Australians at War Film Archive

George Purdy - Transcript of interview

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http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1915

Tape 1

00:35 **So George whereabouts did you grow up?**

In Carnegie in Melbourne, that's where I was born. At that stage Carnegie was an outer suburb of Melbourne, but it's now very much an inner suburb. Market gardens at the end of our street. Plenty of paddocks to kick a football, and

01:00 generally play around. My father was born at Portsea at the quarantine station there, and my grandfather worked on that station, he was the coxswain on the boat that used to go out to welcome the ships in and take the ship's doctor out because that was the days of smallpox and all sorts of things, so dad

01:30 spent the first 16 years of his life, and that was the beach where Harold Holt was killed later on. And when my grandfather retired, they moved up firstly to East Malvern, and then dad built a house in Carnegie and that's where I spent the first 18 years of my life.

What sort of things would you get up to in Carnegie on the weekends?

02:00 Well, it wasn't until I got into my teens that anything particular, we used to just mess around. One of the things that did occur to me is that my grandfather lived with us until he died, and I had an uncle who was a saddler in Pakenham in

02:30 Victoria. He used to come down every weekend and stay with us. My family was a non-drinking non-smoking group, except for my grandfather, who smoked and drank, but not to excess. And this is the interesting thing, he only had one drink a week and that was when my uncle arrived and I had the job of pouring the whiskey. But it was great, because that uncle who was a saddler,

03:00 made my schoolbag, which was a beautiful soft leather thing. And he also gave me a stockwhip which I treasured. I grew up reading cowboy books as many as I could get hold of and anything with a bit of adventure, and it was great. Later on in my teens, when I went to high school I started playing tennis at the weekend, and nearly every weekend was taken up with tennis.

03:30 **With primary school, did you go to school in Carnegie?**

Yes, Carnegie State School, I was there for 6 years, and still remember most of my teachers, certainly from 3rd grade up – I have been very lucky in my school life that I always had remarkably good teachers. And school was just the place where you paraded every morning and saluted the flag, and God

04:00 save the King, so it was a different world altogether in those days. I think the population of Australia was about 7 million. About 98% British, and even though my family were second and third generation, they were still talking about England as home.

That is really unusual to think that happened, because you would never

04:30 **do that now.**

No of course not, but that's the way it was then, and I think it explains a lot of what happened later. The …

Would people go and visit England even though they were born here?

No. Hardly out of sailing ships. We never had a radio until my father had a crystal set, and we stuck it in the linen press because that was there was no noise, and that was where dad and I used to listen to the test cricket.

05:00 This is true.

Nice bonding experience for the both of you.

We didn't have an ice-chest, we didn't have a telephone. Our way of keeping things cool, dad built a little cellar at the back veranda and we stuck our milk and butter in there over summer. Later on we progressed to an ice-chest, we still had an ice-chest after the war. Never had a fridge until I suppose about 1946/47.

05:30 **Were luxuries like that really regarded as a luxury?**

You didn't even think about it, in our world. This is the Depression years. I am talking 1928/30/31. When I was at primary school, and in our street, I think that half the people were unemployed.

06:00 Nobody had much to eat. We were lucky, I was always lucky, because dad had a public service job in the post office, he was an engineer and worked in the engineering side of the post office. They had to take half pay, he had a mortgage over the house which had built, with the State Savings Bank and right through the Depression they charged interest only, just to help people out. I don't know whether it would happen today.

06:30 But that was the way things were. I remember going to my friend's house and eating bread and dripping. The diet was – in our case in my home, I couldn't complain because we always had a meal n the table, but we had very little else. I had a part-time job at primary school with the local shoemaker, when I was about 8 or 9

07:00 for which I got 2/6 a week.

What would you have to do for the shoemaker?

Well he had a special problem because he, do you want all this?

I am thinking what special problem has he got.

The special problem is that he hasn't got a sewing machine he can't sew his soles. So my job was to get on my bicycle and take a bag of boots, ride about 5 miles across to Malvern, to Glenferrie Road in Malvern, where

07:30 Malvern Star's original shop was I might add. Making bicycles. And there was another bootmaker there who had a sewing machine. So I would leave the boots with him, he would sew them over the next day, I would bring back the boots he had already done, and that's the way the system worked, and the rest of the time I swept out the shop. So I did that 3 or 4 days a week for 2/6 [2 shilling, 6 pence] a week, it was alright.

You would think it would be less expensive for him to go and buy his own sewing machine?

08:00 **But that would have put you out of work?**

It would have been less expensive if he'd had the money. He was only making a pittance. If he made a £1.00 a week profit he was doing well, so. So where do you buy a machine from.

Maybe redoing soles on people's shoes they couldn't afford to get it done?

Well, that's another thing you see. He used to cut the soles out and nail them and tack them.

08:30 Everybody got their shoes repaired, because to get a new pair of shoes was really something. I probably got about one pair of boots a year if I was lucky. My feet were growing. But that's the way it was. And it's inconceivable to people these days, like yourself. You can't understand it.

No.

But we didn't feel deprived and we got on with life, and my father and

09:00 mother always worked some kind of charity, they worked for the Blind Association all their life. And dad also worked very hard for the school, the primary school, and he started the Carnegie School Brass Band, of which I was a member at one stage, and they had to get the instruments, they had to do everything, they had to hire a professional teacher conductor who also worked for a pittance.

09:30 And we had little blazers and caps and things. We became a reasonably good band in due course. We used to play at St Kilda football ground every half time. March up and down, I don't think they took much notice of us, but that's what happened. We saw a fair bit of St Kilda football.

What musical instrument did you play?

Ah well, I started on the cornet and

10:00 then I went to the trombone and I ended up on the tenor horn. The big thing about the tenor horn is it just goes oompah, oompah most of the time so that suited me fine. My grandfather bought me a violin when I was about 8 I suppose, so I had about 3 years learning the violin. My father played the piano by ear, and he could also read a bit of music, he'd had some

10:30 training. My mother sang a bit. So it was a musical family and we had a piano in the house and our entertainment was a bit of a gathering around the piano, and a sing-song. So,

Do you have any brothers and sisters?

I had a brother died as an infant. He was two years younger than me, and my sister who is about 5.5 years younger, she came along

11:00 later. She lives in Melbourne still. But because there was a big gap between us, she was something I tolerated. But we're quite close now and we get along fine. Yeah anyway that was the Carnegie State School Band, and that was something else that dad put a lot of time and effort into. So I was lucky in my

11:30 upbringing with my parents and my teachers.

Did your parents really value education?

Yes, as much as they could afford. Um, they were artisans. My grandfather and my uncle whom I have spoken about, they were keenly interested in politics, and the Labour movement at that stage. And dad

12:00 obviously grew up as a Labour man. So their politics were Labour oriented. But those were the days when it was a 48 hour week, working 6 days a week. When the Union movement was in its infancy, and it was an entirely different world again, because these people were fighting to get better conditions,

12:30 and at the same time working very hard for whatever they did, and at the same time didn't mind working hard. That was their life. They believed you had to give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. So, that was the kind of atmosphere that I grew up in. Fair play was important, honesty was very important. And you imbibed this atmosphere.

It sounds like your parents

13:00 **were reasonably well educated?**

No. My mother grew up in South Yarra, one of a family of twelve. Very, very poor. My father he was apprenticed as a fitter and turner and came through the mechanical engineering side of things. But no tertiary

13:30 education, none at all. Intelligent, yes. That's a different matter altogether. So in those days I will always remember both of them used to say, "Never work with your hands". And they valued education to that extent, but it was a way out of this grind they were in to some extent. Although my grandfather

14:00 of whom I was very, very fond, and I grew up beside him, sitting out in the backyard a lot. He was retired for whole of the time I knew him, he died when I was 11. But, he was a fine chap. Only a small man. He had served on ships, on survey ships in the early days of the

14:30 settling of Australia, and he was full of stories about the sea. About various ship wrecks along the Victorian coast. He did 2 or 3 stints on ships, they only did them in summer, on survey ships surveying the southern and eastern Australian coasts. So he was full of good stories.

He sounds like a real character?

Yes, quiet. He used to sit there with his pipe. He had a

15:00 cockatoo. That's another story. He – my father was the son of 2 second marriages, so that both my grandfather who was a widower and my grandmother who was a widow, married and my father was the outcome of that marriage, so they each had 6 kids before they started. There was a family of 13 there, and 12

15:30 on my mother's side. 9 girls and 3 boys. So, I had relatives everywhere, and half of them I never knew, and there were names that kept popping up because of this convoluted family. But anyway, my father's sons the Purdy's, a number of them came over here and you will find quite a few Purdy's in Western Australia, most of whom I think I might be related to, but only 1 or 2

16:00 that I know. I know I am related to one George Purdy, who came over here as a builder in Canning Bridge, and he and his wife lived with our family for 5 or 6 years, my mother always had a full house. I was named after him. But anyway, one these sons of my grandfather's sent him back this cockatoo, which was

16:30 the, all the cockatoos in Victoria are Major Mitchell's with the yellow crest, and this was the West Australian one with no crest. But the damned thing used to screech all day and it used to bite me every time I went near it. It used to sit on his shoulder and poop down his waistcoat. But that was the sort of atmosphere, we were on a quarter acre block, and weatherboard house and a few fruit trees in the back and a few WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s down the back of the

17:00 yard. Some tame Kookaburras we used to feed in the back. And that was life in Carnegie.

What sort of subjects did you enjoy at school?

Well, I was lucky I never had any trouble, I was able to get along with school work. I just absorbed it and I was always somewhere near the top.

17:30 No particular subjects at state school, primary school, at the age of – when I got to sixth grade, it was recommended I went to high school. And at that stage I had 3 options, that's all we had. There was Melbourne High, Dandenong High, I don't know whether you know Melbourne?

I know Melbourne a little bit.

And there was Mordialloc High [School]. And the teacher at Carnegie Primary [School] recommended

18:00 Mordialloc High because he knew the staff down there and felt they were pretty good. So I went to Mordialloc and spent 4 years down there.

Was that fairly close to home?

No about 10 miles away. And I – for two years I rode my bike down there.

10 miles…

Each way. At my own request I was happy doing it. But, it was a great school.

18:30 We were only about half a mile off the beach. There was the Mordialloc Creek running up one side of the grounds and it was a school with out – co-ed – about 200 boys and 200 girls. Because it was that size, you took part in everything. The boys and girls were very much segregated, we came together for class, but that was – apart from a bit of hockey at lunch time which the girls always beat us at.

19:00 We were segregated. We went somewhere for lunch and the girls somewhere for lunch. That was okay, we had no problems. Thanks to an English teacher, who was unique, a woman called Gertrude Bowden, we had some dancing classes and there was the school ball once a year, and it wasn't the kind of thing you do these days. It was a fairly simple occasion, but

19:30 good fun. And that was the only time we got close to the girls. In summer it was always swimming after school. Winter it was always football after school and then get on your bike and ride home. So I seldom got home before 6 or 6.30 and left about 7 in the morning. And if I didn't do that, I walked about a mile or two to a train at Glenhuntly,

20:00 which took the train down to Mordialloc. Mordialloc and Frankston. So, that was the other alternative. So of the 4 years I was there I rode the bike for a couple of years and I went by train for a couple of years.

What was discipline like in your school?

Strict. But it was no problem. I mean corporal punishment was around, I think I got the strap once at primary school. I remember the occasion. I am not sure what I did,

20:30 something to do with putting a girl's pig tails in an ink well. But anyway that was primary school. But at the high school, I never knew anybody that suffered corporal punishment. We had a maths teacher who had a son like that, he later became a professor of mathematics at Melbourne University. He was a great athlete, a man called Harry Sergeant.

21:00 But his favourite was to come up behind you and give you a dig in the kidneys and that sort of smartened you. But after you got that once or twice you, stood still. But there was no corporal punishment, the discipline was exercised through detention. If you got detention you just went to it, after school. We were very, very lucky, we had a great band of teachers. I can remember every one of them.

21:30 I enjoyed every minute of high school.

What sort of subjects were you doing in high school?

English, Latin, Maths, which was algebra, trigonometry, science, chemistry, bit of physics, what else was it, there were 9 of them altogether.

22:00 **So quite a good coverage?**

Oh yes. I did 4 years of Latin, which really – more than anything else was up with English. We had a remarkable English teacher, they were all dedicated, everyone of those teachers. The head was a guy called McCully, and his offsider was a man called Campbell, who was an ex-World War 1 officer, and had an MC [Military Cross].

22:30 They both were highly qualified academically. Our English teacher Gertrude Bowden, who was quite unique. She was dedicated, she introduced us to Gilbert & Sullivan, she introduced us to all sorts of things. I played tennis and football with the school. Ran a little bit. Swam a little bit.

23:00 With the result I have always loved the water. Dad of course growing up down at Portsea, he had me swimming at an early age, and although he always used to say never swim at Portsea back beach, and that's where Mr Holt met his demise.

Why, because the undercurrent is so bad?

Very dangerous beach. And there is a lot of kelp and stuff down there that you can get caught up in.

23:30 There was also a very nice pool – we swam at Portsea Beach, we used to go down there weekends at times. But there's a good rock pool there that you could swim in, but you would never go in the sea. He was also very careful around boats, he had been brought up that way. So, anyway where were we, were back in high school weren't we?

Yes. How old were you when you left high school?

Fifteen.

24:00 I only went to intermediate because – we still had to pay, and the cost to my parents, there were books and there was a small fee for something or other at school. Only a couple of pounds but we still had to find it. And the books always ran into a few pounds. There was a uniform of some sort, a cap and a few guernseys. There was always football gear and football boots, and so it went on. So they found all that money

24:30 somehow or other. But I always knew, it was always tacitly agreed that intermediate would be the end of it. So that's when I left.

Would you have liked to have continued on with your education?

Now I would have, but at the time I was sort of – I knew I was going to leave at fifteen. Mind you I wasn't unique, about 80% of the people left at that age.

25:00 Only a few went on to leaving. So it wasn't unusual. So that was it.

So what did you do when you finished school?

Well my first job was with a solicitor's office in Collins Street, in Melbourne. A firm called Ellison Hewitson & O'Collins.

That's a mouthful.

Yeah. But I was just the office boy and my job was to just do whatever they asked me. Answer the phone occasionally.

25:30 The main job was to deliver the mail around Melbourne. We saved on stamps and used my foot leather instead.

How did you manage to find that job in the first place?

It was advertised I think. I had a good scholastic record, I was always pretty much at the top of the class at high school.

26:00 Always beaten by a girl Maude McBride, and I was always second to her. But that was something else. So anyway I didn't have much trouble getting the job. Because of that. And I had good references. So there I was, I was delivering mail around Melbourne, going to various solicitors officers and Accountants. I do remember one occasion when I was in the RACV [Royal Automobile Club of Victoria] building in Melbourne, the old one,

26:30 and they had these old hydraulic lifts, and I got in the lift on the 4th floor with about 4 or 5 other people, and we went down and we sort of kept going down and I think we crashed on the buffers on the bottom. And a little old lady standing beside me, she just crumpled in a heap. Concertina job. Anyway I walked away from that with a bit of a sore back. Anyway I was

27:00 only with that job for about 9 months, I suppose. I wasn't going anywhere.

You didn't enjoy it?

I had no problems with it, but the best job was going down and looking after one of the partner's boats, he had a yacht down at Brighton Yacht Club, and he was worried about it sinking, and he sent me down there to sit on the wharf and see whether it sank or not. He asked me if I could swim. But anyway

27:30 it didn't sink, and I had a good time sitting on the wharf.

Were you still living at home at this stage?

Oh yes. And giving my mother money. I was only getting 16 a week and mum got half of it. Not that she asked for it, but it was expected of you. It's what you knew you had to do. You had to pay back something. Not pay back so much, but just help.

What sort of things would you do with your money that you had left over?

28:00 Pay my fares, I had to get a train into work that was – train from Carnegie station into Flinders Street, so I paid that and bought my lunches. There wasn't a great deal left over. I don't know what I did with it, maybe I went to the pictures, I think I did occasionally. And I was in this lending library down in Carnegie

28:30 suburb which was a traditional, with a main street with shops on each side. And I used to especially in my earlier years, I used to haunt that library, because it was the only library in town but it was one where you had to pay, because it was private enterprise thing so. I used to read cowboy and adventure books, and anything to do with a bit of excitement.

29:00 That was my outlook. And I was playing a bit of tennis, so a bit of money went on tennis too I guess. My mum and dad provided the racquets and shoes.

So you could actually win money by playing tennis?

No. No professional tennis – no professional sport in those days, except for the Stawell Gift which they just had. Professional running. There were only 4 sports in town, 3 actually,

29:30 cricket, football and racing. That was it. And the professional running was only a sort of sideshow. So there was tennis of course. But the main sports that the community was interested in was those 3 and football was great. I was watching Richmond play when I was 8-years-old. A couple of my mother's sisters used to take me to see Richmond, and I can still remember those teams back in those

30:00 days.

What was the next job you took up?

My dad got me a job – he was in the testing branch of the post office in those days. And his job was to go around and test materials that was being supplied by contractors. Due to one of his contacts there he managed to get me a job with a little engineering firm out in Malvern.

30:30 It turned out to be not much of a job. Because it was a husband and wife deal. They were nice people, no problem there, but I don't think they knew what to do with me or what they expected of me and I wasn't sure either, so after about 12 months there, I gave that away and I got another job, a relative, a cousin of mine was working with Wunderlich Limited, who made tiles and asbestos cement and

31:00 architectural terracotta, and he got me a job with them and that's where I stayed. I began working out at Albion, which is near Sunshine in Victoria, right out the other side of town. And there were two factories there, one was making asbestos cement, same as James Hardie, Wunderlich's had a big factory doing that. And they also had a factory making architectural

31:30 terracotta, which were building facings. Made from burnt clay and they were glazed and made into various shapes and sizes. My job was to work out the volumes of these darn things, which you had to do long hand, no adding machines, no calculators. And everything measured to 16th of an inch. So I spent a bit of time doing that. And then they asked me to go out

32:00 to their tile – roofing tile factory, at Vermont, and that was on the other side of town. And that meant two trains and a walk for about a mile. So I was out there doing dispatch work and wages and all sorts of stuff. But just as a clerk. And the war had started, while I was still at Sunshine. So I had

32:30 begun in 1939, and I must have gone out to Vermont probably at the end of 1939 I think. I was still what, 1939 I was 17 that's right. So, away we went and

How much were you following what was going on in the war?

Not much.

33:00 Communication was bad too. By this time we had progressed to one little manual radio. That was all we had. The newspapers were delivered once a day, we had the Melbourne Argus was our newspaper of choice. Which I didn't read an awful lot. I would read the football. Oh there was one other paper I used to get regularly, that was the Sporting Globe on Saturday, where

33:30 you raced down to get the football results. The Sporting Globe was out by half past seven, and that was how you got the football results. And racing, as well if you were interested in that.

Were you betting at all?

No, we weren't a gambling family. Pretty straight laced in lots of ways, but as I said, non drinking and non smoking, that was pretty strict, that came out of my mother's background, she had a – that was something else

34:00 which I don't want to go into. But she wasn't a drunk. They didn't like booze and they never wanted to smoke. And I have never smoked, but I like booze. But that came later.

Were you looking at the outbreak of war as a very exciting adventure perhaps coming your way?

It appealed to me in that respect, the adventure of it.

34:30 And – so there I am, I am 17. I remember very well the declaration of war, and this is something else that perhaps I would like to make clear that because Australia was as I said was about 98% British decent, we had a few Italians, not many, mainly English, Scottish and Irish,

35:00 bit of division on religious grounds. Not significant but it was there. But because we were tied to Britain, I remember Menzies, who was Prime Minister then, he came on the radio and his words as near to verbatim as I can remember them, were that

35:30 'Today, Great Britain declared war on Germany, and it is my melancholy duty to inform you that as a result of that declaration, Australia is also at war'. That was it. Because Britain was in it we were in it. And everybody accepted it. Nobody – well there were always a few people who would question it, but nobody in our world, my world questioned it.

36:00 This was something that was expected from you.

What was your immediate reaction to this declaration?

Not a great deal, but when I thought about it later, I – the adventure side of it appealed to me, but the actual reasons for it weren't something that I considered very much.

36:30 It was as I said, accepted by the community as a whole, this was what we had to do. And so Australia was at war. I was still a clerk out at Vermont, and when I got to about a bit – somewhere around

37:00 1940, I saw this advertisement in the paper where they were calling for aircrew and first of all you learnt to fly. The minimum educational qualification was the intermediate certificate which I just scraped into you had to have at least intermediate. At the end of your flying career you became a sergeant. I thought that sounded pretty good I don't have to walk anywhere

37:30 I don't have to swim, I can learn to fly. So I immediately became determined that that was what I wanted to do. And of course I was not 18, and I pestered my parents, who weren't very happy about the situation. But after a lot of pestering they finally

38:00 agreed to sign the form. Because you had to have your parents permission at that age. So I joined the air force reserve. Still slightly under age, because 18 was the call up time. So as a member of the reserve we went to Morse code classes down at the local post office. We went to navigation classes and maths

38:30 classes. And some physical training classes at Wesley College at their swimming pool. So that's how we spent the reserve time, busy, probably 3 or 4 nights a week after work.

39:00 So that went on and I turned 18 and I am still on the reserve and we finally got to Anzac Day 1941, which I remember very well, because I got my call up papers somewhere in the previous week, and I had to go in on the 26th the day after Anzac Day, 1941. When I was about 18 and a half. So that was it.

39:30 **Where did you have to go?**

I went to Sommers in Victoria. That was the initial training school. And it was a whole new world of course.

What sort of a uniform were you issued with?

Well just a blue one. The dark blue navy uniform with baker light black buttons, they weren't brass in those days. We were the only air force in the world with baker light black

40:00 buttons, which was great because you didn't have to polish them. Our working uniform was overalls and a beret, that was what we did our work in. Our training in. Our training consisted of a lot of square bashing and rifle drill and classes and various forms of initial training.

40:30 Basic navigation and stuff like that. You had to learn all the ranks of course of the air force, and discipline and did a bit of guard duty and when you had to salute and when you didn't.

41:00 **What did the camp actually look like, the barracks?**

Just - I think they were asbestos cement as a matter of fact, they were up on stumps, and probably either corrugated iron or an asbestos roof. We had iron beds with just metal base and straw palliasses

41:30 and we had fold them up every day, and we had to fol dour blankets a certain way. Had to have everything spit and polished, that was no problem it was good for us. We had about I don't know, about 20 people in our hut. And they came from al over the place. They were mainly Victorians and Tasmanians. Um, they were a good crew, we went through a whole

42:00 series of medicals of course, dental treatment, inoculations

42:06 End of tape

Tape 2

00:33 **How long was your initial training?**

Two months, at Sommers. The – unremarkable really, just that it was damned cold, especially on our arrival there.

What happened on your arrival George?

I don't want to mention it in front of ladies. They gave you the usual inspection,

01:00 standing out on the parade ground, with your pants around your ankles and the cold wind blowing off the southern ocean, and it wasn't very good. But anyway ,

Sounds like a fairly humiliating introduction to the air force?

It was, completely humiliating. But anyway, that's by the by.

What was the daily routine?

Well you were up I can't remember exactly now, but you were certainly up by 6 every morning, showered, shaved,

01:30 cleaned up, had breakfast, made your bed and made sure alright because it was going to be inspected. Everything, your blankets had to be folded in a special way. Depending on what the syllabus was, you either went to classes or you went out on the parade ground and pounded up and down there and got some drill pushed into you.

02:00 So that was pretty much the day. And of course you crammed in medical and dental appointments, if you needed them. Inoculations, they vaccinated all of our group. They came through in monthly intakes, so there was a senior take and a junior intake. I forget how many, but there must have been 250 in each intake. There were 500 people

02:30 down there, I think, I am not sure now. We were all divided into flights, and we were in 11 flight and we had a sergeant in charge of us. A Good bloke. He was a permanent drill sergeant. And each flight had one of these chaps attached to them, and the CO [Commanding Officer] was a man called Tommy White, who later became a Federal Minister for Air..

03:00 ex-World War 1. Good chap. And there were several other officers of course.

Did they share much of their experience with you during your training?

No. Tommy White gave us all an address you know, a stir up.

What kind of things did he say to stir you up?

I remember his final address he said,

03:30 "At the moment the ratios are running 5:1 in our favour so you have each gotta get 5". But whether he meant it or not I don't now. And whether the figures were right I don't know, because you find in hindsight the official figures were rather different to the ones that were put out for general consumption. Propaganda existed even in those days on both sides.

What kind of classes were you

04:00 **doing George?**

Oh resolution of vectors for the navigation work, because when you are flying you have got to work out your drift and so you don't necessarily point at the thing you are going to, if the wind is blowing from this side and you are going there you have got to point your nose over there. So you have got to work out your wind velocities and your own velocity and figure out how much drift you have got to apply. There were other things in navigation and like

04:30 magnetic variation, because the magnetic pole varies from place to place, there's not the true pole, so anywhere in the world your compass is going to be out by a few degrees. It can also be out by the metal in the aircraft itself. So every aircraft has to be swung to determine how much direction you have got to allow compass. These are the sort of things they taught us, they taught us how an aircraft flies, the principles of flight,

05:00 and that was about it I suppose. There must have been other things, mathematics I think were included, they were elementary and nobody had very much difficulty with it.

Was it a competitive environment?

No, not at all. The main thing was you made sure you got through. There were very few scrubbed from that because they had all been pretty well vetted before they went. But

05:30 the – it certainly wasn't competitive. We had a sports meeting, that was a bit competitive and we played a bit of football I think.

Was everyone aspiring to be a pilot?

Yes, but not all were, not all got selected.

What was the selection criteria?

I don't know. They never told us. You were just informed that you had been

06:00 selected for pilot training or you had been selected for - in some case observer, which was the navigation course, or you could have been selected for a gunner's course. I think most were selected as pilots, but as I said

06:30 most of them were selected for pilots. One thing I do remember very well is that we didn't get any leave for the first month, and we were all allowed weekends, to visit our families. The – they vaccinated us all, in big groups, they just lined us up and they always used the one needle, the same with inoculations, they only had one needle which was blunt. And - but

07:00 they vaccinated this whole group of us and it didn't take, for some reason. For some reason or other it was a complete failure, so the next time they really made a bird of it and they dug this stuff in, and we were all sick, gee were we sick. It was a smallpox vaccination of course, and that meant a great scab on your arm and really felt ill. But training went on you soldiered on, but we were all pretty crook for about 10 days

07:30 I remember this very well. But anyway, that was Sommers and at the end of it we were selected for pilot training. A group of us were posted to Canada, some were sent to Australian training schools, and another group of us were selected for Rhodesia. Just how we were picked out I don't know, but

08:00 there was 60, I think off our course, and then we were sent to embarkation depot, which was the showgrounds in Melbourne, they had been taken over by the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] as a depot, and we slept in one of the pavilions there. And waited for a ship. In the meantime we were joined by a second group, so we became a party of 120 altogether.

08:30 We stayed at the embarkation depot for about 6 weeks, getting pretty fed up, we were getting leave every day, we could go out on leave every night, pretty well. But we had to be back by might night I think it was, and during the day they just paraded us up and down, and we marched to meals and did a bit of drill and a bit of physical training. We had

09:00 one bloke called Froghetti who was a wrestler and he managed to break a couple of legs while we were. Anyway the day came when they piled us all on a train at Flemington Station and it was a steam train, and I remember my parents were out in the street waving good by to us, I managed to see them from the train and that was it.

09:30 And we went off to Sydney, changing trains at Albury in those days, because the gauge was different. And we got to Sydney and got of the train and got on a ferry of some sort and they ferried us out into the harbour and there was this huge ship. So we started off at the bottom off the ship and got off the ferry

10:00 and went up the gangway, carrying our kitbags, we had a seabag and a smaller bag and a kitbag.

What did they contain?

Oh your gear and stuff you know. What you would expect, just clothing mainly. Because we had two sets of uniforms, blue and khaki as well, caps and working gear. Carried some toilet facilities

10:30 of course, sewing kit. Anyway I managed to fill two kitbags, I don't know what else I had in it. Oh, I probably had an overcoat and that took up a fair bit of room. So we get on board this ship, and it turns out to be the Queen Elizabeth. She couldn't dock, she had to sit out in the harbour, she was too big, couldn't get under the bridge anyway. Incidentally,

11:00 when I was young, as boys we used to take trips, this is going back a bit now, but on one of our trips we drove to Sydney, and as a little fellow, I saw the Harbour Bridge before they joined it up. There was a crane on each end, and remember that very well, anyway that's by the by. So anyway we are on the Queen Elizabeth and 120 of us and they took us up to A deck and that meant climbing up all these stairs with all your gear, and

11:30 they put us in a cabin which had been designed for 2 but had 14 in it, and they got 14 in by putting wooden bunks, 3 tiered wooden bunks with about that much room in between the wall, and so that was it for 14 of us in this cabin.

The conditions sound rather cramped?

They were cramped, but alright, you could put up with that, and the ablutions were down the – no such as ensuites in those days, even on the Queen Elizabeth. The ablutions

12:00 were all down the passage. Along with us there were 6,000 AIF [Australian Imperial Force] army people, going to the Middle East. We pulled out and the Queen Mary came in, and she got another 6,000. And while we were doing all that the Ile de France was in and she was embarking the 8th Division for Malaya. So they went one way and we went the other. The two big ships and a cruiser came

down

12:30 around the south coast and across the Great Australian Bight and around to Fremantle here where we pulled in for about 24 hours.

What was that voyage like?

It was rough, very, very rough through the bight. And the big ships of course, and they were really big, I am talking about 80,000 tonne they were the biggest ships in the world in those days. They were fast, they were built for the Atlantic.

13:00 And they wouldn't slow down because of the risk of submarines. Not that there were many here but they didn't know. We had the cruiser as an escort. I remember so well, that all you could see of the cruiser was the top of the mast. And because they were travelling – the water was coming green over the boughs on both the big ships, the water was that rough in the bight. So by the time we got to Fremantle the cruiser couldn't go any further, she was so

13:30 knocked around, so we had to get another one. She took us further on. We picked up a few people here in Fremantle, just a few air force people who had completed their training and they were going to the Middle East.

How did you find that voyage personally, had you been to sea before?

No I thought it was great. An adventure. I had been once, across to Tasmania on the ferry when I was a little fella. I don't remember much about it.

14:00 **You didn't find the rough conditions of concern?**

No. I enjoyed it. It didn't worry me at all.

You didn't feel seasick?

I just couldn't believe what was happening to me, I thought it was great. It was all part of that adventure syndrome you know that was with me. But – and I was with a good group of chaps, and we were all friends. I was probably one of

14:30 the youngest I think. But anyway.

Can you tell me about some of those chaps, had you bonded during your initial training or..?

Yeah, I can come to that a bit. The – going up – from there we went up through the Indian Ocean of course, and these ships were designed for the Atlantic, there was no air conditioning of course, there was ventilation but.

15:00 At night they were all blacked out so all the portholes were shut, everything blacked out, and it was really, really hot. We had an orderly room, that was the headquarters of our little group of 120, because we were sort of odd men out amongst 6,000 AIF blokes, who spent most of the time playing two up I might add, and some of our blokes had joined in. But

15:30 we went on this journey up through the Indian Ocean, and conditions had changed completely it was calm, dead calm. And at night the fluorescence in the water was magnificent. Here we were these two ships sailing, almost abreast but separated by probably 4 or 5 miles, with a cruiser out in front. And I remember this night so well, that

16:00 everything blacked out, the cruiser blacked out, the ship's blacked out, and suddenly on the horizon this blaze of light appeared, and it was a hospital ship coming back from the Middle East, and she sailed right between the two ships, lit up like a beacon, she had every light that you could see on, with a great big Red Cross displayed on the side. So she lit us all up like a candle. But anyway that was. And the

16:30 only other thing I remember on that trip, we each had to do a spell on guard duty in this orderly room, and another chap and I copped it at midnight I think, and it was like a sauna down there, and were sitting in just our underpants, we were sweating and sweating and sweating.

What was the food like on board?

It was alright.

What were they feeding you?

I don't know, baked beans and bit of bully beef of course.

17:00 **Where did you assemble to eat?**

Down in the dining halls of the ship, and they were done in shifts. There was 2 or 3 sittings for each meal. I don't remember much about what I ate on board there, but I must have got fed because I survived alright.

What else were you doing to occupy yourselves on that journey?

Not much, we were just sitting round most of the time.

What was the division like between the air force and the AIF?

No problem. We each had our own groups. About the

17:30 only thing that happened was we got a bit of PT [physical training] you know. And if you could walk around the decks you walked around them. I managed to get up into the bow of the ship and do what that [Leonardo] DiCaprio bloke did in that film that was out [Titanic], I did one of those off the bow of the Queen Elizabeth. You weren't really allowed up there much but. So that was it, we went to Trincomalee in Ceylon, that was

18:00 the first port of call. Stayed there for a couple of days. One of our blokes swam ashore there and got not a bit of strife, but they got him back on board again.

Weren't you granted leave?

No, we were kept on board, but he had his own method of getting there. I don't recall his name now, but he did it. Then we went across to…

What was the attitude like on board when you weren't granted leave?

No problems, we expected it. You know,

18:30 discipline was good. Oh what I was going to tell you, we were down in this hole in the bottom, and this chap that I was on duty with, he got on the typewriter in the orderly room, and wrote out his resignation, and to tell everybody that it was too bloody hot and he was giving it up and didn't want to stay in the air force anyway. But he said here sign this, and I thought he was fooling around, so I signed it, but the clot [idiot] left it there, so we were in a lot of trouble

19:00 the next day, I thought I was going into the brig. But anyway we managed to talk out way out of it, it was just something that we did to fill in the time, but I don't think the people in charge took it very seriously, but they certainly put the fear of life into us. Anyway that was something that happened. So we go from Trincomalee up the Red Sea which was stinking hot, we were on – because we were in the air force they gave us anti aircraft duty we wouldn't have known one aircraft from another, but

19:30 anyway we just went on guard. The only armament on the ship incidentally was a 6-inch gun at the end which we never ever saw fired. So we went up the Red Sea to the Suez and we disembarked at the Suez on barges, because that's as far as the ships went. So the army went one way and the 120 of us went another, and we went into a RAF [Royal Air Force]

20:00 maintenance unit which was at Kasfareit which was on the Bitter Lake on the Suez Canal. So we are stuck there waiting of course, because our destination is Rhodesia. And we are in the Middle East. So they wondered what to do with us there, so they gave us a job helping with the dispersal of air craft. They were assembling Curtis Tomahawk aircraft in those days and they were just getting

20:30 in to the Middle East, and they were – because they stared in the Middle East, they had Gladiators and Hurricane ones and these American aircraft were just starting to come through, and the Tomahawk was being assembled at this – and our job was to sit in the Tomahawk and steer it while somebody towed it. That happened because we were in the air force, we hadn't been in an aircraft in our lives.

21:00 Anyway I got towed not a hole, but it wasn't my problem. So that's where we were for a couple of weeks, and they put us on another ship that seemed to be our lot to always get on big ships because this time it was the Mauritania 45,000 tonnes and one of the leading ships of the Cunard Line again. This was a different trip altogether. There was 120 of us and we had the ship to ourselves.

21:30 Except for 1500 Italian prisoners, who were tucked in down the back end. They did all the donkey work and we had a holiday for 10 days, we had a great time. I remember we had a chap on board, in our group called Douglas, and we used to call him Major Douglas, I can't remember his Christian name, but he was Major Douglas and he was one of us. But he was keenly interested in singing in choirs and so we used to

22:00 sing a lot on the way down. Got to Durban.

Sounds like quite a surreal journey?

It was great. As I said we didn't do any work at all, and the Italians waited on us at the meals and we were still – conditions in the cabins were a bit cramped because the same thing, they were busy bringing British troops out from England, that was why the ship was empty. Because there was nobody going back except for these prisoners, who wee going to South Africa.

22:30 **Did you do any sunbaking and swimming?**

Well you couldn't swim, the swimming pools were never full. I don't think – there might have been one on board. These were ships for the Atlantic, and they didn't swim much. We swam on the Queen Elizabeth, yeah that's true and there was a picture house on board too. I think we might have seen one or two films on the Queen Elizabeth. Anyway

23:00 **Morale must have been high?**

Oh it was. No problems. You know once again it's a different world. We are molly coddled these days. Maybe I will come to that later but.

What was the atmosphere amongst the troops, heading off over the high seas for adventure?

They were in good spirits. Nobody talked much about what was to

23:30 come. They just looked forward to the good times I suppose. That's what you do. In war you do what you are told to do, and you very often don't know what else is going on. In fact that's the norm. You live your own little unit. It doesn't matter what you are, army, navy or air force. And

24:00 the 6,000 troops, I think they were 9th Division, because 6th and 7th were already over in the Middle East, and they had been carved up in Crete. In fact a good friend of mine in later years who owns the Witches Cauldron or he did own, his son and daughter own the Witches Cauldron in Subiaco, chap called Phil Taylor, he was taken in Crete with the 6th Division, and spent

24:30 four years in Germany as a POW [prisoner of war]. He's dead now. But we became friends in later years, well after the war. So 6th and 7th they had a pretty – they had been up and down, and done very well in the desert and they got to Crete and Greece, where they should never have gone anyway, but that' something else the British government want to do. And they got carved up pretty badly.

25:00 The 6th in particular. I think the 7th went to Syria. So I think these people with us were 9th division. We really didn't know. So where am I, we are down in Durban by this time.

Why had you gone there?

We wanted to go to Rhodesia. You couldn't go by ship to Rhodesia, it's land locked. We went to Durban, spent

25:30 2 weeks there at Claremont Showgrounds. And

Were the showgrounds called Claremont?

Yeah. And there was a racecourse there as well. And we had a very nice time in Durban, the people there were very hospitable, they were great to us. We got with a family and these girls took us round, and took us to a concert in the gardens, there

26:00 but that was just for 2 weeks while we were waiting for movement orders.

What kind of accommodation did you have at the showgrounds?

In tents. I spent practically the rest of the war under canvas, except in Rhodesia where we were in huts, but all the time later we were under canvas.

Did you have a nice time in Durban?

Yeah great time. We were there for about 10 days.

What did you see?

26:30 Beaches, concerts, we saw the inside – these people took us to their home and they were a couple of girls that took us I think, they were a hospitality group you know for visiting troops and we just happened to get picked up. But they were very, very good to us, I can't remember their names. But I remember I went to a concert and I heard the Warsaw

27:00 Concerto for the first time, and I was terribly impressed by this, I thought it was great. Anyway, they put us on a train, and we went by train from Durban to Rhodesia. Right through South Africa. Mafeking, and all the places you are familiar with from the Boer War. Johannesburg, and we ended up in Bulawayo.

What were the conditions like on board the train?

Oh not bad, took 4 days,

27:30 steamtrain of course.

What kind of carriages did the train have?

Don't remember al that well to be quite honest, just ordinary carriages.

So conditions were?

What you would expect for the times, we weren't travelling first class that was for sure. We were probably they were just compartments, yeah they were yeah, compartments with a door on the end of each compartment. And probably

28:00 a corridor for the toilet facilities. Sort of trains that you find in Britain, because they came out of Britain in the first place.

Who else was travelling on board the train apart from yourselves?

I don't know, I think it might have just been us. There might have been other people, but once again there were 120 of us and we occupied 2 or 3 carriages maybe 4. 2 or 3 carriages I suppose.

28:30 And along the way there were people on the station every station where we stopped there were women there with tea and buns or sandwiches of some description, or something for us to eat. They were very, very good. We just kept on going.

You mentioned some of the place names were familiar from the Boer War, were you familiar with them then or…?

Well yeah, Lady Smith,

29:00 Mafeking, they were names we had heard of in history, that's all we knew about it, I have learnt a lot more about it since of course. But we ended up in Bulawayo and once again we ended up in the showgrounds. Only this time I was in the pigpen. So, I am sleeping in the pigpen in Bulawayo showgrounds, along with a lot of my friends.

Not with a lot of pigs I hope?

No.

29:30 You got the impression they might have been there once. But – and once again, we are waiting, we are waiting to go to the flying station. We are parading every day and doing a bit of drill, something to keep us occupied and I remember playing a water polo match at the swimming pool in Bulawayo, which really I found very difficult

30:00 because Rhodesia is on a plateau, it's 5,000 ft up. And when you are not used to is, if you get into physical exercise you find you are gasping for air a bit. That's the way I was at the end of that water polo match, I was glad to see it end. But anyway, the next day, I don't think it was the water polo, I got some sort of a wog and I ended up in hospital,

30:30 I passed out on parade, that's the only time I had done that. So I am in hospital for about 10 days, which is a corrugated iron shed in the middle of fairly hot conditions, the toilet is out the back, and I am staggering out there with a temperature of 105 deg. They didn't really know what was wrong with me, so that what was alright I just got over that.

How were you treated?

31:00 I don't know, they gave me a tonic, I remember I had to front up and take this tonic every now and then. They just, hoped the temperature, the fever would subside which it did, they called it malarial influenza, for want of a better word.

The tonic wasn't a placebo?

No, they didn't know. But

31:30 I had got some sort of a wog from somewhere.

What were the staff there?

Military staff, Rhodesian army I think. I remember having collapsed on parade, and feeling like death warmed up generally, they carried me over to the waiting room to see the medical officer, and I am sitting there, and this bloody sergeant came in full of importance, he was a Rhodesian

32:00 medical sergeant, I will never forget him. And, he asked me something, and I said something to him, replying and he said stand to attention when you talk to me, and there I am I can hardly hold myself, and I am standing to attention, holding myself up, I will never forget him. Anyway that's just by the by, not anything much.

No, it's interesting.

Yeah, it was.

32:30 It was a sign of his character, he didn't care what had happened to me, he just wanted me to stand to attention. But, so I survived all that and finally got a posting to elementary flying training school. A place called Mt Hampton which is about 10 miles out of Salisbury, which is now Harare. And so that's where I began my flying course. We were flying Tiger Moths.

How were you greeted at Hampton?

33:00 We were just allocated to flights. We all got split up there were several flying schools, and we went there was another, I think there were 3 EFTS [Empire Flight Training Scheme] , so our group got split up and we also went in groups where we didn't all go together. I missed one group because I was sick in hospital, so I went in the second group.

33:30 So in our flight there would probably have been 10 or 12 people I suppose. Out of 120 although we

knew a lot of the other people around, we had all been split up.

Why were you split up into 3 EFTs?

Well that's just the way it was, you can't cram them all into one. There were flying schools all over the place, this is all part of the what they call the Empire Air Training

34:00 School, Scheme rather, EATS. They were all over the world, they were something run by the RAF. For Empire personnel. The Canadians, they had a great number of airfields. There were a lot here in Australia, a lot in Rhodesia and a lot in South Africa, and latterly some in America. So they were all over the place,

34:30 but you can only cram so many aircraft on to one airfield so there were so many elementary flying training schools in Rhodesia.

Were you accommodated separately at each airfield at…?

Yes. Well, the two that were up in the Salisbury area were 25 miles apart, one was on one side of Salisbury and the other was on the other side. And you didn't want to meet one another. Not

35:00 with a lot of sprog pilots around. So we got allocated into a flight, I was put in B flight I think it was, and we were allocated flying instructors, each instructor had two pupils. And another chap and myself were allocated an instructor who hadn't arrived yet, he wasn't even on the station, so all my friends were starting to fly and getting

35:30 instruction, and he and I were sitting in the flight room and biting our nails and wondering when our man was going to turn up. He never did turn up. So they didn't know what to do with us, so they bunged us into X flight and X flight was the flight for donkeys, people who had difficulty flying were put into X flight. But that was the only place with any available space so he and I went into X flight. Not because we were donkeys, we hadn't been in an aeroplane yet.

36:00 We might have been donkeys. But anyway, as a result of that I got this guy called Flying Officer Collins who is another guy I will never forget. And his method of teaching people to fly was to abuse them from the moment they got in to the aeroplanes until they got back on the ground again. And when I say abuse, I mean abuse. And so he called you everything under the sun and you had to repeat it back to him, so yes sir that's what I am.

36:30 This went on for about 4 hours, I will never forget it, it was Christmas Eve, my last flight with Flying Officer Collins and I was up there, and I has been doing landings and take offs and all the other things, but not solo at this stage. I had only done about 4 hours with him. But they were 4 horrible hours. And he kept abusing me and carrying on and saying I was flying

37:00 one wing low, and banging the stick, we landed, I landed, and we got out of the aeroplane, and he said, "Laddie, I will never fly with you again". And I thought that's it, I am scrubbed I am sunk, because the big worry was to get scrubbed off the course. So I spent the whole of Christmas being

37:30 completely miserable. I am still only 19 you know. So, the day after Christmas it must have been Boxing or the day after that because we didn't fly on Christmas or Boxing Day. I go down to the flight thinking this is it, I've had it, so I allocated Flight Sergeant Pickett, he was a breath of fresh air, he was marvellous. We had a fly around and

38:00 I fly with him for another 3 or 4 hours I suppose, and about 6 hours of flying. So I fly with Pickett, and he gets out of the plane and he says, "Well off you go", and I thought, well I am not scrubbed after all. So he sent me on my way and from then I spent 2 months at EFTS and from there you

38:30 went to a secondary flying training school which was on a different type of aircraft.

How did you spend that Christmas?

We had a Christmas menu, but as I said I was completely miserable, and some of my friends had gone solo by this stage and I am thinking well I am for the high jump, so that was my main memory of that Christmas.

39:00 But apart from that, we got leave – weekend leave in Salisbury, I used to stay at Mickles Hotel, and we got to know one or two Rhodesian families who were good to us, and took us out occasionally. But by and large we were very much involved, we wanted to learn to fly, and this was our major effort and our major consideration

39:30 the whole time we were there.

So you spent Christmas commiserating what you thought was…?

Well, sweating. I thought I had had it, because this guy gave me a very bad time. He might have taught me to fly in the meantime I don't know, but it wasn't a very pleasant experience, but anyway that doesn't matter much. We went to service flying training school after that.

I would like to ask you a lot of questions about your

40:00 **elementary flying training, but we are getting the wind up there George.**

40:07 **End of tape**

Tape 3

00:31 **We haven't actually asked about EFTS, can you explain a little bit for us?**

Well, there's a nothing much to it except that you learned to fly a Tiger Moth. I see them flying them these days. There was a woman flying one the other day, on television. They were a wonderful aeroplane. You were battling to hurt

01:00 yourself in them, because their top speed was 75 mph [miles per hour] and they landed at about 40, and probably stall at about 35. So unless you did something really crazy, you couldn't hurt yourself, but if you learned to fly a Tiger Moth you could fly almost anything, because they didn't have retractable undercarriage, they were

01:30 a biplane of course, you know what they were. I think everybody knows what a Tiger Moth is these days. But they didn't have a steerable tail wheel, they didn't have brakes, so that it just had a skid at the back, so the only way to steer them was with your rudder, and you had to get wind over your rudder or slipstream over your rudder in order to steer the darn thing. And

02:00 they would float, because the stalling speed was so low. Inexperienced pilots would of course, they would bounce and hop and hold off too far and come in too fast. The big thing was not to come in too slowly, because if you came in too slowly in any aeroplane, you stalled, and that was the end of it. But they taught

02:30 you to fly. Those aeroplanes taught you to fly, and you had a real sense of flying because it had an open cockpit, and you have got to know the feel of an aircraft, and you have got to know what to a large extent, what you could do with the aircraft. They taught you aerobatics, and they.

What would you do as part of aerobatics?

Oh just the usual slow rolls and loops and stuff like that.

Is that difficult?

Not when you know how.

03:00 The instructors were good. As I said, although the one I referred to was rotten. He was also a good flyer, a good pilot. No question. And Pickett was a great pilot. I remember he had a girlfriend out on a farm out in the boons. They were all farmers around there. And they had a long shed with a flat roof.

03:30 So one of Pickett's little tricks was to always get out there and try and impress his girlfriend. And I remember on one occasion I was flying and he said, "I've got it". So he took over the plane. The next minute we were running the wheels of the Tiger Moth along the roof of this shed. And I thought well that's interesting, but I never tried to do it. But that was Pickett and he was a very good pilot,

04:00 and he taught me a lot about flying, and I was very grateful to him, because after Collins he was so different. So yeah we learned, and you learned to do stall turns, and you learned to get out of spins, you put yourself into trouble or they put you into trouble and taught you how to get out of it. And that's what you learnt. You learned how to handle to aeroplane.

04:30 You did a bit of navigation. Towards the end of the course there was a cross country exercise where you had to all fly out to another drome and navigate your way there, and I managed to get there, but I don't know if I performed all that well, but I did. Anyway, I graduated from EFTS and in spite of it all I got my above average rating, so I felt Collins didn't have

05:00 too much to complain about. But anyway,

Just going back to your training, what were your barracks like and what would an average day entail?

The barracks were much the same as the ones at Sommers, they were just huts with – on stumps and much the same kind of sleeping accommodation, the mess hall was just a hall with trestle tables and

05:30 stools, and you waited on yourself, you lined up for your food and took it over and had it. The food was quite good. Because Rhodesia was a farming community and there was no problem with food, there was always plenty of food, although I always felt that every cow in Rhodesia died of an enlarged liver, because we got a very large dose of liver for breakfast.

For breakfast.

Yeah,

06:00 porridge was on. But my prime occupation was to learn to fly and get out of that place in one – not in one piece, but as a graduate, I wasn't worried about being in one piece, nobody worried about that.

Did you really develop a bit of a passion for flying during this time?

I have always loved flying, I miss it now, I would love

06:30 to go back and fly tomorrow. I see this guy flying a Mustang around and I want it to be me. So it doesn't get out of your blood. And you never forget it, it's like riding a bike or swimming. You have heard all that before. Anyway, I enjoyed the whole time at – from the moment I started flying except for

07:00 those first 4 hours, which wasn't the flying that worried me, it was this guy sitting in the back seat. But that's the only part of flying that I can honestly say I never enjoyed.

What would an average day be for you?

Well, you go to the flight officer, or after the normal things, up early, ablutions and breakfast, and then you would go to the flight office, or you would go to classes.

07:30 It depended, you had a certain amount of ground class instruction, stuff like internal combustion engines, more theory of flight, learning about aeroplanes and navigation and stuff, still at the elementary stages, so you spend half your day doing that, you might spend a little bit on the drill ground but not much so far as I can recall.

08:00 You went on parade every morning, that was something, you paraded every morning. You dispersed either to classes or to the flight – if you went to the flight office you were flying. That was about half a day and then you went back. You usually only flew once a day, a lot of your time would be sitting around waiting for your flying instructor who had 2 or 3 pupils, and he would take each one of them too. After you had gone solo, of course

08:30 you did it yourself, but there were only a certain number of aircraft to go around, so you didn't fall have your own aeroplane. Yes, so that was the EFTS.

What was your first solo flight like?

Just relieved to get it over. I knew I could fly it, that wasn't a worry, I was just so relieved when he told me I could go, because I thought, I passed, I am in. I wasn't all that

09:00 far behind anybody else, I soloed in about the same flying hours, but it took me a hell of a long time to get it because of this delay waiting for an instructor. Anyway, as I said I got solo about the same time as all of my friends, flying time that is.

Were most of your friends from Melbourne?

Yeah, and Tasmania.

09:30 Victoria and Tasmania, not necessarily Melbourne, there was a bloke from Echuca, there were a couple from Tasmania, various areas of the country, and quite a few from Melbourne of course, and we stuck together then, and at the end of EFTS you had to opt for either single engines or multi engines, you had to put in a preference for your next stage of flying,

10:00 your next stage of training. And I applied for single engines and got them, because single engines led to fighters you see and I still had this dream.

How popular was that fighter pilot dream?

Plenty of them.

Like 90% of pilots?

No, no, because they want 90% fighter pilots anyway. The main service flying training school

10:30 for fighter pilots. Or for single engine pilots was Thornhill, which was out of a place called Gweru which is in the middle of Rhodesia and halfway between Bulawayo and Salisbury. And not far from the Zimbabwe ruins, the place where Zimbabwe gets its name from. It was an ancient civilisation called Zimbabwe, and the ruins are still there. Much – long before

11:00 we were civilised. So anyway the – I applied for singles and I got what I wanted.

Did you have to go through any sort of selection process?

Well there were assessing you all the time. While you are at EFTS – in fact from the day you walk into the air force, somebody looking over your shoulder and making notes about you. They are assessing you on what you can do and what they can do with you and

11:30 what you are cut out for. So, it might have been my youth. Maybe too young for multis, where you have to have a crew. It might have been that I could fly alright and I knew I could, or it might have just been that I asked for it and they gave it me. So, I went to SFTS.

12:00 They don't tell you why they just say go.

What do you think was the reasoning?

Well I just told you.

Well you gave me 3 alternatives?

Yeah. I am just glad they did it, but in fact I probably wouldn't be sitting here talking to you if they sent me to multis.

How excited were you that you had realised the dream?

Pleased. Right.

12:30 You see you take every step at a time. And I was still training, I didn't have my wings, okay I got through EFTS, but you don't get your wings at EFTS. So, you have to get through SFTS [Secondary Flight Training School] to get your wings, and you can get scrubbed there much more likely than you can at EFTS, and some blokes were. Now at SFTS we were flying Harvards, which was a North American

13:00 aircraft. A single engine radial engine monoplane, we were on Harvards to begin with.

Can you describe a Harvard?

It was a single engine, radial engine, monoplane, which carries two people. A cockpit in the front and a cockpit at the back.

Which one was the pilot's seat?

They are

13:30 both pilots seats, the instructor sat at the back and you sat up front. There are Harvard's flying here down at Jandakot, still. There's a guy who has reconditioned about 3 or 4 of them. They are made in North America, the same company who later on made the Mustang. And they were a very good aeroplane, although with the Harvard I we were told all sorts of horror stories, by various people that

14:00 they would stall easily, and you would flick in if you let your landing speed drop too low coming in, but that applies to any airplane.

What's flick in mean?

Stall, and you – if you are coming in and you let your speed – or it doesn't matter when you do it, if you let your speed get too low, it doesn't matter if you are way upstairs, the wing will stall, because the air flow over the wing isn't

14:30 enough, and you get turbulence over your wing, and the whole thing will stall and you lose lift. But, a lot of aircraft and the Harvard was one of them, they will stall one wing first, so you flick. And if that happens when you are low down you haven't got much chance of getting out of it, if it happens upstairs – with a it of altitude alright, but you don't do it. Anyway we have told these stories,

15:00 there have been 1 or 2 people killed doing at. But you just did what you were told to do and there were no problems flying a Harvard I.

And what was the speed on one of these?

Or about 120 knots. They landed at about I have forgotten now, about 60 knots I suppose. But they were much heavier than the Tiger Moth. It had a retractable undercarriage

15:30 it had flaps which you never had in the Tiger Moth. It had a mixture control, and a variable pitch propeller, these are all things which the Tiger Moth doesn't have. So that was all new. The

16:00 **You were just talking about…?**

We were flying Harvard Is I suppose. Later on at Thornhill, we got some Harvard IIs which are a much nicer aeroplane, they were much the same except they were refined and not so much fabric covering on the plane, they were a metal plane with square wings, the Harvard I had rounded wing tips and the Harvard II had square wings.

16:30 A nicer aircraft to fly, and because they had been modified a bit. But all in all I had no trouble with either of the Harvards. Once again our instructors were all RAF, Royal Air Force people. Right from the EFTS right through. There might have been – no I think they were all RAF, because the scheme was run by the RAF. There might have been the odd South African or Rhodesian instructor was well, I

17:00 know people who have flown pre-war.

Are you still in the same barracks or are you still in the same location?

No, we have moved down to Thornhill.

Right okay.

That was several hundred miles away.

Right. How did you get from one place to the other, was it on the train?

I think we got on the train or a truck I am not sure, I can't remember now, but I think it was probably the train. As I said Gweru – see Rhodesia is quite a big country, and the –

17:30 you have got Victoria Falls on one side, what's on the border on the other, it doesn't matter. Northern Rhodesia, in those days and Kenya to the North and South Africa to the south. But it's land locked three's no port they have got to go out through this Portuguese – can't remember. But anyway we are in Gweru or Thornhill. And Thornhill was

18:00 about 5 or 6 miles out of this township of Gweru which is a very small place. And Rhodesia is as I said a plateau and not many mountains, there are a few mountains, but not many. Ideal flying country, a bit like Australia really, a lot of gum trees, which I will tell you about in a minute. But so you progressed through two stages of SFTS, and sort

18:30 of the first stage the first month I think it was, and the second stage the second month. You got up I think about another 150 hours flying time.

What are your weather conditions like around these areas?

Oh very good. That's one of the reasons also that we fly in Rhodesia. The weather is not much different to Australia, except well it's in the southern hemisphere, but being 5,000 feet up you don't quite get the extremes of high temperature, it's a pleasant climate.

19:00 But you do get – it can get quite cold in the winter, and it can sometimes get what they call a 'gootee' it's just fog, or mist, but I can't remember ever flying in bad weather there. Not that they would have asked us to, but we did a few cross countries on various places out to Victoria Falls on one occasion Zambezi River,

19:30 which is a very big river. Victoria Falls of course is one of the highlights of the world, it is magnificent.

Be fantastic to fly over?

We never actually fly over it, I didn't anyway, some of the – I didn't even get to it, because some of the blokes got to it on land, on leave, but I didn't. But we didn't have quite the range to reach Victoria Falls, we did go to

20:00 the Zambezi River on another part of it bit close to us at one stage on a cross country.

When you are doing cross-countries, is it important to be able to see what's on the ground?

It helps, you are supposed to be able to map read, that was something else they were teaching us, you have got to have a map and you have got to read the map and read the ground that's underneath, and marry them up and decide where you are, that's all part of the business. Of course it's much easier if you can find a road or a railway line and follow that, but that's cheating they reckon.

20:30 But that's the way a lot of us did it at times. But yes you – one of the things you learn is map reading, but first of all on these cross countries, you are supposed to plot a course by resolution of vectors the way I was explaining earlier, so that you plot – you work out how far you have got to go, and the course you have to fly to get there, and what – you are given a wind speed, you are given an altitude to fly at, and so

21:00 you work out the track that you have got to fly in order to make good this course. And then you hope that the wind doesn't change and yo can fly accurately on the compass, and a lot of little things like that and that you read the map correctly. Sometimes it works out and sometimes it doesn't. But if your fuel is starting to run out you come home.

Fair enough.

Anyway that's all part of it, everybody did, it wasn't

21:30 any different for me than anybody else.

What were the living conditions at Gweru like?

Very good. No problem at all. Of course, you see Rhodesia, once again, had a very strict colour bar, not the same kind of conditions as in South Africa. Rhodesia was more British than Britain. Because once again they were all British migrants more or less, or British stock.

22:00 Some were 2nd and 3rd generation, but not a very big white population, probably only about quarter of a million. And a black population of 2 million at that stage. The Rhodesian on – the population of Rhodesia increased dramatically after the war because conditions were so good. And they got a lot of black migration, and that's what's increased the black population in Rhodesia to a

22:30 large extent. Of course it's different now, but that's what happened post-war. But anyway they have got this colour bar which was all news to us of course, and unfamiliar but we were instructed that that's the way things were and we went along with it quite happily, we didn't question it. Although we all looked at it and thought this can't last. But we didn't voice those. So anyway as a result of this colour bar we always had

23:00 boys who cleaned quarters and sometimes polished our shoes when we got to SFTS, because at SFTS we started out at AC2s [aircraftsmen class 2] in Sommers, we became LACs [leading aircraftmen] in the EFTS, we became acting sergeants unpaid when we got to SFTS. It was something that was unique to Rhodesia I guess, but anyway

23:30 we were acting sergeants unpaid. Which mean we just wore some stripes, but that was as far as it went, we were still treated as dogs bodies. And but we also had the benefit of some of these houseboys, who did a few things for us.

Were they getting paid?

Oh yes of course.

Were you paying them at all?

No, no. We weren't, the government paid them. They were good people, they were quite happy. I never saw a black man ill-treated the whole time I was in Rhodesia.

24:00 Sure there was a strict colour bar and that existed and it was very, very strict, but it was a benevolent kind of society.

When you say colour bar, could you just with that not socialise at all?

They could not socialise, they had separate toilets, they had separate everything. And any socialisation was strictly white, when we went to Mickles Hotel in Salisbury, to

24:30 stay, which we did occasionally, just over night, if we had a bit of leave. The only black people in the hotel were servants, and every house as they did in South Africa, every time we went to stay in Durban the people always 2 or 3 servants. And it was the same in Rhodesia, but it was a society that everybody accepted. And we accepted it too, but as I say I never saw a black man

25:00 badly treated in Rhodesia. We went to – while we were at Gweru we became friendly with some people who lived on – in a place called Ontali , on Shurugwi mine. And strangely enough my wife came out on a ship called Ontali. That was after the war, but yes so anyway we were invited there for weekends occasionally, and spent 2 or 3 weekends out there with this couple

25:30 who, once again I can't remember their name and I am ashamed of that. But they lived on this mine with about 2 or 3,000 black workers, it was a gold mine. And there were white staff of about half a dozen I suppose, and they had this little corrugated iron round house, and they put us up and looked after us, well, looked after me, I don't know whether I went on my own or I had someone else with me, but I think I went on my own

26:00 mainly. But it was an interesting experience the way they lived, but as I said 2 or 3,000 black workers and half a dozen white people, running this goldmine. The blacks all lived in their own corral, and in fact that was the case everywhere, and at night while we were in the camp at Thornhill,

26:30 it was nothing to hear the black people dancing and singing through the night. You could hear them, and the tom toms used to go. It was all good stuff. We had one or two of our blokes who got out lion hunting, and shot a lion.

Really.

Oh yes, that was the thing in those days. There were still lions roaming the place.

So that would be the really manly thing to go off and do on the weekend?

Yeah, but it didn't

27:00 appeal to me much, and in fact I never went, but one or two of our chaps did and in fact one of them did actually shoot a lion. It was the same fellow who was the choirmaster. Oh we made an appearance, I forgot about that, where were we, I am not sure if it was in Salisbury or Bulawayo now but, we appeared on Rhodesian radio. A group of about six of us, we went and sang some Australian songs on this radio.

27:30 This fellow Douglas organised it all. But anyway.

Quite a bizarre thing to do. Considering the kind of training you were going through.

I don't think it was bizarre, looking back on it I can't imagine why anybody even listened to us, but there wasn't much else to listen to on Rhodesian radio in those days.

Was there a bit of a lack of things to do in your free time?

We never noticed it. We all worked pretty hard,

28:00 and you were always glad to get to bed, but as I said, on the weekends occasionally we got leave and I went out to these people, and other chaps went to other places around the place and that's how it all passed, it passed fairly quickly.

So was it much more of a situation where people would go out and see things rather than sit in a pub and drink?

Oh there were a few who sat in a pub and drank, but there was only one pub in Gweru.

28:30 I remember one of our chaps who got into – a cha who I will mention later, he was a big brawny typical Australian outback sheep farmer. And, he got into a famous fight in Gweru and it took 7 Rhodesian policemen to get him in the cell.

29:00 He took the whole lot of them on. He was a – he wasn't –he was about 6'3" and built like a ump of wire, he was tough, he was a fine friend, but he was older than most of us. I think he put his age back to get in to be honest, but he was over 30.

Were there any training accidents?

Yes.

29:30 We lost 2 or 3 at Thornhill. There were 2 I remember very well, who's names just escape me for the moment. I remember sitting and having breakfast with these two guys, they were on our course, fellas I knew quite well. And we were having breakfast and one of them cut a lot of pepper and put a lot of pepper o his,

30:00 and the other one said to him, "You know, my mother always said that people who take a lot of pepper die young". Well 2 hours later both of them were dead.

Spooky.

They were just doing something they shouldn't have done, well – and they got tangled up and they got killed.

They got tangled up in each other?

Yes. But…

Do you think those sorts of accidents happen out of stupidity or bad training?

30:30 Not bad training. They can happen two ways. Most accidents happen by somebody breaking the rules. Some accidents happen through aircraft failure. Some by a lack of competence, chaps who really not flying as well as they could or as

31:00 well as they should have done. I would say none from lack of instruction, I wouldn't put it down to that, and then luck. Luck.

Were you really following the rules as far as flying was concerned?

I always did. But there again luck played a big part for me. My first lucky

31:30 time was when we were very nearly finished our service flying training in Rhodesia, we had been given our wings at this stage, and at the last stage of training we were given a week's army co-operation work with the units of the Rhodesian army. So that involved going out to a strip in the bush somewhere, camping out for the whole week, and flying off this strip and

32:00 doing various exercises and things and everything else. So we had a good time camping out, and we had a – there was always a bit of beer over night, and we slept on the ground out in the open, and we had about 5 or 6 aircraft on this strip with us, a group of about 20 of us. And we had a very pleasant camp. Anyway it was the last day of the

32:30 camp, and I was given a job to do to get in this bloomin' aeroplane and drop a message to the army who were in a clearing somewhere I had to find and then fly back to the airfield to our main base at Thornhill the thing was coming to a conclusion. Now the message was enclosed in a little canvas bag with a long ribbon on it you see, there was no radio. Didn't exist.

33:00 And there was no radio in any of the Harvards. There was only just a voice tube. So away I go and I find this unit in a clearing, which is surrounded by gum trees, a lot of gum trees in South Africa and Rhodesia. It wasn't a very big clearing, about as big as a quarter acre block, perhaps a bit bigger, perhaps an acre.

33:30 So I get down as low as I could over this clearing and tossed this thing over the side, this message I am supposed to be delivering I am looking back to see where this thing landed, I wanted to make sure I got it and sure enough, it landed exactly where I wanted it to go. I looked around in front of me and all I could see was gum trees. And this is where luck comes into it. So I pulled up and

34:00 there's a great crashing sound like a stick hitting a galvanised iron drum, and that was me hitting the top of the gum trees. The aircraft kept flying and I went back to the airfield. I had torn a few strips in the controls – the controls were fabric. I said to the bloke as I got out, "I think I might have hit a tree". Anyway the aircraft hadn't suffered much damage, they just used a bit of fabric and tape

34:30 but the luck part of it was that if I had looked around just a split second later, I wouldn't be here. I hadn't really done anything wrong, but it was my lucky day. So I always try to look in front after that.

Did you get marked down for that?

I got dressed down. Not because of what happened but because

35:00 I had failed to report it to the chief flying instructor, I had only reported it to – I thought I am in trouble here, and I had only reported it to the fitter who was in charge of the aircraft to make sure the aircraft was safe. And I thought, well that will do. And I thought I will keep away and I did. But it was the last day. And the chief flying instructor called me in and told me I should have told him. But that was it I didn't get into any great trouble.

You mentioned before you got your wings, was there any particular sort of a ceremony?

Oh just a parade

35:30 and they just handed out the wings like sausages, we all got them. And we then became sergeants, we were no longer acting sergeants unpaid. We were sergeants then.

And your pay increased with that promotion?

Yeah we got 9 shillings a day. Which is not a lot of money these days. But that was it. The –

36:00 so that was the end of Rhodesia, we were then posted. And some of the blokes got posted to the UK [United Kindom], but there were only 5 of us on that course that got posted back to the Middle East. And one was Barney Wallace who became my very, very close friend.

36:30 Dick Rowe the chap I was telling you about who had the fight with the policemen, old Dick. And myself we were 3 Australians, and there were 2 Rhodesians. One of the Rhodesians was a very quietly spoken chap called Arty Coulson, a very tall and thin, nice bloke. And the other bloke was Ian Smith, Ian Smith later became Prime Minister of Rhodesia. You remember his name perhaps.

I am afraid my history

37:00 **about Rhodesia is not exactly shining.**

Well he was the Prime Minister of Rhodesia when it went through all its troubles when they were under sanctions and everything else. He was a very good bloke, I have got his book there. The Great Betrayal, most upset with England. But he was Prime Minister of Rhodesia for 10 years. And he has been here to visit us out here. We have a thing called the

37:30 The RAF Rhodesia Association, that's all part of it. But it was held together by a chap who was actually scrubbed, he was one of the few who was scrubbed, and he went to an observer's course and came back. But he remembered every name, he remembered every person, and he held this association together back her in Australia for 20 odd years, he died

38:00 about 5 or 6 years ago I suppose, and it still goes on, there aren't many of us left. But of the 120 who went away, I suppose about 45% of them didn't come back. And this is where once again I had a bit of luck because I was sent to fight in the Middle East. I didn't go to bomber command and they were the guys that really got pasted.

Did you actually know any of

38:30 **these guys who got pasted?**

Oh yeah I knew a lot of them. Because there were 120, as I said there were only about of our group of the 120, only the 5 of us that I know of went back to the Middle East. And Barney Wallace and I were schedule to go for army co-operation.

What's that?

That was squadrons dealing with

39:00 co-operating with the army on artillery spotting, recognisance and all that kind of stuff. And 451 Squadron, which I will tell you about in a minute, started out as an army co-operation squadron in the Middle East, and I will perhaps come to that in a second. But, Dick Rowe went to 450 Squadron in 239 wing flying Kittyhawks and dive bombers, and Ian Smith and Arty Coulson went

39:30 to 237 Squadron which was a Rhodesian Hurricane squadron, so – but we all had to do what was called an OTU, an Operational Training Unit. We hadn't finished yet, so these three went to fighter OTUs and Dick and Barney Wallace and I went to an operational training unit I Ryak in Syria which was an army co-operation OTU.

40:00 And we were there for about 6 weeks I suppose.

Was this also for conversion onto a different aircraft?

Yeah, we converted on to Hurricanes 1s, we were flying Hurricane 1s they had Harvard's there as well.

You've gone from Harvard 1s to Harvard 2s and then from Harvard 2 to a Hurricane?

Yeah. And they also had some Harvards on that unit as well as part of the overall

40:30 for when they needed an instructor flying with you on certain aspects of the training. It was good, we were in old foreign legion barracks on an old French airfield in Syria, because Syria was conquered by the – they threw the French – they fought a war in Syria, the 7th division of the AIF went up there, and they defeated the French in Syria. It wasn't a big war, but it was just as nasty

41:00 as anywhere else. Cutler who became a VC [Victoria Cross], lost is legs there, he became Governor of New South Wales later on. Anyway we arrived there after all the fuss had died down.

What were the barracks like?

Good, they were French Foreign Legion barracks, but I remember you went up this great flight of stairs and at the top of the stairs were all these latrines and they were all holes in the ground French style.

41:30 But it was cold, by gee it was cold. Because once again the valley was 3,000 up in the air and it was surrounded by mountains which went up about 10,000 feet, the Lebanon Cedars. And the ruins of Baalbek were just down the road and Damascus a bit further on. I always had ruins somewhere around me. And we –

42:00 as I said spent 6 weeks there, and they were a good 6 weeks.

42:03 End of tape

Tape 4

00:31 **Whereabouts did you do your conversion to Hurricanes George?**

In Ryak in – at this OTU which is called occupation training unit. So anyway, that's where I was introduced to the Hurricanes.

How were you introduced to the Hurricanes?

Well, there's always an aircraft handbook, which you are supposed to read and study, and your instructor takes you out and tells you something about. Your instructor

01:00 takes you out and puts you through cockpit drill, because on your own you can't – but the worst thing about the Hurricane was to get the undercarriage up. See in fighter aircraft you fly with your hands on the control stick, and at this point over here you have got your throttle your pitch control your mix control and everything else is over on this side, that is the normal cockpit layout.

01:30 But in the Hurricane, - oh also in most aircraft you have got your undercarriage lever and your flap lever is not far away either. But in the Hurricane your undercarriage lever is right over here on the right side and it's an H block, a bit like a gear shift in some of the cars, the Mercedes has got one. But it was a battle to get this damned think down and round and up and while you did it you had to let go of your

02:00 throttle, which on take off is really a no, no. Because if your friction is off and your throttle comes off you are in trouble. Because you are pulling your undercarriage not far off the ground. So, but you had to let go of the stick and get a hold of this and argue with it. So the thing that everybody laughed about on practically every first take off in the Hurricane was some poor character going up and down and all over the place trying to get his undercart up.

02:30 So that was on e of the little tricks and this was explained was going to be a bit tricky, but once you got the hang of it, it was okay. Um, so it was just cockpit – they told you what to expect, what speed to land at, the Hurricane was a very forgiving aircraft, it was a very good aircraft to fly, it was interesting, so was the Spitfire, but they had different characteristics altogether. The Hurricane was very sensitive laterally,

03:00 fairly heavy for and aft. And the Spitfire was just the reverse, it was very heavy laterally and very sensitive for and aft. So there you go, that was the Hurricane. And these were old Hurricanes they had probably been in world war one. But, that was all we had so that was what we flew. And we didn't have much trouble with them. And we did things like height climbs

03:30 and a bit of dog fighting. A lot of formation flying, you get to feel the aircraft you get to handle the

aircraft. We did – on training for army co-operation we did some artillery shoots. We did some recognisance flights and there were always ground lectures as well. That went on for 6 weeks.

04:00 My main recollections of it were two occasions, the first one was Barney Wallace as I mentioned became my, we were together well from the moment we went – we were together right from day one, except he had a different group of friends to me originally, but as we got split up and dissected and carried on, we went back to the Middle East together and we were together right until the day he was killed. Anyway

04:30 Barney and I were told by the – our instructors that I had to fly Barney down to Gaza, which is in the news these days, to Gaza in a Harvard, two of us and I was to fly the Harvard and Barney in the back seat, to pick up a Hurricane from Gaza and Barney was to fly the Hurricane back, and pick up another chap on the way.

05:00 So that was alright and away we go. So we are somewhere down over the Dead Sea or Jerusalem or some damned place. I used to chew gum at that stage and I had a packet of PKs [chewing gum]. So we had no communication back and forwards in the Hurricane I might add, no radio no nothing. And I popped a PK in my mouth and held it up to Barney in the backseat and said,

05:30 "Do you want one" and he said, "Yes". I tried to pass this thing back to him, and it fell down on the bottom of the aircraft. So he's fishing around to try and get it, and I knew he was trying to do it. So I said, "Hang on, hang on". So I hit the stick as hard as I could and the tail of the aircraft went straight up in the air of course. And everything on the floor went up in the air including the chewing gum, but when I looked around it wasn't just the chewing gum that was up in the air,

06:00 we had a harness and we had a parachute. We sat on the parachute but there was a bucket seat and the parachute sat in the bucket seat and we had – the first thing you put on is the parachute harness and then you put on the cockpit harness over the top of that. When I looked around Barney had undone the cockpit harness and – he had undone his parachute harness and there he was, only his legs inside the cockpit, reaching out trying to get

06:30 the chewing gum. Well it frightened heck out of me, I thought oh god, he nearly went out. So he flopped back inside fortunately, and we continued on down to Gaza. I made the worst landing – I was so upset I made the worst landing of my life. I got out of the plane and I said, "Gee Barney, I am sorry, that was a rotten landing". He said, "Oh that was a good landing". He wasn't the least bit perturbed, but that was Barney. Anyway I never forgotten

07:00 that. We duly got the aircraft in Gaza and I picked up this other chap who was one of our instructors at Haifa and flew back to Ryak with him. But the two other occasions I remember, up there was that occasionally we got out of the barracks, and on one particular night we drove up into the Lebanon Hills. And we went up this very narrow valley with a mountain stream and we went to the

07:30 this little restaurant and we sat there and the mountain stream went amongst the tables, they had champagne and they put the champagne in the cold mountain stream to chill it, it was a nice occasion. I still wasn't drinking, but anyway my friends drank all the champagne. Another time I remember there was it was a – and as I said it was bitterly cold and I

08:00 had 14 blankets and I pinched them from everybody. But on this occasion it was very early in the morning about 6 o'clock, and we were set out – we were nearly finished our courses and we were sent on formation flying and I was leading as it happened, and there was this group of 4 aircraft and we just stepped out and we flew across the top of the Lebanons. And we were only about 200 above

08:30 the mountains and they were covered with snow, and the morning was as crisp as anything and the ice was forming on the spinners of all these aircraft. And you could see it. And it was as bright as bright as bright. It was one of the most enjoyable mornings I have ever had in an aircraft, it was really good. Because with Hurricanes and Spitfires you don't last very long, I only had about an hour and a half duration, so I was back again before long.

09:00 And that was it. Oh we did a bit of air gunnery on the way, or course. And we also did it back at air service flying training school, some air to ground gunnery and some dive bombing and some air to air gunnery.

Can you tell me about joining Squadron 451?

Yes.

09:30 We were posted – Barney and I were both posted to 451. Which was still called an army co-operation squadron. We were still sergeants, both of us at this stage, but because we were going to army co-op it was practically an automatic commission. The squadron was stationed at that time at St Jean, which is just out of Haifa in Palestine. And

10:00 we also had a detachment on Cyprus. Allocated to B flight in the squadron which was the one on St Jean and Barney went to A flight, which was the one over on Cyprus. These were only temporary detachments. Because the squadron operated as a whole. The squadron had quite an extensive tour in the desert

10:30 on army co-operation. I might say that this squadron was formed in Bankstown in 1941 and went overseas almost immediately. They didn't have any pilots when they first got there, but the pilots were finally posted in. And they did army co-operation work on Hurricane 1s. They served in Tobruk and they served in lots of places and went up and down the desert on those

11:00 four As that happened long before Alamein. In the days when you went up one week and came back the next. They had a fairly extensive tour, but they more or less – army co-operation as such dropped out of sight. They had been pulled back, the squadron had been pulled back and been put on port defence at Haifa and also in Cyprus

11:30 and that's where we joined them. As I say I went to B flight and Barney went to A. Flying Hurricane 1s still, with reconditioned Rolls Royce engines which performed pretty well, except they were reconditioned in Egypt and we used to get a fair number of glycol

12:00 leaks the glycol being the coolant that you use in the radiator, because of course water freezes at high altitudes so you always use this glycol which is an anti freeze perhaps you know all that. The – but that was the only thing, apart from that the Hurricane just didn't have the performance to get the kind of aircraft that we were supposed to be chasing, which were high

12:30 flying recognisance German aircraft coming in over the various ports. They did it all round – and we did a lot of this work, but in those days we didn't have aircraft that was suitable for the job and we just did the best we could. Which was not much. But in the meantime we had a squadron which was very highly trained, the

13:00 standard in the squadron was exceptional. That's the flying standard, because these blokes had been at it a while and the – but the morale amongst the pilots in particular wasn't good, because they were most upset with the fact that they had been pulled out and dumped on this particular job. The commanding officer at the time was a bloke called

13:30 Chapman, Wing Commander Chapman, and that's about as I will say about him.

Why, have you nothing positive to say about him?

I don't want to put this in. Right.

You just mentioned

14:00 **command.**

We had a squadron leader flying as well, his name was Payne, he was a man, a good man, but he'd had – he'd been shot down at one stage and he had been injured in an aircraft accident, so his health wasn't 100% but he was a good chap. Um, my flight commander was a chap called Ray Hudson, who – he had done this

14:30 tour with the squadron in the early days, in the desert and a very good pilot. He later – post war he flew helicopters and he did two tours down in the Antarctic. I never saw him after the war, but he was an excellent pilot, and excellent flight commander, he later was posted from our squadron to 239 Wing which were flying

15:00 Kittyhawk dive bombers, and I think he went to 450 squadron and he got a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] and Bar there. He later became CO of that squadron. So that was Ray Hudson, but there were many, many good people and they became my family, I was the youngest, I flew with all of these

15:30 guys but when you are flying single engine aircraft, you fly as a team and you live as a team, you know. We lived together and this went on for a long, long time.

How were you greeted by the squadron?

Nothing much, reported to the adjutant and he told you where to go and to get yourself a bed and then report to the flight – I probably met the

16:00 CO I don't know I might have met him in the mess. You met your flight commander and he told you what he wanted you to do, turn up at the flight hut next morning, mainly in those days it was readiness, you were in readiness waiting for a scramble, always a couple of aircraft ready, so they worked in shifts. And w also did a lot of practice flying as well,

16:30 to keep the squadron up to scratch in those circumstances. And it was all good because I was learning every time I got in an aeroplane, I learned something. But the – we even did – we did some night flying without a flare path, we did it by moonlight in a Hurricane, that was quite interesting, we survived it.

How did you manage to accomplish that?

17:00 Well, you flew by moonlight for a start, but there was just a little gleam of light at the end of the runway. And that was it, we had nothing else. We didn't have any headlights, we had headlights but you weren't allowed to use them. I think the Hurricane had a headlight. I am pretty sure it did. No, I am not sure maybe it didn't. We flew these things by moonlight

17:30 just as a matter of training more than anything else. And of course both the Hurricane and the Spit flying them at night wasn't always the best, because you have got these exhausts on both sides and you have got these planes coming back which are not visible in day light, but at night they are very evident. So that didn't help but of course with both of them, they have got a long nose and when you are landing it's not the type of undercarriage you have these days, which is a tricycle

18:00 they are on 3 points, so when you are landing you have your nose up in front of you and you couldn't see so you had to cope with all that. Anyway that was just by the by. I – nothing really notable happened there. My first landing with the squadron was a little bit interesting because there were 2 runways at St Jean, this place at Haifa.

18:30 They were at right angles, one went that way and the other went that way. And the idea with single engine aircraft, especially operational was to make a turning approach for two reasons, was to (a) so you could get visibility and (b) if you made a turning approach you were harder to shoot down because you are in a turn all the way. That's if you got caught coming in. So I am send out on a formation flight with a bloke called Morgan Bartlett, who

19:00 lived in Melbourne, he's quite a bit older than me, maybe 4 or 5 years. And so I am flying no. 2 to Morgan, or Barters as we used to call him. And we are coming and I am on formation on him as we are landing, and we are coming down and we've got the runway out in front of us and I think well that's alright. And we are about 50 feet off the ground and he did a right-angled turn

19:30 and went up this runway, so I am stuck on the outside doing all sorts of convolutions to stay with him. Up on one wing. I remember Ray Hudson afterwards, he got a hold of me in the mess, he said, "That was a rather strange landing you did today". And I explained to him what happened, here I am I am this frog, I am 19 you see, full of myself. Ray is looking at me thinking what have I got here.

20:00 So I told him how it happened, and I got down in one piece, but there was at the end of the conversation, and this is the only reason why I still remember it particularly, I said to him, "There's nothing to worry about, I had it under control all the time". And he just looked at me and walked away, he never said another word. But that's the way it was and we flew together a lot later and he never questioned me again. There was a logical

20:30 explanation but it was bit hairy, especially if you were looking at it from where he was, down there.

What did you know about the squadron before you were posted to it?

Nothing. Didn't even know it existed, although when I came back on that – I must have known it existed because the two of the instructors of the OTU were actually from the squadron a chap called Mauldy Mower who was an RAF officer, who

21:00 served with the squadron in Tobruk, because in the early days we had some RAF people because we didn't have enough Australian pilots anyway. I served with Hudson and Kirk and a few others in the Middle East, and he was absolutely enraptured with 451, he's a Professor of English with one of the American Universities now, and has been there for many years. He got a

21:30 DFC in Tobruk, but he has never forgotten the squadron, he has never forgotten the people that he worked with. And it's quite interesting. Every now and again his name pops up in these newsletters where he has written a letter and he is considerably older than me. And he was one of these instructors. And he just happened to be the guy that had to pick up on that return flight from Gaza. And the place I picked him up from was St Jean, I didn't realise the squadron was there at the time, but he had been there visiting his old mates at the squadron

22:00 and I flew him back. And there was one other chap there on 451, but I didn't know that I was at 451 when I landed there, I just landed at this airfield. This was what I was told to do. So that was it. And 451 became a very large part of my life and it has been a large part of my life ever since.

As a very young sprog as you have described yourself, George what was it like to join the ranks of these experienced pilots in a quite an experienced squadron?

22:30 Good. That's about the only way you could explain it. Good.

How did they take you under their wing?

Well, there were others that were not too far ahead of us, you know, a couple called Tom James, Barney Sneddon, there were others who they were all, we sort of arrived in dribs and drabs, mostly in

23:00 pairs. Sneddon and Ward. Jimmy Sidney was the other one I was trying to think of. Sidney and James were together they were a pair, Wallace and Purdy were a pair, but you were made welcome from day one. There was no hierarchy, no – you were part of the team, you were in the mess, you were all shared the same mess. We lived together,

23:30 and we had fun together in the mess. We flew together, we were just mates, and that's the way the squadron always – nobody thought they were better than anybody else, you were accepted if you could fly, and you could do your job you were there, that's it and that's what you had to do. And in that squadron, everybody could fly. And they went on

24:00 the old guard that I mentioned. There were 5 or 6 of them that went on to mainly 239 Wing and they commanded squadrons in the wing, they became highly decorated. One of them Ken Watts was a marvellous pilot, he was a mechanical engineer from Melbourne, intensely interested in aircraft and engineering and everything else, he was a very good pilot. Barney Wallace flew as no. 2 to him

24:30 for a while, in Cyprus and other places. But Ken went on to become CO to one of these Kittyhawk squadrons, he got shot down over Yugoslavia, he stayed with the Partisans for a while, he got captured by the Gestapo, the Gestapo beat him up, he ended up in a – and I mean really beat him up, because they reckoned he was a spy, although they knew damned well he –

25:00 the Germans knew every pilot in every squadron and by name. They knew it all. But anyway they beat him he went back to a POW [prisoner of war] camp, he ended up in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. He's dead now. But that was his story. There were some of these blokes who were remarkable people who went on to do things. Now we were the younger fry so we stayed with the squadron.

25:30 And we went from one place to another, we went up the desert and back down the desert, Alexandria, Port Said, you name it, were mainly doing local defence work and guarding ports in Alexandria, Port Said and Mersa Matruh, Torbuk in the landing grounds there,

26:00 and we were flying, we went from Hurricane Ones to Hurricane 2Cs which were a much better aircraft and a much better armament, the Hurricane One had 8 machine-guns, 8 .303 machine-guns, which sounds like a lot, but in fact as aircraft got better, and better during the war and were better armoured, the .303 was almost useless. They worked in the Battle of Britain because the opposing

26:30 aircraft didn't have as much armour. And they weren't as robust, but the .303 became almost redundant. So we got the Hurricane 2C which had 4 x 20 mm cannon, and that was the best armament I flew at any stage because you could really hit something with that. The Spitfire was modified and that had 2 cannons and two

27:00 machine-guns on each wing, so it had 2 cannons and 4 machine-guns, they took some of the machine-guns out. But, that didn't have the – it was good, but it didn't have quite the hitting power that these 4 cannons and the Hurricane 2C had. That was a nice aircraft, a later model Merlin engine, I flew Rolls Royce's right through the war, they were all Rolls Royce's for me. But that was a very, very nice aircraft.

Where were you posted

27:30 **with the squadron from Haifa?**

Crikey, um, do you mind if I look something up.

After joining the squadron at Haifa what were your movements?

Well the squadron moved on an almost regular basis. I don't think we were anywhere much

28:00 for more than – well we moved everywhere to be quite honest. The whole situation with the war in the Mediterranean was fluid, as you can probably appreciate, Alamein had taken place by this time, and the army was pushing up the west coast,

28:30 our job was local defence, mainly of the major – and ordered them out of convoy patrols up and down the coast. And we moved up the desert to Mersa Metru, LG106 all sorts of places and it meant the whole squadron

29:00 just picking up, and we were all under canvas by this time, because St Jean was the last place that we actually stayed in some sort of substantial barracks, and from there on it was canvas all the way, the mess was canvas, the men were – all our ground staff were under canvas, and we were under canvas. Quite comfortable, but so we were mobile and that mobility was typical of all the Middle East squadrons that shifted around all over the place.

29:30 The whole war in the Middle East was like that, and I suppose war generally, but the – all the squadrons were moving around. There were about 8 Australian squadrons in the Middle East, all the 400 numbers with the exception of 452, which came back here to Darwin from England. But 454, 458, 450, 451, were all Australian

30:00 squadrons but not single engine ones, a lot of them were multi engine squadrons. Only 450 and 451 were single engines. And 3 Squadron was a permanent RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] squadron and they were flying Kittyhawks, 450 and 3 they were in 239 Wing. So we moved all over the place. I suppose the place where we spent most time until the later stages, which we will come to,

30:30 was in Alexandria, and we were at a place called Idku which was on a salt pan amongst a lot of palm out to the east of Alexandria, and we were on local defence against high flying recognisance aircraft. We were still flying Hurricane 2Cs a this stage, and still having trouble trying to catch

31:00 them, because they had these special aircraft, the Germans. Which were built for high altitude flight, the [Junker] JU86 was a fully pressurised aircraft, and the JU88 had special injection equipment on their engine which gave them a very high performance for photo recognisance work, and the whole thing

about the Germans

31:30 was that they had some magnificent aircraft. We had some good ones, Hurricane, the Mosquito, the Wellington, they were work horses and the Mustang of course and the Lancaster, they were all great aircraft but don't underestimate what the Germans had. The Germans had wonderful aircraft, the JU88 which was – went right through the war, the JU86 was a specialist aircraft.

32:00 You have got the Messerschmitt 109 through all the marks up to F to G and you had the Fok…. 190, and later on the Messerschmitt 262 which was the first jet aircraft to come into combat, and the Germans had that right at the end of the war. So, you were flying against people who knew how to fly and had good aircraft. The earlier guys that were in the desert flying

32:30 Hurricane Ones and Gladiators, we used to reckon they were 109 happy because their 109s had the upper hand by a long way. And they – we were in a fair bit of trouble and it wasn't until about the time of Alamein that the allied air forces began to get the upper hand, and that made a big contribution in the turn around. Because the Germans, Alamein is only 70 miles out of Cairo.

33:00 I have been back there since the war incidentally. But all the German flags were flying in Cairo at that stage, the Egyptians were quite ready to welcome the Germans in, they didn't care who won the war. They weren't all that keen on the British. So it was a matter of fluidity, and the squadrons and the whole of – all of these units no matter what they

33:30 were in a state of flux the whole time moving back and forwards. But Alexandria, we were probably there for 6-9 months. And a couple of things happened there, the Barney and I of course were sharing a tent, we shared a tent wherever we went. And we picked up this Alsatian dog, or he had

34:00 with his friends in Cyprus. This Alsatian dog called Hurricane. Who had a big problem, he was with the British ack-ack team in Cyprus, and every time the guns went off, Hurricane went mad, so they gave him to our boys, and Hurricane used to live with Barney and me in the tent which was a little two-man tent with a stretcher on each side, and the dog in the middle. And then when it came to the evenings he had a special

34:30 hessian bag in the mess and he used to lie in the mess. And everybody loved him, a great dog. But anyway, Barney was always out for a bit of mischief and he went into Alex one night and had a few beers, and he came back and they had these gully gully men in Alex, all over Egypt, these magicians, who did tricks. So Barney bought his stock in trade, which was a white rat,

35:00 two chickens and a kitten as well. It's a pretty bad mix with an Alsatian dog. So we are all in the tent together the whole lot of us, so he called this white rat Horace or something, it let him down because it had a litter of 5 so there we are, we've got 6 white rats, 2 chickens, a kitten and an Alsatian

35:30 dog. And nature took its natural course at the end of the day we only had the Alsatian dog left. But anyhow that was Barney, and those things in life happened to Barney all the time. But he was a great bloke, he came from the other side of the street to me, he was an ex-Melbourne Grammar boy, his father was a very wealthy man, and he had a fortunate upbringing

36:00 but we became very, very close, we – he continued in A flight and I stayed in B, so we didn't always fly together, but he was a first class pilot. Anyway he was always up to mischief as I said, anyhow the next thing that happened this came as quite a shock to me, because I walked into the mess one night it was August 7th 1943, and suddenly

36:30 everybody started singing happy birthday, it was my 21st birthday, and I hadn't even thought about it. They had even made a cake, and it was a shock to me then, and it's a shock to me now. Um, they called on me for a

37:00 speech and I said something rather rude and regretted it, and then all I could get out was thanks. We had a party after that, but we had a party many nights in the mess because we managed to scratch an old piano and one of the blokes that was posted with us was a bloke called Ces Ball, he was a flight sergeant but he played the piano and he played rather well. So a sing-song was always on and a game of poker. But I will never forget what they did

37:30 that night. I often wish I had made a different speech, but that's in hindsight.

I am sure they would appreciate that you were overwhelmed?

Well I was, I hadn't even thought about it, and I didn't know that they even thought about it, I was the only one that ever got a birthday party, so far as I know, but to make a cake it wasn't easy, the ingredients were just on army rations and stuff. But anyway that was that,

38:00 it was something that I have never forgotten, but I don't know who organised it whether Barney was behind it, or who, but never found out, never asked. The other thing that happened which was of interest was that at Aboukir, have you heard of Aboukir the Palace at Aboukir and all the Egyptian history, well Aboukir sits on the bay – Aboukir Bay around the Port of Alexandria,

38:30 and the ruins there, in the water, they have been digging some out lately, because it all collapsed in an

earthquake, the palace. But anyway at Aboukir there was what they called the high flying flight, it was a special detachment of aircraft that were set out to catch these high flying recognisance aircraft, they were Spitfires, and by this time we had got Spitfires on the squadron, we had got some 5Bs,

39:00 which were a very early model. We only got stuff that drifted out of England after they had got to something better, that's what happened in the Middle East, and also in the far East. But anyway they had this high flying flight was a special Spitfires with extended wing tips, a special Merlin engine which had a two stage blower, a two stage super charger that is, and they took all the armour plate out of them

39:30 they took all the machine-guns out of them so they only had 2 cannons. And as I said extended the wing tips and these things could fly to 46,000 feet without pressurisation I might say. And it still took a bit of doing. The first blower, the first supercharger came in at about 13,000 feet and the second one you pulled it in at about 23,000 feet. To get to 30-35,000 feet

40:00 wasn't too bad, you could get there fairly quickly. But to get the rest of the way it wasn't that easy, it took a bit of time but you made it. So I got what they were doing they had one or two – and Freckleton, he was an Australian too, he was permanently on this unit together with ground staff and officers and everything else, he was the chief pilot and they used to second one of our people over there on

40:30 for two weeks at a time, to sort of make up the second pat of the operation, there might have been one or two others, but there weren't many pilots there were only about 4, they lived in the mess at Aboukir, so that was interesting. I had my first encounter with a German there, which I didn't cover myself in glory very much. Anyway

41:00 there you go.

41:14 End of tape

Tape 5

00:31 **Before we left you were just going to tell me about your first encounter with the Germans?**

Well, as I said I didn't cover myself in glory, but no it was in this high-flying flight, and I was flying one of these special Spitfires, and there was an aircraft coming in, an enemy aircraft. Over Alexandria this was.

01:00 Anyway for one reason or another I got separated from my number one, a fella called Freckleton. And I am stooging around up there on my own and the next thing I see this enemy aircraft. We've vectored to him by a ground controller, we've picked him up on radar and then they tell which height to fly and which direction you are going to fly in and hope that you see him. Try and arrange an interception. Anyway, to cut a long story short,

01:30 I thought I had better have a go at this bloke I suppose, which I did, so…

What sort of guns have you got available?

Only two cannons. Um because they had taken the machine-guns out, as I explained they weren't much use anyway. So because they wanted to get all the weight out of these aircraft so they can get the altitude. They had taken out the armour plate, all the machine-guns and just left

02:00 only 2 cannons. So away we went.

Is there a control somewhere to fire from?

You have a button on a stick. Just turn it to on or off it's air operated.

How do you know you are hitting the target. How do you line it up?

Well you have got a thing called a reflector sight that shines up on the windscreen right, and it's a circle like that,

02:30 and to hit an aircraft in flight from a fixed wing air plane is not an easy thing to do. Because if you don't fly the plane perfectly, more often than not you are in a turn of some sort, so if you slip in a turn which is easy to do, or skid in the turn which is easy to do, or if you don't hold your nose exactly at the right attitude, any one of those

03:00 things, well you just miss everything. So, and on top of that you use this ring sight to lay off the deflection. Because the aircraft is travelling that way, and you have to go to aim ahead of him, you can't aim straight at him. So, it's not the easiest science in the world. And for that reason if you look at the results of air gunnery in various gunnery schools where and

03:30 things where they can test these things. You are looking at percentages of under 10% normally. I mean, even over 6 or 7% is above average. You don't – it's not easy to hit. So anyway there are all these things that come into it, and it's even a bit more complicated than that, but it doesn't matter. Anyway we have a go at him, and I managed to hit him a couple of

04:00 times.

Well considering it's a pretty difficult thing to do, you must have been pretty pleased with yourself?

Well I really wasn't thinking about that at that stage, it all happened pretty quickly. And incidentally, you have only got at the best 20 seconds of fire power, because your cannons are firing at nearly 600 rounds a minute and your machine-guns, if you have got machine-guns are firing at 800 rounds a minute. You can't carry much ammunition,

04:30 so you have only got, as I said, 20 seconds of fire power. So you are encouraged to fire just very short bursts and then you have got to get the range right of course.

That's how far it…?

And your guns are harmonised you see because they are outside – they out their and you are in the middle here, and you are aiming here. They are harmonised to come together at a certain point, normally in our case, about 200 – 250 yards and

05:00 then it doesn't always come to a point, sometimes it's a pattern. Like – so all those things come into it. Anyway I hit this guy, and all of a sudden, I was pretty close to him, and I hit him in the port engine and the cockpit a little bit, but suddenly I am just covered in oil, there was oil everywhere, and I thought

05:30 my aircraft had been, that's the only explanation I could think of. Somehow or other he had managed to hit me. Well, that's okay we were probably about 30,000 feet I suppose, and he was a pretty smart operator, because it was broad daylight and in the afternoon, I suppose. Because he headed off west immediately, his

06:00 port engine was smoking a little bit. But he started to climb a little bit and he headed off, it was a JU88, high performance and he flew straight into the sun. Well that makes life very difficult, because I was in a bit of a fix then, I had oil all over me everywhere, I couldn't see out the front very well. I couldn't see the reflector sight even, which shines on to your windscreen.

06:30 I could hardly see him because he was flying into the sun. So anyway, cut a long story short I kept on firing at him until the guns packed up, but I didn't hit him. All the time I was thinking my engine's going to pack up any minute because I have lost all this oil. Anyway I kept looking at the instruments and nothing was packing up on me. We were out over the water, we were out over the Mediterranean Sea, so I thought well I had better head for home, I can't do anymore good

07:00 here. So

Was he the only German flying around at the time?

See, they are recognisance aircraft, they come over to take photographs of the ships in the harbour. And the idea is that we have got to stop them from doing that some how or other. That's why they are high performance. We used to do the same thing. We had what's called a PRU, Photo Recognisance Unit. And they used to fly special Spitfires, long range. And they have taken

07:30 photographs all over the world. Some of the blokes I trained with were with the PRU. So that's what they were doing, and that was what we were supposed to be doing. And so, I went back and landed and then I found out that it wasn't my oil at all, it was his oil, and when I had hit him, one of the oil tanks behind his port engine, anyway they plotted him for a while and he dropped right off the radar. He just dropped off so we don't know whether he went in or not. He might have done.

08:00 That was my first encounter. Nothing much.

It sounds pretty exciting from where I am sitting.

Oh, I suppose.

Just rewinding, I think we left when we were talking about Egypt?

Idku, was the place we were talking about.

08:30 **So you head through Palestine and Lebanon after that?**

No, no. Lebanon was before that.

Okay you are going the other way?

Yes, we are going the other way now. We went out to LG106 and Mersa Metruh,

Gaza?

Well Gaza's Palestine, that's further up.

09:00 That was all before. We've left there.

Okay well where are we, it's hard to follow on this map.

We went to El Dhaba, but as I said it was just constant movement, we were doing the same thing the whole time. Convoy patrols, there were a lot of convoy patrols, which meant you went out and flew in

09:30 circles for a couple of hours at a time.

How would the circles be flying round these convoys?

I don't know, 10 miles I suppose. Always – you always had to fly at 4,000 feet and you had to approach them from a certain angle and you had to fly the colours of the day because all these people n the navy and the merchant navy had a pretty bad time and they were pretty trigger happy.

10:00 **Sorry, fly the colours of the day what's that mean?**

Just a very pistol. That's just a very short pistol with big barrel and has a coloured cartridge in it that flies colours right. On any particular day there was a certain colour of the day so they know that you were friendly. It was like having a password.

Is this like having a handgun that you…?

One bloke shot himself down with it.

He shot himself down?

Yeah that doesn't matter, we won't go into it.

10:30 It wasn't me. No they are – you can set fire to something if you let it off in the cockpit. But they are just a very cartridge and you can see the colours of the day, and you come in from a right angle and at the right height, and fire the colours of the day, and hope to hell that the navy doesn't shoot back at you. Which they did a couple of times, well, as I said they were pretty nervous people.

11:00 Because up and down that coast they'd had a hell of a time, especially on the Tobruk run, in the early days, with the destroyers.

Do you have to come in at a certain angle and at a certain height to…?

Yes, that was the set up. So that they would know that we were one of their mob. Some of the aircraft recognition from the navy wasn't all that good so. Sometimes the Hurricane could look like a [Messerschmitt]109 or something else. But anyway that

11:30 was what we did, quite a lot – we did lots and lots of. We escorted the Italian fleet after they surrendered back into Alexandria Harbour, that was one of the things that happened.

What were some of the things that actually happened near Alexandria. Is it also [Jebel] Aruda?

See Aboukir which is not mentioned there, is just right alongside Idku and that was where we were on that high-flying flight so I have told you about that.

12:00 But another one we went HQ [headquarters] in the Middle East got excited once and decided they wanted to do something different, so they organised a raid on Crete. I never quite figured out why, but there were 100 Hurricanes and several sections of Baltimore's from 454 Squadron. There were 8 Baltimore's from 454, and we set out

12:30 from El Dhaba or somewhere up there, it might have been LG106, on this great raid on Crete, 100 Hurricanes – there were 6 from our squadron.

Is a Baltimore a similar…?

It's a two engine bomber, a light bomber, American manufacture. 454 flying it at the time. So off we go on this great adventure and as I said there were 100 Hurricanes and there were 6

13:00 from our squadron, and I happened to be one of the six. So off we go and we fly around Crete.

That's a lot of aircraft in the air?

Oh yeah.

It must be quite exciting to be part of something that enormous?

Well they used to run 1000 bomber raids at night from England, every night of the week. And they were 4 engines. The big thing about this was they were single engine aircraft over 200 miles of ocean. If something goes wrong you end up in the drink.

13:30 But the idea was that we just strafed anything we saw on the ground. There wasn't much to strafe to be

quite honest, this is why I am critical of the whole thing, and I wasn't the only one. But 454 lost 6 aircraft out of 8 that day, and of the 100 Hurricanes we lost 8 of them.

14:00 Fortunately no one from us, my aircraft got hit twice but only minor damage, it was mainly flak, and anti aircraft fire. But as I said the targets weren't worth it. I just think it was somebody who had nothing much else to do and thought up this operation and said, "Let's go for it". Because Crete was isolated, it was occupied by the Germans, but

14:30 I couldn't see much point in it. About the same time, after we – what happened, we started to get our Spit [Spitfire] 9s our later model Spits we converted from 5Bs to Spit 9s which is a much better performance, and we were

15:00 stationed down in Cairo. That's right, waiting for a ship, we were meant to go to Corsica. Oh there was another move in between we were going to go to Syria – not to Syria to Turkey at one stage, Churchill got this bright idea that he was going to get Turkey into the war and we would go up through Turkey into Russia to save the Russians. So the squadron was to go on this, and the whole squadron moved up to

15:30 Aleppo on the Turkish border and we sat there for 2 weeks and they decided that's alright, we are not going to do it after all. Turkey wasn't all that keen about it, so we came back again, and this all might be a little bit out of sync, but this is what happened. Then we – we were stationed down in Cairo waiting for the switch

16:00 to Corsica and there was a war going in Cos, in one of the Greek Islands, somewhere between Crete and Cyprus and the British had invaded Cos. It was also occupied by the Germans. Somehow or other I got the job of flying the mail up to this island and they gave me a

16:30 Hurricane because the Hurricane had a longer range, it had a long range tanks. So off I went, and I landed, I think I landed somewhere near Gaza and got some fuel then went up to Cyprus and I landed there and they said, "There's no point in going to Cos" and I said, "Why", and they said, "We've just got knocked over, the Germans have got it back again". So I was just a day off going in the prisoner of war camp, so I saw some friends in Cyprus I knew and we had a couple of good nights and I came home again.

17:00 But

How can you communicate that you are not going to carry on with the mission can you…?

Oh you have got radio, there's complete signal system right through the whole of the command by this time, so all the various commands and headquarters are in touch by signal. And you just send a signal. So I left the mail, I left the mail in Cyprus with somebody there.

How did you feel about doing a mail run?

I didn't mind.

17:30 That was just something else you had to do. Somebody had to do it.

Would that be common for your squadron to do things like that?

No, no. About the only time I think. We just happened to be in the right spot at the right time when they wanted somebody to go and I just happened to get the guernsey. Anyhow we had these Spit 9s and we put a detachment back up into El Gamaliya just outside Port Said for a month or two, and

18:00 while we were waiting and then finally the ground crew, the bulk of the squadron, they went by ship through to Corsica, and once they had gone and got to Corsica, we could fly up, we had 16 aircraft to fly up and I had a passenger in my Spit, because Barney had done his trick again, he'd been off to Alex and got himself into a

18:30 bit of fun and ended up with a puppy this time, so I had a little black pup about this big, black and white.

Barney certainly had an interest in animals?

Oh well, he was interested in anything. We ended up we had the Alsatian dog and the pup. We moved to Corsica and the Alsatian dog could go on the ship but we weren't too sure about the pup. It was decided I would fly him up. We pulled – there was armour plate behind your head in the cockpit, so I

19:00 pulled the armour plate out and my ground crew – incidentally their names were Fred Bonzer and Joe Cross and they looked after me right through my time with the squadron. There was never anything wrong with my aeroplane. Anyway, they built this little platform in the back and I put Doughnut in the kitbag and tied it round his neck and we stuck him on this little platform and tied the rope to the struts, and that's the way

19:30 he flew from Cairo to Corsica, and he made it. Although he didn't last too long in Corsica, he died of pneumonia a couple of months later. I don't know whether he caught it on the plane, but I don't think so. But

You mentioned your air crew and the fact that these blokes

Ground crew.

sorry ground crew, what sort of a relationship would you generally have with your ground crew?

If you had any sense it would be a good

20:00 one. They were there to do a job and they did their job and they did it very, very well. It was just like everything else, we all had our function. Thinking back, being very young, I don't think I communicated as well as I possibly should have, I probably wasn't as outspoken, nowadays there are lots of things I would like to have said to both those blokes, but they are both dead.

What would you have liked to say?

20:30 Just been a little more appreciative that's all. I would like to say thank you, because you say it to the whole squadron. Because those chaps that went away in 1941 they didn't – most of them didn't get back home until 1944/45, some of them even later. They got no promotion, there was no room for them to be promoted, so people that if they had been at home they would have been

21:00 sergeants, flight sergeants, warrant officers, instead of that they were LACs and corporals. And a few sergeants, and one or two warrant officers. But, they were absolutely first class people. And the job that they did was absolutely tremendous. If you look at that book, you will see places where they were working out in the desert, changing engines doing all sorts of things, using

21:30 makeshift gears, but we never had trouble with our aircraft. Because they looked after it so well.

Would you socialise with them at all?

Not very much, no. If you ask me would I do it now, gladly. And we do because the secretary of this association was a transport person. But there was never any division as such, but we each had our job as such, and

22:00 we'd each get down there and we'd go to the flight hut and there would be the usual flight maintenance people there including my own crew, who were looking after that particular aircraft of mine. And we'd do what we would have to do, we'd fly if we had to fly, come back and throw our parachutes on the parachute rack and get on the truck and go back to the mess.

Is the flight hut that a little area that you keep moving

22:30 **backwards and forwards through?**

It's – in this case it's just a tent, I call it a hut but it's just a tent. A place where the aircraft are parked. You've got the hut with the paperwork that goes with the aircraft, there's always maintenance sheets, we had to sign a maintenance sheet before we took off every time. And we kept our parachutes down there, and we hunt down there on readiness and waited for the telephone to go.

Would you refold your parachutes every time before you went up?

No we

23:00 didn't, there was a special section to do that, but no they were only folded once in a while. But no we never handled our own parachutes. I wouldn't liked to have jumped out of a parachute that I folded. The parachutes weren't used very often. In my time with the squadron I can only remember 2 or 3 bail outs. And the parachutes always worked.

Were you ever trained to bail out?

We were just told what to do, jump out

23:30 and get out as best you can and pull the rip cord. But we also had a dinghy, there was a dinghy in a package about that thick, and about so square and that was on top of the parachute, so when you sat in the aircraft you had the parachute in the – it was all strapped to you, and we also wore a Mae West [life jacket] I might add, and when you sat in the aircraft the parachute fitted

24:00 in the bucket in the metal seat. And then on top of the parachute was this dinghy which was all part of this parachute and harness and everything else. It was attached by a tape to your Mae West, and then you had your parachute harness and then you had your cockpit harness over the top of that. And the dinghy's were pretty hard to sit on at times, especially if things were a bit long.

A bit long?

Well they

24:30 got first of all when the Spitfires and Hurricanes were first built they only had a range or an endurance of about 1.5 hours each, they didn't carry a great deal of fuel, because they were built for fighter interceptions over England. The enemy was only 40 miles away across the coast, and they only had 20 seconds of ammunition anyway. It was all over in an hour and they were back and landed and refuelled

and re-ammoed and if they were still in one

25:00 piece, up they went again. But when we got out to the Middle East, it was a different kettle of fish, we always short of range so they started putting long range tanks on, and the Hurricane was fitted with 2 45 gallon tanks, one under each wing and sort of gave us 3 times the endurance of about 4 hours. With the Spitfire they put on what they called the belly tank, and they started out with a 40 gallon belly tank and they ended up with a 90 gallon belly

25:30 tank. When we were operating out of Corsica we always carried 90 gallon belly tanks, so the flights then became longer but very few flights with these aircraft lasted more than 2 hours 2.5 hours and most of them of short duration, and that's why when you are flying those aircraft you really get a lot of practice because you are taking off and landing the whole time, whereas with the bigger aircraft, you go out on a sortie and you are out for 7, 8, 9 or 10 hours

26:00 sometimes. So they only land and take off once. Anyhow, what started all that off?

I don't know, I was just fascinated hearing what you had to say about it. I was also wondering if when they were sticking the tanks on did that actually affect the performance of the aircraft?

Made it a bit heavier that's all and it caused a bit more drag and cut your speed down. They were jettisonable you see, if you got to a stage where you were in action of some sort, you can pull a

26:30 lever and they fall off, and that was the whole idea, so they were there to get you there you used your long range tanks first, so if you needed to get rid of them, you still had full tanks.

Would that be common to lose the tanks?

That's if you jettison them. You see that trip to Crete, as a matter of fact, I was reading my log book a second ago just to remind myself, but on that one we had to fly from Idku up to the place where we

27:00 were taking off for Crete, and I just noticed in my logbook that I lost a tank on take off. I had forgotten about that. So I had to go back and get another tank fitted and I had to catch up with the rest of the mob. But it's something I had forgotten and I happened to see it a minute ago. So, they did occasionally fall off, but not very often. In fact some of the times the trick was to get rid of them, they wouldn't always come off on the first try.

27:30 Especially the belly tank under the Spit was sometimes hard to get rid of. Whereas the Hurricane tanks were out under the wings, the Spitfire belly tank was right under the belly of the aircraft, in fact you were sitting right on top of it in the cockpit, but you didn't know that, it was outside the aircraft but that's where it was. So, that's long range tanks.

How much could you actually see around you,

28:00 **have you got like a 360 degree view?**

No, not unless you have got a swivel neck. The cockpits were a problem. The Hurricane cockpit was particularly bad because it was a series of panels and we often used to fly with the cockpit open because the visibility wasn't good. And that's the bane of a fighter pilot's existence, because if you can't see what's coming you are going to get in trouble.

28:30 But with the Spitfire's later we had bubble canopies and the visibility was better, but there was a rear vision mirror above your head outside to show if there was anything on your tail. But we developed – or we didn't develop them the RAF developed different fighter formations and we used to fly what was called a finger four, there was a finger 6 depending.

29:00 You never flew in close formation, that was just for practice and for fun, but if you did that, you can't see the fella in front, you are not watching what was going on. But the – with the open formation we'd be flying probably 100 or 200 yards apart, we used to fly in pairs, 1 and 2 and 3 and 4, 5 and 6 and then there would be top and

29:30 bottom cover, there would be a flight of 6 above and a flight of 6 below, if we were a full squadron. We weren't always a full squadron, we could operate in 2s, 4s, 6s and 12s. But flying this finger formation everybody could see the other one's tail, spread out you have got number 1 there and number 2 not close up, but behind him far enough to stay close enough.

30:00 But he wasn't just watching him, he was just weaving around, so he can watch his tail, and he watch the tails of the two blokes over there, number one can watch their tail, and they can watch our tail. And that's the way you did it, because you just can't swivel your neck, you can see here and here and up there, but there's a lot of sky, and if you are looking for a thing that big in the sky, you need good eyesight and good visibility.

30:30 All the planes were camouflaged theirs just as much as ours. We were painted that colour on top and a light blue underneath. So the idea was to be invisible if you could do it.

What would you do if you saw enemy aircraft coming aloft, because you don't have some sort of a radio where…?

Oh yes we have.

You do?

By this time – once again this has all moved forward, we've got VHF [very high frequency] radio 4 channels

31:00 and so we were in constant communication with one another in the air.

And what year would this be?

Oh well, you know, if you are talking England, all that happened 1940/41/42. Out in the Middle East, you are talking 1942/43/44. But once again we had HF [high frequency] radio to begin with which was not that good, but it was alright,

31:30 but then they brought out VHF which is very high frequency. And that was very much better reception and you had as I said, these 4 channels that you could use and you were told which channel to use and that gave you communication back to the ground, and communication between the aircraft you were flying in. The 4th channel, which was channel D was the mayday channel, that's when you got in trouble and yelled for help and hoped that the air sea rescue people would collect

32:00 you from the water. But there was also something called IFF, which is 'identification friend and foe', and it is still used today, the same sort of thing, but it has probably changed a little bit, but this is how the radar stations identified whether you were friendly or unfriendly aircraft. So you had to switch that on every time you got in the aircraft and they would know

32:30 we were on their side. Anything that didn't show an IFF was considered an enemy aircraft. And we acted accordingly.

Why couldn't the enemy just reproduce one of those?

They didn't. They might have had one of their own.

Was it like a signal frequency or something?

Yes. Just sends out a sort of bip bip. So that was how it was done.

How much would you communicate with each other when you were in the air?

As little as possible. It was all part of the

33:00 discipline too, don't use up radio time because if everybody starts talking on the same frequency nobody gets anything. So, you only talk – you talked as little as possible. Also too, every transmission betrays your position and the enemy had radar too towards – later on. So if you wanted – sometimes for our own people

33:30 if you wanted transmission you just pulled the key over and that was enough for them to fix what your position was. So you didn't talk anymore than you had to. But if you got into situations where it was necessary you did. Everybody knew their job, everybody knew what was expected of them. It was only when you got into exciting moments that sometimes you had to if it was absolutely necessary.

34:00 **What were you using as a radar?**

I wasn't using a radar.

Did you have one that you could use?

No. They were all ground installations – they were people who controlled us from the ground and detected enemy aircraft.

I think when we left the timeline we were somewhere in the Middle East?

34:30 You are still there. Well, we went up to Corsica and we became pretty heavily in operations there, the idea was that at that stage there was very heavy fighting in Italy, the front was down around Anzio, south of Rome and it was touch and go, it was a very, very hard campaign In Italy.

35:00 At Anzio in particular, there's a book there written just about Anzio which is one of the most horrifying accounts of warfare you'll ever find. You know, we had it easy in the air force. The – but what we had to do flying out of Corsica, all the supply traffic off the roads in Northern Italy, was to shoot everything we saw on the roads

35:30 or the railway lines. Or anywhere else we saw movement. To stop supplies from getting from the north of Italy down to the front line, that's German supplies of course. And that's what we did. And

Are you in Spitfires with mounted cannons?

Yes, we are in those. With no, by that time we are back to the standard Spits not the stripped down ones, but we've got four machine-guns and we've got

36:00 the two cannons. The machine-guns are okay against light skinned traffic, I mean trucks and cars and things like that, I mean, you can knock them off with a machine-gun. But as it happened the way things were set up everything fired, you couldn't fire them selectively. If we pressed the button four machine-guns and the two cannons all went off straight away together. And once again you couldn't waste ammunition but

36:30 firing air to ground was a lot easier proposition than firing air to air. But you have still got to fly properly, if you are not flying properly because the aircraft is just a gun platform, that's all it is. If you don't aim your aircraft properly you are not going to hit anything.

With the air to ground are you really a sitting duck, I mean if they are in a stationary position and you are coming along and they can see where you are and throw fire up

37:00 **before you?**

If they have got flack yes, but not all of them have got flack. You find that – well, it's the sort of thing that's happening a little bit in Iraq now, but those trucks in Iraq and the American stuff that's heavily armoured, but at the same time they are a sitting duck for rocket propelled grenades and anything else. They've just gone into heavier armament. But what we were aiming for was supply trucks, petrol tankers, water tankers, anything to do with the

37:30 war or a truck of any sort, staff cars, now these are light skinned stuff, so, even with the machine-guns you are going to do a lot of damage. So – and that's what happened, some of them went up in smoke and some of them didn't. We carried the cannons in particular had some incendiary rounds in them so there was always a chance of starting a fire. One horrible day,

38:00 and it was a horrible day, the Germans were using a lot of horses and we ran into a group of horse drawn artillery, and we had to go for it, but we didn't like it, but there it was. The – but that was our brief and that's what we did.

Did you know there were going to be horses?

We didn't know until we got down there. But you can't tell of course,

38:30 because you are firing from 200 to 250 yards away of at the most. But you are headed down this way and you can't come right down of course, end up in a mess yourself. So you have only got getting close to 350 mile an hour, and you have only got about 1 or 2 seconds where you are in range and you can fire,

39:00 with that amount of armament that's all you need. 1 or 2 seconds of fire power and they are gone.

Do you have to actually come from a great height and dive?

No not a great height, it depends on where you are. You are up there and you are looking for them, you see them and you come down. The actual firing doesn't take place, as I say to within 200 yards of them. So it just depends where you start from. Usually we would

39:30 be round about 4,000 feet. And also we did a lot of bomber escorts as well.

Sorry, this is around Corsica is it?

Yeah, all around Corsica, Corsica was a unique command, we were a Spitfire Wing on our airfield and that means 3 squadrons of Spitfires. There was 451 an Australian Squadron, 237 a Rhodesian squadron and there's 238 an English RAF Squadron, all flying Spitfires, all the

40:00 same type. We were part of an American Wing in our air force it goes, squadron, wing, group. In American air force it goes squadron, group, wing. The other way round. But anyway, we were flying under an American Group. There were American command and most of

40:30 the air craft on Corsica were American aircraft, light bombers, Mitchell's and B24s, B25s, B26s, mostly 25s and 26s. And we escorted them on quite a few raids as well, mainly on bridges and railway yards and stuff like that. Flying all over the north of Rome up as far as Florence and

41:00 right up the coast again, every day of the week.

You must have seen some pretty nice countryside?

We did. We flew over Pisa quite a bit, we seemed to go in and out of there. We flew over the island of Corsica then there's the island of Elba where Napoleon used to reside once. And then you hit the Italian coast, but we always gave Elba a wide berth, because if

41:30 you came anywhere near there a great burst of flak came up but so we just skirted around that because we weren't interested in Elba. So we saw a few enemy fighters, because we had pretty well control of the air at that stage, and we got – I didn't, but one or two of the boys got some aircraft we got probably about 10 altogether over the period.

Tape 6

00:31 **I want to ask you how often did you scramble to the sky when you were at Idku?**

Not often, if you got scrambled in any one individuals case, maybe 2 or 3 times a week, that would be about it. You wouldn't really average one a day, it was just when these recognisance – and that was the boring part of it, I used to sleep on the parachute rack. Because

01:00 you had your parachute and all your gear and your helmet all in the cockpit of the aircraft. All waiting. And all you had on was your flying gear, I used to fly in overalls and a Mae West on, and then I used to go to sleep on the parachute waiting for something to happen. Not always, but a lot of the time. I was a pretty good sleeper. The telephone would ring and you were off. Awake and running, and from

01:30 that standing start we would be airborne in 2 minutes. Ground crew had to get the aircraft started while you were running. You had to get in and strap your parachute on first and then your harness and then get your helmet on, and then get going. We used to get off the ground in 2 minutes.

How many planes would take to the sky at a time?

Only 2 at a time. And then there would be more back up if they needed them, but normally 2.

You mentioned earlier there were difficulties

02:00 **in those because the Germans were flying at such high altitude. What did you do to overcome the…?**

Well, the big thing was that we had aircraft that could get up there. These special Spits. But with the earlier aircraft that we were flying, we were flat out doing much good at all, we could only catch them sometimes on the way out, after they had come over and lost a bit of altitude going out

02:30 thinking they were safe and we would run into them out there. But to catch them at high altitude over the top of the target or before they got to the target in a Hurricane was almost impossible. And the Spitfire 5Bs which we got first weren't much better. It wasn't until these high-flying Spits became available and later when we got Spit 8s and 9s which was the later models, in fact just before we went to Corsica,

03:00 we got one or another chap and myself got one out of Port Said, and we managed to clobber that, but that's another story.

What time frame was it flying in the Hurricanes until you were flying in the Spit 9s?

Oh god well, uh, 1942 we had Hurricanes for2.5

03:30 oh no must have been 18 months I suppose.

You had Hurricanes when you were first based at…?

That was Hurricane 1, the early model Hurricane. Then we went to the 2C which was the later model with a much better engine and a better armament, with the 4 cannons, then we went to 5B Spitfires, which was an early model Spitfire, done its job in the UK so they sent it out to us. I mean in the UK they are flying 8s and 9s while we are flying 5Bs.

04:00 So – then we went to 8s and 9s which were the more powerful motors, better performance aircraft and they were comparable with practically anything that was in the sky then. The German 109s and the Fok…. 190s had a much better performance than our Hurricanes. And but the one thing that the British aircraft

04:30 had was manoeuvrability, they were more manoeuvrable than their German counterparts and that was their strength their only defence was to get into a very steep and tight turn. And we could usually outturn them, but they were very good aeroplanes. But the Spit 8s and 9s were a match for practically anything else. The Mustang of course had come into service

05:00 through the American air force mainly, but even the Mustang wasn't any good until they put a Rolls Royce engine in it. And they came out originally with an Ellison engine in it, but that wasn't any good, not satisfactory and then they equipped them with Rolls Royce's and that made the Mustang probably the best conventionally performed fighter of the war, but they were much later of course than this. But for

05:30 performance the Spits 8 and 9 would compare with the Mustang quite comfortably, but the thing about the Mustang, it had a much greater range, it was built for long range escorts on the bombers, and I think it had a range, I might be wrong, I stand for correction, but I think 6 or 7 hours. And it had the American armament, which is a compromise, it carried 6.5 inch machine-guns which of course had a much greater hitting power

06:00 than the early Spits and Hurricanes, but not quite as much hitting power as our 20mm cannon. And the Germans had cannons mainly, and machine-guns, but there were some Hurricanes built for tank busting

in the desert, that was number 6 squadron, RAF squadron. My brother-in-law served with them as a matter of fact, and they carried a 40 mm cannon

06:30 under each wing. There was only about 7 or 8 rounds of ammunition because there was so much weight, and they used to fly just above ground having a go at the tanks and getting themselves shot down most of the time. My brother-in-law, he got shot down and walked back. We served together – he came and joined us on 451, and later on, so he was on 451 with us for a long time, and then we married sisters in England, and

07:00 that's how he became my brother-in-law. And he was the first manager of channel 9 here, when he came back he was the manager of 6XY. Do you want to know all this.

That's very curious.

I am just rabbiting on, sorry.

That's very curious. Did you get into the Spit 8 and 9s while you were in Idku?

Ah, yes, no, no, we were at Port Said when we got them.

07:30 We only got them shortly before we got the order to move to Corsica.

I just want to ask you while we are at Idku, flying mostly over Alexandria, what kind of plane were the Germans flying in their recognisance missions?

Junkers 86 and 87s. 86s and 88s. The 86 was a special performance aircraft built just for that job and it had a pressurised cabin.

08:00 The 88 was an all purpose twin engine bomber which oh, they just used it for everything. It was a very, very good airplane. They built special ones for this PR [public relations] work too, which gave them very high performance and high altitude as well. So they were the 2.

Did you ever exceed your maximum altitude in your pursuit to intercept those recognisance

08:30 **flights?**

I am not sure I understand what you mean.

Did you ever exceed the altitude you should have been flying at to intercept those planes flying at a high altitude?

You can't exceed your altitude. Once – see with a reciprocating engine like you have got in your motor car. Once you start to get into rarefied air, you are not getting the manifold pressure that you need and the performance of your motor just drops right away.

09:00 And this is why they brought in these two stage blowers in the Rolls Royce, so they were super chargers, that's what they were. One came in at 11,000 and the other one at 23,000 that was your last one. From 23 onwards your performance was dropping off all the way, the higher you went the worse it got, and the worse it gets means that you haven't got forward speed, and if you haven't got forward speed you haven't got forward speed you haven't got the lift and the air is less dense, and you reach a stage you just can't go any higher.

09:30 So nobody said you can't go that high. The fact of the matter is you couldn't go that high. One of our chaps a chap called Harry Rollins, he was – went for the high-flying flight, oh I don't know, a couple of sessions after me anyway, and at that time they got a special aircraft, a new one out from England which they had even taken all the paint off that, even stripped it back to bare metal, to try and get weight off it and also it had a slightly better

10:00 performance, and he took it up on a height climb as a special, you know as a test run and the story we have is that he called in at 47,000 feet but where we found him was 30 metres under the ground. He came straight down into the swamp right beside our airfield actually. Because we were surrounded by swampy ground it was part of an old delta, he just went straight in from that height. It could have been anything, it could have been oxygen

10:30 lactic. See when you re getting up there - pilots these days don't do that without pressure suits. All we had was an oxygen mask. If you get oxygen failure well, you are gone. We had no pressure suits or pressurisation. We did a lot of things we were ignorant about.

What effects does flying at high altitude have on the body?

Well if you do a lot of it,

11:00 it can have a lot of effects, and I can't explain them it's a medical problem, but we were never there long enough as a rule, once a gain we were only up there for 10 minutes, 15 minutes and back out again. But there's just a limit about how far you can go with these aircraft. You would be like that you would be trying to climb, your nose would be in the air and you would be falling out of the sky the whole time because the thing was stalling and your engine was just

11:30 gasping for breath. The reason the jets can fly so high now is that – and that's the big advantage of the jet engine, they don't work on the same principal. They compress whatever's there and they push it out the back and they get their propulsion from the reaction of two forces. Whereas we had a big prop pulling us along, and if that engine wasn't driven - if the engine wasn't driving the prop with enough power. Well you were losing speed the

12:00 whole time.

Flying at that excessively high altitude, what sort of effects would it have on the pilot?

Well once again – it never affected me, but then in our case and in all those cases, if you did it for a long time it would have deleterious affects especially without pressure. It's like the bends, you know the bends in diving.

12:30 You can get nitrogen in your blood, or if your oxygen fails you can certainly lose consciousness. I think that's probably what happened to Harry Rollins. You remember this plane that took off and flew for 7 hours with everybody unconscious in the thing. Well that was probably a similar sort of thing, there was gas in the – but oxygen lack is a very, very

13:00 serious thing. But we – it starts to take effect depending on the physiology of the people themselves. But once you get above 12,000 it begins to become effective but you are alright for a while. But once you get above 18-20,000 feet even though you think you are going alright, you are not, you are not performing, you just get – in diving terms, I don't know whether you are a diver or not are you?

Yes.

13:30 **Well you have heard of rapture of the depths, Cousteau used to talk about it, exactly the same thing. Once you get into the higher altitudes, if you haven't got oxygen, you lose consciousness. You get this feeling that you are going well, everything is great. It happened to me once.**

Is that the same thing as oxygen narcosis?

Similar sort of thing.

It happened to you once?

Yeah, I was sent to a pilot gunnery

14:00 instructor course in Egypt. And we were flying old Hurricanes there was this school you see so they only had Hurricanes and we were flying them without oxygen because we didn't really need to go above, but on the second last day of the course we were doing cine camera work which is like you are doing now but instead of firing guns we were using cameras. Taking photographs of the opposing aircraft.

14:30 And we – there was just another chap and myself, we flew up and there was a lot of cloud and we wanted to get good visibility, so we kept on going and we got to about 18,-19,000 feet and we got out of the cloud and we did this exercise. Now I reckon that I h ad one the best exercise, the best job I had ever done in my life. I was absolutely convinced of it. And yet when the films were shown later on

15:00 that night, they were absolutely shocking, I was out of range I wasn't hitting anything. It was just all wrong, but because I wasn't on oxygen I was suffering from that oxygen lack. And as I said that 18,19,20,000 feet you are in real strife. But operationally, and practically the whole time I was flying, I used to have oxygen on from the ground up just get in the plane and turn the oxygen on full blast and leave it on.

15:30 And then you weren't worried, you could do whatever you liked then.

What was the importance of the recognisance flights that the Germans were doing over…?

Well they were looking for shipping you see. And the reason they wanted to know what the shipping was doing, they wanted to know what supplies we were moving and they wanted to let the U-Boats know so the U-Boats could catch the convoys and sink the ships, which was what they did in great numbers in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean there. And we did

16:00 the same thing. We were always trying to find out what they were up to, and they were always trying to find out what we were up to.

Did you feel a great sense of duty flying on those scrambles?

Never ever did I feel a great sense of duty the whole time. You did what you were asked to do. You knew you were in a war. But half

16:30 the time we didn't know what was going on anywhere. The only communication we had was a radio where we could pick up the BBC [British Broadcasting Commission] sometimes in the mess, and more often we listened to Germany, because the reception from Germany was better than it was from the BBC and the BBC was our only source of news, we had no newspapers. And nobody ever sort of got in touch with us from headquarters and said, "The war is going this way and that or we are doing this for

that

17:00 reason". All they did was send the signal and say, "Do this, or do that". So you did it. But you wouldn't know what was going on 10 miles down the road. And, everybody in the war was like that. Everybody, everybody operated in their own little unit, the army people, the navy, in a ship, they might have been with a few other ships, but the jack tar on board, the sailor, he just did what he was told to do and we were much

17:30 the same. So in Corsica we knew we had a strategic job to do, and we knew there was a reason for doing it. But from day to day we did whatever was required of us.

Before we come back to Corsica, how often did you take leave in Alex?

Only 2 or 3 times I suppose. We stayed at a place called – Barney and I stayed at a

18:00 place, a little Swiss Hotel on the foreshore of Alex [Alexandria] called The Beau Rivage. It was a nice little place, and we stayed there a couple of times, and it was on the beach and you could have a swim. But that was about it. We had leave in Cairo once or twice, but I wasn't all that – I was quite happy on the squadron to be quite honest, all those places in wartime are

18:30 of limited attraction, it was just a break off the squadron that's all.

How did you occupy yourselves in say Alex for example?

Eating and

What did you think of the local cuisine?

Alright, it was European stuff, the Beau Rivage was run by a Swiss woman. And there were a lot of French people and Greek people in Alex of course. Many Greeks.

19:00 It's a cosmopolitan city. Very little – there was very little transportation, the only transportation available was horse and garry with Egyptian drivers, and they used to drive us around. I don't ever remember seeing a taxi. We had our own transport to get us in and out of the place, our own trucks would run us in and pick us up when we were due to come home. And there was always

19:30 MP [military police] and stuff around if you got into any strife. You could go to them, but you would try and avoid them if you could. So, life on the squadron itself wasn't bad, because as I said we were a very close knit group, particularly among the pilots and there was an air crew mess, so if we had pilots, or flight sergeant pilots, we all messed in together, it wasn't just an officers mess, it an aircrew mess.

20:00 So to get around – a few drinks, there was always alcohol available in the mess. I didn't drink. I used to drink orange juice. But the boys used to drink, one or two, nothing to excess. Except on a special occasion.

You mentioned that you enjoy your booze, was that after the war?

Oh yes, I do now, but even now I only have 1 or 2 a day, 1 a day really, just a scotch, but

20:30 yeah I enjoy it. But I never wanted to get drunk or you know, blind or anything. But I didn't drink until I was about 25 or 26 I suppose.

Did you have anyone on the squadron drinking to excess, where it became a problem?

No, not really. There were 1 or 2 that drank a little bit more than others, but they always did their job the next morning.

21:00 And that's all you could ask. And they were good friends of mine too. We used to have some great parties, I used to have a great time but on orange, although I think that once or twice I got slipped a bit of gin, but I am not sure.

How did you party together?

Just singing songs mainly, a lot of them dirty ones.

Can you remember any of the lyrics?

Oh yes, I can but I am not going to tell you that now, forget that.

21:30 I am not going to record it for posterity I can tell you. But we had Porky Ball, who could play the piano and sing the songs over and over. We used to enjoy it. And then there would be a poker game going on, always a bit of poker in the mess. And, there's another story attached to that. If you want to hear it, but we have got to go back to Corsica for that one.

Alright, well we'll stall that one.

22:00 **Did you go to any dances in…?**

No. Went to one in Cairo, I don't quite know how I got there. But there was a concert part that came to see us, an ENSA [Entertainment National Service Association] party from England. And that was the only one we got in 2.5 years I might add, and that was right out in the desert somewhere. And they put on a show and then for some reason I had to go to Cairo, I am not sure why,

22:30 and they were back in Cairo, and there was a dance going somewhere and they asked me if I would like to go and go with them. But that's all. Fraternisation, what was there, at Port Said there was a WRANery, all the WRANs [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] were at Port Said used to come and see us or we went to see them. But there was never anything of any great note.

What about the local women

23:00 **in Alex?**

Stay away from them. Depends on what you are talking about. But no. Mainly – see all the Egyptian women were head-to-toe in burkahs or whatever it is, in those days especially and in Alex there were a few Greek and French,

23:30 girls but they were in pretty short supply, so competition was keen. I didn't worry much about that in those days.

Did you ever hear of men refer to Sister Street?

Sister Street is in Cairo.

Oh is it? What can you tell me of Sister Street?

Well I never patronised Sister Street but yeah, a lot of people did that's where all the brothels were, and they were

24:00 pretty much controlled by the British army medical people. Of course the first thing you got when you got into the service and particularly if you went to the Middle East, was a lecture on VD [venereal disease] and all the horrible things that went with it, and they sent you to the Cairo Museum and had a look at all the exhibits there and they were fairly graphic, so if you had any sense you stayed out of those places. So you know, but

24:30 we had good times, we saw everything, we used to swim in the Suez Canal at one stage of the game when we were at Port Said. We went through the pyramids and all the rest of it, and rode camels. All that stuff. We didn't get a lot of time for that kind of thing because you are in areas, which were mainly inaccessible.

25:00 You were isolated.

Did you see much destruction of Alex?

No there wasn't a great deal. Alex was lucky it wasn't raided much. Most of the Egyptian cities weren't raided to any extent at all. The war occurred in the desert and if you wanted a war the desert was the best place. It's not all loose sand, it's a bit like some of the scrub up north, you know. And

25:30 it can be bitterly cold and it can be quite hot, but it can also be bitterly cold. You are in tents, and it sometimes rains. We've been bogged down out there, and couldn't fly. At one stage all our fuel supplies were washed out all over the place, they floated away on the water on the desert, would you believe, and we had to go and collect them from all over the place. They were 44 gallon drums.

26:00 The water was very scarce, you only got about a pint of water a day to wash and clean your teeth and shave and do all the rest of the things, and a little bit to drink of course. The camp scenery, the sand storms were pretty rotten when they came. You'd have sand in everything, including your dinner. But life in the desert wasn't bad at all, apart from that.

26:30 **You flew from a number of strips in North Africa, you mentioned the ground crew would just pack up, and you would pack up and fly off and join up at the next location, that must have been quite a logistical exercise?**

It was, but I wasn't involved in it, the ground crews – we had about - the ground crew strength was about 200-250 thereabouts. This covered everything, you see there was administration

27:00 armament, maintenance, that's mechanical maintenance, parachute, transport, medical, all these various sections were part of this one squadron, we were a self contained squadron, we had to look after ourselves, so we had the transport, the fuel

27:30 carts, the water carts, whatever we needed to accomplish that task. And we were all under canvas so pulling down tents and putting them up again wasn't all that much of a drama, but digging slit trenches which had to be dug was something – if you were lucky enough to fly, all this work was done by the time you got there. With 24 pilots and 16 aircraft, there was

28:00 always 8 people had to go by the ground, or on ship. But most of the time I was able to fly.

Would imagine that you would arrive at your destination much sooner than the ground crew?

No, no we had to wait for them to get there, and then you went. If you went before them you would be helpless. Nobody else on these trips. There were strips everywhere, there were German strips, Italian

28:30 strips, and our strips and we all used to use one another's depending on where the front line was. And they were no more than just a bit of clear dirt out in the scrub. We didn't have runways and all this kind of rubbish, so you had to wait until your ground crews got into place before you could fly in.

You must have been left behind waiting for days?

Oh sometimes, but usually

29:00 the move was only a couple of days. The Corsican was the longest one, because they had to go by sea from one end of the Med [Mediterranean] to the other virtually.

Why were you moving to Corsica strategically?

Well, to do that specific job, to do attack the supply lines of the Germans in the northern area of Italy.

You were describing earlier to Denise [interviewer] that you came under an American arm?

American command, yes. The,

29:30 because they controlled the air forces in that particular area. And all the bomber forces they were all American, and they also had some fighter groups, they had Thunderbolts. We were the only Spitfire Wing in the whole island, just the 3 Spitfire squadrons and the rest were American aircraft. But Corsica was a - it's a very nice place, and very mountainous, you've got mountains 8 or

30:00 9,000 feet high. The centre of the island is practically all mountains and there's just this narrow coastal strip and our air strips are all on that – in that area, but we were causing the Germans a bit of concern because they finally raided us one night, just to keep us on the ground if they could, for a while,

30:30 and they sent these JU88s over at night and they gave us a pretty good run over as a matter of fact, we lost a few people. Our aircraft the 12 aircraft that we normally operated, there were 16, 4 of them always in maintenance, so 12 was the operational number. Of the 12 we only had 2 serviceable aircraft the next morning.

31:00 But those same ground crews had us flying again by lunchtime. We were in the air at lunchtime. They repaired them in that time. And repaired the holes in the airfield. But where luck comes into it and we were talking about the poker games, and when this all happened that particular night, we'd had dinner in the mess in the tent and Hurricane was on his usual

31:30 map in the tent, and I think it was 7 or 8 o'clock and there was a poker game going on in the mess, and I was watching this poker game and there were 2 chaps there, and they were both bidding pretty confidently, and anyway the showdown came and one of them had 4 Jacks and the other had 4 tens, and

32:00 you know how uncommon that is in the hand of poker, even 4 of a kind in one hand but to have it in two. So, just as that happened all hell broke loose, the lights went out the anti-aircraft guns started to go off and there were bangs and crashes, and we all headed for the nearest slip trench, and I was lucky enough to get inside one just outside the mess, but I wasn't quick enough, Hurricane was on the bottom, he was already there, that's the dog, and then

32:30 the CO, he was a big bloke, he landed on top of me. So there was the dog and the two of us in this little slit trench, but these 2 guys that had the poker-hand, they came out and they crawled under a jeep. There was another guy – and this was all close to the slit trench, pretty close to the wheel. But the Germans were dropping anti-personnel stuff that burst just above the ground and sent some fragments everywhere. They knew where our

33:00 tents and everything was, they knew exactly where to come, because they had reccy'd [reconnoitred] it obviously. But, as luck would have it the 2 guys with the two poker hands were both killed. So that's what I say about luck – they weren't the only ones, they were the 2 pilots with us but we lost about 10 of our ground crew that night.

33:30 And the whole idea was I think the Germans were trying to move something big down to the frontline and they just wanted to get us out of the air for a while. They were only successful for half a day.

I get the impression that the damage to the aircraft must have only been superficial?

It was shrapnel damage, you know holes and things, we patched them up and got them going again. A few holes in the ground, there's

34:00 one or two photos of the damage done. One in that book actually. Bit of the damage that was done.

How did that air raid affect the morale in the..?

Except for the fact that we were sorry to see our friends die, no that didn't stop us. It's you know, it was, it wasn't good of course

34:30 it's not good when you loose people, but you just get on with the job. They weren't the first people to be killed on the squadron, we'd had pilots killed before. We lost about 25% overall. Checking back. But that was something else, you didn't talk about it in the mess, you just got on with it. If a chap was killed – probably your reaction is –

35:00 it's probably a bit like you read about a vehicle accident these days, if somebody's killed, even your friend. And you think that's sad, but it's not me, I am not dead. And you carry on. Well it's pretty much the same thing. So that's the way it was.

How did you pay your respects?

We held a burial service. There were

35:30 3 RAAF padres in the Middle East, and they were famous people. One was Protestant, one was Church of England and the other was Roman Catholic. The Protestant bloke was Fred McKay of the Inland Mission, he just died recently, he was the man who took over from Flynn of the Inland, who started the Flying

36:00 Doctor Service, and Fred McKay was a leading light in the Inland Mission after the war. Great man, marvellous chap. So I think he was the one who conducted the services when we buried these chaps in Corsica. But they were famous right throughout the Royal Australian Air Force squadrons in the Middle East, these 3 padres. They were marvellous people they really were, religion didn't come into it.

36:30 If there was a Protestant to be buried and the only Minister available was the Catholic, he did the job and visa versa. So that's how it was done.

How successful were you in intercepting the German supply lines, while you were operating out of Corsica obviously?

Very successful. In the end we were lookin' to find something to shoot at. It wasn't just us,

37:00 there were aircraft over the whole of Northern Italy the whole time. The whole of daylight hours, we would take off in the dark and be there as the sun came up. And other squadrons would come in behind us. There were the 3 Spitfire squadrons on the wing, and we operated only as separate squadrons so there is three lots of coverage, and the Yanks had their bombers, and they had their Thunderbolts, squadrons with Thunderbolt fighters doing the same thing. There was

37:30 coverage right over the whole of Northern Italy, right throughout daylight hours. Now if they were going to do anything they had to do it at night, but it wasn't always practical. So I think we made a difference.

What was the trend in operations you were flying?

Sorry.

What type of operation were you mostly flying?

It was that, we were strafing. Air to ground stuff.

38:00 **Any particular areas?**

Well, it was the whole of Northern Italy. Right across just north of Rome right across to the far coast and up as far north as Florence. And all that area, just right across and back, we were doing that all the time. We'd go in right across, come back again, and take out anything that we saw on the road, or the railway. Or the sea, attacked a couple of ships at the time, small ships off

38:30 the coast.

When you say take anything on the roads, anything that moved, anything that looked…?

Anything that moved. There was a classic briefing by our intelligence officer, who I remember very well because it led me to do something else, but he said, "There had been some concern expressed by some of the pilots that they weren't too

39:00 sure that what they were shooting at were Germans or not and the instruction we were given by him, as a result of instructions from headquarters, were that if they were on the roads, they were either Germans or German sympathisers and we were to knock them over". So that's what we did. Now, we might have got 1 or 2 innocent people, the majority were military targets, but

39:30 that's the sad part of war, people get hurt.

What was the main movement that you were observing on the ground?

Mainly trucks and rail cars mainly. That was pretty much it. The odd staff car, and we delighted in getting them if we could. They were mainly trucks, tankers or

40:00 that sort of thing. Supply trucks. The sort of stuff you see driving around here, except they were military ones. They would be loaded up with all sorts of things, as I said some of them would have – we were

firing incendiaries at them, but as I said each one of our cannons had a certain number of incendiary rounds, so if you hit something that had something flammable on it like a fuel tanker or an ammunition truck, then up they went.

What kind of

40:30 **communication was there between the planes in the squadron during one of those flights when you would identify an enemy target?**

Well we all had radios as I explained before, you just say look there's a convoy down there, and there was several trucks, we wouldn't all go down, because we weren't needed, but it depended on how big the target was. But probably two at a time we'd go down and take them out and carry on, but if there was enough stuff there, well then the whole

41:00 6 in the flight would go down and take them out.

Who would nominate the planes to go down?

The leader of the flight as a rule, but sometimes it was the case but more often than not that one pair would sight it first and they would go after it, because by the time you got round to explaining to everybody where it was, things move and you get out of the way.

41:30 **Think the staff cars you just mentioned were almost a trophy if you saw one of them?**

Yeah. They were, because there was usually somebody of importance driving around in the staff car, and with a bit of luck you would get him too. Rommel, remember General Rommel, did you see the story just recently on SBS [Special Broadcasting Service, television station] on his life. He was wounded very severely by an aircraft doing just that. He was caught in the staff car and he was very badly wounded by an RAF Spitfire.

42:10 End of tape

Tape 7

00:38 **How long were the operational flights that you were doing?**

Probably a couple of hours on average. We were carrying long range tanks as I told you, so that increased our range, normally a couple of hours.

Would you be tired when you got back from one

01:00 **of these flights?**

Flying makes you a bit tired, but no. Not worn out, could have gone again quite happily. Sometimes did. Sometimes did 2 in one day. But the way it normally worked was the squadron would do 2 sweeps but we would just change pilots, and away we'd go. Because we only had 24 pilots we'd only put 12 aircraft in the air at the time, so there was always enough to do two

01:30 runs with two different sets of pilots. But if we were a bit short we might have got the guernsey [go-ahead] on the second one as well.

The next team would be taking off as you would be coming in?

No, no because they had to wait for our aircraft. They just use the same aircraft but swap the pilots.

How long would it take to refuel?

Depends how pushed they were, but – and also how many

02:00 tankers that were available, because they were all just mobile tankers and we only had 2 or 3 of them. So, you would be looking at probably an hour on the ground at least, and that was your armament as well, because you had to rearm all the guns with ammunition and everything else. The armourers had a job to do, the fitters had a job to do, check oil and everything else and make sure the aircraft were okay If there were any faults in the aircraft or if some had suffered

02:30 damage, we ran into ack-ack occasionally stuff like that, then there were other jobs to do, if all was well they could turn it round in about an hour of hour and a half I suppose.

Was there a reasonably good amount of supplies, you mentioned you would have to wait for a tanker, could you have been set up better than what you were?

I don't think so, the tankers were our own

03:00 squadron equipment. They were just fuel tankers that took the fuel out to the aircraft. But they used to draw their supplies from fuel dumps and places like that mainly in 44 gallon drums. And supply was always a big problem and everything had to be brought in by sea, and the U-Boats were torpedoing

ships and half the supplies went down. We were on British army frontline

03:30 rations, which was another problem, I lost about 2 stone in 2 months. Everything was just dehydrated stuff and it wasn't very good to eat. In fact, I don't know how much of this you want.

If we don't want it we'll tell you.

I am thinking of time more than anything.

We are actually going okay with time.

Are you alright. The shortage of food or poor diet

04:00 led us into a couple of things. One of them was we had a visit from an American general at one stage, and he – they were very generous people I might add. And the Americans they were responsible for ground defence around and they had their foxholes, and some of them had fridges in their foxholes, and some of them were eating ice-cream, and we had dehydrated everything, so that didn't go down too

04:30 well. Anyway, this general came along, and he asked our CO, "Do we have any problems" and he said, "Oh well, we don't have much to eat" and he said, "Oh why, what's the matter". And he said, "We haven't been given any fresh vegetables or anything like that, we have been getting along on frontline rations". The army blokes would laugh about this and say, "well bad luck mate". But anyway the general said, "Well, how could you get over that", "Well if we could get across to

05:00 North Africa or somewhere we could get these", but he said, "You can't carry much n a Spitfire". So the next day A B-25 arrived, for our own use. Gave it to us on the squadron and we had it for about 3 months. So with a B-25 we could fly to North Africa, and load up with vegetables and grog and all sorts of things, and bring it back, and that helped quite a bit. We still didn't live in the lap of luxury, but we were a hell of a lot better off

05:30 than we had been. Then, on top of that, somebody said, "There's a lot of wild pigs up in the hills". So these were mainly our ground crew boys, they organised a party and off they went into the hills, and they came back with these pigs, they shot about half a dozen pigs and we looked at them, and said, "Gee they are nice pigs, they were big ones". All these wild pigs, had ear marks,

06:00 you know how they ear mark cattle and pigs.

Pig rustlers.

Yeah, so that didn't make the eating any worse, they went down very well, and we made sure the Americans got some. And all the other squadrons got a big.

What did you do did you put it on a spit roast?

The cooks dealt with it, we had butchers on the squadron and the cooking department, they looked after that, they were just normal kinds of stuff that you get from a

06:30 pig. That's alright, so about 2 weeks later, another expedition went out and we got another 6 pigs, they went down very well. I landed one day – we were mainly flying, so we didn't get on these expeditions, they are right up in the hills you know, they are way up. And the roads were very narrow and tiny little villages up there. And I landed

07:00 this one day, and came back to camp, and here's the adjutant, the adjutant's in his jeep flying the flag and a white flag and a Red Cross flag and an Australian flag and they've all got tin hats on. 2 truck loads of troops behind him all with rifles, and we said what's going on, and he said "Oh there's a pitch battle going on up in the hills", he said "The Corsicans had taken umbrage". Of course all these pigs, they had let them run wild. But they were all their pigs you see. So,

07:30 we got another 5 pigs out of that lot, but we were in a lot of trouble. And the ramifications were quite huge. The Corsicans put in a claim, and they claimed not only on the pigs, but the litters they were going to have and all the rest of it, and this claim bounced around Middle East headquarters – Mediterranean headquarters for quite some months. Finally the Australian government paid it. I think it was about £6 or 8,000,

08:00 which was a lot of money in those days. Anyway, we ate well.

Did it get you down when you weren't eating well?

Well I always complained because I like my food. But no it never got us down, we liked young people everywhere, if we weren't getting what we wanted we complained, or any serviceman, you ask him, the first thing he complains about is the food. No it didn't get us down. We just got on with the job.

08:30 **You mentioned before that there was a bit of gambling going on? What other sorts of things did you do for recreation?**

Read books occasionally.

Where were the books coming from?

Well, there weren't that many of them, but when I went back to do this special course in Egypt I brought back a whole swag of books, they gave me some money out of the mess and I bought a lot of books, and they just got passed around. We wrote letters.

09:00 We also had a job to do. As officers, I don't know whether we did any good, but we were supposed to sensor all the men's letters. We'd be given a bundle of letters each night and we'd have to go through these letters.

How did you feel about having to do that job?

Didn't like it.

Why not?

Private correspondence. We didn't really want to get involved in that. But we had to do it that's all. Mostly it was just a

09:30 question that people didn't give information away that perhaps they shouldn't. That was all, we only looked for that. We didn't really – I can't remember one letter I read and we did hundreds of them.

What sort of things were you looking for?

Just locations and if somebody says we have got 3 squadrons of Spitfires here on this coast of Corsica, you cut all that out, you can't do that sort of thing. I had a razorblade and I used

10:00 to just hack it out. There were very few that I had to mess about with. One I seemed to recall butchering a bit, but by and large the blokes all had the message, they knew what they could say and what they couldn't they had been there for 4 years. And it was just a job pushed upon us. But nobody liked it, nobody discussed what was in it. That was the last thing, you never

10:30 discussed those things, you never remember them.

You mentioned before that the Americans were quite well stocked, how much did you actually make contact with Americans?

We weren't side by side or shoulder to shoulder. We saw them in the air, sometimes they saw us. Once or twice they mistook us for something else and had a shot at us, but

11:00 the

They actually shot at

11:30 **you?**

Oh one group did one day. But.

Can you tell me what happened there?

We were just coming out over the coast and the squadron of Thunderbolts was coming in over the other way. If you look at a Spitfire and a 109 in the air there's not a heck of a lot of difference. So they decided we were 109s, even though they had seen us every day of the week for the last 3 months.

That would have come as a pretty rude surprise to you?

So the next thing we know, they are behind us and wondering what was going

12:00 on. We managed to convince them though before they open fire. We were on their side.

How did you do that?

We abused them over the radio, where do you think we did it?

Well I don't know I am not a fighter pilot, I don't know, you give them the bird?

Well we sort of asked them what was going on, in as polite language as we could muster. We were perfectly prepared to turn around and have a go at them if they got really nasty, but anyway it all sorted itself out.

12:30 **Is this because you think they are a bit trigger-happy?**

Oh, no I don't think so, they were no more trigger-happy than anybody else. And everybody was at that stage of the war, but the – just a question of mistaken identify, bad aircraft recognition, somebody who was leading them wasn't on the ball. But eventually they got the

13:00 message and went the other way.

So how long were you actually in Corsica?

Altogether about 5 months, 4 or 5 months. We got out of Corsica when they invaded southern France, we covered the invasion of Southern France and then we went into France as well. They moved the

squadron, and we went in 4 days after D-day in southern France. It was quite an impressive sight, they mustered about

13:30 3,000 ships, for that invasion.

What did you see?

I saw all of it. We were flying over it the whole time, flying escorts and one thing and another. The ship's were coming up the coast of Sardinia and Corsica and assembling probably a week beforehand, the Germans probably knew what was going to happen.

Did you have any idea that this was getting planned?

Oh yes.

So you were actually fully briefed

14:00 **with the information for D-day?**

Not fully briefed, but we knew that that was going to take place. But as to the actual detail it was just left – we knew we had a job to do and that was the job we were given. Our job was to cover the landing and make sure there was no aircraft activity, against the landing forces. But fortunately there wasn't actually, there was a bit flack and ack-ack fire and that was all there was no enemy aircraft. And in fact

14:30 the southern France landings were very much easier than the ones at Normandy they weren't in the same street, because the German forces in southern France weren't all that great, because the fighting was going on in Normandy anyway.

So that took the pressure away from you in the south of France?

Yes. And we were doing these patrols. We moved into a place called Cuers, which is just

15:00 outside Toulon, and it was an old French airfield, but it also had a dirigible hangar, this hangar was reparations after world war one. They got it from the Germans, it had been built to house air ships. It was an enormous thing. A tremendous size this thing, you can imagine the airfield. There was a railway line right up through the middle of it, and they towed the air ships into

15:30 park them. And the Americans had a couple of their blimps, because they used to use air ships on anti-submarine shipping work, and they had a couple of blimps stationed at this airfield with us. We settled down there fairly comfortably, we were camped right alongside a French vineyard, which fortunately was in full fruit, and we managed to eat most of his crop. They were very nice grapes.

16:00 Really. We hadn't seen any fruit for 3 or 4 years. So that was good. He didn't mind. Or he didn't make a fuss anyway. I think the amount we ate wasn't all that much. But we ate all the grapes we wanted. The French people had nothing. Barney and I used to go to a little French farm nearby and the people used to do our laundry for us, and we used to pay them with soap,

16:30 or whatever they wanted, or whatever we could give them. And

Was soap something that was kind of rare?

Anything. Soap, food or anything that we could spare.

What sort of things could you guys spare?

Not much, but we had plenty of soap and cigarettes, we could give them. They had all the wine, which we used to enjoy when we went there.

So it was a bit of a currency, wine then?

Wine is a staple diet in France and we were in a wine growing area. They drink it for breakfast. Put sugar in it.

Really. I need to live in France.

Not in the wine. They drink vino [wine], which is a clear spirit, and they stick sugar in that to give it a bit of a kick. They drink that for breakfast.

17:00 We went in through – our ground crews went in through – they went in landing ships, I think they landed in between Marseilles and Toulon. And we went into Marseilles and Toulon and had a bit of a look around.

What was there?

Nothing. Except the Frenchmen were starving, in fact we used to have kids that would come and

17:30 rummage through our rubbish tins. Outside our messes just to get something to eat. But we didn't have a great deal of food. But, there was food on the wharves in Marseilles and Toulon and the French were arguing amongst themselves who was going to distribute it because there was about 3 different political factions. And people were starving and they were arguing who was going to distribute the food. We

were disgusted about that but

18:00 what I was going to tell you about, we were in a jeep, there were 2 or 3 of us in a jeep and we were coming back through Toulon and there was a woman and her daughter on the side of the road, and they were trying to get a lift, so we picked the up and gave them a lift. And she invited us to her house, or we took them back to their house, wherever it was a fairly big house, 2-storey. And she invited us in. And we went in and there wasn't a stick of

18:30 furniture in the house. They were sitting on kerosene cases. The Germans had taken all the furniture, and she had nothing, and I don't know what she gave us, a coup of coffee I think. We gave her what we had. Oh yeah, and as we were leaving she gave us a bottle of vino. And we stuck this vino, the jeep's had a little steel pocket above the mudguard at the back, we put it in there and

19:00 forgot all about it until 2 or 3 days later. It might have been a couple of weeks later, and we heard this rattle and we opened it up to have a look, and this vino had broken and also eaten its way through the steel of the mudguard. So that's how virulent that was. I think it was pretty rusted to begin with, I don't think the vino did all of it. Yeah that was -

19:30 of course Barney got into a bit of mischief there too.

What did he get up to?

We were flying out of there, flying up to the coast of the Riviera actually, at least once every day, just looking for things.

You were just recognisance looking for aircraft?

Yeah anything that was going. I managed to get one staff car. But anyway

20:00 we were sitting outside – there were one or two buildings on this airfield, and Barney and I were living in an old pump-house we found near a well. Half the size of this room, just enough for the two of us. Anyway Barney had gone on – he'd gone out for the day, he'd gone into Toulon. Or Marseilles I am not quite sure which. And so, he was off

20:30 and we were sitting outside the mess, and one day went past and 2 days and 3 days went past, and said, "What do you think has happened to Barney, where is he". People didn't go AWL [absent without leave] and anyway while we were doing this and on about the 3rd day, we looked across the vineyard and Barney wasn't a tall man, he was a

21:00 bit shorter than me, and we could see this American helmet bobbing up and down in the vineyards, you see, and suddenly Barney appears and he's got this American helmet with the straps hanging down and he's looking a bit of a mess. So we said, "What happened to you, I was having a good time, I met this American looutenant giving it full burst Loooutenant" he said, "I met

21:30 this American Lieutenant and we had a drink, and we went to another bar and had another drink, and then we went to another bar and had another drink, and then we ended up in the American officer's club". Barney's a flight lieutenant by this time. So he said "We were in this American officer's club for a while and suddenly these MPs came in and they arrested us, and they took us back to the

22:00 cells and locked us up, and they had never heard of the Australian Air Force or Australian officer ranks or any other sort of thing didn't even know about it". So Barney took a while to convince them, he said, "Do you know what American lieutenant he wasn't a lieutenant, he wasn't even a private first class". This guy was impersonating someone. Anyway that was Barney, he was always in some

22:30 kind of strife.

So that's why they got nicked by the MPs?

Yeah. He wasn't an officer at all. But they had a good time, I don't know what they did to the American bloke, they probably put him in the stockade for a while. Barney came home with his helmet, and he had Barney's cap by the way. So there you go. But that was Barney again.

You mentioned you managed to ping off a staff car, how can

23:00 **you actually tell it's a staff car from the height you are?**

You get close and personal, you can tell.

Do you take a look at it before you do anything about it?

You take a look on the way in. You can see roughly that it's a truck or a car or something. If you are not too high, I mean from 2,000 I can tell you what kind of car you are driving. So by the time you get down to shooting range, as I said you burn 2 or 300

23:30 yards of it. But the German staff cars were always open, they drove these big Mercedes Benz' which were big tourist things. Seen pictures of them. That was one of those. It was on a mountain road up in Men… somewhere on the Swiss/Italian border, and I think they were high tailing it out of the place to be quite honest. But we managed to catch up with them.

24:00 I don't know whether I did any damage to the occupants, the last I saw of them they were disappearing into the bushes as fast as they could go. Anyway the car wouldn't go again.

The thing is when people would see you coming, would they just immediately bail out of whatever vehicle they were in?

If they had any sense they would. Because you know a lot of those blokes they weren't trigger happy they were bomb happy, and half the people had been in

24:30 war for 4 or 5 years and any sign of a gun or an enemy aircraft is going to hurt them and get out of their way as fast as they can.

As the war progressed did you feel safer the longer the war went on because people were less brave?

No, not because people were less

25:00 brave, but from an air force point of view, we were really – the allied air forces had the upper hand for probably the last 2.5 years of the war, so we were reasonably confident that no matter what we ran into we could handle it alright. What you couldn't handle and deal with was flack. Because that is

25:30 just sheer luck, again it's luck. And you take – and this is where I have got nothing but respect for the bomber blokes, they just had to stay and fly and fly and stay in it. With flack all over the place, and it is just purely a question of luck where the shrapnel goes. It will hit the bloke alongside you and leave you fine. You have seen photographs of fighter pilots too, where a cannon shell has gone straight

26:00 through the canopy that far from his head, he's still alive, he got away with it, that's just luck you see. And so with flack it was really a matter of luck, and if you were in it you were in it and you did the best to get out of it. But with enemy aircraft I think we had the upper hand, and therefore confidence grew. We always had confidence in our own

26:30 people, our own aircraft we were never short of that. So that's the way it went. The only other thing that happened from Corsica was that with our B-25, no we didn't sorry, not from Corsica from Cuers, we still had the B-25 when we went to France. So a group of us piled in it one day and flew up to Paris, because Paris

27:00 had just been liberated, and we though we would go up and have a look at this. So we flew into Paris and they weren't very pleased to see us, the Americans who were controlling the airfield thought this was a bit of an imposition, but nonetheless they put up with us. We got into Paris, and we would be some of the few people who have driven around Paris when there was no traffic. We had a horse drawn garry and there wasn't a car in sight.

What happened to all the cars?

They had gone, there weren't any.

27:30 It was only military vehicles, one or two military vehicles. The Germans had all pulled out and the American troops which had occupied, hadn't really got organised, there were no civilian cars, no civilian traffic at all, except for this guy with the horse drawn garry, so we all – and there's a photograph of that in there too. So, yeah, it was interesting.

Whereabouts did you go in

28:00 **Paris?**

Just the usual sights, we couldn't go into any of them, they were all closed. The Champs d'Elysee and the Eiffel Tower we thought it was a beautiful city. We were only there for 3 or 4 hours I suppose and we had to go back. We had the temerity to ask them for some fuel and they told us to go to hell, we had enough to get home with anyway, and we went back.

28:30 **How was that viewed upon by your superiors going for a bit of a jaunt like that?**

They thought it was a good thing. We didn't do it without permission. You know you just get let off the leash every now and again. After all we hadn't seen a city like that ever. Oh, when we left France

29:00 we had run out of work, because the war had moved away from us. So they decided to takes the squadron hollus bolus [whole] to England. And to do that they wanted to leave our aircraft in Italy, and to do that we had to fly back to Italy and left our aircraft and we went to Sorrento just outside Naples and stayed there for about 10 days waiting for a ship.

What did you do to pass the time?

Oh we went and had a look around the ruins of Pompei.

29:30 **What did you think of that?**

Very interesting, very good. And we just sort of poked around and took it easy, we were staying in what

was called a recreation area, and we just passed the time away and sat in the sun. We were sleeping on a roof actually, and Vesuvius was erupting, or it had been erupting and

30:00 our only – we didn't have beds in this place, so we slept on the roof, and we were covered in ash every morning when we woke up, but that was the only bit of excitement, and we all got on this ship and went to England.

Did you manage to go and see if you could find some girls in these exotic places?

Well, yes. I didn't

30:30 of course. This will be for publication won't it.

We won't tell anyone.

I mean, boys are boys aren't they and we had 250 of them. They got into their share of scrapes and found some girls here and there. It wasn't quite as widespread or as many of them as you think because they were a bit thin on the ground too.

I am thinking you were the perfect package, you were quite elite within the air force, you have got to be a bit of a magnet?

No. No.

It didn't work like that?

31:00 No, they didn't know we existed. We were hidden away all the time, we very seldom in sight of any civilisation, and whether it was in Corsica in the desert or anywhere else. You had to go to the town, and then you are only on a bit of leave. The nearest we ever got to a group of girls were the ones in Port Said. Some English WRENS they

31:30 had were stationed there in a naval establishment, and we were only 3 or 4 miles down the road. We used to socialise a bit with them, but that's probably the only time we got closed to them. There's a photograph somewhere of my friend Jimmy Sidney, who managed to find himself a little French girlfriend in France,

32:00 and they were both riding horses there, he was one of the lucky ones.

He's done himself quite well. You mentioned with the flack a lot of the time it was just luck, that you didn't get hit, was anybody carrying around any lucky items?

No. Not that I know of. We didn't certainly appealed to me and I don't think it appealed to anybody else in the squadron,

32:30 but even then those things were discouraged by air force command, they didn't like – when we were in Egypt for instance, there were these fortune tellers and all the rest of the racquets going on, they discouraged people from going to these things.

Why is that?

Well they didn't want anybody to be told they were going to be killed. And they didn't want to encourage people who would think about things like that. We didn't –

33:00 there were probably people who probably carried lucky charms of some sort, especially in the larger aircraft. But with us there wasn't much room in the cockpit anyway, apart from the little dog I carried and I couldn't carry him all the time.

I think you were doing well to fit a dog in there.

Well he wasn't very big, about that big.

How long was the dog with you, the small dog?

Well he only flew once and that was on that trip

33:30 from Cairo to Corsica, and it was just a means to get him there. That was the only time he got in an aeroplane. Once I got to Corsica, we put the armour plate back and took the platform out anyway. No he never flew again. And he wasn't really a mascot, it was just transportation.

At what point was it that you were escorting bomber patrols?

34:00 Mainly in Corsica. We did one trip from England, when we got to England we were given these Spit 16s which were special low level Spits as it happens with square winged tips similar to the one that's over there, that's the same, you will notice it has got square wing tips, and not rounded ones it had square ones. And that had a Packard Merlin engine in it, which was a Merlin engine built by Packard in

34:30 America, there was a noticeable difference they ran much rougher. And we were supposed to be – we were down at Hawkins a place called Hawkins airfield in Folkestone, right on the channel very close to the coast. And our job was to dive bomb V2 [German jet propelled rocket] sights over in Holland and

Belgium. We did one

35:00 daylight bomber escort to Europe, Ludwigshafen in Germany, and we just escorted these bombers in and came out again, and we were, this was the middle of winter in England, the middle of winter in England. We didn't have any heated clothing because we had been in the Middle East all the time, and I had a pair of flying boots on and 2 pairs of socks on I remember that, and

35:30 gloves and everything else. But it was minus 35 at the height we were at and it was pretty cold but that was my whole flight of how cold it was. But that's the only bomber escort we did in Europe, we did quite a lot of light bomber work in Corsica, - and the main idea of those escorts was to just make sure they weren't attacked

36:00 by other fighters, they did all the donkey work they didn't enjoy the flack and drop the bombs, we should have stayed away and let them get on with it.

Was it a dangerous exercise to be escorting bombers?

It certainly was for the Mustang pilots who were escorting the day raids over Germany with the fortresses. In my case, no.

36:30 I can't claim it. But it was for some people, because the Germans still had a kick left in them. But in our case we only did one raid over Germany with those bombers, and we never saw anything. And we didn't see much opposition from Corsica either. So I can't claim that we were in great danger, no.

37:00 **Had there been developments in radar being able to see in front?**

You mean from aircraft?

Yeah.

In the modern ones yes. I mean.

Did you never have a radar?

No.

Would you be hooked up to the flight control to tell you what was coming?

By radio yeah, you are always in touch with the ground controller.

How effective would their radar be in order to tell you what's coming up?

Well as

37:30 the war progressed they got more and more effective, but they didn't have anywhere near the range or versatility they have got now, we are talking 60 years later.

I am just wondering…

Radar was just invented during the war by the British.

I am just wondering what the sort of range they had?

Well, for a start it was very short I know that, but they must have had 100/150 –

38:00 it's line of sight radar, and as the course of the curvature of the earth takes over, this is why these days they are looking at these over the horizon radars because that's how they do it. But, if the plane is high enough, they can pick them up 100/150 miles perhaps, but they must have been able to do it, because in our case they were calling

38:30 interceptions out as far as about 70 or 80 miles, but I suppose that is about it. But in the early days they were only worried about the English Channel, so 40 miles was alright. But, it doesn't give you much time to get aircraft off the ground and up in the air and meet incoming enemy.

40 miles away?

No it's not enough you haven't got enough time to scramble the aircraft and you have got to climb up, it takes time to climb.

39:00 So sometimes they could – in England, they could only get them on the way out. Rather than on the way in. Meantime they have done all the damage they can. But radar experience is very significant development during the war and since the war. It's a new ball game now.

Did you notice that there was technology increasing during your

39:30 **time?**

Not really. It increased as we went from one mark of aircraft to one type of aircraft to the other, that was about it for us. As I said you get isolated in a pocket and you didn't know what was going on. We

didn’t know what was going on in England, and when I got to England and finally they posted me home, and I was trying to delay it a little bit

40:00 only a little bit, because I had run into this woman in London and I subsequently married. But I had done this gunnery instructor’s course and so I asked if I – they had a different type of gun sight, which we had never used, but they were available in England, it was the gyro sight, it was a much more advanced sight. And the type

40:30 of aircraft they were flying were very much better performed than the ones that we had, even then. So I asked to go and at least have a look at this gyro sight and fly it around for a while and see how it worked, they let me do that. And I went down to one of their experimental stations at Farnley and flew one of the latest Spitfires then which had about double

41:00 the boost – the boost being the manifold pressure that you get when you open the throttle. Double the boost and about 20% more power than anything that I have flown at that stage, and that was pretty run of the mill stuff down there at Farnley. So the development was going on all the time, and when you read the books later on about Hurricanes and Spitfires and test pilots and people and there’s one there called ‘Cycle of

41:30 Merlin’ which is a Spitfire test pilot’s experience, and he was flying aircraft at – back at 1941 that we hadn’t even dreamt of, that’s just the way it was.

Just rewinding you back a bit, you have gone from escorting bomber patrols in Italy to doing the same kind of patrol work is it throughout the south of France?

No south of France we were just on strafing work and

42:02 End of tape

Tape 8

00:33 **Whereabouts were you based when you were flying in Southern France George?**

At this airfield called Cuers which is about 5 or 6 miles out of Toulon on the eastern side of Toulon towards the Riviera. As I said it was an old French airfield.

And what was the nature of the operation?

01:00 Only just mainly armed recognisance, sweeps to see if we could find anything to be quite honest, and anything that moved on the roads again that wasn’t our people, we’d shoot them up. And any enemy aircraft that happened to be around, but there weren’t any, so, we had a pretty quiet time.

How long were you there?

About

01:30 I think about 2 months, or maybe 6 weeks. I could find out.

Where did you go…?

We went back to Italy from there.

How long were you back in Italy for?

Only just enough to put our aircraft, we flew our aircraft into a holding depot there, holding airfield, and then we went to Sorrento and waited for the ship. And then – a matter of 2 weeks altogether.

So you left all your aircraft

02:00 **behind?**

Yeah. Well there was plenty of aircraft in England at this stage, we were going to England, and they always needed aircraft out there, so there was not much point taking them back. You couldn’t fly them to England, well you could have possibly flown them to England, but we still had to get our ground crew and the rest of the squadron back there, so it was much better to do what we did. The only thing was we had to leave the dog behind, Hurricane,

02:30 the Alsatian. He became an RAF police dog in Italy, but I am not sure how successful he would be as a police dog, because he was a very gentle Alsatian. I don’t think he would bite anybody, anyway, we thought he would be in good hands there, we couldn’t take him with us. We were on this South American ship this time called – she’d been on the South American run, she was called the El Kantara.

03:00 And we went around past Gibraltar and back to England that way.

On that voyage I am imagining that Italy had capitulated and the war in the Med was pretty well over?

The war in the Med was certainly pretty well over, it was a very nasty war and although the Italians had capitulated, the Germans were still there, and they were still holding out in the north of Italy.

03:30 So there was still a lot going on. Rome had fallen, but that's about as far north as they were. It was a very, very rough campaign, for the army in particular. Because the conditions were shocking. The Italian winters are not very good. They were fighting a very stiff battle, the

04:00 Germans were very good soldiers. Very tough. As I said, that landing at Anzio alone there were thousands and thousands of people killed on both sides, but nobody – I bet you have never heard of it, have you?

I am not that familiar with it.

But the casualties were enormous. So,

04:30 as I said at the beginning of all this, I picked it right when I picked the air force.

Given that you were moving to Britain, the Germans must have been on the run at this stage?

Oh we knew we were going to win the war, and the Germans did too. I am sure they did. And the Russians knew. The worst thing that

05:00 Germany did from their point of view was they attacked Russia, if they hadn't attacked Russia Lord knows where we would have finished up. If you look at it, a country of 80 million people held the rest of the world up. In the end they were fighting Russia, they were fighting America and they were fighting us. But the British were darn near exhausted, because they had been in it from day 1. Towards the end of the war there were no more reinforcements left for the

05:30 British army. Montgomery was accused of being cautious, over cautious in France and Holland in his campaign. But one of the reasons he was always cautious – hey, he was a man who was always sure he was going to win, which he did at Alamein by planning exactly the same way, he had tremendous superiority in Alamein. And he also had the Australian 9th Division I might add,

06:00 which took the brunt of it, but by the time we'd reached 1945, the British army had practically no reserves left. And they were just taking people from units which had been knocked around a bit, as their reinforcements. Just the same as the Germans were fighting with 16-year-old boys and old men like me. The

06:30 German had been reduced to that – particularly in the south of France. So you know the writing was on the wall but there was still a lot of people killed, even to the last days.

Was your morale high on the way to Britain?

Our morale was never low. Doesn't matter when it was. It was no different, I don't want to sound boastful or anything like that, in saying that but morale in our squadron

07:00 was never a problem. The only problem was you could get the occasional gripe from chaps amongst the ground crews, who had been doing the same thing for 4 years without any recognition or anything else, but they didn't gripe much. But the morale I never knew them to shirk the issue, at all, they always did their job.

You must have felt victorious when you were boarding the El Kantara?

No, it was just another sea trip.

07:30 There were a few girls on that boat as a matter of fact, there were some British Red Cross workers. I remember one of them had a record collection, which we used to listen to on the way home. But, no it was a good trip. But then we got to England and we had another job to do.

Were you briefed about what you would be doing when you got to Britain before you got there?

No. We just got sent to

08:00 Hawkinge, and they gave us these aeroplanes, and we started off again.

If I can interrupt you there, how did you occupy yourself on that voyage?

Same as all troops you sat around most of the time. But this was relatively short, I think it only took us about 10 days to get back to England, something like that. There was always the chance of submarines of course, the Atlantic was still not

08:30 completely safe, but the U-Boats had been largely defeated by that stage. But they were still around. We went in a convoy, a small convoy I have forgotten quite how many ships, but we weren't sailing alone on that occasion. But she was a vessel of about 20,000 tonnes, the El Kantara was quite comfortable, so

that wasn't a problem.

09:00 **I imagine you would have been looking forward to what lay ahead or reflecting on what had taken place, in the near past?**

We were looking forward to what lay ahead that was one of the aims in life, hope we would get to see England one day. So, that to us was probably the best part.

Did you see England as your next conquest?

What sort of

09:30 conquest? William the Conqueror fixed that up didn't he? No we didn't think in those terms. All we knew was, was that we knew how fly aeroplanes and they asked us to do something in that regard we would do it. But we didn't know what they were going to ask us. What they did ask us to do was a little bit knew to us, because we hadn't done any dive bombing, but the so

10:00 we did a bit of training they taught us to – I hadn't carried a bomb since back in Rhodesia, so we had to practice that all over again, because there is quite an art to dive bombing.

If I can interrupt there George what was the name of the airfield you went to?

Hawkinge. Folkestone. On the south coast in Kent.

Where

10:30 **did you disembark from the El Kantara?**

I can't remember, I think it was somewhere in London. One of the London docks I think, but I can't sure. I thought of it the other day, and thought where the devil did we get off the ship.

Did you get any leave before you got to Hawkinge?

No. When we got there we got some leave after that. While the aircraft were arriving they gave us a bit of leave, and we had various hospitality schemes that we could

11:00 go on. And Barney elected to go on one scheme and I elected to go on another one. We went on one that was called the Lady Rider Scheme, you were invited to go and stay at a household somewhere, for a week or as long as could have the leave for. So we thought that sounded pretty good, we hadn't been under a roof for a long time, so we

11:30 opted to go to see some people in Scotland, who we had never met of course, but who operated under this Lady Rider Scheme, people called Tweedie in Ayr in Scotland, just outside Glasgow, and he was the Vauxhall dealer in that area, and had been for many years, although there weren't many Vauxhalls being sold during the war.

12:00 **My first car was a Vauxhall.**

Was it, well he was a Vauxhall dealer. They – he was not that old, but he was a chap I don't think was all that well, and he hadn't served in the services, but they had people staying at their home right practically through out the war. Serviceman from all over the world, Canada, America, Australia, U.K.

12:30 That was their effort, and they looked after us very well. I stayed with them once, I was with Bob Mercer, who once again was my brother-in-law, the chap I mentioned, we went together and had a very nice people with these people.

Their home in Scotland must have been a long way from Hawkinge?

Oh yeah, one end to the other almost. About 400 miles, nowhere is too far in England.

13:00 But it takes you a long while to get there. We went up by train.

Not exactly local leave thought is it?

No, but still, we had about 2 weeks I think they gave us. So while things were settling down and getting organised, we got back…

How did you travel there?

By train. You had to get permits to travel, you just couldn't jump on and buy a ticket, so you went through – every station had an RTO, which is a Railway Transport Officer,

13:30 so you went to his office and had to show your papers and what you were doing, and he gave you a seat on the train.

Were the trains busy with passengers?

Oh yeah, all the time. Mainly servicemen. I am not sure we didn't stand some of the way to Scotland. As officers we travelled first class which was something I suppose.

Can you describe the first class carriages?

14:00 No, they are just carriages, same sort of thing as I was describing before where you have – and a lot of the English trains were like that, that was the standard English train where you have, a compartment for an external door and a corridor running down the side which was where the toilets were and things like that. And until recent times that was the standard English carriage.

14:30 **How many people per compartment?**

I think there were about 6, 3 on each side.

Must have been a good opportunity to get to know somebody?

Oh I suppose so although we were just – once again in our compartment they were only servicemen. Some of those we knew anyway.

Any mischief had on board the train?

No, no.

15:00 People were well behaved. You didn't get the kind of things that young people get up to these days to occupy their mind. We all had other things on our minds and other experiences and we had all settled down a bit. But no we didn't get up to mischief. The Tweedie's showed us all around the area, and

15:30 were very hospitable and introduced us and fed us well, and looked after us well, comfortable beds, and a warm house so it was pretty good. They became our good friends. Later on after the war, my wife and two kids and I went back to England for a couple of years. We were going for a couple of years, and we were only there for 15 months, but we went up to see

16:00 the Tweedies and stay with them for a while.

It must have been a lovely reunion?

It was nice. Because they were just nice people.

They must have been quite special people to take in servicemen on leave?

That was their bit you know. That was their way of helping the war effort, and it meant a lot. But it was going on all over England and Scotland, and probably here in Australia too for that matter. Because there were a lot of visiting Americans in Australia.

16:30 And our own troops who were in various parts away from home, they weren't in their own state very often. And there were organisations back here that dealt with that kind of thing. So that was it.

Returning to Hawkinge what were you briefed to do there?

Well, we were told we were going to dive bomb these V2 sights. The V2s

17:00 were still giving London a bad time, the V1s and V2s. The V1 was like a sort of flying bomb, with short stubby wings and a little jet engine and a bomb up front, and it flew until the fuel ran out and whenever the fuel ran out, the bomb came down. And they were putting those over in England, in large numbers, and I am talking 1945 now just before the war

17:30 finished. But then the V2 were the first of the rockets, and they launched these – in fact the day we went on that bomber escort, I saw one of them – I saw the vapour trail of one of those rockets being launched. It went straight up in the air. And they would go up in the stratosphere and just go over in a big loop and land on London, and programmed to land in England. And Von Braun was the – he became the

18:00 leading scientist in the American rocket industry with the German scientist who invented the V2. So they were very advanced, and the thing about the V2 was, you never knew when it was coming. You never heard it. It was flying much faster than the speed of sound, so it just landed and blew everything up and you heard the noise afterwards. It carried a much bigger warhead than the flying bomb.

18:30 The flying bomb carried about 1,000 lbs and I think the V2 carried 2 or 3,000. So they were still dropping on London in 1945.

When you got to Hawkinge you were given dive bomb training?

Well we trained ourselves, we knew what to do, we just went up and practiced.

What's the procedure for dive-bombing?

Well they are a single engine aircraft you see you haven't got any bomb sights, once again you point the aircraft so

19:00 you get up and you have first of all got to spot the target, and the only way – you can't because you have got this great monoplane underneath you, and something out the front, you can't see unless you look a little bit before you or a behind you or you dip the wing. So the technique was to wait until you saw the

target appearing just behind your trailing edge, come out from under your wing, you could see it from about 4,000 feet. And then you would roll right over

19:30 on your back and go down like that. And so the steeper the better you probably go at this angle coming down, there will be people watching this who will laugh at me, because a lot of people who have done a lot more dive-bombing that I have, especially in 239 wing with the Kittyhawks boys, because that's what they did the whole time. But that's the way it was done and of course you had the sight you used your reflector sight to get the aircraft on the target,

20:00 and when the time was right you let the bomb go. And hoped it hit something.

What altitude would you let go of the bomb?

It depended, I am trying to think about that, somewhere about 1,000 feet I think, you didn't want to get too low, you would get blown up with the bomb. But at the same if you were too far away, you weren't going to hit anything anyway.

You would need enough altitude to pull out of the dive as well?

20:30 Ah yes. With the Spit you get out of it at 500 feet, even at that speed, but that's about the limit. But I didn't do a lot of the dive-bombing because I got posted home.

Before we follow that line, what targets were you assigned to dive-bomb?

Well these V2 sights, the launching pads in Belgium and Holland.

But what areas in Belgium and Holland?

Right on the coast, quite near

21:00 The coast. See, Belgium and Holland are quite small countries, you would fly over them in 10 minutes. So, these V2 sights were camouflaged but they were mainly concrete pads and things V2 bombers and they lined them up just the way they do the space shuttle now. Stood them on their tail and up they went. I think they had some sort of a launching rail at one stage. But they were the first of the big rockets that you have got today.

Did you have to worry about any anti-

21:30 **aircraft guns?**

Oh yeah, there was flack there. But as I said I really didn't do a great deal of it, just after we got started I was posted home, and a group of us there were about 6 we had been on the squadron for a long time, and they had lots of pilots coming through, the young pilots coming. There were more pilots than they knew what to do with towards the end of the war. Because the VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachments] scheme covered all that, so – and we weren't getting the

22:00 casualties at that stage, certainly in fighter command, that they had had earlier. Bomber command was still suffering casualties, but fighter command wasn't. There were still some – so they had plenty of pilot replacement and we'd been at it for 2.5 to 3 years so it was time we went home.

Did you have any casualties while you were based at Hawkinge?

Yes, Barney Wallace, my mate.

22:30 And that happened while I was away for the weekend in London, and he was leading a section of 4 in a squadron group of 12, and the squadron was part of a wing of 36, 36 Spitfires. Led by a Belgium wing commander. Who took them into 10/10ths cloud which is

23:00 complete saturation cloud cover. At about 300 feet over Ostend in Belgium. Now whether it was – I wasn't there, whether the cloud cover was extensive and he just thought he would go in and out of it, I don't know. But I don't know. Barney leading this section of 4 in loose formation called them in close so that he would do the instrument flying

23:30 in the cloud and they would fall into formation on him. So there were 4 aircraft involved, with Barney in the lead, one on each wing and one flying in the box at the back. And of course they would just be looking at him and he would be doing the instrument flying and just hope eventually to get out of the cloud. You can do it. But the chap in the box unfortunately

24:00 made a mistake, and he just came straight up and cut Barney's tail straight off. At 300 feet there is nowhere for you to go. He tried – he went straight in. He tried to get out of it, but couldn't. At that height he had no hope. The chap that did the damage, he managed to pull up and bailed out and got away with it. But I didn't hear about it until I got back from the weekend, and

24:30 I felt then and I still feel today, that if I had been there it wouldn't have happened, but that's stupid to think like that because there's no logic to that. Just a feeling I had. But, you know that was, he was ready to do home with me at the same time. He was the kind of pilot he would have backed him anywhere. But that was the luck.

25:00 That's what I am saying. The war was nearly over and he had everything to come back to. He had a wealthy father, great business in Melbourne and a fiancé, who was also wealthy. But that's just the way it goes you see. Some people don't have the luck and some people do. So,

25:30 **You must have received that news quite difficultly?**

Yeah I did actually. Because we were very close. Close in a funny kind of way because we sort of – whenever spoke about it, it was never on the surface, but we were always together, as I said we shared a tent for 2.5 years, and we were just like brothers.

26:00 Sometimes he went his way and I went mine, like when he got into mischief with the gully gully men and all the rest of it, but that was just Barney. We had a great deal of respect for each other. As I said, our civilian lives couldn't have been more different. We were from different sides of the street, but I wouldn't have been anywhere near –

26:30 if he had been killed by flack or something else, I would have accepted that, but to go out the way he did. I thought was pretty rotten, but there's nothing you could do about it, it happened. He's buried in Ostend and when we went back to Europe about 15 years ago and went and saw his grave. Well tended he is in a military cemetery there at Ostend. Anyway that's that.

27:00 **Did you continue flying to those targets after…?**

Well I did a couple of trips, but as I said it was just about the time we were posted home. I don't know whether they posted me because of this, but there were several other people posted at the same time, I think the whole group would have gone, and Barney would have gone too. Another week and he would have been gone, so that's the way it goes in war. The fella –

27:30 the chap that was in the accident, they posted him away from the squadron, I know he was upset, but he was fairly new to the squadron and a little bit inexperienced.

Was that a common procedure for something like that to post them away from the squad?

No. It was a most unusual act.

No but I mean if there was an accident within a squadron was it common procedure to remove that pilot?

No. The pilot usually removes himself because he's dead.

28:00 **No, but the pilot survived?**

No, we had – we didn't have anything like that, that was unique that was the only thing like that that happened. We had pilots prang an aircraft occasionally, taxi one up on its nose, or something else goes wrong, damage an aircraft, but that was just part of the game, that was never serious. But that was the only incident of that kind that we had. We had people killed in aircraft accidents,

28:30 we had people killed in enemy accidents We had people taken POW, bail outs. But when it came down to a really bad accident that was the only thing.

On the subject of crashes I notice in your logbook that you had a crash?

Oh well, it was a controlled crash. Had two of them as a matter of face.

Would you care to describe them for us?

Well one was in Corsica and it was in this

29:00 Beautiful Spitfire I had, and it had just been in the maintenance section for an overhaul you see and after that you take a test flight, it was late in the afternoon in Corsica and it was my aircraft so I had to test flight that, I was more than happy to do that. But it had a 90 gallon fuel tank underneath, which was full of fuel, 100 octane stuff. And the airfield we were flying

29:30 on, it was only a gravel strip, it wasn't a fully prepared runway or anything like that, it was only a gravel runway. So I started to take off, and I just about got airborne and I felt my left leg dig in. But I managed – I was just about at flying speed so I managed to get off the ground. And I thought well that doesn't feel too good, so,

30:00 I thought I had lost a wheel. So I called up the control tower and got them to have a look if I left the undercarriage as I passed, he said you have lost a wheel, so my first thought was to get rid of the fuel tank the overload tank on the belly. Because we'd all been taught in training, that if you had to make a forced landing it was better to make a belly landing than try to

30:30 land on one leg and do something cute, because in fact you did far less damage to the aircraft. So that was my plan. So I flew around until I could get rid of the fuel tank and just belly-landed it. Because I didn't want to land on 90 gallons of 100 octane fuel. And that was the luck of the game too, if that had have happened perhaps 2 seconds earlier, that wheel

31:00 could well have dug in, and then I would have been flat on my belly on all this petrol. So you see that's

how close it can get. It was nothing the actual belly landing, anybody can do them, it's just a controlled crash.

You must have had to fly around for a while to consume all that fuel?

I didn't consume it I just jettisoned the tank. But I didn't get it off the first time, I had to have a second go and finally got it to come loose.

31:30 And I dropped it somewhere up near the end of the airstrip where there is nobody living, just bush and I got the control tower to confirm that it had actually come off. That was what was worrying me, I didn't want to land on it. Apart form that it was just a normal landing, landed the aircraft instead of landing on its wheels, it landed on its belly. You break the prop and bend a little bit of tin underneath,

32:00 the radiator and stuff like that. That's all replaceable, you don't do much damage, not under those circumstances.

How long was it before the plane was able to return to…?

Oh they retired it, they just stripped it back and sent it back to one of the maintenance units on the mainland. So it never flew again with us, although it was a great pity because it was a beautiful aeroplane. I got it brand new, and – but they went in every 40 hours for overhaul. What had actually happened was we were on synthetic rubber tyres,

32:30 and it was actually one of those tyres that had packed up. It wasn't the whole wheel it still had a small hub about that big. But I often wondered later on in later years, whether I could have landed the thing successfully on that wheel and avoided the damage and I would have loved to have done it, because I would have had the aeroplane. But I did what I had been trained to do and landed on my belly. There we go.

So the replacement aeroplane didn't live up to the same standards?

Oh it was a good aeroplane, but that was

33:00 that was a very good plane. Planes are a bit like motor cars, you can buy 2 Fords and 2 Holdens, or something, and one will be very good and the other one will be not so bad, but not quite as good as the one you had before. And that's what happens with aeroplanes too. Some of them just, they just flew beautifully from one day 1, and that's what happened to that one, just flew as smooth as silk. But anyway,

33:30 that's what occurred.

You had another similar instance did you?

In Australia when we got back, I was flying as a pilot gunner instructor in a Wirraway.

Maybe we can store that story away until we get to …?

Well there's not much to it, because I didn't do much.

How did you get home to Australia?

On a ship called the RMS Rangitata New Zealand shipping line, which was about 4 or

34:00 5,000 or maybe 6,000 tonnes. And I got married in London, and.

We need to do some back tracking and fill in that part of the story before we cover the voyage home.

Not much to it I just got married.

How did you meet Shirley?

At a dance as a matter of fact, Sheila it is.

Sheila sorry.

The

34:30 Commonwealth Society I think it's called, they used to run these dances for the troops. Bob Mercer and I went along to one of these ones, I don't quite know how we got there, but we got there and we met these 2 sisters, Sheila and Jean. So I danced with Sheila and he danced with Jean, and we kept on dancing. One thing led to another and they took us home after a little while and we met the parents,

35:00 we used to stay with them, they had a flat in Kenilworth Court in Putney. Putney Bridge. And whenever we hade a bit of leave we would take the girls out and there was a little nightclub we used to go to in London. Anyway when the time came to go home, I thought about it a bit and we just went and got married.

Let me ask you a few questions there, what was the name of the nightclub

35:30 **that you used to frequent?**

I am trying to think of it, I can't remember, it was called – no, it had an American name, but I can't remember what it was. It was on Soho. It was pleasant it was nice, there wasn't much food around of course. Mainly horse flesh at that stage of the game, and their parents never had much, we used to take our food ration coupons with us when we were on leave and give them all to Sheila's

36:00 mother. Who converted them into some sort of meals and they were always good. She was always scratching, go to the butcher and plead for a little bit extra for her visiting troops. She always managed to find the food for us, but food was very, very scarce.

You mentioned earlier that Sheila had had a very difficult time during the…?

Well, I don't know that it was difficult, well it wasn't good, she was 16 and working

36:30 and they were in bombing raids every night of the week. I really think that she had a much more dangerous war than I did. They walked to work every morning through bomb damaged buildings, she was working in London. She ended up working in one of the banks there, I think it was Barclays Bank she used to work for one of them anyway.

37:00 And she couldn't move anywhere, she wanted to join the forces I believe, at one stage but they wouldn't let her go, she was in a reserved occupation and they said you have to stay here and do what you are doing. But apart from that Putney was quite heavily bombed, the cinema just down the road, got bombed out one night. Only half a mile away. So there were bombs falling all over London for quite a long period. She went through all that as a kid more or

37:30 less and even as I said in 1945 they were still copping it. Even one weekend when we were there, a couple of these flying bombs went over and you would listen and you would listen to the motor, and if the motor kept going you were alright, if it didn't well you were in trouble. There were a couple of B2s landed just in one of the suburbs nearby while we were there. So, they were under attack pretty well the whole time. Nowhere near as during the

38:00 blitz, it had eased off of course. They were still copping it. And as I said, complete blackouts and everything else. A pretty tough life, no fuel much for warmth. So I had nothing but admiration for them. So anyway I got married.

Before proposing to Sheila, you must have had to give a fair bit of consideration to your future, you are from different countries, you were from the other side of the world?

Oh,

38:30 I thought she was coming to something better, because I always thought Australia was the best place in the world, no matter where we were. She mightn't like me saying that exactly, but she has been very happy out here. She considers – she was very upset when she was told she wasn't an Australian citizen by a Chinese girl behind the immigration counter at one stage, after we had travelled the world on Australian official passports, so it wasn't until 1986 that she got her citizenship

39:00 certificate, it was backdated to 1946, but she arrived in 1945, late 1945.

Was that a slip up with the bureaucracy or red tape?

No they had changed the laws. We were all British citizens, I have still got my discharge certificate here, I was looking at it the other day, I am listed as a British citizen, a British nationality Australian citizen or something like that.

39:30 And when people came from Britain they were automatically Australian citizens, that's the way it worked, then they changed the law, and she had to go through this ceremony that really upset her, because I think she's more Australian than I am now. She is very proudly Australian, but she's been here since 1945

Was it difficult parting with the squadron?

Yes and no, because Barney had gone and a lot of my

40:00 friends, my close friends were being posted home, so a lot of new chaps coming in to this. So the family had changed a bit it if you know what I mean, but the squadron of course meant a lot to me and it still does, because it changed my life. That was an experience which completely changed my life and the people that were

40:30 there we were all brothers. Special time. Anyway I was sorry to leave the squadron, but in one way, ready to go. Because apart from anything else I had been away from home for 4 years, and I thought I owed something to my parents and the time had come.

Did you ever experience any homesickness while you were away?

41:00 I wrote to my parents once a week, and they wrote to me regularly, but it was you know I cared for my parents, I cared for them a great deal, but I was away on my great adventure, and I never got homesick. Until as I said towards the end of the war and Barney got knocked off but that really didn't cover it

completely

41:30 it was the fact that the nature of the thing had changed, the war was just about over anyway, it was over in another two months, over finished. So the – it was time to go home. So that was it.

41:48 End of tape

Tape 9

00:42 **So what was the wedding like?**

Oh the wedding was pretty good do you want to see a photograph? Yeah, well I got mine in. Well it went off well we got married on Putney Bridge. On Putney Bridge there's a church on

01:00 either end of the bridge and of course the flat that Sheila's parents owned was only about 200 yards away, so that all worked out fine. We had a small reception back at the flat, we couldn't do much because not much food and not much grog. A bit of beer and just a few people, few blokes from the squadron. And Sheila's sisters, she had 2 sisters and a younger brother. They are

01:30 all out here. And Bob Mercer who I mentioned earlier, he was my best man. He got married about 6 weeks later to Jean, so in fact they just lived up the road there for many years. So that was the wedding and it went off quite well.

So did you immediately part from…?

02:00 No not exactly, we managed to get away for a week or two, we went up to the lakes district in Cumberland because Sheila's brother, who was considerably younger than her was only about 7 then, he'd been evacuated with his school up to Cumberland so we went up there so I could meet him. He was anxious to come home with us he didn't want us to leave. But we had to leave him there.

02:30 A big house with a lot of kids in that period and it was pretty hard on them, on the other hand they could have been killed. He is a very successful real estate agent down in Pinjara, been there for many years.

So how did you get back to Australia?

On a ship called The Rangatata and as it happened we got put on the ship the day before VE [Victory in Europe] Day, 8th May, and that was very

03:00 memorable because Sheila's birthday is the 8th May, and that was also VE Day. We missed all the celebrations, we were put on a train, and then put on a ship in the Mersey in Liverpool. Pretty overcast, and there were all these people out in the river and they gave us a bottle of beer each, to celebrate but all the celebrations were going on on shore, the European war this was,

03:30 not the Pacific war. That was still going on, but the European war had finished. There were people on boats having a great time, circling us and we were stuck there. To add insult to injury there were about 150 of us I suppose air force people and I met up with some of the friends we had gone to Rhodesia with, so

04:00 there was a group of about 7 or 8 of us who knew one another and the rest – well all eventually knew one another. Anyway we were stuck in a hold down in tail end of the boat, the stern of the boat and down this hole and the Dutch army had taken over all the good accommodation and they had that,

First in best dressed?

No it was all arranged by the governments and how much money they were going to spend. Anyway

04:30 so we got down into this ship, and it was alright, but it took a heck of a long while to come home, we went down around the South Atlantic, and then through the Panama Canal and down around the south Pacific, there was an enormous on the other side of New Zealand, which broke all the crockery and flooded the hold. And we were in that for 3 or 4 days we were only making about 2 knots. And

05:00 finally ended up in Wellington, New Zealand for a day, and we got off the ship, oh we got of the ship once in Panama too, I am not sure which end, I think it was the Atlantic end, just for a day they let us off. And another thing coming through the Panama Canal we got fresh water – fresh water showers because the lakes are all fresh water and that was a bonus. The mates

05:30 several of them had come from bomber command, and I remember very well one bloke called Joe Foster, he was a character, all he could talk about was Nuremburg. They sent 1000 bombers to Nuremburg and lost 96 in one night. And he was in that, it really left an impression on him. Not to the extent that he was shivering in fright, but he referred to it a few times.

06:00 Anyway, we got to Wellington and spent a day there and came across to Sydney, sailed into Sydney.

Do you think that the amount of time you spent on board ship actually helped you wind down?

Not really, I was fed up with it in the end, it was just another ship trip and the winding bit, didn't happen.

06:30 These days, if somebody sees a puff of smoke they have got to be counselled. I don't remember anybody in world war two that had to be counselled. You were meant to cope with all of this and you did.

Would it have helped if you'd had some counselling?

Be the last thing in the world I would want, and I wouldn't want it today. You have got to be strong enough to deal with that yourself. I

07:00 just, I am sorry I didn't want to get on to this, but modern society I think a re doing a lot of things that are really unnecessary. We second guess everything we do. And I think it's ridiculous, people have got to stand on their on two feet.

We've gone soft have we?

Very. But mind you we brought you up this way.

07:30 So perhaps we should be blamed.

I think so.

Well there again every generation has tried to do something better for their children, my grandfather was thing it, my father was trying it for me, and in their own way they did a lot more for me undoubtedly, but our generation did the same thing to our kids, and they have done the same for their kids.

08:00 But we are getting more and more spoilt, we want more and more laid on, whereupon we didn't have an ice-chest, now you have got to have 4 television sets and 4 cars. 5 blocks of flats in their pocket for their retirement.

Of course you do. What's wrong with that?

Nothing. But anyway – all money orientated now, I guess it always was to start with.

08:30 **So what was it like coming home?**

Good.

Who met you?

Nobody in Sydney, we got on a train and came to Melbourne, and my parents met me at Spencer Street Station in Melbourne. I don't know what happened, whether we had already been given leave on the ship or as we pulled into port or when we got on the train, anyway, I think I went straight home with them.

09:00 Home hadn't changed much, it was much the same. Dad had worked himself very heavily during the war, because he was in this machine shop manufacturing business, with the post office machine shop's all turned over the war time output, and he worked very long hours and worked very hard,

09:30 and at the same time running a couple of charitable organisations they were still working for the Blind Institute and they had formed something called the Dad's Association, Fathers of people like me. Who's objective was to send comforts to the troops and things like that. And do whatever they could do for them. It was the Dad's Association and the wives tacked along for the fun of it. It

10:00 wasn't Dad's and Mum's it was Dad's. So, I got introduced back into all this kind of thing and they made a bit of a fuss, but I really wasn't in the mood for it, and

Why, what did you want to do?'

I don't know what I wanted to do. Probably winding down as you said. But,

10:30 started to put on a bit of weight because of mum's cooking, I came home – I went away 12.5 stone and came home just over 10. So I had lost a bit of weight, so I was quite healthy. Anyway, to cut a long story short, after the leave had expired and everything had gone off, I got a posting to Parkes as a pilot/gunnery instructor.

11:00 Now this happened on the 8th August 1945 which was VP [Victory in the Pacific] day, the day the Pacific War ended, so there I am instead of celebrating that, I am sitting on a train going to Parkes in New South Wales.

Missed out on 2 of the celebrations.

So I got no celebrations. So I ended up in Parkes.

11:30 **So you are at Parkes?**

So I am at Parkes. They didn't say much to me, they just sent me down to the flight and said you are a gunnery instructor, take these blokes up and show them air to air shooting. So I get in the back of a Wirraway, the Wirraway was very much like the Harvard, an Australian built version of this North American aircraft. And a

12:00 cockpit for and after and I get in the back and I find there is only a little bit of intercom no radio, and there's a telescope. And I am supposed to look in the telescope and see what this bloke is doing up front you see and this is an exercise in complete futility because I couldn't see what the hell he was doing. So he goes through all these attacks on the drogue and everything else and I say goodbye to him, I didn't know what to say to him.

12:30 So I did this in my log book I notice I did about 7 or 8 trips altogether with these guys and then I was up with one bloke one day and the undercarriage for the Wirraway was on the right hand side, and the lever went back and forwards, and so he is flying the thing and he can't get the undercarriage down, so I have a go and

13:00 I can't get it down either, so we mucked around with it for a while and it was not getting the undercarriage down we couldn't even shift the lever, there is an emergency bottle you can pull if your hydraulics fail but you have got to have the lever in the down position before you do it, and we couldn't move this lever come hell or high water. So, I thought oh well here we go again, and so

13:30 I just said to him, "I will fly it and we'll just belly land again". Beside the runway, there was a grass runway beside that and I put it on the grass. It all went alright, we just skidded and stopped. And then the CO of the station came out in his jeep and I climbed on the back of the jeep, with my parachute

14:00 and he turned around to me and he was very angry, he said, "That looked to me as though it was done on purpose". I said, "Well, it was actually". That was the last I heard from him. I put in for a – I put in for discharge and I was given it.

It doesn't sound like you were really enjoying what you were doing?

I didn't enjoy it, for a couple of reasons, I thought it was pretty futile because I wasn't going to contribute anything to these blokes

14:30 with a telescope in the back and I don't know in hell they ever trained anybody. The war was over, so what's the point in teaching guys to shoot, well of course I didn't think of permanent air force or Korean war or anything like that, I thought what's the point of this. Then my wife was coming out and I thought well I can't be here if she comes out on her own she doesn't know anybody and although my parents were very good.

15:00 So I thought I should be out of this service and that's what occurred, I got out in October. Sheila arrived in November or December, I am not quite sure now, it was on this ship called the Ontali and she came out with a lot of other brides and they came down around South Africa, that way, landed in Sydney and I went to meet her. Took her home to Melbourne and introduced her

15:30 to my family, and I think they thought more of her than they did of me, anyway. She got along very well, they got along famously, my father thought she was great and my mother too. I didn't have a job. I tried a couple of things, I was offered my old job back with Wunderlich, but it was just as a

16:00 clerk and not much future. Not much money, a lot less money than I was getting in the air force. I had been a flight lieutenant for a long time, and enjoying flying pay and all sorts of things, and that was pretty good money in those days. But anyway after I had messed around and tried a couple of things unsuccessfully I decided the only thing I could do was to go back to school on what they called the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme.

Why didn't you

16:30 **consider taking up a flying career?**

As a matter of fact it didn't occur to me. Preference would go to multi engine people and there were only two regular ones, there was Ansett and there was ANA, there was no TAA [Trans Australia Airlines] then which later became QANTAS. There was Ansett in

17:00 a small way and there was ANA Australian National Airlines, but I thought well the bomber command boys are going to get these jobs because they have been flying multi engines, large aircraft. It never occurred to me that single aircraft engine, a pilot would get a job. But as it turned out Dusty Lane who was one of our squadron pilots, he came just a little bit later than me, but he was with us for a long

17:30 time. He got a job with Ansett and eventually became Ansett's chief pilot. So he was single engine. But anyway, that didn't occur to me. I don't know that I would have liked it, it's a bit too regimented, you know you become a bus driver a bit. A lot of our Rhodesian Association members did take jobs with QANTAS. Harry Locke who was a highly decorated bomber pilot, he flew with QANTAS for many years, and several others did.

18:00 But anyway flying wasn't it, perhaps I should have tried but I didn't. I went back to – I went to the Royal

Melbourne Institute of Technology actually, because I didn't have the qualifications for university, I only had intermediate and that wasn't enough for university. So I went to Tech. Started out in chemical engineering, no particular reason, I

18:30 just thought well I will give this a go, but when I found out that chemistry and I didn't agree very much, I changed to civil because the subjects in first year were much the same. So I did a civil engineering diploma at RMIT [Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology].

Did you enjoy the study?

No, I found it pretty hard work. I had trouble staying awake most of the time. Some of our instructors – some were very good, but

19:00 others were immigrants who could hardly speak English some of them. They taught us statistics and I never understood one word he said. So we had to sort of manage to get 50 in that somehow. While all this was going on, my dad – we bought a block of land in North Balwyn for £150 and I bought that with my bit of deferred pay I had.

19:30 We could have bought the other one along side but we didn't have another £150 so I only bought one. The street wasn't made, it was just mud, and dad helped me, he was the prime mover we built a house there and we did it at weekends, and that was going on while I was studying, it took a couple of years. My dad got pretty sick towards the end. He had a bad heart problem,

20:00 so my brother-in-law, who later became my sister's husband, he wasn't married to her then, he helped me finish it. But it was a brick veneer house. But you were only allowed to build 1250 square feet under the building regulations, because materials were so short. So that gave us 2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, 1 kitchen and

20:30 a combined living and dining room, and that was it, not a big house, but adequate for us. And we thought it was great, it was a nice house, it was a brick veneer which most of the houses in Melbourne were and still are, with a timber frame inside a brick wall.

How long did you have to study for?

Well, it took me 3 years of full time study and we were only getting £5 a week allowance

21:00 it was all government money. So I was keeping a wife and a little later on, a couple of years later a child on that, and working all the holidays I could doing all sorts of jobs. But at the end of 3 years we were completely and hopelessly broke, we had a mortgage on the house to pay, a war service loan, and so I had to just get a job there wasn't any question. I had got through the first

21:30 3 years okay but I still had 1 year of full time study to do. I just had to do that part time which took me another 3 years part time, so I got a job and that was all there was to it. But the study was hard going because we had all these other things and

So where did you actually take a job?

I went back 46, 47, 48 so it must have been

22:00 49.

What were you doing?

I went into the Department of Works and Housing in the roads and aerodrome section as a draftsman. I wasn't much of a draftsman, I never have been. That was alright, the survey part was alright, I could understand the engineering, so I was there for about 12 months or so and then the air force was advertising for civil engineers, they couldn't get them, and the pay was pretty good,

22:30 I could go back in with a commission which I had before, and so I applied for that, and I got it, and there was another chap, a chap called Ken James, he had been a squadron leader during the war in charge of a Spitfire Squadron up her in Darwin, had a very good war record, and he was just slightly – he went back in ahead of me, and he was senior to me, so the 2 of us joined pretty much at the same time.

23:00 And we went into the works branch and that began a whole new career in the service. I had finished my qualifications, in my last year I finished my final year part time, and then I was working in RAAF headquarters in Victoria Barracks in what they called the W2 Section under the director of works and building and a man named Group Captain Dale, who had a very distinguished

23:30 war career with the air force construction squadron as a civil engineer, and he was a fine chap. Anyway so we're – we had sold the house in North Balwyn, through lack of money, and bought a house – which my wife hated out in Dandenong. In order to just get a little more money, and anyway one day I was talking to the boss,

24:00 Group Captain Dale, about something and he said, "We are looking for somebody to go to Momote" and Momote is up on Manus Island, up in New Guinea. And I sort was getting a message about all this, and I asked, "Are married quarters available"? "Oh yeah". So I didn't say anything else, I went back home to

talk to Sheila about it, by this time we had 2 kids, and the youngest was only about

24:30 3 months old and the eldest – Janice was about 5 I suppose. I told her what it was all about, and said we'll be there for a couple of years, and she said, "Yeah, okay". So off we went, and we – my father ha died in the meantime. He was only

25:00 53 he had very bad trouble. Today they would have fixed it. In those days they didn't know what was wrong with him. They called it a coronary occlusion. Of course if he'd been able to have a bypass all would have been well. But they didn't do those things then, and dad unfortunately passed away. So anyway off we went to Manus. My sister was still home.

25:30 She was with my mother so it wasn't too bad. So at Manus Island it was a new world altogether. It had been an enormous American Naval Base during the war, and has a magnificent harbour. The airfield is out on the little strip called Los Negros and we had nothing.

26:00 The whole base was running on stuff that was left over from the Americans, this was 1952 or thereabouts. Yeah 1952 it must have been. But we were still living on what was left over from the Yanks. If you wanted a refrigerator, you went into the jungle and found one. The fridge we had came out of the jungle. We were living in a concert hut right on the beach, facing the Bismark Sea and it was covered in

26:30 sea spray the whole time, and the old concert hut was just rusting around our ears it was just falling apart. The whole base was like that. We had several concert huts along there, and they were occupied by families, and the troops were living in much the same sort of thing. For us going up there as a construction unit was to rebuild the base, they had prefabricated buildings built from Huon Pine in Tasmanian

27:00 pine, which they thought was the most suitable timber for those areas. And we started putting all these buildings together, we built a new mess built all new facilities for the troops. Also, build a new airstrip. So I was up there on my own for a while, running this detachment, and there was a base commander, there was a RAAF base and we were the detachment which was sent up to do this work. And so that was alright, and

27:30 eventually more people arrived from the ACS [Airfield Construction Squadron] and more senior people than me took over including Ken James, and also a man called Nobby Ling he was the CO, a man I got to know pretty well in later years. But – so at that stage there was a naval base over at Lombron, which is about 8 or 9 miles away, which was on Seeadler Harbour and

28:00 that was called HMAS Tarangow, the naval station, with a naval officer in charge, and a whole group of navy people. And they had their problems too, they had a Department of Works man working there and building things for them, and he was being transferred and they needed somebody else and somehow I got the guernsey and so I was attached

28:30 then to the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] for 18 months. And I had a naval works party and about 100 people and we had some New Guinea natives working for us, and there was also some Jap [Japanese] war criminals, because they had the war criminal trials there, and a number of them were hung, on Manus, and we still had about I am not sure how many, probably about 250 of them incarcerated,

29:00 and imprisoned on Manus Island. They used to – the chap who used to make my coffee in the office was a double murderer, he was the most gentle bloke I have ever seen in my life, but he was there for 2 murders. But anyway that was the set up and we built the wharves, the new navy hospital, put in a new installation into the powerhouse,

29:30 extended all the powerhouse, new reticulation water supply, new electrical reticulation. We did all that. It was an interesting job. I quite enjoyed. I got on well with the navy people. I had a land rover of theirs and I used to commute from where we lived at Manus and across to Los Negros every day, across to

30:00 Ambon [Island] every day. As I said 8 or 10 miles. Then there was a civil administration, that was at Lorengau, which is about 20 miles along the coast. And the rest of it you couldn't get into there was 70 odd miles of it heavily timbered and the native population, but I think the civil administer used to do a lot with boats and walking, but as far as roads were concerned that was it. And we spent a bit over

30:30 2 years there. My elder daughter Janice, she started school there, she went to school at a place called Nut Point [?], where the instructor or the teacher was the wife of an old chap called Snowy Rhodes, who had been a coast watcher during the war and had a remarkable war record. But she was the teacher and she had this little group of kids, probably about a dozen of them or 15. And that was where Jan started school.

Do you think

31:00 **that your experience of being a fighter pilot actually helped you in relation to going out there and doing something that was a little bit different like going to Manus Island?**

I think it put me in a position I couldn't work for anybody else, and I still can't because everywhere I had been, I was given free reign, and the air force once you got in an aeroplane, you were your own boss.

31:30 And that's the way it worked. Very little discipline on the squadron, I didn't need it and it wasn't there. You just discipline, you got on with the job and you did it. There was no parade bashing, or anything like that.

Did you ever consider joining up as a career?

In what?

As a fighter pilot?

No. Because once again I saw no need for it, the Korean you see, came 6 or 7 or 8 years later, and by that time I had

32:00 embarked on this other business and I was committed to that, so flying was not on the agenda. As a works officer I couldn't even get in a plane, they wanted a works officer more than they wanted pilots. So they weren't going to let a crumby old works officer just fly around for fun. That wasn't their idea at all.

Did you give it a go did you?

I tried a couple of times. I wanted to fly, but no.

32:30 So there weren't any aircraft up on Manus, it was just a base and the only aircraft that flew in was a QANTAS DC3 from New Guinea which flew in vegetables once a week. And the food wasn't all that good. But the kids grew up on it. As I said, we lived on the beach, Janice, my younger daughter was only 3 months old when we took her up there. They both developed

33:00 measles and they had to go down to hospital in Townsville.

At what point did you actually move back to Australia?

Well after about it must have been about 1955, we were up there for over 2 years, and I was still with the navy all that after 6 months service, I was with the navy – and then I got posted to England because the

33:30 works branch used to run an exchange, or an educational system where they posted people to England for 2 years, this was part of Dale's objective in trying to keep – because he had a great deal of trouble trying to keep engineer's in the works branch. And one of the incentives was the fact that this trip to England was on, you had to sign a bond, it was a 2 year trip and you had to sign a

34:00 5 year bond, and that was another part of the story, but the idea was that you went to the experimental – military engineering experimental establishment down in Christchurch for 12 months, and they were doing work building airfields developing various techniques for preparing airfields, soil stabilisation and that kind of thing, bailey bridges and goodness knows what, and that you were supposed to get as much education

34:30 there as you could. And that was a 12 month stint, and then you were to come back to London and spend 6 months at the road research laboratory in Harmonsworth and 6 months at RAF Headquarters in Australia House. That was the program. And that was to take 2 years. Well, it had some attractions for me of course, because I could take my wife back to see her

35:00 family, see her parents, and they could see the grandchildren they hadn't seen. And so we went back from Manus to Melbourne for about 5 weeks, and then went first class on the Himalaya to England, nobody flew in those days, everybody went by ship, so this is all great, I couldn't complain about any of this. So we went and rented a flat down in Christchurch,

35:30 near Bournemouth, that's where the military experimental place was. Janice went to school right along side. She was next door to some private school, and she just went through the hedge and was late in the morning. Pauline still wasn't of school age. So I spent 12 months there and came back to Harmonsworth, sorry to Morton in Surry we rented a house in Morton, I went to – I drove,

36:00 I bought a car in England, a Ford Zephyr. And we – I commuted every day to Harmonsworth to the road research lab. Where I learned all sorts of things about building roads. Actually it all rubbed off, and in the meantime I went and looked at the Goodwin Plant where they were building some crushers for the RAAF, mobile crushing plants.

36:30 And so that was alright and I am in Morton and I have been at Harmonsworth for about 3 months, so we are about 15 months into this trip, and I got a telegram from my boss. It was freezing cold, it was January, there was ice – this is a little house, it had 3 bedrooms, it had everything in it. But it was only a pocket handkerchief. It had a garage but I couldn't even get the Zephyr in the garage.

37:00 But a nice little house, everything was perfect, it was like a doll's house. But anyway we were upstairs, I was in bed, I remember, and it was early in the morning, and the bell rang, and my younger daughter Pauline got this telegram poked through the door and brought it up to me and I read it, and it said, "Will you go to Malaya, we need somebody in Malaya will you go". I looked out the window and I said, "Could I go to Malaya". So we didn't

37:30 go home, we went to Malaya and we were there for another 2.5 years.

It certainly gave you a lot of opportunities and choice?

Of course it did. And it was – I was – I went to the 2 airfield construction squadron who were building in Malaya, Butterworth Airfield in Malaya. And I became senior works officer, which meant I had total control of construction and Nobby Ling was the CO who was the chap that I mentioned earlier.

38:00 But he gave me a free hand and that was great, and never worried me. So I had this good job to do and we did a lot of good work. Strangely enough everything I learnt in England paid off. We were using new techniques which none of the blokes on the squadron had seen before. I knew a bit about it, and I was able to help in that way. So what I had learnt in England paid off.

38:30 A lot greater than I had expected it to. I had the first mechanical concrete spreader and finisher in the RAAF, they were available elsewhere but as far as we were concerned the first they had. First cour… pavers, the first concrete batch plant, we had the first big crushing plants, we had a big quarrying

39:00 operation which we couldn't handle because we didn't have the right equipment. Because when you are in the services, you only get a certain establishment of gear. A lot of good gear, but there were some things we didn't have. We were deficient in batch plant equipment, we were deficient in concrete mixing equipment. The crushers we had although they were new they were too small for the job. Because I have done a lot of crushing since, and I know a lot more about it now than I did then.

39:30 **Was it actually an airstrip that you were trying to construct in Malaya?**

Yeah, 10,000 foot. A completely modern airfield which later became a base for RAAF operations in Malaysia. Enormous hard stands, the whole shooting match. And as I said it was a 2.5 year job. It was the first of the really big airfields the RAAF were building. And because of it, we

40:00 needed much bigger facilities than ever before. You see during wartime, the aircraft that flew in the wartime had low tyre pressures, had low wheel loads and you can build an airstrip up there out of coral in a matter of a week or two. They were only 1,000 or 2,000 feet long at the most, the bomber strips are 2,000 feet long.

40:30 And the pavements are only 6 inches thick. Now, with the modern airfields we were building in Butterworth and Darwin, and in many other places since, we are building 10,000 feet runways, we've got enormous concrete aprons which have to be divided, at each end of the runway to take jet blast, the centre of the runway is flexible paving, but those pavements are 3 foot thick. Because

41:00 with modern aircraft you have got tyre pressures up to 150 –180 psi you have got wheel loads, well think of the wheel load on a bomber, on a big jumbo and these airfields we were building would take a jumbo. So Butterworth was the first one being built up there, and we were using all these new techniques, we were using new concrete

41:30 spreading techniques. I managed through talking to Group Captain Dale, who managed with a lot of his old friends with the department of works, all in the wartime together, all civil engineers. He managed to get an old cour…. paver out of the department of works and shipped that up to us and we did all the concrete work with that and re-organised the batch plant, we put in a new asphalt plant which none of the blokes had ever used before, you know the stuff they put on the roads today

42:00 with the machines. First one in the RAAF

42:03 End of tape

Tape 10

00:30 **How significant was the construction of Butterworth to you in your life?**

Very significant because it was the first big civil engineering job that I had got my hands on. The work up on Manus was also very interesting because it was very – and I was on my own, I had complete charge of al the navy work, and although I was welcomed by the navy and treated very well there, the works party was a little group on its

01:00 own and they were mine. So the work that we did and we had to battle for all sorts of things, because in those days equipment was still fairly close to the wall, up there in terms of time, I mean 4 or 5 years, 6 years was nothing. And the equipment shortages throughout Australia was still quite severe.

01:30 So, that was interesting, that was good. Butterworth was the first big job that I had ever got my teeth into and I enjoyed every minute of it. I enjoyed my whole time with ACF. The works department because they were a great crowd to be with, the work was always interesting, and I couldn't really complain about anything. Anyway,

02:00 Butterworth as I said was a very, very interesting job. We had – we were running our own quarrying, we were producing our own aggregates. The crushing plant, because it didn't have the production we really needed, and one of the problems the primary crusher, the first stage of those crushers, and they are in 3 stages, getting smaller and smaller all the time. The primary crusher jaw is only a 13 x 18 which is very, very small, and we were in granite, which seems to break very big.

02:30 So out in the quarry we had a gang of Chinese women working under contract and these little women had spalling hammers with bamboo handles gloves on and scarves and hats and they used to work in the sun, day in and day out and they used to get about, something like I think it was somewhere around

03:00 what would be today about 20 cents a yard. A cubic yard, to break that stone down into small enough spalls to go into our crusher which was a 12 inch spall, and load them by hand, onto a truck. And they did that right through, we had to adopt different blasting methods in the quarry, because their drilling equipment just wasn't good enough to do what we had to do. And you know I am talking hundreds of thousands of tonnes, I am not just talking about a couple of truckloads.

03:30 We put very nearly a million tonne of material into that airfield, so it was no small job. But anyway that was Butterworth and we managed to get it finished, and finished on time, and everybody was very happy. My – Jan had gone to the RAAF school at Butterworth,

04:00 and she had been to school at Morton in Surry in England, and down everywhere. By the time Jan was 11 she had been to 9 different schools around the world. And my younger daughter started school at Butterworth. And so by the time Butterworth had finished and I was asked where I would like to go, I was given an option. I thought well I had better settle down a bit, and I thought I would like to go back to Melbourne, I would like to go back to Melbourne, that meant going back to headquarters.

04:30 By this stage I had been promoted 2 or 3 times and so they gave me the job as deputy director of works. Group Captain Dale was still there as director. And – although I was very grateful to get that job, we were living in rented accommodation in Glen Iris in Melbourne, because we hadn't anywhere to live, and the rent was being paid by the RAAF. On an interim basis

05:00 until we got somewhere else. That wasn't very satisfactory, and I really didn't like the work at headquarters although I admired and had nothing but respect for my boss, I really liked him, because he was a fine man, and a very dedicated man in the air force. It's a real public service deal there, you write a lot of memos, and deal with treasury and do all sorts of

05:30 things like that. Although it's a service establishment, that's what happens in service headquarters. So I stayed there for about 12 months I suppose. And I still hadn't worked out my 5 year bond. But I saw this job advertised for a quarrying company in Melbourne that suited me down to the ground and I thought – so I applied and I got the job. I had to go and explain myself to my

06:00 boss that I wanted to resign. Which upset him quite a bit, but he supported me to the hilt. The service said, but hey you have still got your bond, and I said but look I only did 15 months for the 2 months I was supposed to be there, and according to me I worked out the bond, I have done 3 years. So we had a little dispute about that I had some superannuation pay coming and I said alright well take the super and that'll pay the

06:30 bond out and we'll call it quits. But they gave me a little send off they had a mess down there on St Kilda Road, it's probably still there the officers mess in Victoria Barracks, and they gave me a little send off, and I said then what I meant to – I enjoyed – by that time I had done about 14.5 years, in the service. Total, world war two

07:00 and the other, and I said, "I enjoyed very minute of it". I said, "I am not leaving because I don't like the service, I just felt it was something I had to do, settle down my family and get a little bit of stability into their life, and so that's the way it went. And that was the end of my service career, and as I said it was a very, very good

07:30 experience for me, I got nothing but good out of it. From any stage of it. I don't hesitate to say it.

Sounds great. How important have the associations related to your squadron been to you in your post-war life?

They are important, they have kept us in touch. Not so much personal, a lot of them are dead now of course. Most of

08:00 my friends are dead, I don't have many left. But you know, the newsletter only comes out about every 3 months or every 6 months and you read about what's going on, and you read about the ones who have died, but you get a little bit of information about people you know, and it's a good way to keep in touch. The 451 Squadron association and the RAAF Rhodesia Association are very good in that

08:30 respect. And I have got friends in both of them. And then of course there's the ACS, which – a lot of the ACS are post-war people and a lot of them are a lot younger than me, and there's a fairly active ACS Branch down in Mandurah but the airfield construction squadron was all disbanded about

09:00 round about the 70s. The last job they did was at Learmonth at Exmouth, and as it happened I was in business at that time in Exmouth and I supplied all the crushed rock to 5 ACS, it was No. 5 ACS up at

Learmonth. But that was the last job they did and they were disbanded there. But ACS worked all over the place. Built most of the major bases in Australia

09:30 now, Learmonth, Curtin, no Curtin was done under contract, Learmonth, Tyndall, Darwin Williamtown, Amberley, Sale, all ACS jobs. And they were in existence before a lot of those dr… but they all had to be brought up to this modern standard which was required. To service modern aircraft.

10:00 Most of them extended. I had a bit to do with airfields in my later years.

What did you have to do with airfields in your later years?

Well, I joined this quarrying company in Melbourne, and I was with them for 4 years, and in that time the kids went to school in Melbourne, and we had a house in Glen Iris, but I

10:30 once again I – I was working – I was the chief engineer at this quarry but it was a limited company, and it had been formed by a man who was a civil engineer, but he was also a bit of a one man band and he had his own group of loyal workers around him who had been with him right from day 1. I had difficulty fitting in to this organisation, we opened a couple of the biggest quarries in Melbourne while I was there, Tullamarine, Montrose.

11:00 We were in Readymix concrete and we had about 75 agitators on the road. We were into asphalt hotmix stuff, and all that stuff. We did that during this period. But I wasn't altogether happy at the end of the 4 year period, not that I – I could have stayed there, but I was tapped on the shoulder by another organisation, who said, "We've got this contract at north west cape".

11:30 They were civil people building roads and stuff. "And we need someone to go over there and run the company". So they offered me double the money I was getting. So I went home and talked to Sheila, and I had the wonder lust again of course. It was another chance. So she agreed, long suffering Sheila agreed.

12:00 She stayed in Melbourne to see out Jan's matriculation year, at the college she was going to, and I came over here and I think I was on my own for about 6 months or so. But I went straight up to the northwest cape, and we lived – this is Exmouth which didn't exist, the town of Exmouth didn't exist, we built it. And we worked on this BLF project [Business Leaders Forum]

12:30 for the United States navy, and we did all the civil works we ran the quarry we ran the concrete plants, we built the roads we put in the services we dug the holes and dewatered the holes. Most of what's up there is under ground. These towers are all much taller than the Eiffel Tower, the tallest one is 1170 feet, and the others are all over 1,000 there were 13 of them. They are held done by these anchor blocks because it's all cyclone country. Have you

13:00 seen it, then you know what I am talking about.

I don't mind hearing you describe it though, because I am hearing it in a lot more detail than I otherwise…?

Anyway, we were – I lived in a tent outside what's now the entrance to the navy base, that's where I woke up one morning in August 1963 covered in red dust. So I ran that job for a bit over 5 years, and we weren't the main contractor but we had all

13:30 civil works but we were the main contractor, for both sections, the second section of the job was where they built the housing and they developed Exmouth town and that was – the first one was Hardiman Monier Hutchison, Monier Hutchison were also related to this company that I was running, called GH Reid, who had that section of it, Hutchison & Monier were doing the structural work, the pier and the tower erection. But Hardiman

14:00 was one of the 4 biggest contractors in the world because under the joint venture agreement the work had to be done by a joint venture and this is the government agreement between the United States and Australia. The work had to be undertaken by a joint venture of an Australian and American partner. With the American partner holding 75% and the Australians holding 25% well Monier had the 25% and Hutchison and GH Reid

14:30 were more or less subsidiaries to some extent of Monier, that's how we got the contract for the civil works. So that's okay. We are about 3 months into the job and Monier suddenly go broke world wide finish. Which really put the cat among the pigeons because there was 75% of the contract people gone, and then the next shock came from Monier when they found that under the bonding arrangements, because they were bonded on performance,

15:00 and bonded on several ways but they were jointly and severally bound with the prime contractor the 75% guy to finish this contract. So Monier who were a public company and quite big in those days, but not big enough for this they had 2 options, the bonding company said we'll take you over and run your company, or you can do it yourself. So they did it themselves and staggered our way through this contract.

15:30 And Monier did a great job, but as I said it was 5 years in the making, and as I said there were a lot of problems associated with it, we got a very, very heavy cyclone in March 1964 called Katie, 27th March

which flooded everything in sight, and damaged practically everything in sight. We got 12 inches of rain in 12 hours on that one. Very high

16:00 winds. And not only that Exmouth Gulf, the wind came straight down Exmouth Gulf and Exmouth Gulf had a high tide at the same time. So the whole of the flat lands out the back of Learmonth airfield and everything flooded. Anyway that's just one of the things, we had several cyclones later on but that was one of the worst of then.

And hence you retired to Western Australia?

Stayed in Western Australia ever since. Came to Western Australia in 1963

16:30 Sheila and the girls came in 1964, we built this house in 1964. She's lived in it ever since, and I have been away half the time I suppose, because when GH Reid finally were taken over by another big company and they went out of business here, I decided that I would like to stay here and I opened my own business called Specified Services, and I bought the

17:00 concrete batch plant up at Exmouth, you might have even seen it. Well that was ours and started from that. From there this small company, we worked all over the Pilberra we had a permanent depot in Karratha and ran quarries and contract crushing, worked for all the mining companies. 25 years of it. 20 odd years of it. But what I was going to say about airfields,

17:30 while GH Reid this company, we had a great earth moving fleet, we had scrapers and dozers and graders and goodness knows what, and because this project was running so far behind schedule, for no reason that was our fault, other factors, structural steel and all sorts of things. The pier was meant to be built in 6 months and took 3.5 years.

18:00 Because of the rough conditions, they decided to build it the wrong way off the water and they couldn't really it. But they managed it after a long time. But anyway, I had no work for all this gear, so I started contracting out here, we built Marooma Dam. We extended Perth Airport, we put 3,000 feet on to the runway of Perth Airport. I built Gin Gin Airport completely for the RAAF that's for their

18:30 training airfield north of Pearce. We built about 40 miles of the northwest highway up in the northwest. Not far from Karratha and quite a few jobs like that. We built the Hamilton Hill Reservoir. PWD [Public Works Department]. And we did all this just to fill in time. We never made any money much, that was a big problem, we were

19:00 battling for dough the whole time.

I would assume they would be quite profitable ventures?

You see…

They are very prominent structures now.

This is the big thing about civil engineering generally and construction, that you do into tenders, it's a tender process, so you cut your price as much as you can to get the job and the margins are not very high. And

19:30 if you run into a bit of trouble, and practically every job they have got – any job that anybody has runs into a little bit of trouble somewhere, and then that profit margin starts to come down a bit.

Did you join the RSL [Returned and Services League] George?

No. I am not really an organisation man you know, I am not in the bowls club or those kinds of things. I am in the Air Force Association

20:00 which is the air force end of the RSL anyway or similar organisation, and that was enough for me, but apart from that I had been away from home, well since I came over here, I had enough an office when I was running my own business – well even when I was running GH Reid we still had an office down here in Perth. But I was away up there on the site for most of the week

20:30 and then I would come down here and work in the office and go back Monday morning up there. But then I got my own business, Specified Services, and one thing led to another, and I was very lucky – when I was running GH Reid I had about 5 or 600 people working for me, and I never really felt I had control of the situation, because I knew none of these people when I came over,

21:00 they were all new to me, I was just placed in on top of the heap and make it work. But, it was very difficult to control and also with these jobs we were getting, oh yes we had a crushing job out at Canna. [?] They were all spread out all over the place, and keeping control of it was very difficult. I had some engineers working for me. But I always felt that

21:30 once you left the place you lost control of it, it didn't matter what you were doing. So, that worried me a bit so when I started my own small company, I vowed to stay small and I never directly employed anymore than 30 or 40 people altogether. We had a few contractors working on cartage work for us carting our products, but we stayed mainly in the

22:00 quarrying and crushing business and pre mix concrete, we stayed in concrete in Exmouth and nowhere else, so I was supplying companies everywhere else. Supplying Pioneer and Karratha and Bells and supplied most of the materials around Karratha, we had a couple of very big quarries there. Ballast for the railway lines for the iron ore companies and crushing for the iron ore itself. We had a very big contract just towards the

22:30 end at Newman and another one at Hammersley. We did a lot for work for Cliffs River and I had quarries up as far north as Derby and Broome, I had a quarry there. We supplied stuff to [Department of] Main Roads and people like that. So that was the work we were doing but I was very fortunate to have a loyal band of about 6 key people. Who I knew – they were just – who did the work hands on.

23:00 But I knew that I could walk away and they would never ever let me down. They are still my good friends, 1 or 2 of them have died but they were just great people. And that's the virtue of having a small organisation. I had a small office here in west Perth because a lot of the tender work is done down here. The head offices of the mining companies are down here MRD [Mineral Resource Development Act] and everybody, but I have been

23:30 away, I was away one week in two, up north and that's where I have spent the last 25 years. So Sheila has spent a lot of time at home alone. And now I am trying to just make up for it a bit if I can.

I am sure that was difficult for your relationship?

Well you know, she's a real brick in that regard and she has battled on. She has done a lot of things she

24:00 shouldn't have had to do, like painting. When I left Melbourne and came over here I bought her a lawn mower.

I am sure she appreciated it.

Oh yeah, she's never let me forget it.

Probably not the most romantic gift you have ever given her.

So that's about it, the northwest is a long, long story but you would be here all night if you go into that.

How do you celebrate Anzac Day George?

24:30 Not very much. I only marched on 4 or 5 occasions, because as it happens being away so much immediately after the war, apart from the fact that first 4 or 5 years I had no inclination to march as a matter of fact, but we went away then for

25:00 6.5 years. We went to Manus, England and Malaya. So we sort of were out of the swim so far as that went, and then after 4 years in Melbourne I am back over here and I know nobody and the organisation for the marching 451 Squadron didn't even get a mention. There are very few 451 people over here.

25:30 Then the ACS became a bit more active, and they have asked me to march a few times, in fact for my sins they nave asked me to lead the march on Sunday, but that might be my swan-song I don't know. They also got a bit active when it was the 60th anniversary of the formation of the ACS' last year, so that was a special occasion, no that was 2002 not last year,

26:00 I marched that year with them. And also they had this reunion, national reunion over here which was held in Mandurah and I couldn't attend there because Sheila can't go anywhere because of this bad back, she can't drive and she can't sit in the car for more than about 5 minutes, but when I say she can't drive, it's a physical problem, she's really a very good driver, but I have to do the driving

26:30 now. So I got involved into making the – they put a plaque in over at the Air Force Association for that and I got involved in making the speech for that. So that's about 4 or 5 marches is my – and one or two dawn services. We used to go to the dawn service, that's with Phil Taylor and his wife, both of them now

27:00 dead, Phil was the guy I mentioned had the Witches Cauldron restaurant. His daughter and son-in-law are still there. So we are running out of friends and relatives, a few relatives about the place, nieces and nephews and people like that, but so we're sort of winding down a bit.

What do you think about on Anzac

27:30 **Day?**

It's not emotional. I like to see the young people take an interest, it's why I am doing this. If it wasn't for that I wouldn't do it. I would just think that I had been sitting here talking about myself and I don't really – although I appear to enjoy it, I don't.

28:00 I have never talked like this to anybody in 40 or 50 or 60 years. So you are it. And there are some things there I know my wife has never heard. So I think it's an occasion that should be kept up for – because I think there is some Australian history there that should never be forgotten. We don't have much, we don't have much in the way of

28:30 heritage and unless we build something like this we are never ever going to be the nation we should be.

We've got to hang on to that and remember what happened and why it happened, and to some extent how senseless it was. We've got to find a way to stop it from happening again, but you have got to find that cohesion. Now in world war two which I experienced,

29:00 the difference in the country is incredible. Everybody was involved in this activity. We had 7 million people in Australia. We put 1 million people into uniform. They didn't all go overseas, but there were 1 million people serving in uniform out a population of 7 million. On today's count we would have an army of what

29:30 3 million or 4 million. In fact our total services number about 60,000 and that's putting the navy, army and air force together. So we are not in a position to fight many wars, but I don't – I am not advocating that at all. I am pretty unhappy about the situation we are in at the moment. East Timor was right, I think Iraq was wrong, nonetheless we are there and we have got to support

30:00 the people we have got there. We can't back out now, we have got to conduct ourselves in the right way and support our servicemen. I thought that Vietnam was a mistake but I thought what happened to our Vietnam vets [veterans] was absolutely shocking, should never have happened, because it wasn't their fault, because they went and did what they were told to do by our government. And that's what the armed forces have to do. The day

30:30 that the armed forces don't do what the government tells them or what the police force doesn't do that the government tells them, then you have got a Nazi Germany or something else. So that's what has got to be done, and we have got to hang on to Anzac Day as long as is possible to be remembered. Now, there aren't too many world war two vets left, there's a few, certainly practically none World War 1, might be one left somewhere, but that's about it.

31:00 And even the Vietnam boys are getting older. The Korean vets certainly are on the way out. But it's not the war that you remember, it's the mateship, the feeling of national unity, the pride that you had in your own country and the fact that your country meant something to you and that flag that we're all arguing about meant something to you too, and it still meant something and it would break my heart to see it changed.

31:30 I think it might be changed. And I am absolutely convinced that the country must become a republic fairly soon. But I also think that we should handle it in a way which practically preserves the existing situation where we have governor's and governor generals. The governor general might be called the President, but it is a non-political thing. And that's important too. If we let our presidency

32:00 become politicised the way the American one is, then the only people who would be running the country will be the rich and powerful. And that isn't what we want in this country. Although of course we are getting a much richer community and the wealth is accumulating in the hands of a few, we know that, and we know there is multi nationalism, and all those things which I don't altogether agree with, but they are happening,

32:30 but we have got to maintain our own way of life as long as we possibly can. And unless we are very careful we are going to go the wrong way. So, getting back to Anzac Day, all Anzac Day in one way is the foundation of this Australia I am talking about. So that's what Anzac Day means to me, and it's not an emotional thing it's emotional to the extent that I

33:00 am emotional about my country. It's emotional to the extent that I remember a lot of good friends and a lot of good mates. But there's nothing I can do about that. I didn't cry of it when they died, and I don't cry over it now. Because that was just the luck of the game. It was something that happened, we knew it might happen and I had been given 60 years of borrowed time, and I appreciated it. The

33:30 other thing I like about Anzac Day is to see the young kids and I see them coming out more and more, and I think their parents are to be congratulated for that, young parents who are bringing those kids along, because I think that that gives them appreciation. Some unity of country, some sense that they belong to something worth while. If you go to America, you may have been there have you?

34:00 Every American is American from here to his boot stops to his top. Now there are some disadvantages with that as far as Americans are concerned, because they are a very powerful nation and perhaps they lead us into a big of trouble. An American never questions his own country. He is completely and utterly American. Now, in Australia we tend to knock things. And we've

34:30 got to try and not do that if we can. The politics sicken me, because all we do is snipe at one another and we should be thinking about building this country, what we are going to turn them into. We've got big problems, we have environmental problems we have got all sorts of problems. We are only 20 million people and we cant' complain about taxes but we live very, very well. But the infrastructure of looking after a country the size of the United States, and that's what it is, building roads, ports and airfields.

35:00 It puts a much bigger burden on us, as well as health and education. So, but we've got to do these things. Our grandfathers pioneered the country, and they did it with horses and drays and they did it the hard way. We've got a lot more capacity but we've sort of lost the knack of it a bit, we're a bit more intent on filling our own little nest egg and not looking beyond

35:30 what's out there. And what's out there is salt, and miles and miles and thousands of kilometres of salt, which is going to give us great trouble. There's a shortage of water, in this part of the world, which has to be – power is going to become a problem, because no matter what you do, if you keep on selling that gas and oil overseas, in a hundred years time you won't have any. And you need gas and oil not just to generate power, but to make chemicals,

36:00 a lot of pharmaceuticals and medicines, are made from this. There are so many things, fertilisers are made out of this. We are running down all our resources and Australia is living on this, so you've got to find alternative methods of generating power. I feel myself that every house in Perth should have a solar panel on the roof for generating electricity. That would solve our electricity problems straight away.

36:30 Because you can get a big subsidy now if you do it, but there are still not enough, they're only about half way there in terms of money. $15,000 would give a house solar power. Now that solves our power problem. Just that. Our cars should be running on solar power or alternatively we should be up there running tidal power in Derby. There's enough power there in tidal power to feed the whole of Australia.

37:00 But you can't reticulate it because of the voltage drop on land lines you can't transfer electricity all that far away. You can turn it into hydrogen and bring it down here and run the cars on hydrogen clean fuel, an inexhaustible supply. You know, nuclear power, which is a dirty word. In fact if you look at it we have more trouble with coal, and

37:30 oil a fossil fuels than they have ever had with nuclear power. The United States navy and the British navy have had nuclear ships and the Russians as well running around all over the world for 40 years. What trouble has there been, may be 1 or 2 incidents. In the meantime we've sunk oil tankers, they've polluted shores, we've lost hundreds of thousands of people in coalmines, nobody blinks an eye.

38:00 We could be having clean power, nuclear power. That would solve our desalinisation problem. Supply the water that we need, and it could also generate all the power that you need in this country if we don't take the option that I just mentioned. And if we don't do something about desalinisation that's going to take over the whole of our agricultural areas and we won't have any food.

38:30 So all these genetically modified foods, we are crazy, what are we afraid of. Every cow and sheep in the country has been genetically modified and we eat all the meat. You know they have cross bed, they've done all sorts of things, and we are not using our heads. We get emotionally involved in things and it is led by the media to a large extent. But people like

39:00 yourselves have to stop and think, because you are the guys that are going to do it. Anyway I am sorry about all that I didn't mean to preach

That's alright, you have raised a lot of interesting points there George. I was just going to say to you, do you think the fact that younger Australians – the fact that Anzac Day is growing in popularity that that might indicate that younger Australians are identifying with the men and women who not only fought for Australia's freedom and served the country during wartime,

39:30 **but actually also built this country?**

It's difficult you see, you don't remember World War 11, I don't remember world war one. And unless you have really experienced that it's hard to get it across. What I would like for younger people to grab is an idea more than anything. That Anzac represents the people

40:00 largely, a generation, particularly world war one, who virtually pioneered this country. And they've given us freedom, those world wars, although they were fought and in some cases, and certainly in World War 1's case and not for a very good reason, and with awful results. But World War 11 was, in my opinion justified. Because we would have been speaking Japanese or German by now.

40:30 So, it gave us the country which we have now, and I think that more and more Anzac Day just becomes a symbol, it becomes a symbol of Australia. It's what the country is all about, about everybody pulling together and about mateship. Football teams and all sorts of things. That's how I would like to see it, they become to appreciate their own country,

41:00 to love what they've got and be prepared to do everything they can to make it better. The Anzac spirit is what has to be conveyed to them. I don't think they have got to spend a lot of time shedding a lot of tears, they can't do it because they haven't experienced it and it's like, you don't cry about somebody that you don't know. It's the idea they have got to get.

41:30 **Thanks very much George, for putting your experiences and beliefs on the record.**

Yeah well, it's the only time I have ever done it, so I thought I would bash your ears for a couple of minutes.

41:50 End of tape