, you wouldn't want to be giving the gunners on the ground a chance to use their instruments
- 24:30 and work out your course and your height and things like that and make yourself an easy target, even though it was night-time. The Germans were very efficient with many things that they did.

**Efficient, could you give me some examples?**

Well they were highly trained soldiers, they knew their job. Those

- 25:00 who worked the anti-aircraft guns had been trained, they knew what they were doing and if you gave them a chance they would certainly make use of that chance. But I can't compare our targets with what were attacked in Germany. We didn't have the mass,
- 25:30 the saturation of aircraft that happened in many of the targets in Germany. When I got to squadron, I lost my thought a while ago, but during August with the Russians advancing from the east and the planned attack on southern
- 26:00 France by the landing down there in the Marseilles area, Romania and countries nearby like Hungary they had given up the fight; they had capitulated. So prior to me reaching the squadron, Wellingtons, for example,
- 26:30 had headed out to Romania across Yugoslavia to bomb the oil fields around Ploiești and in some cases to drop mines into the Danube River - now that was very unhealthy exercise. But when those countries capitulated that meant that the Wellingtons
- 27:00 no longer went to those targets. They didn't go to Romania and the Romanian air force had Messerschmitt 109 and 110 fighters. They were getting weaker but they still operated. I didn't ever see a night fighter and I am not complaining about that because the Wellingtons
- 27:30 were an easy target for the night fighters, and there were aircraft lost attacking those oilfields - Wellingtons. And of course in the daylight the massed attacks by the Yankee heavies, they were
- 28:00 opposed by the fighters which operated daytime and also anti-aircraft gunners. The Yanks had a great liking for getting in formation and flying in the day time. They did that a lot in England in the early days and they suffered terribly until the Mustang fighter was improved greatly
- 28:30 and went long range escort and started knocking out the fighters that were knocking out the heavy bombers earlier on - terrible business. But my group became involved in.... I think their Liberators, were, could have been the only ones involved with this when they went as far as Warsaw when there was an uprising
- 29:00 in the capital of Poland. And it only last about six months, six weeks I should say. But the Liberators of 205 Group went as far as Warsaw. And our Pathfinders squadron was a Halifax squadron, that is a four-engine British Halifax, so they were able to
- 29:30 go long distance. But I might be a bit wrong. I don't think the Wellingtons went as far as that.

**Once you returned home from an operation, what happened there? What was the debrief?**

Well simply reporting how things had gone for you - if you had any trouble, what did you see, what were your impressions, you

- 30:00 would give your report. And we would have an intelligence officer there and they would record this information and that, that would help them to assess your success or otherwise of the operation. And if your photograph was any good, that would assist the interpretation of what had happened.
- 30:30 **Okay, could you talk me through a few of the, I guess, the missions that you went on?**
- Well some of the... A couple of the early ones were on the marshalling yards at Ferrara and Ravenna, which were well up towards the
- 31:00 Po Valley. If you know the geography of Italy, there is quite a large valley – the Po River starts over near France. So it is quite a contrast to the area of the mountains. But the armies were pushing up beyond Rome trying to reach the Po Valley but it was a
- 31:30 very rugged tough area and the Germans, even though they were getting a hiding so to speak, they didn't give up. They fought the army very strongly so any of the railway marshalling yards were a major target because they carried supplies.
- 32:00 Attacks on some of those targets such as that they would have their anti-aircraft guns and searchlights trying to pick out the aircraft. I think one the boys who trained with me in Canada was lost on one of those raids. It might have been near Bologna, which is another town up in that area. So they were
- 32:30 amongst our toughest. Although I remember there is a contrast in this one. One trip the Wellingtons went on was to go right up the Adriatic and then turn in over the Po Valley and then head up to a town not far from
- 33:00 the Austrian border, in the Brenner Pass. Have you heard of the Brenner Pass? It is a famous pass through the mountains. And the Germans used to send supplies down from up that area of Austria down through onto the Brenner Pass down to their fighting forces. So Bolzano
- 33:30 was the name of the place that I was trying to think of. So we went one night to hit the marshalling yards, it was fairly cloudy, we had ack-ack guns against us. But I didn't know that at night there were twenty Liberators from the squadrons there; two South African squadrons were going right over into the Turin area
- 34:00 to drop supplies to the Italian partisans. Now that is about forty-eight [actually one hundred and forty] men taking supplies over to the partisans. We had reasonable weather, they struck a shocker, storms and goodness knows what. I don't why exactly but out of those twenty
- 34:30 Liberators, six crashed. They weren't shot down, the weather got them. And two of my mates were pilots of two of the Liberators that were lost. We didn't know about that – nobody told us. You very often operated in a different part
- 35:00 as to where you went and what you did and [you] didn't know exactly what went on elsewhere. And I only found out – I knew they had been lost – but I only found out the details of that operation not many years ago, by a bit of research.
- You had spoken earlier a bit about the weather in England, you know, the fogs, the rain**
- 35:30 **and everything else, I mean how did the weather in Italy compare? Was it worse, better?**
- At times, at times worse. I have heard the term about sunny Italy; it is sunny at times. But there are times in the Adriatic where you get nasty storms. I can remember one particular evening the storms were
- 36:00 really building up around our Foggia area and we were heading off to drop supplies to the Yugoslav partisans this time – to go across the Adriatic to part of Yugoslavia. Now I hadn't got very high altitude when I am riding a bucking horse, so to speak. I got
- 36:30 caught in the base of vicious air turbulence and I am fighting to make sure that I got away from that. The aircraft was going up and I am trying to get it to go down. The updraughts in those storms, air turbulence is very dangerous. I managed to get down low and continue on. But when we got back, we found
- 37:00 out that the group had lost eight aircraft. They weren't shot down – the storm got them. Now if that is eight Wellingtons, you've got forty fellows taken by the storm. So that was a bit frightening, although I had the advantage of being a pilot, I was fighting,
- 37:30 I was concentrating to keep control, whereas the other members of the crew had time to think and get more frightened than I was.
- So what was your biggest fear?**
- Well, the greatest fear of the air force in combat
- 38:00 was fire. There were various ways in which an aircraft can catch fire – fighter aircraft can cause fire,

ack-ack can cause fire. I didn't ever see an aircraft going down on fire,

- 38:30 but that happened a lot with Bomber Command, sometimes they would just explode. I know this because I have seen film and you have heard about it. But fellows who have seen aircraft going down in flames, it happened a lot with the fighter pilots. They were a different part of the service, but many fighter pilots
- 39:00 in the Battle of Britain suffered terrible burns. But it is an interesting word, this word 'fear'. I have never been what you might call real scared. I have been anxious and worried - some people use the word petrified,
- 39:30 I have never had anything like that. But I suppose more so than fear are concerns, concerns that nothing would go wrong. That you would cope with this and cope with that - but there are times when you don't have much time to cope with things, and I can tell you a story about that later.

**Put a bookmark in that cause we are at the end of the tape.**

## Tape 7

- 00:47 **All right, Bill, just to get a better idea about, of what we have been talking about in the operations in Italy, I think we need to know a little bit more about the aircraft you were flying and the crew on the aircraft.**
- 01:00 **Perhaps, you can describe for me a bit more about the Wellington and what the crew did and where they were? And just give me an overall description of the plane.**
- Well, it was a very famous plane, it was one of the British aircraft that really served right through the war. It was a geodetic construction, the airframe,
- 01:30 which was covered in fabric. But it was a tough aircraft. It was able to take a lot of punishment, so that helped give it a good name. When I first saw the Wellington I thought, "Oh my God, have I got to fly that?"
- 02:00 I am reminded of a story of an American Negro sergeant in America, in England, who was having a look at a Wellington and there was an Australian pilot nearby and this was in 1943. And he said, "You fly this thing, man?" He said, "I do." He said, "You fly it at night?" He said, "Yes, I do."
- 02:30 "Man I wouldn't fly in that thing if it was taking me home." I reckon that is a gorgeous story. The Yanks had... Out in the Middle East the Wellington was something new to them because of the fabric over the geodetic construction, and the Yanks used to refer to it as 'that Goddamn, rag bomber' or
- 03:00 'Two fanned canvas bastard', which amused us very much. So that was the way it goes. But it was well powered when I flew the Mark 10. The Mark 10 had the Bristol Hercules sixteen hundred and fifteen horsepower engine, which was a very
- 03:30 reliable engine to a large extent. Powerful for the Wellington. The Halifaxes I understand, the later model Halifaxes were equipped with Bristol Hercules. There were many marks of Wellingtons, that is, you might say models, mark 2 and mark 3, and mark 4 and so on. There was
- 04:00 provision for two pilots, but we only ever had one pilot and he was up the front of course and below him down towards the nose that was where the bomb aimer was positioned. In the early stages they had provision for a gunner up the front, they had a front turret, but that was done away with; we never had a front turret.
- 04:30 Then, behind me sat the navigator at his little table, near him sat the wireless operator and then you went back to some of the spars that gave it strength and right back to where the rear gunner was. A very isolated, lonely position.
- 05:00 He wasn't a pretty aircraft. He wasn't a comfortable aircraft. But it was functional and it did its job very well. I only had some troubles later on, and then I had some engine troubles bit later on, which could have been disastrous. But whereas I had a couple of cases,
- 05:30 the others didn't to my knowledge. So a bit isolated perhaps who knows.

**This geodetic construction designed by Barnes Wallace, I mean it is written down in the books, but what did it look like on the inside of the aircraft?**

A

- 06:00 massive crisscross airframe with the... You couldn't see the geodetic construction clearly from the outside. There would be a be in there, there was the Elsan - that was the toilet. Oh, I suppose, cables and wires and what have you.

06:30 It is not difficult to get photographs of the inside of a Wellington to see what it looked like.

**So there was a bed inside?**

Something to rest on. If you had an injured crew member you could put that person on that. It wasn't, it didn't have an innerspring mattress or anything like that. But it was there if it was needed.

07:00 **What about the bomb loads or supplies? If you were carrying supplies to drop, where were they put?**

In the bomb bay underneath. On bombing trips we always carried bombs that were five hundred or two hundred and fifty pounds. They weren't big bombs. Sometimes a Wellington

07:30 would be fitted to carry the four thousand pound cookie - which looked like a big coke can or drink can or something like that - it was just a massive explosive inside a can. But there was a bit of difficulty there. The bomb bays would have to be adjusted so the cookie would fit in there.

08:00 But the bomb bay wouldn't close properly, therefore you have got the cookie hanging down a bit or protruding a bit and therefore it added to the drag against the movement of the aircraft, like an extra brake, if I can put it like that. So I never carried a cookie, but my mate George McDougall carried a number - that's the way it went.

08:30 **The bomb bay doors wouldn't close if you had a cookie on board?**

Yes, because the cookie took up more space than really was intended in design of the aircraft.

**You said it wasn't a comfortable aircraft. What was the pilot's seat like and what were you sitting on and around?**

09:00 Now it wasn't, it was a reasonable seat, let's put it that way - it wasn't a great soft cushion. But you had to be strapped in, very firmly strapped in. And I have never failed to strap up in a car since. I got used to strapping in - you have the advantage of being firmly held.

09:30 Well, once again, it was fairly austere. You weren't going on a comfort trip in a plush limousine - it was a war plane.

**Those straps, were they connected to a parachute? How would you strap in?**

The parachute we carried was a clip on at the front.

10:00 We would have on our harness a couple of clips and the packed parachute, which would be in a little pocket nearby, would have to be clipped on before you left the aircraft. Too bad if you couldn't clip it on. The fighter pilots, as I have said before,

10:30 they had a parachute that they sat on. It was part of their personal equipment. If they went out, the parachute was there. Part of them, it opened up out the back.

**What are common problems did you have? Just little problems with the Wellington?**

Well the most uncomfortable problems I had - and I am not the only one who had this -

11:00 was for the escape hatch above the pilot to fly open when you were on your way. It was a two-door escape hatch which fastened down the centre. I think it must have been an oversight on ground staff for that to happen. But when it flew open, I got the shock

11:30 of my life. And there you are in an awful draught, as cold as cold can be. And I can still visualise and remember that because two of my crew were climbing over and about me while I concentrated on the instruments, while they struggled to get the hatch closed - they succeeded.

12:00 But in that book over there I have got a story from a Wellington crew member from our group who had the same thing happened and they couldn't get it closed. They had to work wearing goggles and they continued on their trip, they were just about frozen when they got back, and they had a fair bit of eye trouble for a while after that, because of the cold and the draught.

12:30 So we were lucky to get ours shut.

**Without the escape hatch open, how warm or cold was it inside a Wellington?**

Well, we were able to have heating by plugging in so that helped. But it still wasn't a trip of real comfort.

13:00 You would wrap up with as warm a clothing as possible. You would have your inner flying suit, your outer flying suit, your warm boots, your gloves. So, hopefully you were reasonable in comfort, without being real comfortable.

13:30 **When you say you were able to plug in, what do you mean by that?**

Plug into the heating system that was in the aircraft. Now don't ask me at this stage to explain that and

how it worked. But obviously the heat came from the engines and it was... Well I think, no, I would have to retract that.

14:00 It was electrical type heat, but I can't explain it at this stage.

**But I am curious as to what you mean by plug in? Did you plug your suits in, or did you plug - you had electric kind of suit, like a...?**

No, nothing like today. Modern aircraft today with their compression, their compressed suits, it's a new ball game. To give

14:30 you an accurate answer on things like that I would have to look back into information.

**I guess all we need to know, was every member of the aircraft plugged in individually into the aircraft heating system?**

Oh yes, it was awfully cold for the rear gunner no matter what happened.

**What else was little problems that you had with the aircraft?**

Well like anything that is worked under conditions

15:00 that are not ideal, the aircraft, like a motor car, it ages. And when they age they can start to get little problems. I can't give you a list

15:30 of the problems, but there could be problems with the handling of the aircraft, the response of the aircraft. You could have pilots, some Lancaster pilots, for example, you read about some of their experiences, some of them would have an aircraft that was a joy to fly and another Lancaster they would call it everything under the sun

16:00 because, it just wasn't right, it was aging, and there were responses that it wasn't as easy to fly, without being able to explain exactly. One of the problems with Wellingtons, I think this mainly applied to where we were

16:30 operating, was with tyres. If you got problems with the runway, any gunk or whatever it might get on the runway. I didn't ever see it happen, but you could get a burst tyre on takeoff. Now if that burst while you were trying to take off and you had got a bomb load,

17:00 you've got problems. Or if a tyre gave you problems, when you landed. I have read about and heard about this sort of thing. I know that tyres were a problem in that area where we operated, simply because of what happened to them.

**Was it a difficult aircraft to take off? I mean was it lighter than usual with its fabric**

17:30 **construction or heavier or...?**

It wasn't real light, but you trimmed it. You had to trim it with your elevators, see, this is part of your takeoff procedure. You would trim the aircraft for takeoff and then adjust that trim when you were in the air. So

18:00 it would be a difficult, there were times when it could be difficult to take off if something wasn't quite right and one motor responded stronger than the other and so you could get a swing in the aircraft. That happened to me on one takeoff and really for a split second or so it really frightened me, for one minute, one second I am on the

18:30 runway and the next I am heading off and the only time it ever happened to me. But I was flying an aircraft that I recall having been given some a few unflattering words by previous pilots who had flown it previously. So it was a problem.

19:00 And I wasn't sorry to have that trip cancelled because a problem developed with the wheel on the [undercarriage] being off the runway. And so we didn't go. I didn't weep over that. I thought, what else was in store for us if we had kept going.

**How did you identify each of the aircraft in your squadron? Did they have names or numbers?**

Oh, they had numbers.

19:30 They had a big number like W, like G for George, like over in the War Memorial, that was famous aircraft. Not only did it have a large letter, it had a registration number like your car registration. So every aircraft had separate, let's call it car registration.

**Was there any attempt in your squadron to personalise**

20:00 **these aircraft or to treat them as your own in any way?**

Not that I am aware of. I wouldn't be at all surprised if the commissioned officers who took a liking to a particular aircraft would ask for that particular aircraft and be on, using it as much as possible. But as I

said earlier, aircraft

20:30 were prepared by the ground staff, and the engineering section with the officer in charge would allocate aircraft for that particular trip. So then it was a matter of allocating crews to the aircraft.

**The Americans had a tradition of painting on their aircraft. Did**

21:00 **you see that in their aeroplanes?**

Very little, not out where I operated. They did it a bit with Bomber Command with the Lancasters and Halifaxes and Stirlings, but they didn't go about it the same way as the Yanks did - they were past masters at that.

**You said you had a couple of problems with engines,**

21:30 **could a Wellington fly on one engine?**

Yes, later on after squadron, when I was back at the Middle East Staff Navigation School, there was one exercise I was on and I hadn't got far from station and I looked out and there was oil

22:00 running over the engine so it obviously to me had a broken pipe, something like that, so I wondered what to do. But I ended up thinking that, "Now I've got to get back. I've got to get back to the drome." So I feathered the engine or the prop, which means turning the blades

22:30 like that so they have reduced air resistance, and I nursed it back on one engine. But I was a lather of sweat when I landed and it was a case of gently does it, nurse it back, turn very slowly, carefully, without over-using the controls. And I made one of the best landings I have ever had.

23:00 But it was interesting, the squadron leader in charge of that section said to me, "You should have cooked that engine. You should have got out of it as much as you could before it stopped." But he smiled when he said it, I wasn't in trouble, he just didn't agree with what I did.

**How far were you away from the trip when that happened to you?**

23:30 Oh, not far. Fifty miles, less, I don't know. I think I was in the air for about half an hour or a bit less.

**From takeoff to getting it down or...?**

From takeoff to getting it down. So it was an interesting experience. I was glad that it didn't happen when we had gone some hundreds of miles away

24:00 and over the Mediterranean, for example.

**Would you lose altitude immediately, would you be able to sustain altitude with one engine, did you?**

Well, I don't think I tried, I was returning but I was

24:30 getting down lower in height. I would have to fly slower of course, but get her down lower so that you reduce your attitude. I think that is what happened.

**All right, back to the squadron. You have described where they sat in the Wellington, I would like you to go through an operation with us and tell us what each of the crew members is doing.**

25:00 **Obviously, you are looking after the controls of the aeroplane. What about the other crew members, can you take us through what they did on the way to the target and over the target?**

Well, the navigator is at his table, he had got his charts and a number of instruments to watch and he is plotting his position on the chart.

25:30 The wireless operator would be helping him, with his signals, reading the signals from the primitive assistance we had through radio beams, that sort of thing, so they would be working together. The bomber aimer would be near me, keeping an eye out for things.

26:00 And the poor old gunner is freezing, so he would have the worst job to do. The navigator was very important, they were all important but the navigator was the one who was supposed to know where we were.

**How much communication was there between the five of you when you were on your way to a target?**

26:30 I'd say it varied. You'd be in contact. I don't think crews appreciated the yapper, the person who wanted to yap, yap, yap, yap, yap and not shut up. He would be told to pull his finger out or what but it was mainly a case of keeping in touch

27:00 and making comment about something that mattered, what you could see or what was happening. At times the WOP [Wireless Operator] would go and observe from the astrodome. The astrodome was

where the navigator could take a shot on the stars to work out where we were if he needed

27:30 that information to plot on his chart and these lines from reading the stars. You'd know about that, wouldn't you? When you were in the target area, the wireless operator would be observing from the astrodome, because he could then communicate, well maybe an aircraft that you were getting too close to or was getting too close to you.

28:00 Observed information that he thought was helpful.

**What equipment were you using to communicate within the aircraft?**

Oh, just a microphone. You'd have a microphone in the oxygen mask, you'd switch it on, switch it off and that would be plugged into the inter air communication system.

**Would you or the wireless operator have contact with anyone outside the aircraft?**

28:30 If need be the wireless operator, through his signals, his working, his transmissions, if need be he would receive messages and transmit a message if needed. You wouldn't do it unnecessarily; it would have to be something that needed to be done.

**What about when you got to a target, what would everybody do then?**

29:00 More or less what I said then. The bomb aimer is down the front, he had his bomb sight, which he would work. He would be setting as best you could any drift that might be happening, but that was difficult, but he would set his height. And just get that, the

29:30 bomb sight, as ready as he could for that particular operation, and then he would communicate with the pilot to tell him what to do - left, right, steady. Common procedure.

**How did your procedure differ if you were dropping supplies on one of those supply drops?**

30:00 Well the supply drops were a very important part of the operation at that time. The Germans were being harassed by the partisans, the Italian and as well as the Yugoslav. Marshal Tito was very

30:30 appreciative. I don't know if you have heard of Tito, but Tito was very appreciate of the assistance given by the RAF crews to them. I can't tell you exactly what the supplies were but they would be ammunition, probably special clothing, food, medicine.

31:00 They were a great assistance if any crew went down in their area - the partisans would help to assist them. And it was a dreadful area over there - mountainous, snow when I was operating. But we would drop to signals, at night it would be lights, flashing lights,

31:30 a code, something like that. We reached the stage where we were able to go across and do daylight drops and there would be a special place, a special marker that the bomb aimer would help identify and then the aircraft would go in and drop.

32:00 Sometimes, if the weather turned bad, night-time you wouldn't drop because you wouldn't know where - you couldn't see. But that was in the latter stages of the war. The Wellingtons were being taken out of operation simply because the Germans were on the move. They were pulling out. They were being harassed by the partisans but they

32:30 still fought fiercely as best they could. We got over in day time on some trips, not to drop supplies to the partisans but to bomb the retreating German troops with their vehicles. I remember one time, we were over there having a

33:00 go at them and the Mustangs came across. I don't know which squadron, could have been part of the Desert Air Force, which had Number 3 Spitfire Squadron, for example. The Australian RAAF fighter squadron operated right through North Africa, and right through into Italy and they did a lot

33:30 of harassing. There was another squadron, it was a Kittyhawk bomber squadron. They used to harass transport. I am sure Number 3 Squadron was equipped with Mustangs, so they could have been helping us, I don't know, joining in and what was done. But that was the day that anti-aircraft fire from the

34:00 ground hit our bomb sight area. Frightened the living daylights out of the bomb aimer, but it made the bomb sight unserviceable so we just did our best to disturb something down below, near where the troops were, by having a guessed aim, but it was daylight.

**Can you describe that incident, what happened,**

34:30 **what was happening in the cabin, when this fire hit?**

Well we were just doing our normal duty when the bomb aimer was down with his head near the bomb sight when it was hit; it frightened the hell out of him. But we weren't very effective as a crew after that not to be accurate. So it was a case of I think the navigator checked him

35:00 and he did what he did. He was more scared than anything; he was just lucky that he wasn't really hurt.

The aircraft was damaged and he wasn't. It was a case of get rid of the bombs and then go back.

**What could you see of your targets on those daylight runs, of retreating Germans?**

Very little. You could see the transport trucks.

35:30 There were a lot of them. They would hide if they could. Sometimes, if there was any place for them to hide, if they could get off into woods they would do that. So it was just a matter of trying to just in an area, sight them and then the bomb aimer took over guiding the pilot until the bombs were dropped.

**What sort of resistance did you come under**

36:00 **fire and from the ground during these late stages of the war?**

Not heavy. It was, I suppose in a way you could feel a bit sorry for the Germans because they were getting a hiding and it was our job to keep on making it uncomfortable for them. So that continued

36:30 and then the weather was really setting in. Most of my trips in December were daylight trips over Yugoslavia but the weather was getting cold - there was snow, rain was coming, it was raining at times. The living conditions were...

37:00 You have seen some of those photographs - we lived in tents. Now when you start to get adverse conditions it is very difficult, and this was one of the reasons why they were taking the Wellingtons out of service because once you go into January, February in Italy and southern Italy

37:30 you are getting the worst of the winter and extremely difficult for people to do their jobs. Those who look after the aircraft, those who fly them. The danger, the need wasn't there to keep them going. So they started to take the Wellingtons out of service. I remember I was

38:00 supposed to do forty trips to complete a tour but I remember the flight commander poking his head through the flap of a tent and just saying, "Scotty, you're finished, your tour is over." And what was happening was that they were condensing. I'd say at that stage they only had four Wellington

38:30 squadrons left, so they were tour expiring those who had the higher numbers of operations, and those that had lower trips in numbers, they would then concentrate them more. The two Wellington squadrons that were on the

39:00 wing away from Foggia Main would have been the next ones to go. It was in early October when the first [means second] two went, and that was when my mate George McDougall joined me. He was on 150 Squadron, Number 150, and he had... And another mate of mine he was also on 150 but he went to 40 Squadron, which was at Foggia Main, and George

39:30 came to 104. So without having the detailed information, I would say that later on the other two squadrons were finished, so it was a case of condensing, "Okay, you fellows are finished, you fellows go to that squadron."

**What was your reaction on getting that news?**

40:00 I didn't mind, actually, because it was damned uncomfortable, the living conditions that we had. It was, well the first bed I had. Well you take over a tent that had been used by another crew and they would take us.

## Tape 8

00:39 **Bill, you were discussing how the ground crew had better accommodation?**

Because they were good scroungers, things that they had scrounged would be discarded materials from the Yanks. If they had

01:00 timber from crates, for example, where things that had been delivered to them they would use the timber or whatever was available. I know that my first bed was couple of boxes and a couple of poles and a blanket fastened to the poles. I am not sure how I improved that, but

01:30 heating was a problem. You had to work out your own heating with a bit of fuel and drums and so on. My navigator had become an engineer in the oil industry after the war. He was a great one at trying to improve what we had and get it to work.

02:00 But there were always problems. One night it was a windy night and we were in the mess and one of the crews lost everything to fire and something happened, and something in the tent caught fire and that was it, the whole lot went up, whatever they had. So even trying to heat up a bit of your own stuff from home with you, tins from

02:30 food parcels from home, or from the Australian Comforts Fund, which was a great organisation, try and heat up something, but if you were a good innovator, as some fellows were... I laughed one time; we were being pestered by mice so the navigator was trying to invent mouse traps. And then

03:00 he wasn't a great inventor of mouse traps; maybe he didn't have the right material. But things like that - mice would make living in places like that uncomfortable. We had no private transport or anything like that.

03:30 There would be the squadron transport too, if necessary, to take you to such places as the mess or into town, but there was no chance of heading off on trips to visit other squadrons. I didn't ever, in the four months that I was at Foggia, try and go across to locate the

04:00 members of 40 Squadron and link up with fellows that I knew. So those fellows that I went out to the Middle East with, most of them would have gone onto the Wellingtons, some onto the Liberators, but I didn't know where they were and they didn't know where I was. Often you weren't with these fellows for a long time. They hadn't become firm friends

04:30 from the point of view of long association. It was quite, quite interesting at times, in the short time that you got to know fellows fairly well. The weather was a real problem. As I mentioned before, the dust and the mud.

05:00 Food, outside they had the, whatever you call it, like the army kitchen or something, outside cooking, setup, which was a hell of a job for the cooks, as you can imagine. So what they dished up varied, but quite often it was potatoes, that had been dried potatoes,

05:30 dried eggs, your meat was usually Spam, which was from tins. Vegetables, very scarce. If you were able to barter with the Italians and had something to swap for fresh fruit maybe that would work - if you had your contacts.

06:00 But they were desperate themselves for food. So that was a problem. We didn't travel very far. In the town itself there was a bath place organised by the NAAFI, that I think is the Navy, Army, Air Force Institute, a British organisation,

06:30 a bit like our Australian Comforts Fund. They had organised in a building in Foggia - there is a photograph of it in George's book. But that was where you could go for a hot shower. There was nothing like that out at the squadron, around your tents and so on. You just put up with cold water. So the hot shower, when you could get there,

07:00 if you'd get there now and then was very welcome. There was a bit of entertainment in the town. Sometimes there would be a show put on by the Yanks or the RAF fellows. But I can't visualise them. I was saying to Nola the other day, checking one of my letters, I read about these happening, the only one of my

07:30 mates from overseas that I caught up with and there was George and Brian Comerford, but Brian was living in the Newcastle area, and George was in Sydney. So I never had reunions, like a squadron would have. One of the fellows that I went out to the Middle East with, Peter Pettitt, went onto Australian Wellington Squadron, which was 458

08:00 Coastal Command. They were painted white and they used to fly out and look for enemy shipping and that sort of thing. They'd fly over the Mediterranean, fly out over from Gibraltar, they were stationed there one time, go out over the Atlantic Ocean a bit, not too far in the Wellingtons I think. But Peter had trained at Narrandera

08:30 and I saw him there at the last, Narrandera, Association, the 8 EFTS [Elementary Flight Training School] Association gathering. And there, he was there with quite a group, they had all been on 458 Squadron and here I am - I'm a lone bird looking around. Oh, you are wearing the Italy Star, the ribbon of the Italian flag,

09:00 didn't know them but I recognised the metal, the ribbon, so I had a chat with them. And I was yakking away there for a while and I said, "What's your name?" And he said, "Peter Pettitt." "Oh, you were with me going out to the Middle East." But that was years before, you see I didn't recognise him. But what I am getting at, following the war, even when I would meet up with George

09:30 and Brian, we didn't talk about Foggia, we didn't talk about the trips or what it was like living there. So you forget. It is like fellows that I can see names in those old letters and I can't visualise the fellows. If I had photographs, that is a different matter. But to try and visualise

10:00 those fellows and relate happenings to them, I can't do it. So this emphasises strongly why fellows like myself are known as odd bods - if I march in Sydney in the Anzac March and I have got to join the odd bods, and I have looked and taped the Anzac march for years and looked for the odd bods,

10:30 looked at the odd bods and they are gone, there are hardly any marching, I haven't been able to recognise one. Maybe the fellows I knew were about, some of them. But I don't see them. Now this brings recollection into a difficult stage. I can't say, "Ah, do you remember this?" You see old fellows getting together at times, the army blokes who have been in the same unit

- 11:00 and they will earbash each other about this and they have these special meetings and they do it again and they do it again. Like the navy fellows. But the air force fellows who flew on these RAF squadrons can't. My squadron had an association in England, 104 Squadron Association – they have wound up now – no more.
- 11:30 **Just coming back to Italy, you mentioned the Comfort Fund, what sort of things did you receive?**
- In the Australians Comforts Fund? Warm clothing, always very welcome, socks, very practical things, things to improve your meal, to add to your meals, which you shared it with your crew.
- 12:00 They would just top what you were getting from home. My family sent a lot of parcels, so did friends, from my home town, and they helped. So great organisation, the Australian Comforts Fund.
- You mentioned that you did obviously daytime and night flying,**
- 12:30 **which was the more difficult of the two?**
- Depends where you were going. Some trips – well daylight is comparatively easy because you can see where you are going, but other people see you too.
- 13:00 As far as handling the aircraft was concerned, it didn't worry me. I liked night flying, I didn't mind it at all. But when you are on squadron there are things, you have to be on your toes a bit more because the fact that you can't fly back with lights on and that creates a problem. Hopefully you don't get troubles.
- 13:30 **You mentioned the incident where some, I take it, some ground fire hit the bomb sight and damaged that. Was there other occasions where you had close calls?**
- Yes, one was over the Po Valley one night, when we were going up to Bolzano the night we lost the Liberators. A battery of guns, I must have been a bit asleep then, I don't know where the other aircraft were
- 14:00 about, but maybe we scattered a bit and they were able to just focus on me. I was the one that they obviously just targeted. And there was a great crash of anti-aircraft shells out to the right of the aircraft. That was close. But golly, compared to a lot of targets,
- 14:30 that was only minor. There was another time when we had slight damage. But photographs that I have got in that book there of Wellingtons that have got back to the squadron and have been severely damaged, it is incredible that they got back, only emphasising the punishment they could take. So we got off lightly.
- 15:00 **Just some of the officers who were back at camp, such as chaplains, what can you tell me about them?**
- I haven't strong memories of strong associations with chaplains, just a little bit. Out around
- 15:30 squadron, we had three chaplains in the Middle East. One was the famous Fred McKay, who took out over in Alice Spring, the inland mission that was started by Flynn of the Inland. So Fred McKay ended up out there and he was a great fellow but I only met him the once. There was
- 16:00 the RC [Roman Catholic] chap, Johnny McNamara, and there was the Church of England fellow, Davey. I saw them together in Cairo at the Kiwi Club but I am afraid that I can't recall much in the way of church services. I remember the padre helping in Alexandria
- 16:30 after the incident and he was getting clothing for us. I don't have vivid recollections of padres, to be honest.
- That's all right. One of the areas that the archives are interested in is obviously recreational time. Do you know much about brothels that the fellows may have gone to in England,**
- 17:00 **Palestine or Italy?**
- No. I remember in Egypt. At one time we got into a horsedrawn gharry, a group of us went in that and got the Gyppo [Egyptian] driver,
- 17:30 he had his whip and his horse. There must have been about half a dozen of us and he took us into the brothel area of Alexandria. I'll tell you, mate, we were horrified. What we saw of the women, they would cut your throat. The Pommy sailors were there in droves.
- 18:00 But we had a quick look and said, "Let's get the hell out of here." So out we went. No thanks. That thought of thing never interested me and I think a lot of the fellows with me were the same way. We must have been a clean living lot.

**Excellent.**

18:30 We had been given fair warning of problems that could arise.

**What had been said to you?**

Well, mainly from the point of view of health. The dangers to your health was real, and if you copped a dose you had big trouble, you had big trouble with the authority and you had trouble with the

19:00 medicos – you had to be cured. So, no, I must have been a pure living fellow, but no thanks, I didn't want any association with anything like that.

**Do you know of any of the men that got themselves in trouble health wise from those sort of places?**

No, none of my mates.

19:30 **Okay.**

But that was the way it was.

**Now, where you last left off with Chris, you were up to the point where you received the news that you no longer needed to continue, you were up to thirty-two flights. What happened from that point?**

We were sent

20:00 over near Naples. We had been on leave at one stage while we were on squadron. We had a short leave over at Sorrento where hotels building had been taken over. We'd go there and you would have the comfort of good meals and good beds and so forth.

20:30 And that was where we were sent into that cluster of buildings. My crew dispersed, the bomb aimer and the wireless operator went to England on leave. My navigator became navigator for some months to one of the top RAAF men out there. I easily remember his name,

21:00 because he was Air Vice Marshal Baker, had the same surname. I think the Canadian fellow went home – I didn't hear from him. The Aussies and New Zealanders when the time was ready had a two-day trip in trucks with canopies and we went down to Taranto, right down the south.

21:30 You know where Taranto is? Well, if you've got Italy it looks like a foot, a leg, you've got the toe coming down and the heel coming down, Taranto was way down there, that was the harbour, that was where the Italian fleet, when it surrendered or whatever, finished up and it was tied up all out of action in Taranto. It was interesting to

22:00 see them. It was interesting to see a group of Yugoslav partisans, and half of them were women, who were, or they had been sent or taken over there for medical treatment. A lot of them were on crutches, one of the girls, had, she had lost a leg. So the partisans were not just the men fighting the Germans, they were the women too.

22:30 They looked a hardy, tough lot. And I might also mention, before we left Sorrento we had, there was dance in one of the places and one of the blokes met up with Polish army girls. And that was an interesting experience, with the Polish army girls, who were on leave there because there was a Polish group of men

23:00 fighting with the 8th Army. And I can tell you what I can remember from then, I wouldn't have liked to cross them. They were tough girls. But it was interesting and we had fun trying to yap to them and sign language and so forth. But we waited a few weeks down at Taranto, a little bit of entertainment waiting for a boat. We guessed we were going back to Egypt

23:30 but we weren't sure, but it was pretty obvious. And that is what happened; we went back to Cairo, to a camp near Cairo.

**And what were you doing near Cairo?**

Filling in time. Just going in to town, now and then, to the Kiwi Club. Run by the New Zealanders –

24:00 that was a good club. You could have a drink and some good meals and so forth. Oh we would do a bit of sightseeing; we would go around in groups. Say writing letters, playing cards, reading. It was just a lazy time, mainly. You would get a bit sick of trying to traipse around Cairo; it is not an exciting place

24:30 for people like us.

**And so from there you moved back to Palestine and a training unit, is that right?**

Some of the fellows, they went onto different jobs. I went to, I'd call Ein Shemer; I understand somebody told me later on the aerodrome was near Megiddo, that is a biblical name, Megiddo.

25:00 And the aerodrome, it was a wartime aerodrome established there. And that is where the Brits had the Middle East Staff Navigation School. I don't know if I mentioned earlier that they were changing over

from the American Baltimore aircraft to the Wellingtons so they needed fellows who could fly the Wellington, wireless operators.

- 25:30 They were the main ones sent there. So they got there from different squadrons, Brian Comerford joined me there, a mate of mine, Norman Lord, from New Zealand, I'm still in contact with him. Some of the fellows from 458, the Aussies, the Coastal Command squadron
- 26:00 ended up there. There were RAAF fellows as well. But our job was to just fly the navigators around to put into practice the additional learning that they were getting from the school. So when we'd fly out there would be one pilot, one wireless operator and two navigators.
- 26:30 So we were nothing like a bomber crew, we'd fly out over the Mediterranean, down to Egypt, up to Cyprus, just tripping around. Doing exercises like that. We would do what they wanted to. The navigators would tell the pilot where to fly, and the WOP was there as a back for
- 27:00 emergencies. Take messages, send messages, we were doing exercises, based on Bomber Command, air sea rescue, search out over the Mediterranean, trying to find something that had, say a ship that had been lost or whatever. And then we had some trips based on long
- 27:30 range transport command. One of them we went down to Khartoum down the Sudan, flying right down up along over the Nile, way down over the desert. Not very comfortable looking out over all that sand and realising, "God, I hope I don't go down there, a long way to walk. Wouldn't make it." So we got down to Khartoum and overnight there.
- 28:00 That was smelly place. Like a lot of those Arab places, or such places. So we stayed overnight and flew back the next day. Very hot in flying gear in those desert places, you would sweat like a pig, but you had to put up with that. Another trip we were to go right across Africa to Casablanca
- 28:30 So we would have two legs, and I flew with my mate Brian Comerford, and two navigators and two WOPs, one I had teamed up with, Roy Schoppe, he been on one of the - he was a Western Australian who had been on one of the other squadrons, and there was a ground staff corporal with us. So we had seven on board,
- 29:00 And leaving about midnight, and Brian and I tossed to see who would fly first. One had to try and get some sleep. So I don't know whether I won the toss or lost the toss, but he was to fly first. So I am down in the bomb bay and believe it or not, I was getting some sleep. And a couple of hours later, I am getting roused by the ground staff fellow to tell me.
- 29:30 that Brian, we knew him as Shorty, was in trouble with the aircraft. And he was in trouble - he was fighting it and he was becoming physically distressed as he was trying to handle the aircraft. Well here I am, I am not sure where we are, what was going on. He was having trouble with the right rudder, which made me think that he had engine trouble.
- 30:00 But a moonlight night, we were close to going down and there was a moonlight shining on a patch of water and without thinking much at all. I said, "Head for the water." So I am struggling to help him for a while and you talk about a cat with nine lives,
- 30:30 he put it down in marsh at the edge of a lake near Alexandria. And we were loaded with extra fuel and obviously the fuel tanks in the bomb bays burst and the next minute, a split second, there is fire around us and behind us. So we had to get out,
- 31:00 but luckily, you wouldn't believe it, the water was up to there. If it had been up to there we were curtains. We scrambled out, some out the front, I not sure whether three or four got out the front, but the Aussies were definitely up the front, two pilots and one of the WOPs, and the others got out the back. Now that is where they got burnt, those getting out the back.
- 31:30 Skin off and what have you. They would have been inhaling heat and you name it. One of the English navigators died later in hospital. But obviously the WOP had sent out signals and the signals were received. The gyppos [slang term for Egyptians] came along and they are calling out,
- 32:00 "Baksheesh, Baksheesh, Baksheesh." Do you know what that means?

### **Money, money, money.**

We'll help you if you give us some money. We didn't have time to any inclination to say anything. Just get out as best we could. So we struggled out of the water and got away from the fire and after a while we were rescued

- 32:30 by Brits who took us to the naval hospital in Alexandria, and that is where Johnny Wressel, one of the English navigators, died. That was very sad because it's only a few days off victory in Europe. So he died and the other fellows recovered and we
- 33:00 we were looked after there with one of the organisations. I can't remember offhand now what it was; I know I have got it in my notes. I think it must have been the Australian Comforts Fund hostel or something like that. And that was where we met a padre who helped us get clothing

33:30 and we just waited about there until we were taken back to Ein Shemer. It was interesting while we were waiting that we met up with some of the Kiwi soldiers who had been with the 8th Army on their way home and we were yapping to them one night at one of the cafés. And they said, "You fellows who are flying up in the air, you can have that on your own,

34:00 we wouldn't be in that." And we laughed and we said, "Well you fellows that are in the army, you can have that on your own too, we wouldn't be in that." And here are these fellows who had been through lots of army fighting against the Germans. So it was a matter of what suits you.

**Did you ever discover what went wrong with the aircraft?**

You couldn't because

34:30 when we were picked to be flown back to Ein Shemer, the pilot flew out over where we had gone down and here is the aircraft, just a burnt-out shell, sitting in the marsh. We lost everything, so how could they find out exactly just went wrong? So the Brits always

35:00 had an enquiry, oh, you must have an enquiry and see if they could find somebody to blame. That is being a bit harsh, I suppose. But we were interviewed, what could they do, what could we do. I think it was one of those cases, the sort of thing that would happen with many crews. It was a miracle that you survived, the circumstances varied,

35:30 and I suppose to lose one fellow out of seven wasn't a bad score, if I could put it that way.

**Firstly, did you have your lucky charms with you?**

No.

**Was that the first time you had flown without them?**

Oh, I didn't take. When I say I had a photo of Dad and his medals,

36:00 that was back in my gear back at the camp. I didn't take things like that with me on trips. Oh no, I wasn't one for carrying a lucky charm such as a rabbit's foot with me wherever I went.

**Bringing the plane down, you had spotted this area of water. Do you remember talking to the other pilot as you were coming down and approaching?**

36:30 No, I don't think so, I may have a bit. He was concentrating so hard on what he was trying to do that I don't think he was talking much if at all. So we were living in hope. They talk about coming in on a wing and a prayer. We weren't praying, I know that.

37:00 We were just hoping. But you didn't have much time. We were fairly close and things happened quickly. So to a large extent it was left to him and his judgment and he did a marvellous job, but I think there was a hell of a lot of luck in that.

**Where does the rest of the crew brace themselves**

37:30 **before impact?**

Oh, behind, wherever they can get. Behind a spar is the main place, if they can brace themselves there.

**A spar is what?**

It is part of the frame. You would step over a spar as you are going along the aircraft. So there would be more than one spar.

38:00 I don't know exactly where they went. One of the problems with a place like the Staff Navigation School was that we didn't do drill duties, or drill procedures. That was mainly done on squadron as going into action on bombing raid and so on.

38:30 And in hindsight, because you are supposed to get wiser as you get older, I think that the powers that be, those that were in charge at the Staff Nav School, took too much for granted. And didn't, we didn't discuss things that we should have. So what do you do about this and so forth?

39:00 Foresee possible hazardous predicaments and do something about it. But as far as... That was the only aircraft that had trouble when I was there. So I suppose when you are affected by something like that it hits home hardest - "If only..." "We should have done this," or, "We should have done that." "We should have been better

39:30 prepared."

**What were you able to do for the fellows who got burnt?**

Just help them along a bit. We were in a great state of shock, even those who weren't burnt. It was a matter of getting out and we had nothing to treat them with. No gear, nothing,

40:00 so things happened so quickly. I think we were all in a state of shock to some extent and hoping that people who could really do something would soon turn up. We were very close to Alexandria and the wireless operator sent the messages out.

## Tape 9

00:42 **And this incident that we were talking about, the crash land, how close was that to the end of the war?**

Very close to the end of the European war because it was while

01:00 we were waiting, that's those who were able-bodied, those that hadn't been badly burnt were waiting and filling in time, victory in Europe was announced. So we were in a place where we were reduced in number,

01:30 only a few of us, and when it came to celebrating the end of the war in Europe it was very low key for us. We didn't go out and paint the town red or anything like that. It was wonderful news. But we were in a fairly sober mood. So while we

02:00 joined in with some folk, I guess, the British folk, ex serviceman, I can't recall details. But that was good news.

**What were your plans in respect to fighting in the Pacific?**

I didn't have any plans at all because I knew

02:30 that we weren't needed; we had enough information. My brother who had followed me into the air force and he got his wings, but he didn't get overseas, posted down to Bairnsdale. And he spent half a year flying Ansons down there training navigators. It was interesting that and when he was posted to Tocumwal

03:00 down the Murray River, there was a big airfield there. The Yanks had a lot to do with that. Liberators, and he started to train on Liberators, but as the time went by his flying decreased. So he and many others realised, and it happened in England too,

03:30 they weren't needed. Fellows trained, half trained, the writing was on the wall, the war was ending. So earlier on we thought, and I would write it home too, letters to home that, and about us being needed at home. But everything was pretty well under control. The Japs

04:00 were getting a hiding with the might of the Yanks. And the Aussies' contribution, they didn't get very much recognition at times. It was the same as our group, 205 Group in the Middle East, the news would go out strongly about the Yanks and what was happening with their force

04:30 but we were in the background. We were wanted, but we... I am not being nasty or anything, like, but the same happened with some of the Aussies' squadrons. There were Aussie squadrons operating in Italy, 454 Baltimores and others, you didn't hear a lot about them but they were doing a great job.

05:00 The fellows who were part of the famous Desert Air Force, which continued on.

**Something to be said about PR [Public Relations] then, isn't there, with the Yanks? Coming home, how did you, when did you get news that you were returning to Australia?**

Well, when I went back to Ein Shemer. It

05:30 wasn't long before we had the Malta trip, not long after we had had the ditching business. So maybe it was part of the old story - if they have had a mishap, get them back flying again. If they have got to get over it, they will get over it. And that was an interesting exercise. Brian Comerford and I were the pilots again, so we weren't being sacked. Brian Comerford,

06:00 Roy Schoppe was one of the WOPs. And we had the same experience again, in that we had two pilots, two navs [navigators], two WOPs and a ground staff fellow. And it was interesting to go to the famous isle of Malta, which had received the George Cross for their resistance - a battering they got from the Germans. But it was a sad island to look at. It was battered

06:30 and the people were poor, the way they lived, and to have been there was an experience. And we went back the next day, a long trip. And then we started doing the same sort of exercises again and obviously the powers that be were, that is, those in charge of the Australians

07:00 and the Brits, were working out what to do. And after a while English pilots and WOPs started to arrive at Ein Shemer and we were told that they were going to take our place and that we were going to go home. So the final exercise that some of us did was to

- 07:30 fly Wellingtons that were being put aside and fly them down to the Heliopolis drome near Cairo, and once or twice go back with one, and that would take us back and we'd take some down. And they were left at Heliopolis - I suppose they were turned into scrap or something. So my last flight was a
- 08:00 ferry flight with Roy Schoppe down to Heliopolis, and here we waited. And as time when by, fellows started coming in from other squadrons, from 454, the Baltimore squadron, from 459, where my mate Keith Pond had been when he flew out attacking the island of Rhodes,
- 08:30 and I got a bit more information from fellows from that squadron. And the fellows were coming in from the other places that they had been flying. So I was catching up with fellows that I had known previously somewhere back in England. Some who had been with me in Canada, they'd turn up, and
- 09:00 we just filled in time. We'd go into the Kiwi Club, hear rumours, "Oh, we are going home soon. This is being organised and that is being organised." One ship was to take us and then we read in the paper that it caught fire in England, so that finished that. And in the end, while I was waiting, my good friend from home, Bill Abbot,
- 09:30 there is a photograph in there. He eventually caught up with me. He is younger than I am but he joined later and then he arrived in Italy when I was about to leave and we had a little bit of correspondence. And so reunions occurred. But we still waited and then George McDougall turned up, and George had been sent from 104
- 10:00 to one of the OTUs to be instructing - they were still carrying on doing some instructing work. I didn't get that. And George turned up and that was great to be with him again and then finally we were told, "Pack up your kitbag with unwanted gear." That will go in the hold of the ship and it would be delivered to your home address. So we
- 10:30 knew that something was in the wind, and we had heard that the burnt ship was being replaced by the Stirling Castle, which was right, and others, there were groups leaving at times. Some of the fellows would move off and catch another ship. I didn't know that my mate, Russ Jones, had gone
- 11:00 through that area, about a month before on the Stratheden. Now that is a well known name, an old P&O [Pacific and Orient] Liner that used to do the trips. And down we went to the Suez to get on board the Stirling Castle. It is not right on the canal, it opens, the waterway opens up
- 11:30 there at the top of the bigger water. And as I am walking up the gangplank, here is Barry Brown, my instructor in Canada, and he was standing up there grinning at me. He had stayed on instructing in Canada and then he went on to fly Mosquitos and he was on his way home on the Stirling Castle, so he was good company and a good finale.
- 12:00 And away we went, a day at Fremantle and then home to Sydney Harbour. That was great - to be given a leave pass and requirements, paperwork, and then head off with families and friends and then eventually be discharged.
- 12:30 But my younger brother had been discharged early September, they were getting rid of the unwanted fellows out here, fair enough. He returned to his job with the Commonwealth Bank. I returned to work again for BHP and that was a job
- 13:00 it was a bit difficult trying to settle down, to fit in where only you and another fellow had left and the rest had stayed on. And the odd one grizzling about the rationing during the war, which didn't go over at all well. So then I started doing correspondence course to become an accountant and after a while,
- 13:30 I learnt about the teachers' shortage from a TAFE [Technical and Further Education college] teacher. He said, "Do you know that there is this and that, shortage of teachers?" And one of the fellows that we had lost on Liberators in Italy had been a primary school teacher and another fellow, he had started teaching and later on he went back to teaching and became an inspector of
- 14:00 schools. So I applied for teacher training. I had the necessary qualifications and I was amazed to be accepted and I was amazed to go the Sydney Teachers' College and find so many ex servicemen going through that college, training for teachers.
- Did it ever cross your mind to stay in the air force?**
- 14:30 I had thought about it a little bit. And while I was at Ein Shemer I had been commissioned and a couple of my mates had too. But then I started to find out that as the Yanks would say, 'pilots were a dime a
- 15:00 dozen'. So I didn't dwell on it or give it serious thought. I know my mate Russ Jones had been instructing in England, and he was developing health problems, and he couldn't get away from the aircraft quickly enough - "I'm out, finished." And I think a lot of blokes were like that. And my mate George went
- 15:30 back to work where he had been. He got itchy feet about flying, so he did training at Bankstown and got his civil licence, but he was dead set on becoming a civil pilot and that happened and he kept flying.

- 16:00 But he is a lucky man to be alive because when the first turbo prop aircraft were brought out to Australia they were something special, the turbo props. And he was training with four other, no, three other pilots and I think some of them I think were ex RAAFies,
- 16:30 and down west of Melbourne, the training place down there, and there were a number of them in the aircraft and something went wrong. There were two pilots instructing at the front and George and another pilot were standing behind them. And something went wrong and the aircraft was going to crash. And just before it
- 17:00 crashed, George turned and dived towards the tail and he was the only pilot who lived. So how is that for a bit of luck?

**Amazing! Amazing!**

Amazing. That really knocked him about for a long time.

**Just going back on to you, after the war did you experience any trauma as a result of the war?**

- 17:30 No, I didn't have any trauma. I think maybe I took after Dad – you get on with things. If something happens you do your best to get on with it. There are other people worse off. If you can cope, well cope.
- 18:00 No, I didn't have any worries. Although, one of my mates, Mattie Tack, his photograph's in there. In the skating group, about the time that I started flying about with squadron, Matt was in a badly shot up Lancaster, and he lost half a leg from
- 18:30 fighter fire I think it was. Some of the crew were badly hurt. Matt was a real outgoing person. He received the DFC for helping the other fellows in the aircraft but he had a lot of recovery to do, recuperating to do, in England. But coming back home,
- 19:00 he was telling me, he has been dead for some years now, but he was telling me one time we met, about the chaps that were recovering from burns and so forth. And he knew some who suicided – they couldn't handle what had happened to them and what they were going through with recovery from burns. Of course in those days
- 19:30 it is nothing like what they can do today, so.

**The fact that you had served in the war, and so had your brother and father had, did that bring the three of you even closer than you were?**

Well maybe a little bit.

- 20:00 I know my brother, that one thing affected my brother, was that he hadn't gone overseas. No. Mates of his, who had graduated and got their wings at Malalla, went overseas and didn't fly again. And he went down to Bairnsdale training navigators and they lost Avro Ansons out in Bass Strait.
- 20:30 Those fellows who went overseas and came back were returned servicemen and he is not, so there is no chance of him joining the RSL. The RSL has done funny things over the years. And then later on, when they started to change their rules of acceptance and advertise the fact that they were looking
- 21:00 for members and wanted fellows like my brother to join, he got irate about that and he wrote to the RSL National President, I think he was national, Sir Colin Hinds, and he said, more or less, he was polite about it, "You didn't want me years ago and now you want me." He says, "Too late, you want more members
- 21:30 now to make for those that you are losing. You didn't want me then. I have got no interest now." And he received a very courteous reply back. But that is one thing about serving now, because the RSLs are nowhere near as strong as they used to be. But sometimes the Aussies have strange opinions. A bit
- 22:00 like the Vietnam fellows. So many of them, "Well you haven't been in a real war," some of the returned fellows would say to them. Not right.

- 22:30 **Just a few final questions to sum up. Given that this is for an archive, what would you like to say to future generations about war?**

I don't think it solves what people want it to solve. You have only got to look at what's happening now. And very often wars are started by people who have some power, and it is greed that motivates them to keep their power, to keep what they have got

- 23:00 or to add to that. The Middle East is a classic example of that, the way that different groups have gone in there – the French, for example, up in what is now Syria. They were after land out there, property. The Brits were after more to add to the Empire and
- 23:30 what we are getting now, with all of this business with Iraq and so forth. What motivates people, don't you see, the Yankee, the ordinary people, finding out to their horror, especially the parents, their sons have gone. But those that start the war, to a large extent, you don't see them firing shots and being

- 24:00 shot at. So I am a bit cynical about the human race. I think it's creating so many problems and trying to solve them in the wrong way. You go to Palestine, Israel - there are hundreds and thousands of more Arabs, there
- 24:30 now than when I was there. The Jews think it is their homeland, the Arabs think it is their homeland. Will they ever stop fighting? I doubt it. And if you study what's happening with people around the world, well, up in Timor, East Timor,
- 25:00 and the brainwashing that goes on for the people who don't have basic needs, to a large extent. And they envy what other people have got and they resent what other people have got. So with the human race I don't know what the answers are. We are so clever, but we are so stupid.
- 25:30 We achieve so much and yet we ruin so much. And now they want to go to Mars - well, I don't know.

**Why do you think it was important for you to share your story today?**

It was important, but I wrote up,

- 26:00 I rang after thinking about the information that had gone out through our local member, Kay Hull, about this exercise being on and encouraging the returned people to respond. And I started thinking of my age, I will soon be eighty-two, and I was only a young fellow
- 26:30 when I was with 205 Group. The Aussies were there but not in great numbers. And I thought, "Well I can put in a word on behalf of those who served with 205 Group and some of them who didn't come back. Well
- 27:00 that might add something to the history of that conflict." I'm unimportant, but those who didn't come back need to be remembered. Age shall not weary them - I only
- 27:30 remember the young faces. Anyhow, it's been a long day.

**Is there anything else you would like to add to your interview today?**

Except to say that it has been quite an education to

- 28:00 tackle this. I was thinking, I spoke to one my mates here, he had been a POW, John Woods. I don't know who interviewed him, but he was telling me about it being a long day. He was a very young fellow, he was on HMAS Perth, which was sunk by the Japanese,
- 28:30 and he survived as a boy and he wanted to tell his story. But when he told me a few things, I thought, "Oh God, all that time!" and I was beginning to feel a bit sorry that I had volunteered, and rung up and more or less said, "Well if you can get two bobs' worth out [value] of me, well fair enough."
- 29:00 You don't know what two bob is, do you? Two shillings. The old twenty cents, although it would be worth more then twenty cents today. So it has been an education. Thanks for putting up with me.

**Good. I hope a happy education at that. Thank you for your time today. We appreciate it.**

That's all right.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**