Australians at War Film Archive

Ian Innes - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:35 **Mr Innes, thankyou very much for agreeing to be a part of the archive. What I wanted to do first of all is ask you if you could give a very brief summary of the main points in your life.**

Pleasure. Yes. I was born on the 28th January, 1922 at Waverley War Memorial Hospital in Sydney.

01:00 My parents were in business in Papua New Guinea, and I spent my early childhood up there. I was actually at three places, in Misima [Island], Samurai, and Russell Island. In fact my second name is Russell. I developed malaria of course, and some of the other tropical diseases,

01:30 and my parents decided that they would arrange for me to go back to Australia and stay for some years with my uncle and aunt. The same happened to my sisters, because it was a fairly wild old country out in those days and the medical situation wasn't all that good, but I was fortunate that my mother had been a matron of a hospital in Fiji.

02:00 She actually met my father, who was a WW1 soldier and they got married, but the people that I stayed with were very good, they were like foster parents. They didn't have any children and he was the headmaster at the school, in the New South Wales Education Department.

02:30 My aunt was also a teacher, so my childhood, really, was in their hands. I actually had gone to I think seven schools before I went into the services, because they used to get moved all the time.

03:00 My first school was Collarenebri, which is right out in the northwest of New South Wales. Then I went to a little place called Delungra, which is near Inverell. From there I went to Springwood in the Blue Mountains. I then went to Lithgow, I went to Lithgow High School. I went to Penrith High School.

03:30 I went to Wollongong High School, and then I finally ended up going to Sydney High School. It was Sydney High School that I really became interested in languages, and I became quite fluent in French. I had a very unusual French Master, he was a brilliant teacher, and he'd actually

04:00 been a gold medallist and was sent to the Sorbonne in Paris. His idea of teaching French was to let the class have access to these particular writings of Balzac and people like that. In fact I spent a lot of time reading the unexpurgated versions of Balzac, which is all about the old Mother Superior and the convents and the antics that went on with the nuns,

04:30 and all that. It was very exciting stuff to us, and that made us take a very keen interest in the language.

Mr Innes, I might just interrupt and ask you if you could give just very briefly of where you were in the war, and what you did afterwards, and we'll go back and talk about your schooling and the influences in your life in detail.

Yes, well I went through the Initial Training School

05:00 at Bradfield Park in Sydney, when I joined the air force and selected for aircrew. I was there for some time waiting in what they call a pool, an embarkation pool waiting for the ship that would take us to Canada, under the Commonwealth Air Training Scheme. Whilst I was there,

05:30 we were asked to participate in a little exercise down at the wharves to occupy our time. I didn't know of course, at the time, what they had in mind was that we were going to be unpaid wharf labourer because we were sent down to the Glebe Island Docks and we found ourselves, a small group of us having to unload mustard gas

06:00 which sort of horrified us a bit. Which, incidentally, the Australian Government vigorously denied that they had ever used mustard gas or had ever brought it into the country – which of course was arrant nonsense, but that was brought out years later by the wing commander in charge of our party that was involved. The draft that was going to Canada was about to leave

06:30 on a ship, and then somebody fell sick and they had to delegate me, at very short notice to fill his place. So I eventually ended up on the draft, going over on an old vessel called the Hermitage, which had been a captured Italian ship, and it was run by the US Navy. That ship took us to

07:00 Vancouver, via Samoa, and we left the ship at Vancouver, went by rail then to Edmonton in Canada. In Canada we were there for a short while and then it was decided that we should be

07:30 split up, because I went over for observer training – which was of course in that time, the duties involved both bombing and gunnery, and navigation. I had, before the war, qualified as a navigator under the Yacht Master Scheme – in fact I had a Yacht Master Certificate because I was

08:00 fond of sailing, I did a lot of sailing.

Mr Innes, would you just be able to, sorry to keep interrupting you, but what I'd quite like to do, because we want to talk about that training in detail a bit later. I was just wondering if you could just give me briefly the main points of where you were in the war, and then we'll go back and we'll talk about that later.

All right. Well the first place obviously was in Canada. Whilst we were training there I went to a

08:30 place called Mossbank, which is in, Mossbank is in Saskatchewan I believe, for bombing and gunnery exercises. I then went to [No. 14 EFTS] Portage la Prairie, [Manitoba] where we did navigation. When we finally graduated, they split us up into navigators and bomb aimers. They wanted there to be two special categories,

09:00 whereas before we had been one. That was a bit of a blow to me, because I thought I was certain to be a navigator, having got the Yacht Master Certificate, however, as events turned out I never regretted it. When we got to a place called Halifax, which is the port of departure for England,

09:30 I found that our particular group had mostly come from Sydney, and it was quite and interesting group of fellows because they had school teachers, they had bank clerks, they had barristers, one was a policeman, and several engineers.

10:00 We mixed with some RAF [Royal Air Force] trainees, and then all of us were shipped off on the Queen Mary to England and we disembarked in Glasgow in Scotland.

I might just go back and talk about your childhood now, and we'll talk about that part of the war later. I was wondering if you could tell me what sort of

10:30 **businesses your mother and father were doing in Papua New Guinea?**

Well my father, of course you remember that would be the time of the Depression in Australia, and my father actually had a hotel in Salamaua. A number of our relatives were unemployed because they were builders, carpenters, one was a butcher, and one was a motor engineer,

11:00 so he took them up to New Guinea with him and they got freezing works – he employed them of course – freezing works and butchery. Butcher shops, they used to import the carcasses and there was a lot of building going on, so all in all, they built a group family business there.

11:30 **What do you remember of Papua New Guinea as a child?**

Oh, I have very dim memories of that. I only remember a couple of incidents there, that my nurse boy used to have breakfast with me and we used to have, I suppose, the usual cereals and he used to help himself to my breakfast, and I used to get a bit upset

12:00 about that. That's the only image I can remember, but I do recall I used to imitate the birds, particularly in Russell Island. And my mother told me I couldn't speak English, I could only talk the pigeon language of the natives. I became very fluent in that, and I recall the episodes there where the

12:30 nurse boy used to take me out in the bush and we would imitate the birds. That particular episode is about all I can remember, apart from the other little incident.

What was the role of the nurse boy?

Well he was really my protector, and my friend. He did all the odd jobs around the place,

13:00 and I suppose it was left to him to make sure that I didn't get into any trouble because it was rather wild territory in those days.

What do you recall of the family house in Papua New Guinea, where you were living?

13:30 I really can't recall much about it at all. There are no particular aspects that stand out. I can only recall really the incidents relating to my friends and also some of the servants that were working in the place.

14:00 So I really can't recall much at all, because after all, I was only five or six at that time, before I came back to Australia.

Who were the main patrons or clients of your family's business?

Well there were local people who were settled there, and there was an awful lot of gold miners of course, that came up to try

14:30 their luck out in the goldfields at Edie creek and Bulolo. They would of course be there buying supplies and food and they would meet the ships and my father also had a brief to look after the gold ingots that

15:00 they would bring to the wharves, and weigh them, and then they would send them on the ship. He used to do all the checking of those and make sure they were stowed away securely. In fact on one occasion it was quite a consternation really, because they found that they were a couple of these ingots short and he was held to pay over that,

15:30 and everybody went around searching for them and couldn't find them, and finally, somebody found out that one of the natives had taken one of these things and used it as an anchor for his canoe, and it was at the bottom of the ocean. He had no intention of stealing it, it was just that it was a practical way of mooring the canoe. So they found that and they took it back to the wharf, and of course it was shipped

16:00 safely back to the wharves and the bank in Sydney.

Were there many other Australian or European families living where you were living at that time?

No one on Russell Island, no one in Misima and no one in Samurai. We were entirely on our own as far as I can recall. I don't believe my parents met up

16:30 with anyone else really, until they went to Salamaua. Salamaua became a very important centre, but the other areas, there may have been one or two planters there who were planting coconuts for copra, but I've never heard them mention it.

How did they come to be in Papua New Guinea?

17:00 **How did that come about?**

Well my father, after the war came back, and he had been working in Fiji with Burns Philp, the big shipping and merchanting group in the Pacific area. He was asked to go to, I think, Russell Island first, and of course my parents were married by that stage.

17:30 He took the job on there, and he still stayed with that company, and he was there a manager in the area there and that's how they ended up in Papua New Guinea.

Could you tell me about your father's First World War experience?

Well my father was in the second AIF [Australian Imperial Force], I'm not sure, I think it might have been the 18th Battalion,

18:00 I can't quite remember. He went to France of course, and served in the trenches like most of the Australians in the AIF. I don't really know much about what he did over there, other than slog around in the trenches

18:30 and probably got, you know, pretty harsh treatment, but he came back and he didn't have any war wounds other than I know that he was affected by gas at one stage, but it apparently didn't interfere with his life too much.

Did he talk to you about the war?

19:00 He didn't so much talk to me about it, but my uncle did, the one that I was living with for some years back in Australia. My uncle was badly wounded, in fact he nearly lost one arm, but it was saved by the matron in the casualty clearing station, because the doctor wanted to amputate and she wouldn't let him. And she helped him recover,

19:30 and when I was living with them as a child, I used to have to massage his arm every now and again to get the blood circulating, but he was in quite a bad way as a young man, but he survived that all right.

What stories, or what kinds of things would he tell you about the war?

Well, he

20:00 used to tell me about the life in the trenches, and the horrors of the attacks and the bayonet charges that they were compelled to undertake. He had so many friends killed there, in fact in his own family one of his brothers was killed

20:30 on the Somme. I can only recall him only ever being bitter about it on one occasion which involved an incident in Belgium, where the local people in the village locked the water, the pumps up, the water pumps that were in the village. Which meant that the soldiers couldn't get water to

21:00 drink and he was pretty hostile about that, I remember him telling me. Anyway, they were forced to take

the padlocks off so they could get access to water, but other than that, he didn't discuss it after that much. He told me incidents of how they used to play draughts, a game called draughts and he was apparently a very good

21:30 player. That's a sort of secondary form of chess, I suppose you'd call it. Chess would be the sort of premier type of game for that sort of thing, but the boys used to play draughts and I suppose they gambled and all the rest of it, but there were no sporting activities that I can recall him mentioning. Eventually he came back

22:00 from the war, and married my aunt who was a teacher.

How had your mother and father met?

Well they lived in Fiji, my mother and father. My father I think was a store manager there. My mother was a nursing sister at the hospital.

22:30 They obviously met socially at some stage of the proceedings. She eventually ended up matron, and of course they were married, and my father went and joined up with the AIF and went to France. My mother stayed on nursing at the hospital, I hear it was a little place called

23:00 Levuka.

Did she talk to you about what it was like to have your father away at war?

No, not really. Not in any detail that I recall. She was obviously like everybody else, concerned about his welfare, but the only incident I recall her talking

23:30 about was an occasion when – I'm trying to recall his name – a German captain from one of the merchant raiders, came in to port under escort by one of the navy ships. And he

24:00 ended up in hospital, I think he had pneumonia, and my mother was nursing him in the hospital. He was a Count, I can't recall the name. Yes, Count von Luchtner, that's right. She said he was a very fine gentleman, and

24:30 they used to talk about life in Germany and Europe. That was quite an occasion for the local villagers, to have this fellow there you know, and his ship of course was impounded. And after the war my mother and father met up with him again, when he used to go around on world tours lecturing.

25:00 **Did they have any particular thoughts on the Germans?**

No, not really, because my father had a number of German friends in Papua New Guinea. I remember them coming out to the house when I came back after the war, and they came and have dinner with us.

25:30 And I found them very interesting to talk to because they had actually been mining engineers. They used to talk about all the different types of mineral that were in the Pacific islands and the places they'd been, but no, he wasn't bitter against the Germans, and indeed I'm

26:00 not either, strangely enough, despite my experiences. I'm only bitter about the political animals in the German society, like the Nazis and the SS [Schutzstaffel guards], who I think were terrible people. And most of them were criminals anyway, but there was no bitterness on his part in his case, and there was no real bitterness on my part, with the average German.

26:30 **Do you remember what it felt like to leave Papua New Guinea and your parents and come to Australia?**

Well, as a child it was pretty upsetting of course. However, I wasn't really in a fit state to protest or anything, after all I was ill with malaria, and I think I got dengue fever at one stage.

27:00 It was done really for my sake, but I was not really old enough to get too upset about it, because after all I would have only been about six or seven when I came under the patronage of my aunt and uncle in Australia.

27:30 **Whereabouts were you living when you first came to Australia?**

Well as I say, my mother came down and I was born here. I remember she stayed

28:00 in Shellcove Road in Neutral Bay, I think it might have been a boarding house, and she made a number of friends there who ended up her friends for life. Then she, after I was born she stayed for some months after that and then took me back with her to Papua New Guinea.

28:30 **So when you left Papua New Guinea when you were six, whereabouts were you living with your aunt and uncle?**

Well I went, as I say to these country schools here. His first school was as I said, was Collarenebri, which was a little school way out in the northwest of New South Wales. They had a residence for the headmaster,

29:00 and that's where we stayed and so forth, every move that we had, there was usually a school residence supplied. So the next place, as I mentioned was Delungra, and then we went to Springwood and so forth.

What are your memories of what you used to do as a child in these country towns?

Well one of the most exciting

29:30 enterprises that I was involved with was rabbiting. I used to, I remember one of the local stock and station agents used to pay for rabbit skins, and I and some of the other boys used to go out in the country there and round the farms, and trap rabbits. Skin them

30:00 and dry the skins and take them down to the stock and station agent and get paid. Probably the other enterprises were the usual sports. I played football, cricket, occasionally we'd have a game of tennis. I learnt tennis; I was coached by a fellow there in tennis.

30:30 And one of the schools it was rather good fun because the school had a small carpentry shop where they used to teach the Aboriginal kids how to use the tools and build things. I used to often go there on the weekends because I could get access to it. I used to

31:00 make things out of, as I recall, the old milko butter boxes, which were very fine timber that you never see today.

What would you make?

Oh just little things like gifts for people, like little boxes – jewellery boxes, trays, all sorts of things like that.

31:30 **Did the Aboriginal kids go to your school?**

Yes, we had a lot of Aboriginal children go there and I remember my parents were very good to them, too. They had a lot of problems because their parents didn't look after them all that well, as you probably know. How they get on the drink and

32:00 sleep under the bridge of the river, and leave the kids to their own devices and they'd get into mischief. So there was a lot of good welfare efforts made by those teachers, and there's been a lot of criticism about the Aboriginals being taken away from their parents, but my recollections and the country life they were treated very, very well.

32:30 **What do you remember of what it was like to be the nephew of the headmaster in these schools?**

Well it did have its problems, I must admit. I would be the victim of some fisticuffs at times from the other kids, but that was all good experience anyway. I found also that

33:00 the difficulty was of course, that it was implied that I was always the favourite of the teachers because of the role of my uncle, which of course was nonsense but you have to live with that situation, but by and large, it didn't really trouble me all that much.

What kinds of things would they say? Do you remember?

33:30 Oh, you know, "There's that sissy Ian fellow, he's got his uncle there to teach him at home as well as at the school, and no wonder he comes top of the class all the time," and this sort of thing. In those days the Christian name of 'Ian' wasn't very well known.

34:00 There are a lot of Ian's around now but in those days there were very few called Ian. I used to really have a hard time, particular with the footballers. So they decided, Michael decided that I should be called Joe. So I was always known as Joe after that and I hated the name Ian until later on, of course then it's a totally different situation.

34:30 **What would they say about your name?**

Well, putting it bluntly they'd call me 'Ian Pee'n'. However, I convinced them my name was Joe, so that solved that problem.

What was it like moving around between the different schools?

Well it was difficult in many ways for me

35:00 because the syllabus that would be set would be fairly standard, as you can imagine, but the various schools would reach different levels. You know, you sort of had gaps in your knowledge. I was forced to do a lot of homework, and having two teachers looking over my

35:30 shoulder all the time sort of pulled me up to catch up if I'd missed out on anything, but it wasn't easy. I think the worst feature was making new friends all the time, and that was fairly traumatic in some cases.

How would you find it on the first day of a new school?

How did I

36:00 find it? Like all kids, I suppose, not very pleasant. Particularly so I think in country schools, because they had, you know the boys and girls there had a fairly different attitude to the city school people, but no,

36:30 I think I was like all kids starting a new school. I took a while to settle in and you've just got to put up with it.

Was that because the country kids knew each other so well?

Well that's right, because they'd been in the same town, or area for years. I mean some of them have never been outside their

37:00 particular locality. Certainly a lot of the Aboriginal kids had never been outside their particular town, which is one of the reasons that the Far West Scheme [Royal Far West Children's Health Scheme] was so successful, which was run by the Reverend Drummond, where they used to take some of these kids down to Manly for the Christmas holidays.

37:30 And of course they would swim and they would have a fairly good time down at the beach, but that was the reason why that started, because they were so insular.

What are your memories of the Depression in the country?

Oh that was rather sad because that was a difficult time, of course.

38:00 I do recall that there were a number of swaggies [swagmen –vagabonds] that used to come through, particularly in places like Collarenebri and Delungra, be looking for work. Now some of those men would be highly educated, but they didn't have jobs – they couldn't get jobs in Sydney or Melbourne or wherever, and they would roam the country and camp under the stars.

38:30 Boil their billy and make their dampers, and then they would come round the houses and offer to chop wood or do odd jobs to get some money. And most of the farmers and the local people would do their best to help them, but it was a very trying time, but indeed a lot of them used to sleep in the

39:00 sheds, in the grounds of the schools. My uncle used to permit them to do that, and not infrequently give them meals, and even an extra blanket or two, but it was rather sad at times, and there were a lot of them passing through.

What kind of jobs would they look for in town?

Well,

39:30 some of them, as I said were very skilled people, and some professional people. They ended up just taking any job, labouring jobs in some cases. If they were lucky to get chosen for the job, but most of them just couldn't find work.

40:00 End of tape

Tape 2

00:33 **Mr Innes, what happened when it was time for you to go to high school?**

Well I had been at Wollongong High School as I mentioned, and my parents had come back from New Guinea because of the Japanese invasion and they relinquished all their business interests there and they bought a home in Vaucluse.

01:00 We all then, as kids, got together again as a family and lived there with them. I had to find a school to go to and my mother was absolutely insistent that I should go to Scots College and having been brought up by my uncle, who as I said, was in the Education Department in the public school sector,

01:30 I'd been imbued with the idea that the education would be better at a public school rather than a private school – which of course is arrant nonsense, but that's how I felt at the time. So my mother and I begged to differ. The other school that I was interested in was the one that was a selective school in Sydney, that was Sydney High School.

02:00 At that time there were two considerations in order to get admission to that school. One was the scholastic achievements you had, and the second was that you had to be in the particular area. So I ended up going to Sydney High School, and of course I've never ever regretted it. That's where I,

02:30 one of the, as I said I'm very grateful to one of the teachers there who had this wonderful idea teaching

French. So, as I say, my French served me in good stead in later years after I [was] shot down in France, in fact, it probably saved my life.

What sort of languages were taught in high schools then?

Well there was a tendency to

03:00 allocate the classes in respect to what your ambitions might be in a professional sense: in other words if you wanted to be a doctor, the tendency was to put some emphasis on Latin. In other areas it wasn't so evident, but I did Latin, but I had no intention of being a doctor.

03:30 I couldn't take much interest in Latin at all, but I had a lot of interest and also English. I like the classical English texts, and I think I knew I would end up going into business, and I sort of drifted along knowing I would end up going to a business

04:00 college or something like that later on.

Had you inherited a passion for business and enterprise from your parents, do you think?

Well, as I say, my father was a businessman and it must have rubbed off onto me. When I first went for my first job, you will appreciate that jobs were pretty hard to get then now that was at the end of the Depression,

04:30 but jobs were fairly scarce and I went in the insurance industry. I started off as a stamp licker in one of the departments there in a British insurance company and then I did night school and studied my diplomas and that's really how I started

05:00 in the business scene.

Can you tell me about that French teacher you had at Sydney Boys High, and what was so innovative about his teaching practices?

Well it was certainly innovative. As you probably know, these French texts, these old French texts like Balzac's [Honoré De Balzac (1799-1850)] and de Maupassant [Henri-René-Albert-Guy de Maupassant (1850 - 1893)]

05:30 and people like that – the great writers of France. They had some pretty earthy tales to tell and you know, at our age we were always interested in finding out a bit more about sex, and what was going on. He was wise enough to know that if he gave us exposure to those texts, we would probably take a damn sight more interest in the subject he was teaching,

06:00 which we did of course.

What opinions were you able to form about French culture from these lessons?

Oh I learnt quite a lot about the background, particular of the village people rather than the Parisians. I tended to gain the view that the Parisians were very much city folk who were not much interested in the country at all;

06:30 whereas [to] the village people [the country] is their whole being, is living in these villages. Some of them never even leave their villages. I've known many of them still living in the same old house that's been in the family for three or four generations and the village life, particularly [those] with the religious background,

07:00 they tended to be church goers. They tended to be very dependent on each other, and it was kind of a closed circle. That, I really came to grips with because of the texts that we were reading.

Did it give you a desire to travel to that part of the world?

Oh very much, yes.

07:30 I had always had an interest in France, I had an interest in England because of the English history that I used to sort of devour books on English history. Australian history, unfortunately at the schools I attended, wasn't given the same priority as English history, which is of course ridiculous looking back. While we had a rudiment of knowledge of

08:00 Australian history, most of us I think, well I did anyway, had a far greater knowledge of English history and European history.

What sort of Australian history was being taught then?

Oh, this business about Burke and Wills and the, you know, Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson finding their way over the Blue Mountains, and the opening up of the Western Plains

08:30 in New South Wales. The gold mines and exploration in Victoria. The settlements you know, around in parts of Australasia The convict settlements in Tasmania. The Aboriginal carvings and the sites

09:00 that were prevalent, particularly you know in the coastal areas. These were the sorts of things that we were aware of, and were interested in, but somehow most of the teachers, well most of them of course came from Britain and Europe. I suppose it's a matter of that

09:30 was the culture at the time.

What sort of history was taught at school about WW1?

Yes, there was. There wasn't in the early part of my life, because a number of the teachers had already been diggers in WW1 and the Returned Soldiers' League was very active. I would say yes, most of us

10:00 got a fairly good grounding in what the Australian soldiers had done and achieved in WW1, and the horrors of the trench warfare. So we were fairly conscience of that.

Were you able to form an impression of what it was like for some returned servicemen, particularly at the difficult time of the Depression?

Yes, I think I mentioned about the swaggies that used to be round, travelling

10:30 through all the state. A lot of them were ex-servicemen, and a lot of them were unemployed. Life wasn't easy for them, finding jobs as we know. A lot of them were suffering fairly badly from the consequences of their life over in the trenches.

11:00 Things like, you know they had shell shock, a lot of them had been gassed, wounded. I don't think the care and attention was given to them like it is today, particularly with the current Department of Veteran Affairs. I think that they had a fairly difficult time.

How fluent were you in French by the time you finished school?

11:30 Well, I was fairly fluent. I could both read and write French and I could certainly speak it. My accent probably wasn't all that good, because when I eventually was shot down in France and had to make contact with village people, and talk with them, the argot [slang] of the village

12:00 French people is somewhat different to the high French, if you like, that one gets taught at school. Like German, you get high German and low German. My French was probably a bit 'la-di-dah' as they say and the village people used to sort of ask me to repeat occasionally what I said because they didn't understand it.

12:30 That varied sometimes from one canton to another, just the same as in Britain where you have some Welshman talking to a Yorkshireman, or Lancashire people, or Geordies as they call them. They often don't understand one another all that well either sometimes. Certainly, when you get a Scotsman talking to an Irishman or something, you've got a bit of a problem.

13:00 Well, it's the same in languages and it applies in most countries, I imagine.

While you were at school, how were you encouraged to practice your conversational French? How would you do that?

We spoke a lot of oral French, we would get up there and would be told to address the class on some particular issue under the tutelage of the master. That was fairly difficult,

13:30 but obviously served a purpose.

How did you keep your French up after you left school?

Well, I really didn't because there was no reason to use French, not in my area of business. I really had to learn,

14:00 not learn, but it's like riding a bicycle – once you've done it you know how to do it, but later on you probably need a bit of practice. When I got into France I really had to smarten up, but it's amazing how one acquires the true accents and the knowledge of French when you're actually domiciled with the French, living with them.

14:30 I mean that is the real way to learn a language.

You mentioned that your parents had to return from New Guinea. Can you explain exactly what was happening there that forced them out?

Yes, I'm trying to think of what year that would have been. I guess it would have been about 1939, when the war started and the Japanese started

15:00 to get active in moving into those areas, and the fighting with our soldiers. I think that it was a case of they had to get out because after all they were being bombed, and certainly in Salamaua, most of the buildings were obliterated by the Japanese air force.

15:30 And of course, there was concern about the Japanese actually moving down to Australia, as you know. So they were really forced out with most of the other Australians, and Europeans that were there, to evacuate.

How quickly did they have to evacuate?

Well some of them had to walk, of course, across the

16:00 ranges to get to the coastal ports. Others had problems because they'd be sick with malaria or tropical diseases. Some were fortunate that the ships would call into port and take them off. They obviously couldn't fly out

16:30 in those days, but others would have to make their way into the Papuan area and hopefully get a berth on a ship to come back to Australia, but many of them had to walk over mountains for miles and miles to reach

17:00 some zone where they could be lifted off, so to speak, by the Australian shipping people.

What did your parents do for work once they were back in Sydney?

My father had been pretty successful in business up there, and he virtually retired. I think he would have been about forty-five years of age when he retired.

17:30 So he didn't really do much after that at all. He was probably a very good example of retiring too early, because I never felt that he was the same man after he retired. He was so active before, and he really, in my view started to go downhill a bit. I on the other hand,

18:00 I've said, "Well, I'm going to keep working till I drop dead." And I rather enjoy it, I've never had the problem he had.

Can you describe what that family home was like in Vaucluse?

Yes, it was an interesting home. It was right opposite Wentworth Park, which was a beautiful part of Vaucluse of course, with all the trees and the old building there which was the home of

18:30 William Charles Wentworth, has a lot of historical significance. The home was a two-storey home, I had the luxury of having the downstairs section, which was almost like a little flat. It had a bathroom, a bedroom, it had a little lounge room. The walls of that area downstairs were covered

19:00 with native spears and masks and stone axes, and all the bric-a-brac that my mother had acquired from New Guinea, which they brought with them. It was almost like a museum, they had some wonderful relics there that, if you're interested in that side of the business. We had a lot of people

19:30 from the museum come out to take photographs of some of these articles and make notes about them.

Do you think that your family, given these artefacts and the life that they had led in PNG, how exotic do you think your family would have been considered by your classmates, or people in the neighbourhood?

20:00 Well, my mother was a very good hostess and she had many of the neighbours in for dinner and they used to talk about their life in the islands. It was always of interest to people. She was also a writer – she used to write articles

20:30 for the "Bulletin" and papers like that. There were a lot of interesting characters that used to come and go. There would be all sorts of writers and radio people, and actors and actresses. So the locals tended to welcome them in that sense, that there was always some action in the Innes house

21:00 and that was rather nice.

You mentioned that while you were living in the country you'd done rabbiting and shooting. Now that you're a city boy, what did you do for fun?

Well, I started to get fairly serious about tennis. I had a very good friend who was a New Zealander who had been to Christ College in Christchurch. His father was moved to Sydney as a

21:30 manager of an insurance company and he and I became very good friends and we decided that we'd go into the competitions, the tennis competitions, and we used to play tennis in the eastern suburbs. That was almost a regular feature every week. We also had other crazy ideas – we also used to go out to watch the racing

22:00 cars at the showground and do all sorts of things like that. We also fancied ourselves as speed car drivers, and racing people. There seemed to be a lot to do, because we did a lot of swimming there, because Nelson Park Beach was very close. Then I started to get interested in

22:30 sailing, and I got a VJ, which is a small sailing craft which was probably about twelve feet long and go out on the harbour with that, but it didn't last long because the damn thing sunk. I know that because I wasn't a very good boat builder, although I improved later and built a Manly Junior for my kids.

23:00 There was a lot of sailing there, and the club was there of course, because that's where the VJ club started, was in Watson's Bay and that was nearby. So sailing became a pretty interesting hobby for me

and my friend the New Zealand guy. He ended up in the navy, and he was a very keen sailor.

Did you have any interest in joining the navy?

Well I did at one stage,

23:30 particular when I did the Yacht Master Certificate course. I got called up on the militia, which I loathed – I didn't like the army one bit. I got thrown to some terrible job there in the ordinance section, and I ended up a store clerk, because I could type and I could do shorthand and all that sort of stuff – bookkeeping. I didn't like it at all.

24:00 So I said to my friend who had also been called up, "What about us trying to get into the navy?" So he and I went down and in fact they advertised for applicants for trainees as sub-lieutenants in the anti submarines service. So we thought, "That's the job for us, we'd be just right in one of those fair mile

24:30 fast operating ships," you know chasing the Jap's and what have you. Anyway we went down there and we were complete misfits because we ended up being interviewed and they reckoned that I was too short to be in the navy – according to them at that stage. And he wasn't suited to it because he hadn't got a university degree or something. Anyway, we ended up

25:00 getting fed up with the whole business. Subsequently I got into the air force, which was my next choice. He got into the navy as a simple matelot and did his stint down in Flinders [Naval Depot, Victoria] and was commissioned, and eventually put in charge of a torpedo boat. So he was happy. So we both ended up getting somewhere

25:30 where we were fairly pleased and proud to end up.

If I can just go back to before when the war started, what memories do you have of the tension that was brewing in Europe, and what sort of awareness you and the family had of that?

Well we had a lot of friends in England of course

26:00 and we were very interested in the news that was coming through. My mother had previously travelled through Germany and Finland. She'd actually gone over, when they had the hotel in Salamaua, she'd actually gone over to buy for the hotel, all the crockery

26:30 and silverware and so forth, and the linen and in the process she did a lot of travelling. She told us when she came back from Germany – and that would be just prior to WW2 when Hitler had come into power – that things had changed so much that it looked as though

27:00 this new chancellor would end up causing a lot of trouble. She sensed it, and being a writer she of course wrote articles about it. Well we obviously had the benefit of her reactions and feelings, and we felt that war would be inevitable and there

27:30 would certainly be a problem with France and Germany, and eventually we felt, well England will be drawn into it. And if England is drawn into it, then the British Commonwealth will be drawn into it and ultimately it would affect us in Australia, which is exactly what happened.

So to what extent did it seem that war was inevitable?

To what extent? Well

28:00 I think probably one of the reactions she experienced from Germans was that they were pretty unhappy about the Treaty of Versailles, and the restrictions imposed on Germany after WW1 and I must admit they were very harsh. In retrospect it was handled rather badly, in my view. The

28:30 French were very, very strong in imposing enormous sanctions on Germany. In a sense they had the feeling that they would restore the might of their country and their honour and their recognition in the eyes of the world. So under Hitler of course, they had found a man

29:00 who would lead them on to achieve these sort of things for them – rather sadly, but that's what happened.

How would the family get international news?

When we were in Sydney?

Yes.

Well of course the traditional way was through the radio hook-ups.

29:30 It was before television, but there were very good radio programs, and there were correspondents all over the world. My mother used to be a correspondent for one of the big news groups when she was in New Guinea, and there were a lot of people like her all over the place.

30:00 In fact, on one occasion she was reporting on the loss of the aircraft that Amelia Earhart [1897 to 1937],

who was famous American aviator, got lost. The papers were wondering, well they wanted a story about it, and did anybody in the Pacific area have the capacity to

30:30 give them of the news of the reports of the searches that went on, and of course that's what my mother did. So there were lots of people like that bringing news back via the radio networks.

Did you go to the cinema to watch newsreels?

Oh yes, we used to love that.

Can you tell me about that, and the cinema you would go to?

Well, I recall one incident when I was living in Lithgow,

31:00 I and a friend of mine went to a matinee once. We had to walk probably a mile because we lived just out of Lithgow in a place called Cornwall [NSW]. The picture that was on was called "The Bride of Frankenstein" and I remember it was wintertime, and we went to

31:30 watch this movie and we came out of this movie, and it was as black as pitch. I had to walk all the way back to our home, and God I was scared stiff after seeing this picture. I used to have nightmares after the damn thing. That was probably my introduction into the films. After that of course we were like everybody else, avid movie goers.

32:00 We used to go down to the movies at the old Winter Garden Theatre at Rose Bay, and they were some very good films of course.

I believe that it was quite an ornate theatre, can you describe it?

Yes, it is, you're right. It was a very ornate theatre. It was a sort of classical old theatre that had

32:30 that look about it. I don't recall any plays being enacted there, but we felt it was an interesting place – not that we were much interested the architecture, we were more interested in the film.

What sort of films were you interested in back then?

Oh blood and thunder things, and my sisters of course, they loved all the

33:00 stuff like "Gone with the Wind" and I was more interested in some of the dashing antics of buccaneers and pirates, and aeroplanes, and things like that.

You mentioned that you'd had an interest in sailing and yachts. What sort of interests did you have in aircrafts and aviation?

33:30 Well I was interested in aviation because in New Guinea when my parents were there there were a lot of the old Junkers, German Junkers aircraft utilised for transporting miners up to the mines in the mountains and also dropping supplies to them, and a lot of transportation of animals – cattle and pigs and God knows what else.

34:00 And the pilots used to come down to the hotel and my parents got to know them all. In fact one of my sisters was the first white child to go up in an aircraft in New Guinea, on a flight, with one of the pilots.

34:30 I suppose the interest arose from that, because I would be just as interested as they were. That was a country that was really developed by, as a result of these small airlines that started up there.

Were they German pilots flying the Junkers?

35:00 No they weren't, none of them that we knew were Germans. They had bought the aircraft in Germany but most of the pilots were Australians or were Brit's that had migrated, so to speak, to Papua New Guinea to seek their fortunes. There were some very good pilots of course and a lot of them joined up when war started,

35:30 joined the air force. Some of them became instructors, and we would meet up with them of course, and with the background that I'd had in New Guinea through the family connection, so some of them were known to us.

When did you first get to go up in a plane?

Well I must admit

36:00 that the first time I went up was when I got to Canada. I don't recall ever going up in a plane in Australia before we had to move to Canada. We started flying on the old Anson's when we were training. So I suppose like all the blokes that join the air force, we all wanted to be Spitfire pilots or what have you, but

36:30 it never works out that way because it was a case of supply and demand. Our training was more related to ending up on bomber aircrafts but I can't recall having flown, except commercially. Now I come to think of it, yes I did go up on some commercial flights, but not in a training situation.

What are your memories

37:00 **of the day that war was declared and Menzies declaring Australia's participation?**

Well, I'm not sure how to answer that because there was a lot of mixed feeling about it. There was a certain element in Australia who used to project the view that

37:30 you know, "What's the war got to do with us?" A lot of us, of course are of British stock, and had an affinity towards the Mother Land, as we used to call her, England. Regarded it as, "Well, we're in this with them. If our cousins are becoming involved we've got to help them." But they weren't all like that, a lot of Australians

38:00 were anti the whole business.

What do you think the reasons were for that?

Well a lot of them came from European backgrounds, they weren't of British stock, they were Scandinavian people stock, French, Italian, Greek, and Yugoslavs. There were a lot of – and Chinese, who came

38:30 out to the gold fields originally. I think the Aboriginals weren't involved in the proceedings either, and I couldn't blame them really. That was probably the reason.

What do you remember about how you actually heard the news – where you were and how you heard it?

39:00 Well I would have just started work on that occasion. No, I would have started at a business college, just when that happened. I recall that now.

39:30 To some of us, we felt well this is going to be a pretty exciting period. I was certainly thinking about the air force as well as the navy at that stage. I think we tended to say you know, "Well it's another area, it will be pretty exciting and we might get a chance to go overseas."

40:00 Your reaction wasn't too specific. We weren't in the political arena, to us it was just another door that had opened, so be it, we just had to go along with it.

Were you listening to the radio, were you hear the announcement?

Yes, I recall that.

40:30 I think Menzies started off, "It is my melancholy duty," I think that was his 'piece de resistance.' Then the announcement came, as I recall, but it certainly didn't come as a shock to a lot of people.

Tape 3

00:34 **Mr Innes, you mentioned that you found the militia a loathsome experience, can you explain how you became involved in it?**

In what, sorry?

In the militia?

Oh yes, well obviously when one reaches a certain age, the government at that stage just calls you up. I and

01:00 my friend the New Zealander, were called up at the same time. We ended up at Victoria Barracks [Sydney], and I was assigned to the Ordinance Corps and they in turn had smaller units. One was a Light Aid Detachment Unit, which was comprised only of about twelve people

01:30 and I ended up in this particular unit. We had a CO [Commanding Officer] of this unit who was a lieutenant, who was an old WW1 veteran who was, I think he was shell-shocked. He was a crazy sort of a guy, he used to give us hell. I remember he used to roll his cigarettes and put them beside his stretcher of a night, and end up smoking cigarettes all night – I don't think he could sleep.

02:00 Which is very sad, it probably made him the way he was. I got assigned to this truck that carried all the spare parts, and I wouldn't know an SA thread from a BSA [British Standards Association] thread or any other thread, and it was absolutely hopeless. I'm not mechanically minded at all, and I loathed it, but he found out

02:30 that I could type and knew something about accountancy, and also did shorthand. So he grabbed me and put me in the little orderly room they had there in an old garage they had requisitioned. So I became his orderly clerk. He gave me one stripe and told me to get on with the job, and I loathed too, I couldn't stand it and he was impossible to work for.

03:00 I wanted to join the air force, and I said to him one day, I said, “Look, I want to join the air force, so I want to be discharged.” He said, “No, I’m not going to let you go.” I said, “Well the air force want a letter saying that you’ve been released from the army so they could put you through the enrolment procedure.” And he said, “No, I’m not going to release you.” I said, “Why is that?”

03:30 He said, “Oh I don’t like the air force anyway, in WW1 I couldn’t stand those guys in the flying corps.” And he carried on like this sort of business. I thought, ‘I’m going to be stuck here with him for a long while, I’d better try and do something about it’, so I decided I’d write a letter myself to the Victoria Barracks to the captain in charge of the personnel section. I would

04:00 forge his signature on the letter and say that he required a replacement for Lance Corporal Innes. I made sure this got into the hands of the right people at the Victoria Barracks. Anyway some months later, we were moved up to a place called Kelso, near Bathurst. It was cold as charity, oh it was a terrible place. The wind was blowing

04:30 and it was almost snowing, in fact it might have been snowing at one stage. I know that you could hardly write because it was so cold, and I had to do all the writing of the reports and signals and what have you. Anyway, in the midst of all this I see this guy in greatcoat with all his gear on, and his big kit bag, coming along through the gloom. He finally gets to the

05:00 orderly room and reports that he’s the replacement for Lance Corporal Innes. Well the old lieutenant nearly had a fit, he couldn’t work out how all this came about. I said to him, “You said that if a replacement would come through, you would release me. Now, there he is.” That’s how I got released, and I went and applied to join the air force and I particularly wanted to get into aircrew. So that

05:30 entailed, of course the normal interviews and the medical examinations down at Woolloomooloo, and that’s how that little incident occurred.

What kinds of questions were you asked to get into the air force?

I think the first question was, “What prompted you to apply for aircrew and the air force? What was your reason?”

06:00 Well we all had the same reason, we wanted to fly, and we wanted to be trained for flying, and we all wanted be pilots, and we all wanted to fly Spitfires. I mean that’s the sort of general approach, really. Anyway, I think one of the interesting things was, of course my doom was sealed from the start, because one of the

06:30 questions they asked me was, did I know anything about navigation? Like an idiot I said, “Yes, I’ve got a Yacht Masters Certificate in coastal navigation.” And that earmarked me of course, I’d never be a pilot. Well I thought afterwards, ‘That was a damn silly thing to answer that question.’ So as events turned out, it didn’t quite work out that way either, when we got to Canada.

07:00 **How soon after leaving the militia were you able to join the air force?**

Almost with two or three days, it didn’t take long. I don’t say we were admitted in that short time, but we were interviewed at that time and we completed the papers for admission and we were probably medically examined within that period.

07:30 But I didn’t really get called up for initial training, until probably two or three months later. There was a waiting list, but as I recall they gave the applicants who passed their medical and were sort of signed up,

08:00 they gave them a badge to wear so that it would announce to all and sundry that this little badge indicated that they were waiting to get into the service.

Why do you think they did that? That they issued badges, to let other people know?

Well I suppose the feeling was, “What’s this young guy doing, why hasn’t he joined up?” I mean,

08:30 it wasn't unknown to give someone like that a white feather, for example, which is obviously a sign of cowardice. So it was some sort of a means of letting whomever the person concerned, to find out why you haven't joined up. It was probably a way of saying, “Look, I’m going into the service and here’s my little badge to prove it.”

09:00 **Was there a divide in the community at that time between people who’d enlisted and people who hadn't?**

By the people themselves or by the public at large?

Both.

Both? Well I think the public at large sort of reacted, there were a lot of younger men particularly, who were

09:30 not interested in going into the services. I mean I know several who were bookmakers for instance. They didn’t want to get involved, they were making too much money out at the race track. I suppose the

answer to the question is yes, there were people who were critical if one hadn't joined one of the services.

10:00 **What kinds of things would be said to people who hadn't joined?**

Oh, I don't recall them saying anything, but it was a question of the way they looked and the reaction. I think, I know that even the militia was regarded in a fairly poor light because

10:30 at that time the militia, the call up and the militia, was only really for local home service. They couldn't be sent overseas. Of course that changed, because you know in New Guinea the militia that were sent to New Guinea did a marvellous job, but at that time, that was the feeling. So, you know, you had to be in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force],

11:00 because in the AIF you know you were going overseas and people would sort of look at it in that light. So not only, they used to call them the Chocos [sl. chocolate soldiers – militiamen], as they called them. Chocos were the militia people, and it was a fairly derogatory term, and they were obviously embarrassed to be called that, but that's an example of what people thought.

11:30 **Why were they called Chocos?**

I'm not sure. Chocolate soldiers I suppose was the reason, but I really don't know, other than that.

You mentioned there was a waiting list for the air force, why was that?

Yes. Well the intake was slow, the Commonwealth Training Scheme really hadn't

12:00 got into top gear. There were delays in transporting trainees going over in ships going over to Canada, and also they were training in Rhodesia at that time. Which of course is now Zimbabwe. The usual bureaucratic delays. Probably another reason was that certainly

12:30 Bomber Command had not been built up to any real strength at that early period, as it did later of course – there were so many casualties that they had to keep filling the vacancies. So it was a question of it hadn't really got off the ground in the greatest strength possible, so there were inevitable delays.

13:00 **You mentioned that most of the men that would be interviewed for the air force would say, "I want to fly and I want to be a Spitfire pilot." How was the air force perceived in terms of its glamour and prestige?**

Well I suppose one of the attractions was that it had a damn good uniform. It was a tradition in the air force of course, that you wore a

13:30 tie which was certainly not heard of in the army, except for the officers. The benefits to the airmen, particularly the people on flying duties, was that they were of the lowest rank in the air force

14:00 and probably deliberately made that way. They were aircraftsmen second class, as they called them whereas anyone joining the air force on general duties, which are ground duties say, that would be an aircraftman first class. So they probably deliberately did that to pull them down to size a bit, but it was regarded as a fairly glamorous sort of a uniform. We were all proud to wear it.

14:30 The girls seemed to like it and I guess, when you're young like that it's silly, these things mean something.

When you were called up, where did you have to go?

First to Woolloomooloo, which had a recruitment office at Woolloomooloo,

15:00 which was down at the wharves, as you know. I think I just signed papers and went through the usual questionnaires and the usual introductory talks that were given to us, and of course the medical set up was there. I remember

15:30 that finally when I got admitted to the air force, called up. I found myself despatched down to Nowra of all places, to do guard duties at the aerodrome. I was down there for probably four months, five months, before I actually went to Bradfield Park for

16:00 initial training school there, which was 2-ITS [Initial Training School]. That's where you really started getting into the swing of the air force, because you'd be pulled out of parade and there'd be the old sergeants and corporals there be drilling on the parade. You know, smartening you up generally, and giving you a taste of what's to come and then you'd be doing the studies

16:30 and the normal things like navigation and they general things associated with a rookie in learning all about the service he's joined.

What kind of training, in terms of practical training did you get at Bradfield Park?

Oh nothing very practical I can assure you. That didn't

17:00 really start in earnest until Canada, until we got to Canada.

What were you learning in Bradfield Park, in detail if you could?

I'm just trying to think what we learnt. That's a bit of an enigma to me, because I know we had to learn how to roll our blankets in the correct way on the palliasses we slept in. We had to do all this parade ground stuff, and

17:30 I don't really know what we learnt there that much use to us, to be honest. I suppose there was some bookwork we had to study, but I don't recall anything startling that I ever learnt there. Certainly nothing about flying.

What was that camp life like for you?

It was rather good

18:00 fun because we used to get quite a lot of leave there, which meant that we could get on the train at Lindfield and go home. When the instructors were fed up with us and fed up with what they were doing, they would march us down to the Lane Cove River and we could have a swim there, and that was pretty

18:30 pleasant, and talk to some of the locals, particularly the girls. Then we used to go to dances in the hall at Lindfield, and that was good fun. It wasn't exactly a hard life, I can assure you. Quite enjoyable.

What kind of other men had joined up at the same time as you?

19:00 **What were their backgrounds?**

Well, they were, I think the standard of education of the ones that went into the air force was fairly high. They were fairly selective in the early days and I suppose later on too. I know many of my friends, as I said, were barristers, solicitors,

19:30 bankers, bank clerks, insurance clerks, shipping clerks. Some were, the odd one was a policeman, because I don't think the police would release them to the air force when they had a lot of difficultly. Some were, there were some characters that were bookmakers, some who were motor mechanics,

20:00 school teachers. I know one fellow who was a hospital orderly. Several of them were trainee medical students who decided to join the air force. There were a cross section, but by and large I think they were all pretty well educated.

20:30 **You mentioned that the girls were quite keen on the air force uniform, and that you would go to dances. Can you explain some of the social activities you could do at this time, when you were in training?**

Yes, they were. Well I'm glad you said 'social activities', and not 'activities'.

Or you could tell us about those.

Well, the parents used to come

21:00 along of course, with their girls, more often than not which tended to limit the activities a bit. But the usual dances that we'd do, we'd go there and find some young girl that would, you know, took your fancy and quite often you'd end up on many outings with her. Sometimes

21:30 we'd go to the city and go into the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], and that was a fairly good opportunity to meet some charming young ladies. So all in all, it was a continuous sort of way of life, until you actually seriously got down to the business of being trained to fly.

How were the girls at that time responding to

22:00 **people joining up and enlisting, and all of a sudden being in uniform?**

Oh I can't answer that, I don't know. I don't know, the girls probably had their own ideas on it, but I think they tended to like to be with uniformed men.

22:30 And the royal blue of the air force appealed to a lot of them. The army fellas wouldn't like me saying that, but I think it's a fact of life. Because I know that we were often called the 'Blue Orchids', that was the acronym given to us. Some of the army guys used to call us 'Pansies' - we wouldn't be orchids, we were pansies. I don't know,

23:00 that was sort of inter-service jealousy I suppose.

Was there rivalry between the various services?

Not really, certainly not when we got serious about things, and we were particularly in England, flying. We had a high regard for the servicemen over there, whatever their service they were in.

23:30 And even the civilians, because the civilians were doing all sorts of things, like armed guard duties and fire fighting. They were very much a part of our life. Probably not so much in Australia, but certainly

over there.

Could you tell me about leaving Australia and where you went, and how you left?

24:00 Yes, I mentioned to you before that I was put into this pool, what they call a pool, which is awaiting embarkation which was a bit disconcerting because all my friends were suddenly going on board this ship to leave. I'd missed out because

24:30 there were only so many permitted to go, it was just a case of lottery really, the numbers came up and that was it. A number of us were in this pool, and they didn't quite know what to do with us, but eventually somebody got the bright idea that we should be sent down to the Glebe Island wharves. That's where the incident occurred, where we were unloading the mustard gas in these drums.

25:00 A number of the fellas got seriously burnt by this gas, and a couple of them were on the draft going to Canada – they ended up being sent back to Australia and being discharged, it was so bad. As I told you, the government denied all knowledge of this sort of thing. The wharf labourers went on strike, that was the reason why we were sent down – they wouldn't handle it these drums of gas.

What kind of burns would they…

Mustard gas.

25:30 **So would…**

Well it would affect the skin and the fumes would get in your lungs. It was a dreadful thing. They used it in WW1, it was a terrible source of problems for them. Many, many soldiers in WW1 were gassed in the trenches from mustard gas.

26:00 So anyway, we ended up, I finally got on this particular draft going on the ship, because one of them had fallen sick. So I was sent to take his place, and I went over then eventually with my friends. We went on this old ship, the Hermitage, as I said before, was a captured Italian boat that was pretty clapped out, and

26:30 used to break down in the Pacific quite often which didn't cheer us up. It was run by the US Navy and they seemed to be a sort a slap happy sort of an outfit to run the ship anyway. However, we ended up getting to Vancouver on it. We called in at Pago Pago I remember, we stayed two days there. I remember also picking up at Pago Pago,

27:00 or rather the ship picking up at Pago Pago, a lot of casualty cases – American GI's [General Infantrymen]. Their limbs were all swollen from some insect bites they had which were toxic. It affects the limbs and they were grossly disfigured, and they looked terrible.

27:30 **What year was this that you left Australia?**

The year would have been 1941 I think, yeah I think it was 1941.

Was this at the beginning or the end of the year, do you remember?

Oh probably towards the end of 1942, yeah. I'd

28:00 have to check my own records on that, but I was on course 33. It might have early '42, I'm not sure.

Do you remember when Pearl Harbour happened, where you were?

Oh yes, I do. I think, what was Pearl Harbour? What date was Pearl Harbour?

It was December 7th, 1941 I think.

Was it?

28:30 I remember that well, yeah.

What do you remember of hearing about that?

What do I remember about it? Well I remember that there was a tremendous concern in Australia about the Japanese, because it was quite obvious that they were going to attack Australia. They were certainly going to come down en masse

29:00 to Papua New Guinea and those areas of the Pacific. I could foresee a lot of involvement by Australian troops against the Japanese, and with the Americans of course.

So you were still in Australia when the Japanese entered the war, is that correct?

29:30 Yes. I was. How I remember it is this – my parents of course lived in Vaucluse you know, and you could see out through the heads from the balcony upstairs. And my father had a

30:00 sign that had the name of the house, that was 'Salamaua' where he lived, which used to flash, change colours like a little neon sign which was a little German patent that he picked up somewhere from one

of his German friends. This thing, we had some visitors coming so he switched this sign on, just to tell them to look for the name of the house.

30:30 Suddenly two detectives turned up and demanded to know why he was signalling to the enemy – which gave him a bit of a shock. Anyway, he had to write a long explanation of why this light was flashing, and it didn't take him long to make his mind up – he better get rid of it in a hurry, which he did.

31:00 **Can you explain what the conditions were like on board the Hermitage when you were going over?**

Oh terrible is the word to respond to that. They were terrible. We were crammed in like sardines; I remember the stench in the part where we were was

31:30 dreadful. The boat was wallowing in heavy seas on one occasion, and a lot of people were sick. The food was run on strictly US Navy lines, with the chow line and the stainless steel trays where you queued up.

32:00 The cooks would slop the food in your tray, container. They always had plenty of ice cream, like most of these US ship, but then all the trash, as they called it, was put in these big barrels and they'd be trundled up to the deck and at a certain time all the trash would go overboard.

32:30 And the reason would be, it would have to go over at a certain time because the captain insisted the timetable be adhered to because they didn't want to leave a trail for the German submarines, or the Japanese submarines, but the stupid part about it was that the ship also had cases and cases and cases of Hershey's chocolates. I remember

33:00 these chocolates were ok when the voyage started, but half way through they acquired what they called bloom, bloom on the chocolate and it's terrible to eat, so they decided to turf all these boxes of chocolates overboard. So unbeknown to the captain, these guys on the mess deck just picked all these chocolates up and throw them overboard, and there'd be a tail a mile long behind you

33:30 of all Hershey's chocolates. Whereas he was so strict about the garbage detail, but he didn't worry about the chocolates. Well I thought, 'That's a bit dumb.' But that's what happened.

What were your sleeping quarters like on the boat?

Terrible, again. I think they were just these collapsible sort of steel

34:00 bunk things. Which you lowered down when you went to sleep, and pushed them up and locked them in position when you got up of a morning. So it wasn't pleasant.

You'd been waiting a fair amount of time to actually go overseas, waiting to be called. What were your feelings as you left Australia?

34:30 Well, apprehension – wondering what's in store for me. Probably a feeling of wonder, an element of excitement. Interest in visiting a new country like Canada and England. Stimulation by the contact with your

35:00 mates and some concern about whether you'd ever see Australia again. I guess they're the main sentiments one has.

Was this the first time overseas for you, apart from Papua New Guinea?

Well, apart from being up in the islands, yes. Yes, I'd not been out of Australia other than that before.

35:30 **When you got to Vancouver, where did you go from there?**

Well we disembarked in Vancouver. We then were put on a train that went across the Rockies to Edmonton, which is in Alberta I think. Yes, Alberta.

36:00 And Edmonton was the collection point before you're actually sent out to the particular flying schools or the particular stations that you were committed to, for the training and that. I went through a selection program there. I went over in an aircrew category as

36:30 an observer, which involved navigation, bombing and some gunnery. Then of course because of the heavy aircraft that were now being produced for bombing command, the powers that be decided that they should split the category up and have two specialist categories, where one would be navigator and one would be bomb aimer.

37:00 That's what they decided, so therefore, the selection committee would look at the situation and allocate you accordingly. That was a bit of a hit and miss arrangement, too because in my case, I thought, "Well they're never going to make me a pilot because of my navigation, so I may as well ask to be a navigator." Anyway it

37:30 turned out I had no say in the matter at all anyway – I ended up a bomb aimer. I thought, "Oh well, that's the way things go." So they sent me to a school in Mossbank in Saskatchewan, which was the No 2 BGS [Bombing and Gunnery Schools. No. 2 Mossbank, Saskatchewan] or something which was a bombing school. I was trained in bombing there and flying in the essence.

38:00 I got pretty interested in it because I had particularly good sight – I had a good long sight – and I found that I fitted into that category rather well. I know that I ended up breaking the station record in bombing the targets. They set these targets floating around in that lake, and

38:30 you would come in and bomb them. They would vector where the bombs fell, because they would send up smoke. They were dummy bombs of course, bit they were smoke filled. They would vector in and work out the distance to the target and different headings and rather to the surprise of my mates, I did pretty well in that. So it suited me in the end, and I

39:00 had got a new team of blokes there, some of them came over on the ship with me, but we got along fine, we did very well, all of us. The Australians were very good in that respect, that they'd help one another, and they were good company.

39:30 **I might just pause you there and talk about that training in a bit more detail. Could you explain what you do as a bomb aimer?**

What you do?

Yeah, when you get in the plane, what's the procedure?

Well on the heavy aircraft it was a very important role because your responsibility really started as part of aircrew, when you were coming up towards the target to bomb. You actually were in control of the aircraft

40:00 operation, bombing operation, once you got near the target. It was incumbent on you to really do the job properly. One of the things that you had to was of course, with a flak flying around you, you still had to keep in position and keep flying on towards the target. So the photograph flash

40:30 would go off and record where the bombs were falling. That was probably to ensure that you probably got to the target and that you actually did your job properly. When it was dense cloud of course, you had to rely on the marker flares dropped by the pathfinder force who would mark the target and you would bomb the flares, rather than the ground because you wouldn't be able to see it anyway. There were all sorts of radar devices and navigation devices that helped you tremendously. The other parts of the duty were of course, to assist the navigator as well. I mean my navigator and I worked very closely together. I was reasonably proficient with the 'G'-sets and H-2S sets, which were navigational aids. My pilot regarded me as his co-pilot in any emergency. I don't know whether that applied in all Halifax aircraft. I know in Lancaster's it's generally the engineer, the flight engineer that is supposed to be the emergency pilot. Now we weren't trained as pilots. I had done some practice on these, what do you call them…

Tape 4

00:33 I had trained on several occasions on a Link [instrument flying] Trainer, they were kind of a small box-like fuselage with a cover that you pull down as though you were blind flying, with all the instruments, connected up to a plotting machine near the table. The operator would see the plot being worked

01:00 but you'd have card with instructions which way you'd have to fly and when you turn on course so and so, and all that sort of business and it's supposed to have made a pattern on the plot, if you'd done it properly. I remember the first one I did was a pattern that had to look like the iron cross. I made a hell of a mess of it, it didn't look too much like

01:30 an iron cross when I finished, so I thought, "I mucked that up." The second time I did it, it wasn't too bad. I can't remember what the pattern was there, but it wasn't too bad so I had a little bit of an idea of how to fly a plane. The purpose of the bomb aimer being put in that position was in our case, in Halifax, that because if the pilot was killed or out of action, it was your job to get the plane back to base and then bail the crew out.

02:00 You couldn't land it obviously because you weren't trained in that. That was just another duty, and you hoped it never happened, but it happened quite often unfortunately I think, and of course the other thing, was that we were trained in gunnery. I had gone to the gunnery school in Canada, the gunnery section of the school, the bombing school

02:30 and had been trained on Vickers gas operated machine guns, one of which was fitted in the nose of the Halifax – which as it turned out in my sojourn in France was very useful, because I ended up unofficially as a rear gunner on a jeep with the Special Air Service [SAS] operating behind enemy lines. So that stood me in good stead, but those

03:00 duties were secondary really to the main task.

Can I just ask, with that Vickers gun that was equipped in the nose of the Halifax, what was the theory behind when that would be fired? In what instance?

Well it was a measure of protection. In bomber command generally, the idea was

03:30 that you wouldn't go actually looking for fighters to shoot down, your job was to bomb – to get to the target successfully and do your job and get home. So it was a protective device rather than attacking mechanism. I had, of course, I didn't last too long in operations, we were shot down early in the piece. So I really didn't get to the stage of using the gun, except on another

04:00 aircraft. In the training area, on operational training unit, we were using these, firing at drogues towed by one of the other aircraft to record your capability in gunnery, but that's about my main recollection of it.

04:30 **Can you explain exactly what the Halifax looks like and what the layout is inside, and where everyone sits?**

Well, that's a fairly detailed sort of a question, isn't it? I mean, technically I suppose you could say initially the seating of the crew would be such that the bomb

05:00 aimer would be in the nose next to the navigator, who had a curtain which he'd draw so that he could keep the light out when the flak burst and flares were going down, he wouldn't be disturbed. The wireless operator would be next to him.

05:30 The pilot would be sort of, if you like on a mezzanine floor above him. There'd be a spare seat that could be used next to the pilot so that bomb aimer would spend much of his time in that seat, and then proceed to the nose, and then of course he would be down on his belly down in the nose, map reading as you went along. Then there'd

06:00 be some map reading particularly if you had good sight, which I had, and long sight, you could pick up objects and more or less pass that information to the navigator who would check it against his plotting and his fixes. So it was a bit of a teamwork thing. Then you would have the mid-upper gunner, who would be

06:30 be in the mid-upper turrets. He would have four machine guns, and then you would have the poor old rear gunner right in the tail of the aircraft, and he would have four guns. And he'd be doing a freezer [very cold at altitude] in there because most of them used to remove the Perspex panel, so they would get clear vision whereas the Perspex panel would have protected them to some degree from the elements, but

07:00 many of them would remove them because they reckoned that you know, they got a speck on the Perspex and they thought it was and aircraft, and you know all sorts of mayhem would start and there would be, that would cause a bit of a problem. So they would remove it. The crew would be a total crew of seven.

07:30 There were escape hatches – in my case the escape hatch is in the nose, [that] was really the only major problem that the navigator and I experienced anyway, because we were responsible for getting rid of it so we could jump out with the wireless operator, or with the pilot if necessary. There was another hatch

08:00 further down towards the tail. I can't remember whether it was a hatch or a door, I can't remember. This particular hatch jammed on us, and we had a job to get rid of it, but the aircraft was four engine. They used to run on Hercules sixteen

08:30 engines, which are a radial engine. The earlier models had inline engines, they were Rolls Royce Merlins, but I think the Hercules radials were more powerful. The technical details of the aircraft were specified in part of training and our manuals. I remember there

09:00 was a trailing wireless aerial, which the wireless operator had to wind in if we were landing, and let it out when we were flying, but occasionally he would forget. Oh, and the flight engineer, I missed the flight engineer. There would be a flight engineer too, who really sort of stood behind the pilot or occupied the seat next to him when the bomb aimer wasn't

09:30 sitting in it and sometimes he would get and clear out of the astrodome and see what's going on, but he was mainly concerned with looking after the gauges for the fuel and so forth. In the Lancaster's of course he assisted the pilot with the throttles. In the Halifax's it was certainly my job

10:00 to do that. So it did vary between the type of aircraft, and also to some extent what the skipper of the aircraft wanted, how he would prefer it to be handled. That's about it, without going into all the technicalities of it.

That's fabulous. Were you training with the same team while you were in Canada?

No, in Canada we were not.

10:30 We used to go up, I remember we flew in an aircraft called a Bristol [149] Bolingbroke, which I think three of us went up in. Particularly doing gunnery exercises, which was a fairly tight fit actually. I remember one occasion, one of the guys that came with me and another fellow

11:00 was, he was subject to air sickness. We used to call him the Dad, because he was thirty years of age and was regarded as an old man. We were round about the twenties. When we were doing some of these flights he would be sick as a dog, and if we ever got him to the stage that two of us would do the exercise, and he was the third one,

11:30 it was all right. But if he went first he'd throw up all over the whole thing, and even in bombing, the same problem. So it could be over the bombsite and it was a pretty messy operation trying to work out the bombsite with vomit all over it. However, we put up with it because we wanted to help him get through and graduate. We had

12:00 a high regard for him because we thought he had a lot of guts, putting up with being sick and still pursuing his career as an aircrew.

What could you do to get him through it?

Well, I think not reporting him for being airsick. I mean it's a terrible thing to be airsick and have to put up with it and still have to do all your routine exercises.

12:30 It took quite a lot of guts really, to persevere. We admired him for that, and we would supported him and say, "Oh no, he's not been sick. He's a good aircrew man."

I've talked to a lot navy people who talked about the frequency, or how common seasickness was. How common was airsickness?

Very common.

13:00 It may not have got to quite the extent of the navy boys. I've been seasick and I've been airsick, because of my sailing experiences, and I've sailed in some pretty rough seas. I had a boat built down in Victoria and sailed it up to Sydney, and I went through some terrible weather coming up. I know what seasickness is really like.

13:30 But my own feeling is that I think that airsickness is even worse than seasickness.

Why is that?

I don't know, it's just more upsetting. It may be that you've got a noise in your ear from the engines, you're maybe being hurtled all over the sky because of the atmospheric conditions, as well as being

14:00 internally upset. That may be the reason, I don't know.

Given that before joining the air force lots of people might not have ever been up in a plane before, were there ever any cases in Bradfield Park or in Canada of people having fear of flying?

To cease flying?

Of having a fear of flying, and then that affecting them?

Well I mean

14:30 we've got to be honest, a lot of us had a fear of flying. Particularly when certain events took place. If one lost an engine or that landing gear wouldn't come down, you've obviously got a fear. I don't know whether you call that a fear of flying, but you'd certainly call that a fear, as to whether you're going to get down in one piece or not, but an actual fear of flying and getting into an aircraft, and no incident occurring.

15:00 I think anybody says, particularly on operations over Europe, anybody says that they weren't afraid, I think are just bloody liars to be honest. I think we were all pretty concerned about things, but you had to put up with it. That was part of the job. I know I've experienced the

15:30 situation of having to bail out of the aircraft, and like others like myself who are members of the Caterpillar Club [Any person from that time on who jumped from a disabled aircraft with a parachute became a member of the Caterpillar Club], as we were known, which is the 'hitting the silk' sort of thing. Not a pleasant experience, although a lot of people now are doing it as a hobby, it's a little different because on those occasions the need to get out

16:00 arose by emergencies. And you know, you've got all sorts of things happening in the air around you. You've got flak flying around, flares dropping, fighter aircraft zooming about, and even concerns about some of your own aircraft dropping bombs on you while you're coming down. All that sort of stuff creates a fear situation, and you know that you're going to end up in enemy territory. You don't

16:30 know what the hell's in store for you. So fear is a thing that's I suppose it's relative to the conditions that prevail.

Do you think there are particular character traits that RAF people are equipped with that mean they can deal with that fear?

Well I think any serviceman can deal with that fear because they're lost if they can't.

17:00 It’s not particularly air force or navy, I think fear situation arise in all sorts of service, in actions with service people, and civilians of course. I know of only one instance of

17:30 an airman being discharged from the service in the air force, for being discharged on the basis of what they call LMF – which is Lack of Moral Fibre. He just couldn’t do the job he was assigned to do. Now the normal reaction

18:00 of other airmen to that situation, is anyone that goes LMF is yellow, he’s a coward. In the case of this unfortunate fellow, it was the fact that he had a strong religious background. He was quite happy to fly an aircrew in bomber command, providing he wasn't engaged in the physical task of sending bombs

18:30 onto civilians. He didn’t mind being a radio operator, or a wireless operator. He wouldn’t have minded being a flight engineer, but he just wouldn’t be a bomb aimer. In fact he had some hesitation about being a navigator, and he certainly wouldn’t be a gunner. So he pleaded that his religion

19:00 would prohibit him from flying in the capacity of a bomb aimer or a gunner. They said, “No, that’s not good enough.” So they discharged him as LMF and the poor fellow had to be shipped back to Australia. Now there were other cases that I know of, but I wasn't

19:30 intimately involved like I was with him, because he was on our course in Canada. The other cases that I know of through my colleagues over there, were fellows that were just plain damn scared. They had no religious feelings about these things, it was just that they were scared. They admitted it, and they were then paraded in front of

20:00 all the crew and stripped them of all their flying breve or wings, or their stripes or whatever. It was a terrible degrading situation. Then they’d ship them off somewhere in another part of the service, like the mess room or the cooks or something like that, or discharge them completely.

20:30 **What sort of accidents were there while you were in Canada?**

Quite a few. There’s always flying accidents in training. There’s certainly a lot of accidents when you get onto the heavy aircraft in England. Either flying twin-engine aircraft, or four engine aircraft at the conversion units and the operational training units.

21:00 I witnessed a terrible accident myself, I wasn't in it thank goodness, but I witnessed it – it was shocking. It was a one engine aircraft that lost its engine on take off and the thing crashed, and we happened to be close by and we all raced over to see what could be done. And of course there were bullets flying in all directions. The thing

21:30 was burning like fury, and finally there was a huge conflagration and I happened to see the wireless operator with his hand up like this, on the radio set, and he was like a skeleton. Burnt to a cinder. The smell of human flesh burning was not very pleasant. That was a fairly sobering sort of sight to me.

22:00 Of course the rest of the crew were all burnt, but I didn’t see them, but I particularly remember that, and I’ve thought about it in later years at times, too. It’s not a pleasant sight that happened not infrequently. There are others that collided in training, and that was another hazard of the business.

22:30 I remember the old Anson’s we used to fly, it took I think a hundred and fifty turns by hand to wind the wheels up, and you’d be sweating like a pig and sometimes the damn things would jam and you couldn’t get the wheels down. Then you had a problem, you would have to land on your belly, on the belly of the aircraft. So these things happened all time – you’d blow a tyre on take off, or you’d lose an engine.

23:00 All sorts of things.

On a happier note, what would you do on leave while you were in Canada?

In Canada? We used to do the usual things, get drunk. Canada was a funny place for booze. In Canada it wasn't the practice, in fact

23:30 I think it was prohibited. You couldn’t get liquor from a pub and take it away and drink it, and you couldn’t take it away – you had to go to the liquor store that was like a bond, and purchase the liquor in bulk. It was rather a peculiar arrangement, and of course the obvious thing happened, and you picked up your liquor supply and you’d have

24:00 to sort of get stuck into it and drink the whole lot, which caused a lot of problems. I don't know the reason for that but that’s the way it was. The liquor laws in Canada are very strange, and I’m told that they still prevail. The other obviously, the usual thing would take place, we would be invited to the homes of the citizens and they’d be very kind

24:30 and generous. They enjoyed having people like ourselves around the dinner table. There’d be the dances we’d go to, I remember a place out of Halifax which was a rest camp that I ended up with a few of my mates. And fortunately they had a sailing boat there, and I used to go out sailing – I was the only one that could sail a boat.

25:00 We used to go out and sail around the lake, then go down the fish shop and have fish a chips and all that

sort of stuff. The usual thing, a lot of them went gambling, a lot of them went to the races. The usual sort of things would go on.

Did you get to spend any time in the USA?

25:30 Yes, I did. I went down to New York on leave on one occasion. I had an introduction of the manager of the branch office in New York for the insurance company that I was working with before I left Australia. Of course the girls in the office gave us one hell of a good time. I remember I wanted to do some shopping and buy some silk stockings for a couple of my girlfriends, and my mate did the same.

26:00 We were taken over and all around the big stores, and they'd pick up the tab for it and the taxis. We were entertained a tremendous lot. I remember we ended up in a bar called 'Jack Dempsey's Bar'. Jack Dempsey was a famous boxer,

26:30 in fact he won the world champion I think at one stage. And he owned this bar, and we'd go in there and all the US GI's and the navy guys and all the rest of them, and the WAC's [Women's Army Corps], and we'd have a pretty good time, drinking some of these fiendish cocktails that were brewed up.

How did New York women seem

27:00 **compared to Australians and Canadians?**

Women are women the world over. Charming, I suppose is the word. I didn't meet one that wasn't. I didn't meet one that wasn't friendly. I'm not complaining.

Would you get to kiss these girls?

Oh of course we would.

27:30 They weren't kiss proof.

How did it seem, given that America hadn't been in the war very long, what were your impressions of America in that wartime climate?

Well it was strange because there were no blackouts as there were in England,

28:00 when we got to England, and to some extent Australia on the coastal areas. There was, life went on, people went about their business in the usual way. There was hustle and bustle, particularly in New York, it didn't change, it was still existent. The businesses still operated. There was a lot of affluence there, a lot of money being made, particularly the ones working in the

28:30 munitions factories and the aircraft construction factories and so forth. It was a pretty robust sort of an atmosphere, and of course the place would be full of servicemen, and servicewomen. Pretty exciting place in a way.

29:00 **Where did you stay while you were in New York?**

Well we stayed in some hotel there, I can't remember the name of it. I can't possible remember the name of it. I may have even stayed at a club for servicemen, I don't recall it. We were probably too boozed to know about it, I don't know.

Did you receive your wings while you were in Canada?

Yes.

29:30 **What sort of ceremony was there?**

Well there was a big wing parade, of course. Everybody's lined up, and everything is pukka [clean, polished], and the big brass [high ranked officers] was there. It was a ceremony that was taken

30:00 very seriously.

Can you tell me then about getting posted to England from Canada?

Yes, when we'd finished graduating some of them were commissioned of course. Usually the ones that were commissioned were the ones that were made instructors to stay in Canada.

30:30 The rest of us were sergeants, and ultimately became flight sergeants. That was a peculiar situation because on my course particularly we had some pretty brainy fellows who had done remarkably well academically, but they ended up sergeants because we were asked actually,

31:00 were we prepared to stay in Canada to be instructors – those that were selected. And most of the guys, and certainly I was the same, said, "No, I don't want to stay in Canada and instruct. I want to get where the action is." So we were quite happy to wave the commission business goodbye and go over as non-commission officers. I think most Australians felt the same way. There were

31:30 some commission guys sent to England, like on the draft, but every Canadian I know of ended up being commissioned. The Canadian Government believed the principal trades and aircrew should be

commissioned officers. The Australian Government didn't believe in that at all, nor did the RAF, so the result

32:00 was that nearly every Canadian that was on your course would get their commission no matter what he did. We wouldn't, we would be non-commissioned officers, most of us. That frankly didn't worry us, we couldn't care less as long as we got over to where the action was. So we went over, we were all drafted to meet up after leave in a place called

32:30 Halifax, which is on the east coast of Canada, and it's a big port. When we got there we were all marched onto the Queen Mary. The Queen Mary used to do the run from Halifax to, well in our case to Glasgow in Scotland and it was never in convoy because it was such a fast ship.

33:00 But the submarine couldn't get near it, unless they fluked a lucky shot with their torpedos or whatever. It plied back and forward, and it used to carry something like fifteen to eighteen thousand troops on board. So being part of that lot, we used to have to queue up for meals. We would have

33:30 breakfast and then start thinking about queuing up for the evening meal, because there were so many of us. There'd be other contingencies that would have to be contended with, that was the accommodation. We were all jammed in like cattle, and I remember having to sleep on the deck on one night because you had to change bunks with somebody and alternate.

34:00 One would have the bunk and you sleep on deck, and vice versa, but because it was a reasonably short run, it didn't really matter all that much, but it did a mighty job that Queen Mary, I must admit. The Cunard [Shipping] Line contributed greatly.

Were there personnel from other services amongst these eighteen

34:30 **thousand troops?**

Yes, there were a lot of troops on board. It was a mixed lot.

Were they all different nationalities?

Well there'd be Americans, there'd be Canadians, there'd be Australians, there'd be New Zealanders, and maybe there may be others for all I know, but that would comprise the bulk of them I would imagine.

What would you do on the ship if you weren't sleeping

35:00 **or queuing up for food?**

Well that took up most of our time, frankly. Oh, they'd play cards and gamble, and pontoon and all those things. I think cards was probably one of the ways they occupied most of their spare time – playing for money of course.

Was there alcohol

35:30 **on board?**

Not supposed to be, but there was. There are plenty of opportunities to take a bottle of scotch with you, or whatever you drank. Rye, Canadian rye or whatever. I never had a problem there, I always managed to get a drink.

What happened once you got to Glasgow?

Glasgow we were disembarked

36:00 and then we were given rail warrants and sent down to a place called Brighton, which is on the southern part of England, which is on the foreshore there. Brighton was a kind of collection point, particularly for Australians and New Zealanders. We were billeted, I remember, in two big hotels there.

36:30 They were old Victoriana hotels, one was the Metropole, and the other one was The Grand I think. I remember they had palatial staircases, circular staircases, and it was common practice to put your kit bag on the top and let it slide all the way down and cause a lot of people problems. It was reasonably comfortable.

37:00 We would have stretchers, so many to a room and that sort of thing. Then we would have to parade outside and do the roll call, and when you would be discharged from that function you'd generally do a

37:30 round of the towns, or a pub crawl. I seem to remember that Brighton in particular had an enormous amount of pubs and if you were going to try and attempt to booze at the lot of them, you wouldn't last five minutes. So you sort of did a pub crawl with four or five of them, that would be it. That was, you know,

38:00 you'd go to the movies or walk the waterfront, or maybe you'd go to a dance if there was one on, but it was just killing time until you were posted to an operation or training unit.

What sort of provisions were made in Brighton and in these towns against air raids and attack

from the enemy?

Well there used to be a

38:30 lot of anti-aircraft batteries there, which were manned by the home guard. There'd be observation posts for the radar blokes, sand bags, you know around the observation gear. There were some pretty big guns mounted

39:00 on the cliffs. The beaches would carry wire netting and probably would be mined. A lot of the buildings would be protected by sand bags. In the end you may have these big blimps [barrage balloons] sent up by the particular specialists in the army that did that sort of

39:30 thing, and the air force. They of course would be there to harass the German fighter aircraft coming over. Quite frequently the Messerschmitts would come over and start shooting up, you know in the street, stirring things up a bit, and civilians and servicemen alike.

40:00 It wasn't unusual for them to swoop down and start just spraying bullets in all directions. I don't recall any bombing incidents there, but there were certainly plenty of fighters coming over.

How did English life appear to be carrying on, given this ever-present threat?

Well they are remarkable people, the English, all the British.

40:30 They're a stoic people who tend to be, what would be the word, apart from their normal courage they would tend to be capable of putting up with an awful lot.

41:00 Their aggression doesn't arise until they've pushed very hard. That would be my summation. Then they really fight. For instance, in the Battle of Britain of course, as you know, the fighter boys that were there did a marvellous job. The surprising thing is the scene

41:30 there is the distinct difference in classes. Have a distinct upper class there, and a lower class that we don't experience in Australia. We don't really look at one another in that light. We're very egalitarian. They tend to put people into slots, and in the early part of the…

Tape 5

00:33 **Mr Innes, before lunch you were talking about being based in Brighton, where did you go from there?**

From Brighton I went to, I was sent to a place called West Freugh – no wait a minute, sorry. I was sent to a place called,

01:00 I think it was West Freugh in Scotland. Would that be right? No, it wouldn't be. I was sent to 27 Operational Training Unit in Lichfield. Lichfield is in Staffordshire. That's where the crew selection came in, so in other words the system was all the aircrews were there ready to go on their training

01:30 missions, and they had to select the crew. They had to do it individually, so it was a strange procedure. Eventually it worked, strangely enough, but the idea was that you would sort of mix around together. There'd be pilots, bomb aimers, navigators, gunners and so forth, and you just mix around and say, "Look, would you like to

02:00 be part of my crew?" And so it went on and on and on, and they eventually formed a crew, which would comprise six. So there'd be six of you all start to come together. I know that sounds a crazy system, but it works. It was rather psychologically a shrewd system, because I think it meant you all had a say who you wanted to fly with. That formed the nucleus of the crew that

02:30 you flew with on operations.

How much time did you have to get to know the men before this crewing happened?

Oh not very long. I mean you might be sort of in this particular building where this occurred, and you might only be in that building for half an hour, when everybody's looking around mulling over who they might like to have as their mid-upper gunner, or rear gunner, or pilot and what have you.

03:00 In my case, they were mostly Australians at that time, and so we became an all-Australian crew. That worked out quite well. The only other member of the crew was the flight engineer, who was generally English, or British, might be Scots as well. The flight engineer wouldn't be picked up until you

03:30 got way ahead further along the track, at the conversion unit, on the four engine conversion – so you picked them up there, but this was the nucleus of the crew that you start training with.

Who was in your crew? Could you explain who it was?

Who, the names?

Yeah.

Yes, the pilot was Bob Mills [417883] from South Australia.

04:00 The navigator was Keith Mills [425954], this Australian – same name, no relation – from Mackay. There was Johnson, Barry Johnson [266115] who was from Melbourne. Jimmy Willams, who was the rear gunner, he came from

04:30 Bathurst. There was Doug Foden [428495], who was the mid-upper gunner, he came from Melbourne. And myself. So we were a mixed lot, but we got on very well together.

You mentioned that this was an all Australian crew, but there would have been mixed crews of different nationalities. How did people get along?

With the mixed crews?

05:00 Oh very well, there were a lot of Australians in mixed crews. There were circumstances where you know, you would lose members of the crew, who were either shot down or transferred or something. There were occasions where a crew would go out and come back, one of them would be injured and put into hospital.

05:30 Then another one would have to fill that gap, and so it went on. Then of course, as the heavy bomber attacks geared up, [there were] a lot of casualties. You have to remember that I suppose the casualty rate in bomber command was something like seventy percent. It might have even been a bit higher. The actual casualty rate in

06:00 Bomber Command when we were operating fully, compared with say the German U-boat service, which was their highest casualty rate of all services, was about eighty percent. Might have even been a bit higher. So we were running second, which was to give you an idea of the number of people that lost their lives in bomber command. The

06:30 number of operational flights to complete the first tour of operations was thirty. At that stage, when I was on operations eventually, I hadn't met anyone who had finished the tour, a tour. Now, there are people that have, in fact one of my best friends lives here up the road – he finished a tour on Lancaster's, but he's one of the few I think, that finished the whole tour.

07:00 **When you were in Scotland and the crewing up happened, what kind of characteristics were people looking for in their fellow crew members?**

Well we thought that the first requirement was that they would have to be proficient at their particular job, whether they were gunners or bomb aimers, or navigators or pilots, or whatever – they would have to be good at that. Now, you really

07:30 didn't know, because you'd never flown with them before. So it was a question of just forming your own judgement. The other thing of course, was compatibility. You had to try and assess whether they were compatible, because you couldn't have someone who was always a trouble maker, or argumentative, or a totally undisciplined approach to things. It had to be

08:00 somebody that you felt confident with, and as I said, that you could depend upon. Because the success of any operation depended on teamwork.

Where were you based in Scotland, in terms of the accommodation and the layout of the place?

Well we were based in Nissen huts. West Freugh of course is right up in the north of Scotland –

08:30 well it's not right in the north of Scotland, it's really north of the northern part of England, in Scotland. It was a coastal area near Stranraer, and the aerodrome was a typical operational aerodrome, or training aerodrome. We used to do training flights in Anson's and the whole thing was

09:00 fairly well organised. We would have exercises with instructors. We would be given assignments and do a flight plan where we were to go. We would be graded in accordance with our abilities, and we would be give marks for the exercise, with our respective roles

09:30 in the exercise. We would do practice bombing and so forth, because you must appreciate before we went there, we had to go through the satellite aerodrome of 27 OTU [Operational Training Unit] at Lichfield, and that was on Wellingtons. So it's a matter of just following the procedure right through and going with the system.

10:00 **Could you explain what you had to do at Lichfield exactly?**

At Lichfield? Lichfield, we really didn't do any flying at Lichfield – we went to the satellite aerodrome that belonged to Lichfield. Our particular group were at Church Broughton, which was a satellite, and it's in Derbyshire which is just across the border from Staffordshire.

10:30 We were flying Wellingtons, and Wellingtons' a twin-engine aircraft, and we trained on them. That was

the next area of our activity. So our crew really got together at Church Broughton –

11:00 that's really where we got together for actual flying. The West Freugh episode was prior to that where we just went as our own particular categories, like bomb aimers went as a group, the navigators and so on, you did that sort of thing. The flight training in 27 OTU

11:30 at Church Broughton carried on until you were finally assigned the task of dropping leaflets. They called it a 'Nickel', so you had to complete one nickel towards the end of the training period. That meant flying over, in our case, France

12:00 dropping leaflets. Which was referred to in rather crude language as 'Dropping bum fodder', because we reckoned it was a useless sort of an arrangement. The leaflets were really the only – I've got one here by the way – it was really kind of a newsletter for the in our case the French.

12:30 It was promoted by [General Charles] de Gaulle and the Free French, but it provided a training exercise in the first six pages of flak, enemy flak. It served its purpose I guess.

Could you explain what would be in those leaflets?

Yes, there'd be news of what was transpiring,

13:00 news of interest to the French people, who were of course not permitted to listen to the broadcast from the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation]. A lot clandestinely used radios but had to keep them hidden from the Germans, and the collaborators who were French people and turned them in to the Germans for reward money.

13:30 So they had to get their news from somewhere, and that was one way of doing it I guess.

Could you tell me about that flight over France? What you remember of that?

Oh well it was a pretty easy sort of a flight. There was a bit of flak flying around, nothing too

14:00 traumatic. I imagine it would have only been about three and half hours flight, maybe four from takeoff. Some of the nickels were done on towns in France – ours was Paris, but as I said it wasn't very traumatic at all. But it did give us some exposure, I mean we didn't know

14:30 what flak was, and these bursts of flak were coming up, of light flak particularly. You just began to understand what it was all about.

When you're in a plane, what does flak look like and sound like?

Well it depends what heights they're bursting at, and what's the power of the flak batteries. Mostly sort of

15:00 puffs of black dots, clouds. Bursts of colour sometimes, if they were using flak in (amatol? UNCLEAR) [?] with their search lights. It's hard to describe what they're like really.

15:30 It jut puffs all around you, and if you're very close you'll hear the rattle of the shrapnel, bursts of shrapnel on the aircraft. Being on the bombing run of course you would get a lot of it. The aircraft would bounce up and down and all sorts of things, but it

16:00 was pretty scary particularly at night – and all our operational flights were at night. We didn't fly by day on operations like the Americans. The American flew by day, we flew by night. But it was the other parts of the business that was frightening, that was the night fighters, and the dropping of the flares by

16:30 some of the German aircraft, the heavier German aircraft. They were dropping flares to silhouette the bombers to the fighters up above them so they could see. That was one of the hazardous parts of the business. Certainly if you were bailing out it was a hazard, as I found out, subsequently when I bailed out.

17:00 I nearly got wiped out from one of those flare dropping aircrafts.

When you were flying over Paris at night, could you explain what it was like, and what you saw below?

Well it depends on how much cloud was about. In our case there was a fair amount of cloud, but you see,

17:30 as you know there were black outs of course, but you would see lakes and rivers quite clearly from the moonlight. And you would also see the guns, you know the shell bursts from the guns, and you would see the searchlights.

18:00 So it was a very eerie sort of an atmosphere, but as for saying, "What does Paris look like at night?" Well there's no way you could answer that question. It's like any other city that's in wartime, it depends on the cloud base.

What part did the weather play in your training, and also later in operations?

Well it plays an enormous part.

18:30 I mean you know, clouds cause a problem. If you get intense cloud it's like flying with a blindfold on. If you get hail, the worst features in the weather was icing up, when you reached a certain height and

19:00 the meteorological position wasn't as good as it ought to be, you get particularly in the high base clouds, you get a lot of the icicles if you like, and the temperature would of course effect it. And you find that the aircraft

19:30 would be bombarded by noise like hail stones and some of the controls would freeze up, they wouldn't function properly. It was very hazardous if there was a lot of that type of cloud and that type of weather prevailed.

What could you do if you were in the air and the instruments were freezing in that way?

20:00 Well the only thing you could do was dive down through the cloud into a lower altitude, and hope that they thaw out. The pilot would have a lot of trouble sometimes controlling the aircraft, and the decision was, "Well do we descend from this heavy cloud base lower down and drop height, and risk the

20:30 flak, which would obviously have a better chance of hitting you, or do we carry on and put up with it?" So it was a question of decision which way to go, and judgement.

How long would you have been in training in Scotland for?

In Scotland? Probably

21:00 about four weeks.

Where did you go from there?

Well training you're talking about West Freugh. Well West Freugh we went to on to the Wellingtons at Church Broughton. Then

21:30 we went from there to Marston Moor [Tockwith] in Yorkshire, and Marston Moor we were converting on to four inch Halifax's, or actually Halifax 2 aircraft. We did a lot of conversion training on those, the pilot particularly.

22:00 The rest of us, the navigator and bomb aimer had to get used to handling the navigational aids. We did a number of cross-country flights in the aircraft, which were over England, over the North Sea,

22:30 probably up to Scotland. Then we would do both day and night flight training on those flights. Then you did practice bombing as well, so it was getting you used to the bigger aircraft. The pilot would have to do bumps and landings to see how he could handle it, with an instructor sitting beside him.

23:00 And that was preparatory to going onto a squadron.

How different were these aircraft to what you had been used to?

Well, as I said, at West Freugh we were on twin engine Anson's. The Halifax was a four engine aircraft, and the Halifax 2 were obviously an inferior aircraft to the Halifax

3.

23:30 That was a Mark III [The Halifax MK. III appeared in 1943. The Rolls Royce engines were replaced by the air-cooled Bristol Hercules radials] version was a much more efficient aircraft, it had a lot of additional features – higher speed, and all in all a better version of it. But they were allotted to the action operation squadrons. So we actually went from there to our operation squadron, which was

24:00 at a place called Breighton, which is near Selby in Yorkshire. I had bought a small Ford Prefect car which had been up on blocks in a farmer's garage because petrol rationing was on of course, with the civilians. In fact they had

24:30 the petrol for the aircraft was, I think it was a colourless fuel, and the civilian one was red, it had a dye in it. We managed to get a few coupons, because it was all under coupons. It was controlled by the ministry, and we had a few coupons.

25:00 I paid twenty pounds I think for that car, and it was a good little car, it ran quite well. The only worry to get around was to milk petrol out of the aircraft on the side, for which of course you would get into terrible trouble if you were caught.

25:30 On one occasion, I had arranged with someone on the ground staff, to give me a drum of petrol out of the aircraft on the aerodrome, and we filled the car up, filled the tank up in the car, put all the crew on board and seven of us

26:00 clamoured in the vehicle. All our kit bags and our gear, and we took off and that's when we drove to Breighton to commence our operational flying and we made a couple of bypasses down through York,

down to the pubs in York on the way, and drank more than we should have. That was a pretty wild old ride, and we

26:30 were pulled over by a policemen. He was on a bike and he saw us, and we thought, “Hello, we’re in trouble now,” because I was scared stiff he’d see, have a look at the petrol tank and check the carburettor or whatever and just check the colour of the fuel we were using. Anyway, one of the guys started to give him a lot of backchat and cheek,

27:00 he got pretty hot under the collar. A bit of an argument started, and he was more concerned about his discussion with these guys than worried about checking the fuel. So we were lucky he didn’t bother us, but he did ask me did I have a licence, to produce the licence. I said, “No, we don’t have licences in Australia.”

27:30 He knew damn well that we were talking nonsense but he finally got tired of all this discussion and flagged us on. So we didn’t get a fine or anything, which is pretty good. They were pretty good, the police there. They were very, particularly if you were aircrew, you got away with a fair bit – and if you're an Australian you get away with a lot.

28:00 But that was really our introduction into the airfield we went to.

Could you explain what the airfield looks like, and the camp looks like at Breighton?

Well it had an assortment of huts where we used to sleep in our

28:30 allotted bunks, if you like. They invariably had an old pot bellied stove in the middle of the room with a chimney going up through the roof. You’d stoke this with coal or a bit of timber, or whatever you could scrounge around. It served a great purpose particularly, because cold

29:00 [it] was snowing. It would get damn cold in those huts, and they’d have a galvanised iron roof on them. You would have the concrete watchtower where the duty officer would be, and all the ground staff officers would be using that for a number of things. That’s where they'd observe you taking off

29:30 and give you the signal to take off. There were the big hangars where the work was done on repairs and maintenance. The aircraft would just be dispersed in pans which would be scattered around, probably under camouflage, remotely near the

30:00 timber woods areas, round that area. It would feature the runways, there’d be a number of runways for taking off. Some would be shorter than others, they usually followed like an egg pattern, and depending on the wind direction you would use whichever runway you were directed to use.

30:30 We had a hospital, we had the bomb dump of course. You may have a sort of shelter, bomb shelters, which would be dug into the ground. The aerodrome would sort of be a hive of activity before an operation because you

31:00 have the fuel tankers there. You’d have a lot of the armourers going out to check this and check that, and you’d have the crews being picked up by the WAF [Women’s Air Force] driving the truck. And you’d have the change rooms where you could change into your flying gear and clamour aboard the truck. She would drop you off to your particular aircraft and do

31:30 the rounds. Then you had the NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute] [food cart] wagon there, which used to serve the coffee and the rolls. So if you were off duty you could use, or the ground staff could use while they're working, to get a hot cup of tea and a bun as they called it. Then you had the mess, which would be the officer’s mess, and the sergeant’s mess, and then the mess for the ordinary, the other ranks.

32:00 And of course, staff headquarters, where the officers were and the CO, and all the hierarchy that controlled the administrative side of the business. Another area would be briefing room, where all the crews would go for briefing before the fight. You would have sections

32:30 there where the gunners would go to their own briefing, and the navigators would go to theirs, and so forth to prepare their flight plans. You obviously always had a guardroom, where the guards would check you in and out of the gate and control the security of the aerodrome.

33:00 You would probably have a stand where the bicycles were stored, you usually owned a bike yourself, or you pinched a bike from somebody else, or one was provided. It depends on the circumstances. And it depends on the way the particular

33:30 aerodrome staff operated. That’s roughly the situation, and it really is hard to describe, you’ve really got to see pictures of it to get a good feel for it.

Well that gives a good indication of what it was like. You mentioned the planes were camouflaged, how would that be done?

The camouflage?

Yeah, when they weren't in use?

Well they were always camouflaged.

34:00 From the time they go on operations they're painted. The camouflage could vary, but obviously the camouflage with the night aircraft would be different from the day aircraft. I know our Halifax was painted with a kind of matte black paint.

34:30 Certain other parts were painted in a different colour, but then the bigger aircraft that the Americans used a different colour altogether, because they flew by day.

I might talk about the preparation for the first operation. What preparations were you doing, what were you being told about your role there?

35:00 Well you knew what your role was, you were trained in that, and you knew also that you had to do a flight check on the equipment before you left. You might even have to go up on a test flight, just testing everything before the evening departure. That would be done during the day. There would be a briefing

35:30 for the different members of the crew. I mean the gunners' briefing would be about the armament side and the problems of a gun stoppage and all of that. And any other things that they should know about as far as the enemy fighter attacks were concerned. The navigators would spend this time

36:00 preparing all his maps, his flight plan, check the turning points, all that sort of business, and the weather. The pilot of course would be interested in the weather, and how many aircraft would be set up. He'd be interested to know which runway they were going to use, which heights they would be flying at.

36:30 The bomb aimer would be the same but he would be briefed by the bombing leader. He would have to know what bombs they're carrying. He'd have to go out and check the bomb gear, the switches, the bomb sight. He would have to know what incendiaries they were carrying and he would have to know the order of bombing.

37:00 Things like that. He would also have to know a bit about what the navigator was doing, and then they would confer too, because they worked so closely together. About using the 'G' set and the H-2S [navigation] equipment. That is the instrument detection stuff, the radar. They would also, all of us would,

37:30 the wireless operator would have to get his codes from the wireless signals leader. He'd get a bit of a briefing. The flight engineer, of course, would have to know all about the fuel loads, he'd have to know approximately what is the length of the flight.

38:00 And sort of work out when he transfers fuel from one tank to another, where abouts he should do [it] and all that sort of thing, theoretically. Then in actual flying he would check those anyway, but it would be done as he goes, not pre-flight. Then would come the time eventually for the flying supper,

38:30 you'd go in for your flying supper. It was usually, you'd be given a treat of bacon and eggs or something like that, which was pretty good, because eggs were very scarce, and we were sort of the favoured few. The rations for the others wasn't all that great but we always got a flying supper like that. After that

39:00 of course you go to the parachute ramp and get your parachutes, and get your gear and all that sort of thing, and change into that and get ready for your flight. Wait for the truck to come down with the WAF driver, and then all clamour on board and she'd drop you at your aircraft you were flying in. You settle down and do a check then, check everything. The

39:30 pilot would know what he should know for the operation. The navigator would know what he's to do, the bomb aimer would have checked his things, he would know what would have to be done, but prior to that you'd have one big meeting together. So before you actually went that far, you would have had a briefing by the CO or the chief

40:00 flying instructor [CFI] or someone like that, or whoever, the net guy – you might even get an intelligence guy there to tell you about what happens if you bail out. It was a very comprehensive briefing, and then of course everybody would be sitting around wondering what the targets are going to be, and if this is going to be really a dicey one, or a piece of cake, as they used to say. Well of course, we would wait with great

40:30 expectations to see this. In the meantime, very often the flight engineers would know roughly where they might be going because of the amount of fuel that they loaded on board, but they would have a [security] curtain there, of course it would be strict security. There would be guards at the entrance of the briefing room. All telephone communications would have been shut down, you weren't allowed to make phone calls to anything like that,

41:00 or take calls. Then they'd have the target map on the wall, and they'd have it covered by a black curtain or something. And at the last minute they would pull a string and show you the target, and you see this big red line going to wherever it was, showing the flight plan that you've got to follow to get to the target. When you saw the thing stretching right across the map,

41:30 you knew damn well it was going to be a long flight, and a tough one. So that was one part of the exercise which was fairly stressful, particular those that were nearing the end of their tour, hoping they

could survive another trip, you know. So that was it, and when you got to the stage when you got out in the aircraft...

Tape 6

00:32 **What sort of gear were you equipped with in the case of a landing, a crashlanding?**

We had a rubber dinghy, a collapsible dinghy, which technically should inflate itself if you crashed, particularly in water of course.

01:00 You had, well what else did you have?

What did you have on your person?

Oh, well we had a Mae West of course, which you called a Mae West that was really like a life jacket thing. Which, again, was if you came down in the sea, channel,

01:30 or whatever. You had a little escape kit, which was like a little celluloid box in which it had certain things – like a small compass, a silk nap. You had a sheet

02:00 which gave certain key words in various languages, like French, German, Spanish and so forth. There was a small hacksaw blade about six inches long that was fitted in it that you could use if you had to. Ostensibly, if you got into the cell and you were captured in a cell, you could, you might have a chance of sawing the cell, the iron

02:30 work on the cell, and getting out. You had what we used to call wakey, wakey pills, which were a drug to keep you awake and give you more energy in a crisis, if you were on the run or something. There was a water bottle, a rubber water bottle that folded up.

03:00 Also the good old Horlick's malted milk tablets. A tube of condensed milk. There's probably one or two other things that I can't think of, but they were a compact little pack that you usually kept in the pocket of your flying jacket, which of course, I found very useful.

How were you

03:30 **prepared for the case of being shot down or crashing behind enemy lines?**

Well that's a very good question, because the thing was fairly iffy in the sense that I never felt that they gave you any instruction what to do. It was a case of, "Well we really don't want to know about that,

04:00 because you're not supposed to have to jump out of aircraft." For instance, I never ever had training with the parachute, using the parachute, jumping out of a parachute. In fact I don't know of anyone in the air force that did. They spent some time ensuring that you knew the routine and procedure

04:30 to evacuate an aircraft in an emergency. That is true, they did teach you that. They taught you precious little about what to do if you were shot down. I had a very strong criticism in later years of the way the air force intelligence operated. I was, in view of my experience I would probably

05:00 give them a mark in the range of ten, I would give them about five. I think they made some terrible blunders. I'm very critical in fact that we all had to use these brown suede flying boots, which you zip up and they're very comfortable and warm in a cold aircraft, but they're terrible things to be walking around the countryside in.

05:30 In my case, when I had to bail out, as soon as I put my feet through the escape hatch to get out my flying boots were whipped off by the slipstream. Most of the people that I met in France who bailed out, had the same experience, many of them.

06:00 Which to my mind was absurd, the flying boots should have been designed with a strap on them which gripped your leg. Later on they remedied that, but it was until almost 1945 that they dreamed up the idea of giving you leather flying boots which had the upper part of the flying boot separate from the main shoe, if you like. And you used the hacksaw

06:30 that was in the flying boot to cut the top off, and then you had a pair of shoes, which is a much more sensible idea. You didn't loose them when you jumped out, and when you did jump out you just get rid of the top part and you had a pair of shoes to walk in. So when I landed, of course, I didn't have anything on my feet except my socks. And many, many of the people I met in the same position were the same. With the result you ended up with sprained ankles,

07:00 broken toes like I had, all sorts of strains and stresses, back problems. You know, it was terrible. That's one of the things I felt they made an awful blunder with, and I don't know why common sense wouldn't have directed them to do something more sensible. The other thing is that the intelligence that was fed

07:30 back, in some cases the CO would invite an ex-escaper that had got back to England, to give a lecture to everybody, what to do if they were shot down. I found that the sort of stuff that was coming back just didn't fit into what I experienced at all. There was a lot better way of handling it. The

08:00 resistance people in the Maquis [resistance] in France, in the forest would have radios and would send wireless messages back to London to the operations people, and be able to tell them what was going on. We were shot down by these upward firing cannons of the twin engine German aircraft, like the

08:30 JU-88's and the ME-110. The Halifax and Lancaster's had no defence whatsoever under the belly of the aircraft, there were no guns or anything. It was all taken up with radar or the direction finding equipment and H2S stuff. So what they used to do, they'd attack the aircraft but they'd come up under the aircraft and these

09:00 upward firing cannons would be operated by the pilot, and the ammunition would be fed by his gunner. They would just blast you, you couldn't do a thing about it, because you couldn't fire at them, you couldn't get at them. The gunners couldn't get them, being underneath. This was a procedure that the Germans had dreamed up and was very successful. It was not unusual for a German

09:30 fighter pilot, a German night fighter to shoot down three or four bomber aircraft in a matter of two or three hours. It was quite usual. Some of the aces, the Luftwaffe would probably be up to, I don't know, maybe kills like that, up to about fifty or sixty, or more.

10:00 Now, that should have been communicated to all the aircrew, and they should have known all about that, because there could have been a procedure of defence developed how to handle the situation. I didn't know anything about this until after the war.

Are you saying that nothing was communicated to bomber command units about this tactic of the JU's?

Yes, it was communicated by the people in France, who obviously

10:30 could see the aircraft standing around on the aerodromes fitted with these upward firing cannons, and they would have reported it to them, but in no case, not one in our crew, and we've discussed it since, ever could recall anyone giving us a briefing about this. I've spoken to other airmen who've told me the same thing. Now, that to me is ridiculous, and that's what I say,

11:00 I don't give them full marks at all in the intelligence branch of the service. They did some very good things, but they're two issues that I just thought sheer stupidity. Because if we'd have known that, we would probably collectively worked out some form of defence against that type of attack. These weren't just machine guns, these were cannons. An example,

11:30 the night fighter blokes used to try and hit, I know in the Halifax, they'd try and hit the port inner engine which was near the fuel tanks, but it would also put the hydraulics out of action for the rear gunner, so he couldn't even use his guns. So that was a very standard form of attack. I've read reports of some of the Luftwaffe

12:00 aces after the war, where they said, "We were really trying to give the crew members of the enemy aircraft a chance to bail out to safety, by not firing right at them or the pilot." That's absolutely rubbish, that was their attack because that's where the best attack position was, and it would do more to speed up the damage to the bomber.

12:30 And cause an enormous fire when the tanks exploded.

By the time that you went on that first operational flight, how would describe what the state of the Luftwaffe was? And the state of the battle of the skies of Europe? Who was in control?

Well I would probably say that

13:00 at the time that we were shot down was just after D Day [allied invasion of Europe]. I would say that the Allied fighters, who had done a magnificent job really, had control over the skies by day. I'm not so sure about the night, I would say the

13:30 German night fighter were pretty much in control because so many bombers were shot down. On this particular target we were on, I think, well I know there were two aircraft shot down. There was our own and another one, another Halifax, all within about fifteen

14:00 kilometres of one another, where they crashed and other targets that were being attacked, there were losses probably just the same. So collectively you could be talking about, I know on one raid in Germany for instance, I think it might have been Nuremberg, which was a terrible situation, I think there were ninety shot down.

14:30 It's a lot of aircraft, and a lot of crews killed. So you could say that the battle of the sky, I don't know, pretty even in my book. Later on of course it changed, because of the petrol shortage on the German side. The fighters, well they couldn't get off the ground as much because they were restricted because of

15:00 the limited petrol stores. After D Day it progressed a while, the bombers were able to do a pretty good job at blasting the supply areas, and particular in our cases the marshalling yards where they were taking the supplies and equipment and the guns and ammunition, to

15:30 the Germans and sort of through strafing them because the trains couldn't get through, because all the tracks were blown up, the engines were targeted by the day fighters, the Allied day fighters like the Typhoons. So, you couldn't really put a finger in I don't think, till probably in July –

16:00 this would have been around June, D Day 9th June period, in 1944. So it would be around about early 1945, I think the whole scene changed, and then it went our way, so to speak.

Can you take me through the day that you were shot down, what happened?

What night I was shot down?

The night you were shot down rather, from

16:30 **leaving Yorkshire?**

Yes, we had taken off at eleven thirty p.m. The distance from Breighton, which was our aerodrome, to the targets was I think I worked it out was eight hundred kilometres.

17:00 We had struck some flak on the way, we hadn't been hit. There was a lot of search lights in the sky – there was the master search light, which was the blue one, which is the dangerous one because that one, once it got on to you it would stay there, and then all the other searchlights would home in and follow the blue light.

17:30 So the poor devil that was caught in the blue light would have all these other searchlights on him and the guns would start opening up on him, you know, all the batteries of the anti-aircraft units. The idea was that you had to dodge these searchlights, it was a pretty dicey sort of thing too, because you'd have to go into what they called a corkscrew. Put the nose down, the pilot puts the nose down and sort of corkscrew his way down and then raise up again.

18:00 He's doing this all the time, and poor old navigator's maps would be going in one direction, his pencils flying in another. Your stomach's flying one way and another way – not particularly pleasant, but that was a defensive mechanism which worked generally. But it was very difficult once that blue searchlight got onto you, because they were radar predicted.

18:30 They were actually controlled by radar, and they'd sort of home in on you. We struck quite a lot of searchlights and we struck quite a lot of flak, but we weren't actually hit by the flak, and we didn't have too much trouble with the searchlights. I was in the bomb bay of course, getting ready to bomb, and the whole of the target area was

19:00 covered by cloud. We had a master bomb, what they call a master bomb, who was in another aircraft whose job it was to fly around and try and identify the target – certainly if not visually, at least by using the navigational aids like 'G' or H2S, to pinpoint the thing that way.

19:30 Then they would drop the fighter flares down – not fighter flares, the bomber flares down to mark the target, so to speak, in the cloud. The two types of markers that they used on the target I was on was red and green. There would be red and green flares going down in a cluster, and you knew that was where you had to bomb, so you really actually bombed the middle of the flares.

20:00 And you could hear him directing you over the radio, and you would have to follow those instructions. Then when you drop the bomb load, you tell the pilot, "Bomb's away. Bomb's gone." He would have to continue to fly the aircraft straight level, on that heading for, I don't know, maybe a minute, to allow the flash which was in the chute [parachute]

20:30 to go down and light up, and take a photograph it was connected to the camera. You couldn't really turn away until that happened so there was a sort of rest taking period there where you thought, "God, let's get the hell out of here, everybody's screaming out," and you know damn well you can't until the job's done. So that was always a bit hairy, that sort of a business.

21:00 Having bombed the target…

Can I just ask you, Mr. Innes, what was your target that night?

The target was a small town called Leon – L-e-o-n. It was northeast of Paris, it would have been about probably a hundred kilometres northeast of Paris. It was a strange place, the town

21:30 was built on a plateau, and the big railway marshalling yards and the goods area were down below the plateau, if you can follow me. So from a bombing point of view, you had to be particularly careful that you didn't drop the bombs on the civilian end of the town, you had to drop them on the marshalling yards where all the traffic was with the trains and the trucks.

22:00 But it was, I actually saw the bombing analysis and the records of the 78 Squadron, some time later. I had written to a historian who was actually 78 Squadron, and he pulled out all these records that were the official records. When you get back, when the crews get back they report on the results and all that,

and you're

22:30 questioned by the intelligence officer when you get back as to what happened, and they examine the photographs. As a result, this report said that the target had been very efficiently bombed, it was on target and generally a very successful operation. I didn't know that until after the war, but at least that part of it was pleasing.

Was it a railway yard?

It was kind of

23:00 a marshalling yard where all the trains and rolling stock got together and shunted off the different rail tracks. A bit like the engines were in sheds and then pulled off and fitted to this stream of carriages, or truck or whatever. It was just the centre, one big centre where all this was organised.

23:30 Not like a railway station, but it was a control point, if you like, for the railways. That, on this particular occasion, there was a need for D Day to get all the material and stop it all getting through to the Germans on the coast.

What sort of bombs were dispersed on that target?

These would be five hundred pound bombs

24:00 with a lot of incendiaries. The Lancaster would probably drop a thousand pound bombs. Cookies, as they called them, although there were no Lancaster's on target that night, it was all Halifax's. Lancaster's would be doing another one further up. So you could sort of picture the scene where you have the bombers

24:30 going off on different targets, and they're mainly concentrating on these big railway centres where all this action is going on.

And how many Halifax's in that convoy?

Halifax's went out?

How many?

Twelve.

What altitude would you drop the bombs from?

Oh the altitude, I remember the altitude very well. It was eighteen thousand feet. That was a bit unusual because as I told you the situation,

25:00 the way the town was built. I mean normally we would have bombed much higher than that, I would imagine.

What sort of pressure did you experience, given that you were the bomb aimer and, as you said, in this instance the target was in close proximity to a civilian area, what was that like? To be responsible for that sort of accuracy?

Well, you had a big responsibility.

25:30 I think you've got to appreciate that as bomber crews we couldn't dwell on the thoughts of what was going to happen to the civilians, otherwise you would have gone mad. You were ordered to bomb, war is a terrible thing, and you just have to do what your orders said. I know that I kind of shut it

26:00 out of my mind. I had one objective to get those bombs on that target that I was told to bomb, and do it successfully, just as much as the navigator had to get the aircraft to the right target despite whatever winds came up. The pilot the same, we were all in that situation.

26:30 **What happened once the bombs were dispersed on the target?**

Well, from the aircraft's point of view?

No, that night. What happened to you?

What happened, once we did that, the navigator gave the pilot another course to fly, which was going south for about twenty kilometres

27:00 which we called the first leg of the route home. We completed that, we did the turn of the final run, the final leg. We'd been flying along that for about ten minutes, and we thought, "Well, we got out of that mess all right, but now I wonder how we're going to go now," and the next thing the flak batteries open

27:30 up on us. We got hit by some flak, I don't know what damage was done because it happened so quickly. But it was just after the flak got us and then there was a lull, the fighter came in – this German night fighter and he zoomed underneath and the next thing we got peppered with these cannons.

28:00 He obviously hit one of the engines, we heard a bit of and explosion. The next thing the fuel tanks

erupted and of course there was a huge burst of flame and the whole aircraft started to burn, and became an inferno. So we got the order from the pilot to bail out, so that's when we all had to get out in a hurry.

28:30 Everybody, fortunately was able to get out, but I had a bit of a problem with the navigator in the nose, because the hatch to get out in the nose, had jammed and he and I were kicking it, pushing it, trying to get rid of it, and that caused us a bit of a problem. Eventually we got rid of it, and then we obviously put our feet

29:00 out, and we had our parachutes on, clipped on, and away we went. But as I said, I lost my boots on the way. Having gone through that exercise – remembering this is night – it was pitch dark except for the searchlights around.

29:30 I heard the parachute crack open, and I thought, "Well, things aren't too bad, I'm in one piece," and then suddenly there's this terrific roar of engines coming just near me, and it turned out to be one of the enemy aircraft dropping fighter flares. These fighter flares were used to illuminate the sky section.

30:00 So their fighters were up the top and they could see the bombers there outlined, like silhouetted, so they could pinpoint them very quickly. That was one of the reasons they were dropping these fighter flares. Well this damn aircraft nearly cleared up my parachute because suddenly it collapsed. I just felt myself hurtling down, you know. Anyway, fortunately it opened again,

30:30 and then eventually I hit the ground. I couldn't see anything because it was so dark. When I hit the ground, I hit of course in my stocking feet, and that's when I broke my toe and sprained my ankle and broke my back. I was in a bit of a mess, and my parachute got caught in a barbed wire fence just near a bottle yard of a pub.

31:00 A little [entangled][?](UNCLEAR), and I thought, "God, I'm supposed to untangle the parachute and harness and bury the damn thing," as they used to tell us to do, and then get the hell out of there. So the more I tugged at this damn thing, the more noise it made with the jangling of the wires, and I thought, "There's no future in that." So I just left it and took off. I was running, as I say, with this problem about my feet and I must have run about,

31:30 oh God knows how long, a couple of miles I suppose. Then I could hear the German motorbikes and search party start to chase around, and they seemed to be getting nearer and nearer, and obviously the bloke in the pub must have got his shot, he probably rang them up. They were out looking for me and the other crew members.

32:00 I never saw any of the other parachutes come down at all. I had no idea what had happened to them until after the war. So eventually I came to a wood, and I thought, "Well that's a consolation," so I was just about out to it, and I managed to find a spot in the wood, and some leaves were there, because it was June, it was a nice warm month fortunately.

32:30 All the leaves were in a heap and I just threw myself on the heap and went to sleep. In the very early hours of the morning I woke up in a daze and looked around and wondered what I was to do and where I was to go, and I had my escape kit and I had a rough idea where I'd landed. I got out the map from the escape kit

33:00 and figured I'd head for the Swiss border if I could get there, I'm right, - which is a long way away. So I sort of crawled along this path of leaves and came to this break in the woods where I could look out, and there was a field there and lo and behold I saw

33:30 some cows and haystacks, because they'd just harvested. So I thought, "That's all right, I'll make for the haystacks." So I got over to one of these haystacks and I buried myself in one of the haystacks and just started to doze off again, and then suddenly I heard the rattle of carts, and the noise of drums rattling, you know. I looked out and then I saw this old Frenchman in his

34:00 beret and garb, and he had a young girl with him and an old horse was dragging the cart over and I thought, "This is my chance to use my French, now." So I called out to him and he got a hell of a shock of course, and she was absolutely beside herself, nervously wondering what this was all about and who was I. She thought I was German, you see.

34:30 Anyway, I told him my predicament and when he found out I was an Australian the guy's demeanour changed completely. He just welcomed me so much, there was almost tears in his eyes. He gave me the typical Gallic kiss, you know on both cheeks, and she, the little young girl, she smiled and looked relieved, of course.

35:00 I said that I had a problem with my feet and that I would have to get some boots, and I wanted some clothes to get rid of my uniform, and get into civvy clothes. So he said, "Look, you leave it to me, and stay there, don't talk to anybody, and I'll be back." So he turned to cart and horse around – and I might add, by the way, before he

35:30 actually came over, they'd started milking. They were actually milking the cows in the paddock, which I'd never heard of before. I couldn't work this out, but that's how they milked the cows over there. They

go out to the fields and milk the cows.

Can I just ask you, what did you assume were the reasons for his warmth towards Australians?

Well he told me,

36:00 he told me in fact he'd been a pilot in WW1, and he'd fought with Australians in France, in the Somme. He had a regard for Australians.

How important do you think that history of WW1 was in how you were treated by the French?

Oh, enormously important. Everywhere I went they were aware of the contribution that Australia had made.

36:30 It was like a magic password, certainly as far as I was concerned. They had some reservations about the English, I don't think they ever forgot about the Battle of Waterloo, somehow. But if you were an Australian, that was entirely different. I couldn't, I just couldn't begin to

37:00 express how important that was. Anyway, the outcome of it was, he returned later with a heavy pair of hobnail boots, obviously military boots, and the girl brought back a musette, what they call a musette, which is a little carry bag thing of canvas that

37:30 farm labourers carry their food and their wine and whatnot out to the paddocks where they're working and she had filled this with boiled eggs, cheese, a big chunk of bread and the inevitable bottle of rouge. So that was a start for me to carry on, I had some food then. He gave me the boots

38:00 and he sort of gave me wink when he gave me the boots and nodded to them, and he said something about 'la boche,' and then he spat in the ground as though he was emphasising the word 'la Boche.' I knew what he meant, he hated the Germans like hell. He obviously got these boots I would say, from a German. Whether he shot him or killed him, or took it off

38:30 him if he was dead, I don't know, but I got German boots. The only problem was that they were three sizes too big for me, which in one way was all right because my feet had swollen up so much, or the fact that, you know, I suffer later when the swelling came down because I would be swimming in these boots. However, at least I had something to walk in.

39:00 **What were your feelings at that stage about becoming a prisoner of war?**

Well, I didn't have it then, but I must confess later I did, which I'll tell you about. I had another interesting episode after that. I took off after that, I had a swig of the rouge with him and I nibbled at the bread and cheese and then I took off. I said farewell,

39:30 and went through the old parting business again, and was all emotional, and wished me luck. Told me to be very careful, and he pointed out the road that I should follow, because there was very heavy German traffic starting to build up, and away I went. I just walked and walked and walked – I must have covered about twenty kilometres. Then I was really

40:00 starting to get a bit weary now, and I came to another wood. So I went into that wood and it was pretty dense. I was sitting down in the wood, thinking, "Where the hell will I go next?" and all the rest of it, and I thought, "I'll have a bit of a snooze." So I went off to sleep. Before I really drowsed off, I heard this strange noise of

40:30 twigs cracking, twigs breaking. That startled me a bit, I thought, "Hello, we've got an intruder here somewhere. Maybe somebody's looking for me," or whatever. Anyhow, it turned out it was an old man who had a sack on his back with twigs in it – branches. He was a woodcutter and he got the shock of his life when he saw me

41:00 and I wasn't too happy about seeing him, but I spoke to him in French, and again when I told him I was an Australian, totally different story again. His whole demeanour changed again, and he went through the same rigmarole of kissing you on both cheeks and hugging you and whatnot. I told him about my feet and the problem with them, and he made me take my boots off to have a look at them, and he shook his head and after a while he said, "You must follow me." So I followed him. Now, my only concern with him was that he had a shotgun in one hand. I wasn't too sure if I was doing the right thing, but anyway, I followed him. He lead me to his little home, house, which was about another mile away. So we went into the house, and of course when we went in the old lady, his wife…

Tape 7

00:32 **Mr. Innes, you were saying that the woodcutter took you to his house.**

Yes, because I said the old lady, his wife got a tremendous shock. She couldn't quite work out where this young foreigner be thrust in her presence, what it was all about. He explained who I was of course, and she changed her attitude completely then,

01:00 and started to get very concerned about the state of my feet. She produced a bottle of some composition there, it was made of herbs. This compound that she put on my feet turned out to be just magical, the pain started to disappear, and I felt

01:30 like jumping over the moon after she did that. It was really a marvellous remedial thing. I should have got the recipe actually, I could have made a lot of money selling it. Anyway, she was obviously knowledgeable in herbs. She then put the kettle on so to speak, and we had a cup of soup, and a very good meal.

02:00 Then she said something about, “What about your clothes? You can't wear your uniform?” And I said, “No, I can't. I’ll get picked up.” So she spoke to the old man and they had a bit of a chat, and eventually he brought out into the room a very neat, washed old pair of patched jeans, like the farm labourers wear, which has got a

02:30 blouse top, and trousers, a typical French peasant’s gear and a beret, and gave it to me. He said, “This is for you,” he said, “It’s a gift from my son, who is a prisoner of war in Germany. I want you to consider it as a gift.”

03:00 So I offered him a hundred franc note out of my escape money, and he refused to take it, and she refused to take it. So I thanked them very much, and I had an aircrew flying jumper on, one of these big heavy knit things. I said, “I’ll leave my uniform with you.

03:30 Take off all the insignias, because you don’t want to be caught with those. They might be useful, and I’ll take these clothes.” But I said, “I want to keep my woollen jumper, and I’ll have to get you, if you don’t mind, to sew on to the jumper my wings and my sergeant stripes, and the Australia tag,” and all the rest of it.

04:00 Because if I’m picked up at least I’ve got that under my blouse thing, that I can say that I’m a genuine airman that has been shot down, not a spy. So she did that for me, and I changed, and that was that. I said, “Well, look, I’ll have to leave you because I don’t want to risk you getting caught by the Germans sheltering me,” particularly as there were so many out looking for airmen.

04:30 So I departed, and that was quite an emotional departure. Then I took off and walked quite a way, and finally towards the end of the day – and I was walking better now, because this pain had started to ease from this ointment she gave me. I

05:00 came across a big cemetery, and the cemetery had rows and rows and rows of crosses over the graves. I looked at these and I suddenly realised that they were crosses of Germans that were killed, and on the other side were a different style of cross, which were the crosses of British that were killed, from WW1.

05:30 It just seemed to go on for miles, so that was obviously a battlefield. That was just outside the town of Compiegne, which is quite a big town. Compiegne was on my route, because I had to go through Compiegne to get in the direction I wanted to go, to travel to Switzerland. So, I walked through the town without too many problems.

06:00 I came to the big bridge across the river, and there were German guards on the bridge. I was puzzled about how I was going to get across the bridge, I didn’t have an identity card or anything – no papers at all. I saw a group of workmen with shovels and carrying tools across the bridge, and they were all together, and there was a big bunch of civilians going across, and he was checking all the civilians’

06:30 for their identity cards. There were two guards, one on either side, so I thought the best way to get through was to filter into this group of workmen. So I sort of managed to dodge here and there and get inside the middle of them and walked over, and they weren't called up at all. Because obviously they were regular workmen going to and from and the guard knew them and so on. Then I realised why he let them through so easily,

07:00 because there were a lot of bombs scattered around which hadn't exploded. There were unexploded bombs lying around left, right and centre, and they were air force bombs, because I could tell from the markings on them. Obviously the shovels and what have you was there to either defuse the bombs or bury them, or do something with them, or move them. So I finally got across the bridge, and the only incident that really troubled me

07:30 was when I walked on the road on the other side, which is on the road to Soissons, which is another big town on the way that I had to go through. This damned lout of a kid, scraggly looking fellow, started to harass me for cigarettes. Of course people were starting to look around wondering what the fuss was.

08:00 I was getting pretty angry with this bloke, and I thought, “How am I going to get rid of him?” I mean, I could belt him over the ears but that wouldn’t have done much good, that would only make it worse. So I saw a gendarme in the distance, and I thought, “Oh, that’s the answer.” So I walked straight up to this gendarme, and of course the bloke took off, he got the hell out of it. As soon as he got the hell out of it, I got the hell out of it then, and went around the gendarme and departed.

08:30 And then I just kept walking and walking, and finally I get to Soissons. I managed to find a spot just out of the town that was another field that I could lay up in a haystack, and I still had some food left, so that was all right. So I stayed there for a while, and then the following morning

09:00 I took off again, and the story went on and on and on, one day after another, you know. I just walked and hid and walked, and all the time getting a bit closer. I would pinch eggs out of the fowl yards, I'd eat raw turnips,

09:30 you know, maybe scrounge a loaf of bread here and there. This went on for, a number of days, and that's when I really started to get depressed. I got most depressed when I ran right into a thunderstorm. I got sopping wet and was really miserable. I was tired and I was out of food. To top it all off, I fell in the damn river.

10:00 On the muddy bank, I slipped down and ended up in the river. So I was ringing wet and just about fed up with the whole business. That's probably when the depression set in. I thought, "This is no life, I may as well give myself up to the Germans and become a POW [prisoners of war]." Anyway, finally common sense sort of prevailed and I

10:30 thought, "This is ridiculous." Eventually I pulled myself together and carried on. There is some incident there, I'll just stop for a moment.

Sure.

I carried on. You right?

Can you take your glasses off, Mr. Innes?

Oh, yeah. I carried on

11:00 and I kept walking, and then I was going through another forest – and this was at night time now – I nearly ran into a flak unit. I just happened to see the guard near the flak unit, otherwise I would have walked right into the middle of them. So I dodged that, and after another few miles I came to

11:30 an aerodrome. I found myself on the edge of a Luftwaffe aerodrome, and the night fighters were just taking off. I got so hopping mad about these night fighters and watching them, and thinking, "How many more bombers are they going to get tonight?" Somehow this depression disappeared and gave me a fair amount of determination to

12:00 proceed and forget about this crazy thought about becoming a POW, you know. So it probably did me a world of good. Anyway, I'd a series of incidents that kept me going for a long while. Eventually I came to an area where there was a

12:30 farm, quite remote from the small village. I looked at this farm and I thought, "This is an ideal place to stay and sort of recuperate a bit and get ready for the next stage of the journey." I thought, "I'll just watch the goings on from where I was." I saw this woman there with a man and a

13:00 little child, and I didn't see anyone else around. It was fairly quiet and I thought, "What have I got to lose?" So I went up and spoke to them. The young bloke that was there, I rather suspect was the de facto husband, because subsequently they married,

13:30 and we met them in France again. But at that time I think he was a, you know, he was dodging the Germans too, because the Germans were calling up people like him in his age group and shipping them off to Germany to work in the factories. He was frightened that he would be picked up too, so I think that's how he became involved with her at the farm. She was on her own at the farm because her husband

14:00 had left her. I think he either left her or went in a prisoner of war camp, I'm not sure, but there was some reason for it. Of course, he thought he could fill the gap for him, and also help on the farm and earn his keep and so forth. Well they apparently became lovers and he did a lot of good for them, he was a very nice bloke. The other fellow that was there was an Algerian, a rather swarthy gentleman.

14:30 He, because I could all speak French, we could all get on very well, because none of them could speak English. He was on the run too, because he'd been in the French army and he must have been a price on his head or something. He knew that the Germans would give him hell if they caught him. So, he was on the farm as well, with the idea of evading the attention of the Germans.

15:00 So, there we were altogether, one big happy family, and we had a lot of fun. We payed games with the young kid, we had plenty of good food, chicken and what have you. There were ducks and things, and they had a very nice cherry tree that was ripe with cherries, so you know, that was great. I was there for about four or five days,

15:30 and then suddenly she got word that the Germans believed that there was British airman hiding in the vicinity. I don't know how it came about, but she got very concerned about it, obviously, because she would have been shot if they found her harbouring me. So, I said, "Look, I've got to get out of here. You can't take that risk." So, she said, "All right."

16:00 So, she got in touch with her friend who lived in a big town called Montceaux Les Meaux and Montceaux Les Meaux was a town that's very well known in that region because it had a huge area there where the French army used to train, like Liverpool, say, a place like that but quite a city. Anyway,

one day this young attractive lady

16:30 comes riding along on a bicycle, and she goes up to friend and they were sort of talking in whispers together, and it turned out that she'd come to collect me. They got a couple of spare bikes in the shed or something, and they dragged one out, gave me one and she had hers of course. I had to ride alongside her

17:00 back into this Meaux Laconte. That was rather amusing because just outside the town of Meaux Laconte there was a big guard gate across the railway tracks, and these guards were checking everybody going across. Because in France nearly all the workers on the fields, and the farmers, don't really live on the farms, they live in the town and

17:30 go to and fro from their work, you see. That's why it was unusual to find a place on its own stuck out in the farm. So, anyway, we go up on the bikes as we're going to the guard, she whispered to me not to worry, she'd fix them. So we went through the gate, and she started to chat to the guards up, and started to giggle and carry on.

18:00 Finally the other one came over to her and talked to her, pointing to me, and I heard her say, "I'm taking my poor little brother to the doctor, he's very ill." The guard let her through and that was the end of that. We walked into the town. So, we got into the town in Meaux Laconte, and she said, "We will go to my people's home, and you will stay there." I said,

18:30 "Oh, thankyou." When we drove the bikes up, she pulled up right opposite the German barracks in the town, because there were Germans everywhere. I thought, "My God, what's happening here?" Anyhow, it turned out that this was her parent's home and I was to stay there. So, we drove in and introduced me to her parents, and he was an old (pwyu UNCLEAR) POW [?] from WW1 too. He had

19:00 a very fond memory of Australians as well, and so did she, I think she had a boyfriend who was Australian, by the sound of it. Anyway, we were bedded down in the attic and my friend went out and did her chores or whatever she did. I settled down nicely there, and they looked after me and fed me, we didn't go short of food

19:30 because he had rabbits in hutches around the back, and he had a beehive. He had a garden of vegetables, you know, he looked after himself pretty well, the old fella. So, that was it.

What were that family's names?

Goustille – G-o-u-s-t-i-l-l-e. George Goustille, and her name was Henriette Goustille.

20:00 The daughter was Jacqueline. So, they were a great family, and the old man decided that I should write down a bit of my story for him. He said, "I will give this to you after the war, or I will give it to your mother if you're killed." So, he took that and he put it behind a brick in the garage and cemented it over,

20:30 with the idea of later on he would send it on, which was very nice of him, I thought. Anyway, he said, "I have a very good friend who's in the underground. He's a baker. He's got the bakery pastry cook business in town,

21:00 but he's in the underground." And he said, "I will talk to him." So, that was that. I waited to see what would happen next, but in the meantime I was standing in the attic room looking out through a window at the back, across the fields at the back and the garden. Well suddenly there's a hell of a commotion, there's a roar and scream of Lightnings [Lockheed P-38 Lightning], American Lightnings

21:30 flying over, these twin engine boom Lightnings came roaring over, you know. Started to drop bombs on the barracks and another couple of aircraft came zooming down firing machine guns at the fleeing Germans. They were going hell for leather across the fields, and I'm sitting there watching this, enjoying myself immensely. In the distance I think there was

22:00 more bombing going on, because Meaux Laconte was a place where they were really keen on bombing, because there was so many German soldiers there, and so much artillery there. It was a big airfield there as well. So, that filled the day in. Eventually, oh, the following morning

22:30 I was down at breakfast, and the breakfast room had a little window looking straight through to the front door – only a small window. We were all sitting around the table, and I was sitting in a position that I could see the front door. Suddenly there's a knock at the door and I thought, "Oh my God, here I go, they're after me now,"

23:00 because I could see a German at the door, in the uniform, German. He had something under his arm, and I didn't know what it was. Anyway, Jacqueline went to the door and I could hear them talking, and eventually this German handed all this stuff that he had under his arm to her, and took off. So later I asked her what was all that about,

23:30 and she said, "Oh, he comes over and he brings his clothing and his washing to me, and I look after that, and then I do his sewing for him, and he pays me." So, I thought, "That wasn't a bad little arrangement." Anyway, she said, "I heard you like tea, John." She used to call me John. "I heard you like

tea" I said, "I sure do, I haven't had a cup of tea for ages." She said, "Wait."

24:00 So she went to make me a cup of tea, he'd given her some tea, which is pretty hard to get. That was that. Anyway, the following morning, this underground fellow arrives, the baker – and he's clad in his baking gear, you know, typical baking gear and he said to me, "I'm arranging to take you to Troyes, which is a big city."

24:30 He said, "I will help you." So, it was raised that this guy would take me down to the bus depot, so they got me all ready to go down to the bus depot with Jacque or whatever his name was. I didn't want to know his name, because I didn't want the Germans getting it out me who he was anyway. I followed him down to the bus depot, and there was a crowd of

25:00 people there, and this bus is waiting. He sort of indicated to me that he had another passenger that would be sitting next to me. He brings this bloke along, a big tall fellow, good looking bloke too, and he was dressed in a sombre suit of black. He had a black hat on, black shoes,

25:30 and he looked like a damned undertaker. I thought, "My God, what's this about?" Anyway, he didn't say anything to me, this fellow. The bus started up ready to go, and suddenly there's a stack of German soldiers all appear from nowhere to catch the bus. All the civilians pour in the bus, and they're all scrambling to get seats.

26:00 This bloke I'm supposed to sit next to is in his seat near the window, so I scramble in and sat beside him. The underground guy sat behind us. I'm sort of looking at him, and he's looking at me. Can't say anything, can't speak. Anyhow, the bus takes off and we're jogging along, and all of a sudden I look up

26:30 and here's this bloke reading a French book. I thought he might have been an escapee but what would he be doing reading a French book. I looked again and the damn book's upside down. So I dig him in the ribs and whisper in his ear, "Don't be a bloody fool, turn it around the other way." He turned it around, and then he knew who I was, speaking English in his ear.

27:00 He couldn't speak a word of French, he was an American. He was a flyer shot down from a Fortress, and he'd been hiding somewhere else, and the old guy routed him up to come with me to Troyes. So anyway, we still couldn't speak, so when we finally get to Troyes, we get out of the bus and we were told to walk behind this guy, don't catch up to him, walk behind him.

27:30 We walked for a few blocks and he took us in this big apartment building, and we went in there and were confronted by a real pukka English type. He spoke fluent French, in civilian clothes. Had another guy, a Frenchman, obviously in civilian clothes, and this guy started to question me, cross question me - who was I, where was I, what did I do, what did I know, where did I come from? – and all the rest of it.

28:00 After a lot of interrogation he finally agreed that we were who we were, and same for the American. But with the American they had some previous information from the underground bloke, so he was pretty clean. Anyhow he satisfied himself on my integrity and who I was, and then he told me that they were going to arrange for me to be taken out to a maquis camp,

28:30 which wasn't far away, but in the big forest nearby. But in the meantime, I was to stay in another apartment with somebody. So, Mack, my Yankee mate and I trudge along to this apartment, and we're ushered in, and the guy was a school teacher.

29:00 Of course he could speak English fluently, and his wife was there – she was a nervous wreck. She was ringing a handkerchief all the time while she was talking, you could see that she was almost weeping. I thought, "My God, this is going to be miserable. She's going to give us away if she keeps doing stuff like that." So anyway, the guy told us he was putting us in the cellar. So he put us in the cellar of

29:30 this apartment, and he said, "You've got to stay there for a couple of hours at least, maybe three hours until somebody comes for you." So he and I stayed in the cellar, and because we were bored to sobs, there was nothing to do, nothing to read, but we happened to find a big wine rack. We looked at this wine rack and they had the best damn wines you would ever see. The best of French wine, so I said, "I think we

30:00 should knock a bottle off." We decided to cure our boredom by having a bottle of this super special French wine, which we did, it was very, very nice I must tell you.

What did the American tell you at this point about what he'd been through?

Only that he had been shot down, he was a co-pilot in a Fortress, I think, from memory, because they had two pilots.

30:30 I think he had to get out in a hurry and all the rest of the crew were killed, but other than that, I don't know much about it. I know that he had been at the university at California. He'd been training for, he was a draftsman and had been training for architecture, and the war broke out and he didn't finish his course. He was married, but

31:00 beyond that I didn't know that much about him at all. Anyway, we had plenty of time to talk then, of course, in the cellar, particularly over this bottle of wine. Finally the word came through that two

gentlemen were going to pick us up, so the wife couldn't get us out of the place quick enough. We departed with these two guys, and they took us to an old truck they had

31:30 which was driven by, it was called a 'charbonniere' which is a charcoal burner at the back, because obviously they didn't use petrol, they used charcoal burners. This thing chugged along, and they took us right out to this forest, going all these funny little side roads and tracks, right into the depths of the forest, and we ended up in a Maquis camp. The Maquis camp are these guys that all cleared out when they

32:00 have been impounded to go to Germany to work for the Germans, and many of them took off and joined the Maquis. They were armed to the teeth, they had all the damn rifles in the world. They had machine guns, they had Sten guns, they had German Mausers, they had knives, stilletos,

32:30 they had a Bren gun, they had Owen guns – not Owen guns, Sten guns. There were parachutes all over the place in the trees which camouflaged their hide out. They had a couple of old trucks there, and they had trip wires around with explosive devices on them. Trestles and tables and things, and they had a big radio shack there.

33:00 Obviously that's where they transmitted their messages to London. This Mack and I stayed there, and then he took us to one part of the camp where they had half a dozen wounded RAF blokes. These guys were absolutely burnt up, they had been on fire almost, and wounded – they were in a terrible mess. Then one bloke there was an Australian,

33:30 it turned out when I got talking to him, that my uncle in Wollongong knew his family in Albion Park. I remotely knew about that family, so we had an interesting talk with him, and then finally we used to talk together and the Maquis guys would go about their nefarious activities, blowing up electric light poles and pinching

34:00 petrol, and bombing German convoys and all sorts of things.

How had those RAF pilots come to be in that camp?

Well they were taken there like I was, because they were wounded and they had bailed out of their aircraft. Because they were burnt in their aircraft when they crashed. They were hiding them, really. One of the doctors from the little village used to go there and attend their wounds.

34:30 **Before we talk about that camp in a bit more detail, I just wanted to go back and ask you, when you were travelling through these different villages, what was you feeling on seeing a German soldier? How self-conscious were you about being in that environment?**

Well, if you're going through the village you wouldn't be too fussed about seeing German soldiers because they were everywhere.

35:00 I got stopped on one occasion with a very rude, aggressive German cyclist, who demanded to know some direction, "Where's the way to so and so?" Oh, he was just so arrogant and rude. I didn't mind him being rude and arrogant, as long as he didn't ask me for my identity card or check out who the hell I am. Anyhow, he was more interested in shooting his mouth off than doing that, so that was fine with me.

35:30 Anyhow, I spoke to him in French, I sort of shrugged and, "I'm French. Nix Deutsch." He finally, I thought I'll give him the directions, so I gave him the directions and pointed the opposite way to where it was, and he took off. So that gave me bit of personal satisfaction. Then I departed again

36:00 but that could have been nasty, going through the villages, unless you saw the Gestapo or the SS, or someone like that, they wouldn't really bother you much. If you looked suspicious they would, but by that time I had a sort of, 'Don't give a damn' attitude, a bit, which helped I guess.

Were there certain things you would do to try and avoid being

36:30 **targeted by the Germans?**

Well, you couldn't do too much. I mean you start running around corners trying to dodge them, you wouldn't get very far, because they'd know something was wrong. You'd just have to act as though you were one of the civilians. If you got too smart, you'd get caught. You obviously would avoid the main roads when you're travelling.

37:00 I mean, I'm fortunate in one way that I'm short, because I look like a Frenchman. When I wore my beret and my gear, you'd swear I was a Frenchman because as you know, most of the Frenchman are fairly nuggetty and short – or most of them, by and large – that a pretty generalised statement. No, you just act as though you were one of the French

37:30 villagers. It was the villagers that were probably the dangerous ones, because you were just as likely to be turned in by a collaborator. The Germans used to pay I think, twenty thousand francs for turning in an allied airman. If he was an officer, they would get twenty five thousand francs. So that was pretty tempting for some of the French to turn you in. To collect

38:00 the reward.

In a small village especially, I imagine they would have know everyone in their village.

Well, they would, because they hardly ever left the village, but remember, this Troyes is a town, not a village. A lot of people wouldn't know one another there, but in the smaller villages, yes they would know everyone.

38:30 **Did that pose particular problems for you?**

No, sometimes it went the other way, because the patriotic French would know then, and if there was any sign of any of them collaborating they wouldn't have lasted too long. They would have taken them on a dark night and shot them and if they were sheltering an allied airman, anyone

39:00 in the village that didn't keep quiet about it, would be in for a hard time. Now in a big town, that wouldn't be the same situation. So, it could work the other way.

Did you get a feeling for how the French were coping under the German occupation?

Well it was very, very difficult for them. They are a very proud race. Most of them loathed the Germans.

39:30 The French attitude hardened enormously, as the occupation went on. In the early stages the Germans were fairly well behaved with the French, there were not too many major incidents. The French tended to knuckle down and accept, you know, c'est la vie, c'est la guerre, UNCLEAR) what can we do about it anyway?

40:00 But as the war progressed it got harder and harder attitude, and the thing I think that really got the French all worked up, in particular these Maquis yards, is the fellows in the Maquis camps. Where they really started to get angry, was when they heard of the village, I think it's Oredor Souglaine [?], which is a little village about a

40:30 hundred and twenty kilometres north of Paris, or somewhere around that vicinity. Where the SS Das Reiches [SS-Panzer-Grenadier-Division "Das Reich"], this crack German SS unit, had arrived near the village on the way to the frontline – after D Day. They had been harassed all the way by the resistance and the Maquis.

41:00 The trains that they were in, carrying all their tanks and things on a platform, had been blown up, and a lot of them in the convoys had been shot up. They were getting pretty fed up of all this. Then they had wind that the villagers in this little village had been feeding the Maquis camp nearby, and all that sort of thing. They decided this business has got to stop. I think one of their majors in their unit was captured by one of the Maquis guys, and probably shot. Anyway they decided they'd do something about it to teach the French a lesson, so they sent in trucks of soldiers armed to the teeth armed with explosives…

Tape 8

00:35 The Germans had brought all their equipment with them including flame throwers, and they rounded up the mayor. They got him to instruct all the villagers to come out to the square. Men , women, children – everybody, including the

01:00 babies even in prams. Made them all go into the church hall and then when they were all in there, I just can't remember the number, but there would probably be about two or three hundred of them by the time they finished. Then they locked the doors and then they set fire to the church and of course they both shot and burnt the lot of them. It was a horrific thing to do.

01:30 The result of that, the whole occupants of that village were killed, except one woman. There was only one woman who managed to escape and of course that really caused a change in the attitude of a lot of the French after that, that this bestiality went right through France, if they didn't do something about stopping the Germans.

02:00 The village itself I've actually been to after the war, Gwen and I, and this village is preserved still, just the way it was. When you go in there is a terrible feeling about it, there is an aura of death. You see prams there that have been burnt, kids toys, all sorts of things.

02:30 And the Mayor himself was pushed into a baker's oven, because he was a baker, and they just fired the oven up and burnt him. Didn't even shoot him. This is the sort of thing that happened, and that was a pretty sickening business. Now that spread like wildfire with the Maquis, they all heard about that. So these guys were really out to kill Germans after that.

03:00 **In terms of the resistance, you mentioned that this brutality really had an impact on the stoic, proud French. In these small villages, what would be the extent of the representation of the resistance? How many people would be in each town? What sort of organisation was there, do you think?**

Well there'd be usually one resistance leader in small villages. There would always be the ones that

03:30 sort of in fear all the time and wouldn't do anything that might upset the situation. You would probably find a leader of the resistance in one of the group, in the hold, not canton, in the department, is probably the word to use and he's in charge of all the Maquis camps, say. They would be meeting and planning all sorts of things.

04:00 The Mayor was always the focal point. When the Germans went into a village, the first thing they did was grab the Mayor, and make him give out all these instructions for the villagers and if he didn't co-operate they'd shoot him, but the pockets of resistance mainly came from the fighting Maquis.

04:30 Because the British supported the Maquis by dropping arms to them from the aircraft. There'd be Halifax and Sterling aircraft going over dropping canisters of ammunition supplies, machine guns, all that sort of stuff. Even plenty of baskets of cigarettes and money, because they needed money to buy things on the black market.

05:00 And the radio operator with the Maquis would be in touch with the SOE [Special Operations Executive] headquarters in London, and there'd be messages flying backwards and forwards. The BBC used to send out messages on the radio and the French weren't permitted to listed to these broadcasts, they were clandestine

05:30 broadcasts and they could be shot if they were caught. But a lot of them used to listen, and they'd get the news and spread it around to their friends, and in that way they kept up with the scene, what was happening and the advance of the Allies. But when I was there, you'd hear these broadcasts coming through and

06:00 if you were near a radio, and French compatriots listening, you would hear these, "Voici le mechard de personnel" which is, 'These are messages.' It might be, "Le chard enoir," "Messiuer Paul avec nouveau chapeau." Any silly damn message, but it would be in code, and that's what they used to do, because they'd hear that and they would

06:30 know what it was. That might even say, "We're sending another parachute arch over tonight to drop canisters to you, and it will be in xyz dropping area," or something, this sort of thing. So, it was a battle of wits getting this through, but there was a lot of stuff transacted like that.

What is it about the French or their landscape

07:00 **or their society that made them so adept at this underground activity?**

Well, I wouldn't say they're adept at it, actually they weren't very well organised at all, in my book. The Maquis camps were, you know, they wandered around like Brown cows, they didn't know what the hell they were doing, but, there were a lot of bosses, a lot of chiefs and very few Indians.

07:30 They all wanted to be chiefs. It wasn't run like a military operation, but they weren't trained for that. I mean they were just irate Frenchmen who wanted to do something to make it hard for the Germans. They were angry, very angry. The village people were

08:00 different, the villagers themselves. Some were collaborators, some were the type that would stay on the sidelines and did nothing, others used to do all sorts of things on the side without telling anyone. Some encouraged the Germans and slept with them, and all the rest of it. Society is like that.

08:30 If you imagine your role there, you're living in this place of your own and suddenly you've got no more rights – you've got these invaders taking over and treating you like dirt, and telling you what to do, and you can't this and you can't do that. You can take that up to a point, but the moment the invaders start acting like animals and beasts, and you know shooting

09:00 babies in the head and all that sort of stuff, and burning homes down and the farms, you get pretty damn mad.

How do you think the average German soldier treated the French civilians?

Well originally they treated them very well. The original history of the Germans in France at the early stages of the occupation was quite good. They acted with decorum, their

09:30 officers wouldn't do anything that would upset the local villagers, they were sort of quiet acquiescence. "We've got a job to do and we intend to do it, and as long as you behave we won't worry you." But that all changed later, it became very vicious and of course, the British didn't exactly discourage that attitude either,

10:00 because it made it a lot easier for them. Because during the D Day set up, with the Allies making inroads into the German territories, that all helped them, and the resistance did a lot for them – the Maquis particularly. They helped them in the fighting.

How did the Maquis treat collaborators?

10:30 Oh, they would dispatch them immediately. I was in the Maquis camp, as I told you, this camp and I was

witness to an incident which I didn't particularly enjoy at all. That was they had caught two collaborators, a man and a woman. So they held a court

11:00 in the forest around a trestle table, and sort of heard the evidence. The verdict was already made before they even questioned them, because they had given them shovels and made them dig their own grave. Then they lined them up and told them they were found guilty of collaboration and they would be shot. So, the Maquis guys all gathered around, and they handed round straws, and the one

11:30 that drew the shortest straw was the one that had to do the job. I was there when the old cook drew the shortest straw. So they put a German Luger in his hand and told him to do the job, so he took the two of them near the grave and just shot them. Tipped them in the grave and then covered them with parachutes, an old parachute, and threw soil on the grave and that was the end of that.

12:00 So they didn't beat around the bush. It was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth in that set up. Mind you, you've got to think of their side of it – if they were caught the same thing would have happened to them, particularly as partisans.

What did you do once you left the Maquis camp?

12:30 I had heard that the French police were going to attack the camp. The French police were pro-German sympathisers recruited for this job under the guise of being French

13:00 forces. There were many criminals and gangsters recruited for that – French criminals and gangsters. They were a pretty tough lot, but they were nasty individuals. They had no compunction in shooting another Frenchman. So they sent these police onto these Maquis yards and they equipped them with all the gear,

13:30 and treated them as though they were an army. We'd heard that they were going to attack this camp and exterminate all the Maquis. My American and I had a bit of a powwow and we decided it was no place for us. We were sorry for our mates that were wounded and all that, but we would be more of a hindrance anyway, they had two more to be looking after us. We said, "No, we better get out of this

14:00 and stick to our plan to get to the border in Switzerland." So we left, and we walked about another eighty or ninety kilometres, he and I, heading towards Switzerland. We had a few incidents on the way, but no major problems. Then we came to a very attractive little setting,

14:30 which was a fast running stream, and there was a mill on it, and it was out of a little village – the village was about a mile away. We thought, 'This looks like a good little place to hide up for a while' and make our plans to cross the border, because it was only about eighty kilometres from the Swiss border. So,

15:00 I said, "Well look, I'll get closer and go up to the kitchen because you can't speak French, and I can speak French. So, I'll sneak up to the kitchen, have a quick look in and if everything's all right I'll get on my knees and wait under the ledge" because I saw a radio in the kitchen. Anyhow, around the kitchen table the whole family were there,

15:30 stuffing away at the aperitifs, because that would have been around five o'clock at night, you know, they were having their little snort together, the family. It turned out it was a flower, and the old miller was there with his wife and two boys and a little girl. Anyway, I listened carefully and suddenly I hear the radio switched on.

16:00 Then on came this message, le personnel, you know, the BBC London. Then the next thing you knew it announced – I've forgotten what it said – I think it was "Ici londres, voice le nouveau," something like that. I thought, 'Oh, they're going to give us the news from

16:30 Britain.' This announcer went through the whole business of the news, and the Allies were advancing, blah, blah, blah. I thought, 'My God, these people would be patriots listening to that, they would have to be.' So, I thought, 'Oh well, here we go', so I up to the door and knocked on it. Well the next thing all I hear is a real commotion. The radio went off, the scraping of chairs in the kitchen, and macks [aperitif] disappearing

17:00 in all directions. The miller comes to the door and he's still got flour all over him, and he wanted to know who I was, and I told him of course. When he found out who I was, oh the whole scene changed again. They all came back in the room and switched the radio on again, and poured me a mack aperitif, and we joined them. We ended up having

17:30 a terrific stay with them for about a fortnight. Wonderful time, peaceful and quiet. We used to go fishing in the river and helping the old man with the mill. We used to make in the middle of the night, we'd get up and he would make what they would call 'Goot', which is a very powerful sort of cherry brandy. Because the Germans used to confiscate all copper utensils,

18:00 and you needed a copper utensil for this distillation thing process. He had it all rigged up with the hydrometers and the glass tubes and God knows what. His old mate would come in with an old cart and horse, loaded it up with cherries. In the middle of the night we'd brew up these cherries, put a chain in the

18:30 copper, pour some straw in it. The idea of the chain was, it was a bit like your mother used to making jam, putting a two shilling piece in, you know, so that it would move around and stop the jam sticking to the bottom. Anyway, you'd get the fire going stoked up, and we were gathered around, and every now and then, he would check the pipette as to how it looks,

19:00 and the specific gravity. We'd all have a sup, and by about two o'clock in the morning we were just about full. Anyway, then it would be bottled and cooled off and bottled, and that would be the supply of Goot for the next month or so. So we experienced all that, so I'm an expert in making Goot now..

Where did you sleep in the house?

In the hay stack – not in the hay stack, in the,

19:30 where the hay is with the animals, in the barn, because the animals used to be brought in of a night. So we used to sleep there. It wasn't a bad existence. Anyway, having enjoyed that stay, they decided that we'd better get on with our business and cross the border.

20:00 So the old miller got a couple of his mates from the village and they sat down and had a meeting, and they planned for a couple of blokes to take us over in an old horse and cart across the border. These were fairly nefarious characters who were smugglers, and to the best of my knowledge, the deal was they would take over French

20:30 perfumes and stuff and whatever. The idea was that they would throw some straw in the back and Mack and I would have to get under the straw in the back and hide ourselves, and when they'd get to the border they would bribe the guards. Then they'd buy the watches or pinch the watches or whatever, and bring watches back

21:00 across the border and sell them to the French. The guards would get paid off again, so this was the racket that used to go on. So this sounded a pretty good way for us to get into Switzerland. Anyway, we're all set to go and suddenly the panic started, because with the Allied advances increasing the pressure on the Germans, there became a constant flow of German deserters trying to get across the border

21:30 to get away from the advancing Allies. They'd had enough of war, and of course the guards were doubled then. Then they started the caper of the guards were instructed to stick bayonets in any straw, or any vehicles, you know, or any carts – probe it with the bayonets. We thought well there's no future in that,

22:00 so that ended that little caper and we had to think of something else. So, these blokes then dreamed up the other idea of the miller getting touch with his brother who happened to own a mill in a place called Resis Larousse, which is only about twenty kilometres away. He had a little mill on the river, too. Somehow they sent a message to him, and it was raised between the two brothers that the

22:30 miller at Resis would send his young son on his pushbike to this mill at Montarlot les Champlitte, which is the name of the village. The message would be that he was to bring back this American guy and myself, and borrow some bikes and the three of us would ride to the next mill.

23:00 Then the bikes would be returned later. So, that was arranged. In due course the young lad turns up on his bike and my host, the miller, wrote a note to his brother and gave it to the son. The son tucked the thing in the handlebars of his bike, and off we went. We rode the bike for the next

23:30 twenty kilometres and finally got to the other mill. When we got to the other mill, of course we were in the family so to speak, and we were looked after extremely well again. This time the other miller said that he happened to know there was a British Army unit in the forest, and he knew that they were causing the Germans

24:00 a lot of trouble because their job was to harass the Germans behind the lines, behind the German lines, in front of their own advancing lines. It turned out that this crowd was called the SAS, which is the British Special Air Service. They were a wonderful bunch of blokes, commandos. He said the captain of this crowd, the British captain – they

24:30 all spoke fluent French I might tell you – this British captain would come and interrogate us, and if he was satisfied he would arrange to take us back to their headquarters in the forest. So, in due course he turned up and we went through the business with him, and he was satisfied. He'd already checked on the radio with London.

25:00 Got all the particulars about us and we were then taken in a jeep. I mean, you can imagine a jeep driving around behind enemy lines, but that's exactly what happened. Anyway, he took us in this jeep with his driver who was a cockney – a funny bloke, he was a great guy – and we went into the forest. In the forest were all these army guys, all the SAS blokes, they were

25:30 a tremendous bunch of fellas. They used to do some horrific things, unbelievable. They would go out in jeeps, and the jeeps would be dropped by parachute from their own aircraft. They would actually drop the jeep with four parachutes on them, and they dropped the canisters and the ammunition. They would go out on patrols and shoot up German convoys and all that sort of thing.

26:00 We thought this was a pretty exciting sort of a life, and I had been used to handling the Vickers gas operated machine guns because we had one on the Halifax. It turned out that there were twin Vickers fitted on the bonnet of the jeep and one on the tray at the back, which was a free singing single machine gun. So, I spoke to Mack and I said, “We better earn our

26:30 keep here, we’ve got to do something.” So, I said, “How about you, how do you feel?” and he said, “Oh, I’m all right. I’ll be in it.” I said, “Well, I’m going to be the rear gunner on this jeep.” So that’s what happened. I used to go out on patrols with them as the rear gunner on this jeep, and we did all sorts of wonderful things. He’d go on the other one, and then we got into a battle with the Germans. It was a Panser Division, which was

27:00 holed up in a town called Champlitte. About half a dozen jeeps and the patrol from the SAS set up their weaponry strategically, and they had all the battle plan worked out, and then the battle started. We made an assault on the Panzer group, and of course that was a pretty

27:30 wild battle. There was a lot of shooting and carrying on.

What sort of impact did the Vickers guns have on the Panzers?

Well, they wouldn’t be too happy, because this has happened behind their own lines. It wasn't as though it was the fighting line, or the front line, it was around behind them. So, you know, that caused a bit of consternation amongst the Germans too.

You mentioned that these jeeps

28:00 **had been dropped by the British.**

The jeeps? Yes.

So, given they were commandos operating behind enemy lines, how covert were their operations when they were driving around in the jeeps?

How what?

How covert were their operations?

Oh, very covert. I mean, they did some amazing things. When I was in that particular SAS camp,

28:30 one day a string of about six jeeps loaded up with all their gear and their weapons, came in under the leadership of a major. I think he was the highest decorated major in the British Army – he had all the medals in the world. He brought this team through from the American lines, through the German lines, up to

29:00 this camp. Dodging around roads and shooting their way through – amazing.

How would they conceal their weapons and their jeeps and their equipment when they weren't in use in operations?

Oh, they would camouflage it all with nets. The nets would have leaves entwined all around it with branches and all that. Of course you couldn’t spot it from the air, because they would have the nets in the trees, you know.

29:30 Camouflaged equipment and all that sort of stuff. But if they thought that they were sighted then they would move on to another forest or something like that, set up camp again, which happened actually when I was there. Because they’d reached the stage with the Allied lines advancing very quickly

30:00 towards Germany – they weren't into Germany but they were getting close to it – the SAS had to move further in, in front of them, so they were almost in Germany. So, the major and the captain told us that if we were staying with them we’d have to be prepared to consider ourselves as being fighting our way into Germany.

30:30 I said, “I’m damned if I’ll be fighting my way into Germany, I’ve had enough of it. I’m trying to get back to my squadron in England,” same as the [American] guy. So we said maybe we should say farewell and thankyou very much. He said, “Perhaps you better, because I’ve got enough problems trying to look after my lot without you guys tacked onto me.” So I said,

31:00 “Yeah, that’s sensible.” I said, “Oh well, it’s been a lot of fun. Thankyou very much, ta ta.” So, we took off, and we decided we’d walk through the German lines back to the Allied lines, which was exactly what we did. It took us a while but we finally got there. Then when we got to the American lines, the Americans just couldn’t believe what we’d done and what we’d been through.

31:30 They couldn’t believe the Brit’s had done what they’d done. They couldn’t believe it, as for dropping jeeps behind the German lines, they reckoned that’s crazy stuff.

Those commandos, were they living as Frenchmen in the villages?

No, as British soldiers. They were in their uniform, there was no civilians amongst them. The only

32:00 contribution they made to be looked like enemy soldiers, rather than British soldiers, was they used to wear a khaki peaked cap. It was identical to the cap of the Africa Corps, but it didn't have any badge on it, but the rest of the uniform was all British uniform. They even had one Scotsman there,

32:30 a lieutenant who wore a kilt. Now they'd be on patrol and this guy would be in a kilt. The guys leading the patrols would have these caps on, and of course when they were seen by the Germans, the Germans would be puzzled about these damn jeeps, because they wouldn't know whether they were theirs or ours. They looked strange sort of vehicles, but invariably the guards

33:00 across the road would let them through, and of course this happened on two occasions I might tell you. One of the lieutenants on the jeep was a fluent German speaker, so they had to go past this road which they knew was guarded, to get to a – I don't know what it was,

33:30 whether it was a bridge or a power station or something – they wanted to blow up. So, he's driving along with his driver, and the gunners in the jeep, and they come to this guard there with the barrier up. The guard's looking puzzled at what the hell they are, and challenges them. This big tall officer guy, the Brit,

34:00 yells out to him to smarten up, he's sloppy at the guard, he'd better learn proper guard drill or something, in German. The poor bloke was shaking like a leaf, he thought it was German officer because he was looking at this cap he was wearing. Anyway, by the time he sorts out what it's all about, he lifts the barrier and of course they shoot through. That happened quite often, they were just remarkable. Another time

34:30 they captured a German, a young soldier, and they dragged this poor kid in and he's as white as a sheet and shaking in his boots, he doesn't know what's going to happen to him. They handed him over to me, and I had to take him down to the Maquis, down the road. So, they gave me a Remington revolver, so I got a brand new 45

35:00 Remington, which I kept from there on, and one of those nice, cosy American jackets. I had to guard this poor bloke and take him down to the Maquis. Well, I don't know who was more frightened, him or me, because I didn't want to shoot the poor bloke, but if he had to try and escape I would have to shoot him. I thought, 'I hope to God he sits still and behaves himself.' Anyway,

35:30 as it turned out, he was as scared as anybody and he just huddled in the corner and awaited his fate. I knew what his fate would be, because as soon as they took him down to the Maquis I knew what would happen to him. I didn't want to know, but I had an idea, because they were pretty damn ruthless. That was my exposure to the one

36:00 German that they brought in.

So they were technically in breach of the Geneva Convention, the Maquis?

The Maquis? Oh yeah, all the time, but they weren't soldiers, they were just civilians. There was no such thing as the Geneva Convention for civilians, it was only for soldiers, military.

Can you explain for me then, when you walked through the German lines,

36:30 **exactly what was there, and how you were able to walk through?**

Well the German lines, it's not like WW1, you don't have a line of soldiers, you have pockets of soldiers and motorised vehicles, and mobile cannons and what have you, you know. They're all scattered here in pockets, loose knit, so you'd sort of

37:00 have to dodge in and out and hope to God you could get through. It was a bit scary but it was doable.

What happened once you reached the American lines?

Oh when I met the American lines, that was quite a thing because he being an American, he was with all his buddies then. He hustled up the big boss around what they call the Red Ball Express.

37:30 The Red Ball Express was a kind of special string of vehicles that was constantly going backwards and forwards from where they were to Paris. To and fro, taking ammunition, equipment, mods, supplies, all that stuff. It was like a, I suppose a – what would you call it – a motorised

38:00 transport arrangement. So, he hustled up the boss, and they came from the same home town, I think, and told us we wanted a couple of berths on the Red Ball Express. So, that was all right, they treated us like royalty and put us on this big truck. This big Negro driver's there, and he starts off and goes like the clappers [fast],

38:30 and drives this thing straight through to Paris. So, we got off at Paris and it was arranged that we should go out to the airport, and then they had a Dakota aircraft there, which was doing nothing else but taking to London all the flotsam and jetsam like us, that was emerging from inside France. So, that's what happened.

39:00 We were taken back to London, and then of course we were interrogated by our intelligence in London.

They spent a lot time finding out all we knew, the positions of anti-aircraft guns, and all of that sort of stuff. After that they sent me to a convalescent camp. I was at this convalescent camp at Bournemouth, which is on the east coast of England, and I was there for about a month.

39:30 Then finally they thought well I'm fit enough to ship out of the place, and I'd had enough anyway. So, they shipped me back to Australia, and that was the end of that.

Given this absolutely incredible adventure that you'd had in France, what did it feel like once you were out of enemy territory and

40:00 **you'd reached American lines?**

Well obviously it was a huge relief because in a sense you're living on your wits, and you're living on your nerves. You've been subject to some fairly demanding situations. Psychologically you think you've reached somewhat of a confused state.

40:30 You'd grown up in a hurry, because we were only young. We were a bit traumatised there, in a way. There was a kind of undoing of all this tension, which is natural, that's exactly what happens in these cases. It just takes a little while to get all that out of your system. There were certain incidents which were fairly nasty on the way, but the plusses were that you began to develop a great insight into human nature. One had the ability I think to size people up much quicker. There was a greater understanding, I suppose, of the meaning of life, and a fairly proud feeling that you were an Australian, because you were always welcome – except by the Germans, of course.

Tape 9

00:32 **Mr. Innes, I just wanted to go back a little to the Maquis camp, what kind of work did you and your American friend do there at that time?**

At the Maquis camp?

Did you get involved in anything in particular?

We did some of the chores, we would attend what they called the droppings, which is when the aircraft would come over and they'd be all set up to collect

01:00 the canisters that were dropped by parachute. We would form part of the team to go out and help them. We would help to collect the canisters because they'd have to hide them very quickly in the forest – like you'd take them out of the clearing into the forest, because there were German spotter planes all the time zooming around looking for these sorts of places.

01:30 They would signal through to the aircraft coming in, and they would have a little radio thing in the middle of the clearing, or they would use goose flares together, in a sort of circle or whatever. The navigator would home the aircraft onto that with his radio equipment, and then they would drop all this stuff.

02:00 Down would come the parachutes and the containers, cluttering down and a number of occasions they even had guys jumping out to reinforce them – like British officers that were experienced in leading troops, or very good linguists, or fellows trained with explosives

02:30 or those trained as radio operators. That happened quite frequently and as I said with the SAS, they dropped jeeps. We used to help them be involved in all that.

Who was making the drops to the Maquis?

The Royal Air force, there was a unit – I don't know which one it was, but it rather

03:00 specialised in that, and not only to the Maquis, they used to drop these to the partisans in Yugoslavia and of course probably in the other countries like Holland, Belgium. I don't know, but I presume so. So, we enjoyed that part of it because it was pretty boring in many ways being there.

03:30 When you're busy you don't get too upset, you feel that you're earning your keep, so to speak, because they had to feed themselves and it was a pretty onerous task. Although the villagers used to provide them with a lot of food, one of the things that they all missed of course, was cigarettes, tobacco, because they could only buy it on the black market. It was very expensive

04:00 and pretty rubbishy tobacco too, I might tell you. I know, I used to smoke a pipe in those days and occasionally my helpers would give me some tobacco that they'd bought on the black market. I had made a pipe – I didn't have one, I lost mine – I made a pipe out of the stem was a bit of a

04:30 walnut tree where you cut the little branch off and you poke the stuff inside out of it, to hollow it, as the stem. Then the bowl would be a piece of rosewood, a briar thing, and you'd use that as the bowl. So it was a bit makeshift, but it worked. The French smoked like chimneys, they all smoked. Every

Frenchman I saw

05:00 had a cigarette dripping from his mouth. The British used to feed them a lot of cigarettes by air, and our own blokes too. They dropped money, as I mentioned before, because they needed money to buy stuff on the black market.

You mentioned you were questioned by a French Canadian.

Yes.

What kind of questions would they ask you, to determine whether you were who you said you were?

05:30 Well, I think the French Canadian guy as I recall, when he heard I had been trained in Canada, was a natural ask me what places I'd been to and what did they look like, and do you remember such and such a café, in Mossbank for instance, or Portage la Prairie. They'd talk about

06:00 what are the regulations about drink, you know liquor and of course you would know that you've got to go to the liquor bulk stores over there. Well these are questions that sort of satisfied him in many ways, but then again he could check up on you himself by contacting London and getting a description of you,

06:30 and verifying that you were on that aircraft and you were shot down, and all this sort of thing, you know. There were numerous ways, they were pretty smart at all that sort of thing. Now, if you were being questioned by an English intelligence officer, it wouldn't be very hard for him to find out whether you were really Australian,

07:00 because they knew the Australian accent. He'd also knew enough about Australia to know a bit about the history of the place, and he'd also ask you about if you were near a particular town in England, he'd ask you questions about – well he'd ask you probably, name some of the soccer teams there, you know, anything like that and you obviously would know them.

07:30 There'd be a lot of things that they could find out about you. I've read a lot about the Germans that posed as British, when they were captured, and they were actually spies in the British uniform, and how they were caught, because the knowledge they didn't possess when they

08:00 were being cross questioned. I can understand why, it's really hard if you're a foreigner to pretend you're otherwise, when you're asked about things like, "What position do you play on a cricket team over there?" or, "When somebody says, 'Go to silly mid on' or something, do you know what that means?" Do you know what I mean? Things like that.

The French Canadian at the Maquis camp, what was

08:30 **his role there?**

Well because he could speak fluent French was the first thing. The second, he was a trained officer, and he was an army officer of course. I suspect he was also a trained radio operator, but he'd really be picked because he could handle himself pretty well

09:00 as a leader of men, and they try and bring a bit of discipline with these Maquis yards, they were pretty wild and reckless, and do a few foolhardy things, you know. See, a lot of those fellas weren't trained like a military man would be trained. Even using the weapons they did some crazy stuff. Some of them would even blow fingers off their hand through bad handling of their weapons,

09:30 all that sort of stuff.

What made you think that he was a trained wireless operator?

I can't remember, I think he told me actually. I just have a feeling that I recall that he said something about it.

Did your family know what had happened to you?

My family only knew that I had been posted missing. They got a telegram to that effect.

10:00 They heard eventually that I was missing but safe, but they weren't allowed to make any attempt to communicate with me. I was safe in enemy occupied territory. They'd heard from the Air Ministry when I was awarded a military medal. All this came through, you know over the fullness

10:30 of time, but they went through a period of about I would have thought about two months, before they knew that I was still in one piece.

How do you think they found out – or how do you think the information was gleaned that you were safe and then passed on to your family? How do you think that came about?

Well my feeling was it would have been the first indication

11:00 could well have been from the radio operator in the Maquis camp. If he's talking to London and we have been in the camp, he would have reported it on the injured RAF people that were there. He would have

told them about them, and we were there, and the American was there. He would have passed that information on to them. So, I'm presuming that that's how they heard. That would go through to the Air Ministry in London,

11:30 and from Air Ministry to Melbourne headquarters of the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]. They would send a telegram to my parents.

When you were in London you said you were interrogated by intelligence officers there, what kinds of questions were they asking you?

Well, they asked me what kind of aircraft did I last see in that vicinity where I was.

12:00 Did I have any indication of the number of troops that were there; what sort of troops were they; what was the kind of morale of the troops – the French and their own people that I'd met. They would ask me to draw a map as best

12:30 I could of my walk through France and indicate any things of interest – like fuel depots where there were big groups of army engineers for instance, things like that.

13:00 Could I give them names of other people who were wandering around France that they hadn't had any information on, that I might have come across. Escapees, evaders, all that sort of thing.

How did it feel to be home in Australia?

After this? Well, obviously a wonderful feeling.

How did you come home?

13:30 I came home on a ship – I'm trying to think now – oh, I know. What was the name of the ship? It's a well known ship. No, the name just escapes me for

14:00 the moment, I must look it up. I don't think I've even got it written down, but the ship I came back on was a British liner, and it was pretty comfortable because I know we had bunks and cabins – because I was a commissioned officer by then. I know a couple of our guys that came back like me, we were all commissioned.

14:30 We were pretty cheesed off by the fact that this particular ship had picked up a lot of young rookie officers from the British Navy, and given them the best cabins. These were only guys just out of training whereas we had been through this hard mill and we thought we were deserving of better cabins than we had been given, but by and large we didn't complain, we were looked after pretty well.

15:00 I think it was the Mauritania come to think of it, yeah.

Could you tell me about the Military Medal?

Right, well a Military Medal [MM] is a military award, as you know. There are only, so I'm told, there's only four air force airmen, Royal Australia Air Force personnel, who've received a military medal.

15:30 I remember my father when he heard that I'd won the Military Medal, he was beside himself, he couldn't believe it. He was so excited because he would understand that in WW1 to get a Military Medal is really something, you know, in the trenches, but for an

16:00 air force guy to get a Military Medal is quite unusual. But apparently the Air Ministry took the attitude that if you had gone through a situation like I had, as an evader in enemy territory etc, they couldn't very well give you an air force decoration like a Distinguished Flying Medal [DFM], or a Distinguished Flying Cross [DFC].

16:30 That wouldn't be appropriate, so I guess they thought they've got to give a military decoration. Now, I remember one famous escapee from a German prisoner of war camp who got a Military Cross [MC], who was an officer, so they get a cross – a non-commissioned officer gets the medal. There's one subtle difference, by the way, when you get a Military Medal you get twenty pounds sterling at the time from the government.

17:00 When you get a Military Cross you get no money, so that was one advantage anyway. But getting back to this other matter, this fellow's name was Chisholm, who was an Australian and he got a Military Cross for escaping. He had a fairly hairy time getting away from the prisoner of war camp, but he succeeded. So that was a military award too.

17:30 **Where were you when you were told that you would be getting the military medal?**

Back in Sydney. I didn't hear until I got back to Sydney.

What was the procedure for that?

Well I was asked to go to an investiture at Government House. It was rather amusing, I received this ornate letter with all the blurb about the award of the medal,

18:00 and asked to attend the investiture by the Governor General. Was it the Governor General, or the Governor? No, I think it was the Governor, the Governor of New South Wales. The Governor at the time was a fellow called [Governor General William] Mackell, Billy Mackell. I said to my wife, “I don’t particularly like this fellow.

18:30 I don’t think he’s ever had any war service.” He’s an ex-Trade Union bloke, not that I would hold that against him, but just didn’t feel comfortable with this guy handing me a medal. I wouldn’t have minded if he had been a member of the Royal family, or the way we used to think in those day, we were part of the monarchy society. It would be

19:00 different now of course, but then, we felt that way. We felt it a pretty big honour to be decorated by the King or the Queen, but this guy didn’t appeal to me, so I said, “Just put it in the post.” And that’s exactly what happened. Some of my friends are pretty strong Labour voters would say, “You were a snob. Poor old Billy did a good job, he’s a Labour guy, he’s a Trade Union fellow.”

19:30 However, I don’t argue with them, I just say, “Well, he didn’t appeal to me and that’s it.”

I wanted to talk to you about what you found out when you came back to Australia. Could you tell me what you found out about the other crewmembers in your plane?

Yes, I did. That’s an interesting point because I didn’t know what happened to them until very late in the peace.

20:00 One of my crew, the mid-upper gunner, was not captured. There were two of us not captured. When he was shot down, he couldn’t speak a word of French. He was a happy go lucky sort of a guy, a nice guy, but he always took the easy way out, and he was dead lucky.

20:30 He was a funny bloke. When he was shot down he headed for a big chateau nearby. He wasn't injured at all in any way. He saw this big wrought iron gate with a crest on it, and it had a bell, so he went up and belted on this bell.

21:00 Of course nobody in their right mind would do that, because you would think it would be occupied by the hierarchy of the German regiment in the district, or whatever. But anyway, they turned out to be patriots, and they were anti-Germans and they took him in. He lived the life of Riley with them for the duration of the war, or almost to the end of the war. So he didn’t do any escaping or anything,

21:30 he just took it easy. They had a wonderful wine cellar, they had a very attractive daughter, they rather liked his sense of humour, and they looked after him. So he had a very, very pleasant stay in France I must say. So he was the clever one in the end, not me. The other ones was the sad part.

22:00 The other members of the crew, there were four of them. Four? One, two, three – no. Yeah, it would be four. They came down safely by parachute.

22:30 Somehow they managed to get together, whereas I didn’t see anyone else. They were rounded up and they all went to the same house, village. The French looked after them. One of the local villagers was the school teacher,

23:00 and he was a member of the Resistance. His wife was apparently a strange woman and she was a bit of a high flyer, and she like to have a lot of money to spend, and apparently he wasn't all that well paid. So, when she heard that they were

23:30 going to look after these airmen, for which there was a reward – as I said twenty thousand francs I believe it was then, for non-commission officers, and twenty five thousand for officers, and they were all non-commission officers. She decided that she’d turn them in to the Germans, collect the money, but she didn’t do it directly, and

24:00 this came out after the war. What she had done was she had tipped off some friend of hers, who arranged to take them supposedly to meet an aircraft, a [Westland] Lysander which is a small aircraft they used for carrying agents into France, and for picking them up. This guy gave them the storey that he

24:30 was taking them to the little landing strip there to be picked up to be sent back to England, and they went along with it and when they got there, they found themselves surrounded by SS guys and the Gestapo. So, they were rounded up and shipped into a gaol, and then the next thing they found themselves

25:00 being taken on a train to Buchenwald Concentration Camp – not a prisoner of war camp. So they ended up in Buchenwald Concentration Camp, and they had one hell of a time. They were bashed around and they were in a shocking state. They were taken out to be shot three times. Fortunately at the railway station there was a New Zealand

25:30 squadron leader, a RAF squadron leader in the New Zealand Air Force, who’d also been shot down, and he’d been rounded up to go to Buchenwald also. So, what happened, he fortunately happened to see an International Red Cross representative on the station,

26:00 and you could identify him by what he was wearing. So he wrote a little note, and he wrapped it in a pebble or something and threw it to this guy, just as though they were pushing him on to the train. The note explained who they were and how they shouldn't be treated like criminals, that they were prisoners of war and they should be

26:30 treated in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. Then that was that. They pushed them into Buchenwald Concentration Camp and they were in there for probably about a month, no three weeks I think he told him, I believe they were there. Then suddenly the commandant of the camp, surrounded by his retinue, all marched down to the cells

27:00 and gathered all these guys up and said they were going to send them to a POW camp. So, obviously the Red Cross guy had complained and got in touch with [Field Marshall] Goering's office in Berlin, and the Gestapo were given instructions to release them and hand them over to the Luftwaffe to go into the prisoner of war camp, and that's what happened.

27:30 But they got a hell of a bad time. Now, recently, or firstly, when I first met up with them back in Sydney again when we had a reunion, they said that the Australian Government had agreed that they would pay ten thousand Australian dollars to each of them, in recognition of their

28:00 suffering. Now, I don't know whether that followed some sort of sequence of events following the Japanese prisoners' arrangement that was entered into. They were told to lodge a claim against the German Government, anyway, somebody gave them the papers to complete, and that was that, they never heard anything

28:30 after that for about ten years. Then suddenly out of the blue each of then received a payment from the German Government of ten thousand dollars, the equivalent of ten thousand dollars, with a letter saying that there would be another ten thousand to follow in another two years, or something. They've just got the second ten thousand now, so they did

29:00 get something out of it. But unfortunately the rear gunner had died in the meantime, the pilot had died in the meantime, and I suppose it's been paid to their family. Well, that was a pretty sad thing because they were nearly exterminated. The other guy, the flight engineer, he was just picked up quickly and was sent to a POW camp.

29:30 So that's the story of that little group.

When you came back to Australia, you mentioned that psychologically the tension had been building while you were over there. What kind of impact did it have on your life when you returned home, and how hard was it to adjust to civilian life?

Well, put it

30:00 this way – it's very hard to answer that question, because it's a long while ago and the circumstances that prevailed at that time were somewhat different because you were at an age then, and at a period when you're trying to rebuild your life. You're trying to re-establish yourself as, you know, with your family.

30:30 You've got to do something about your career. You just had to come to grips with it, but the memories of it still were there. The War Veterans Department, when I first came back, weren't all that friendly.

31:00 I know when I complained about the fact that I had this exposure to mustard gas, they denied that completely, "That's impossible." And it wasn't until some years later, I may have told you this, the wing commander in the air force was in charge of that party that went down to those ships to unload that mustard gas, he wrote to the press about it. Then suddenly it all opened up, the government suddenly admitted that they were messing around with mustard gas.

31:30 I found out later that they were storing the mustard gas drums in the old tunnel up on the Lapstone Hill [Glenbrook Zig Zag Railway tunnel] there, up on the railway line. Which was true, because they actually checked it out, but you see, even the Repatriation Department was then know, would not acknowledge any injuries from that. I'm sure there were some consequences from that, because the fumes were horrific

32:00 in the hold of the ship. I think in the terms of war injuries they didn't really seem to be all that interested in the psychological traumas that one would have experienced. I just felt there was not a very strong sympathy towards the returned servicemen, because there were a lot of them of course.

32:30 Now, over the years of course that's changed dramatically. The way that the Department of Veteran Affairs works now, they've done an excellent job. I can't speak too highly of them, the way they've helped the diggers, and certainly airmen.

When you came back did you have nightmares?

Yes I did, many. I had some horrific nightmares actually.

33:00 **What kinds of things would you be dreaming about?**

Well I would be thinking of the incident of the two French people being shot, and you know, the sort of hearing in the forest, and the cooked up kangaroo court, and the trial that was there. I presume they were guilty, I don't know, but it still stuck in my craw.

33:30 You know, it wasn't really justice in my book. They were justified but I didn't feel that it was done properly. As I say, to put the shovel on someone's hands and say, "Dig your grave and then we'll put you before the court and see if you're guilty." I mean that's nonsensical, but that's what happened. Now, that sort of thing sticks in your mind. I remember the fire in the

34:00 aircraft, that was horrific. I remember the tension when we couldn't open the hatch. I remember the time when I thought I was finished when the German plane dropping the fighter flares just about wiped me out coming down the parachute. I mean these are the sort of things that you can't help thinking of. It's

34:30 no use sort of survived all that, but you think they're pretty horrific things, they must affect you, but after years you forget it. Some guys can't even talk about some incidents like that, they don't want to know about it. I find that talking about it now doesn't worry me at all.

When you came back to Australia, what did you do straight away?

35:00 I went back to work at the insurance company I started with, and I studied at night. I was very interested in marine insurance. I was running a marine insurance department, I used to go down to the wharves inspecting cargoes with the surveyors for the insurance claims, and general average claims, and all that sort of thing.

35:30 Then finally, I met up with one of my old mates who was a Lancaster pilot who I went to school with and we'd know one another for all those years, and we used to talk about old times. He said to me, "Why the hell don't you go into business on your own? Why do you want to work for someone else?" And I thought about it, and I thought, 'That's a good idea.'

36:00 So, I started an insurance broking business. I didn't have any clients and I didn't have much money, but I started. He let me use part of his office, never charged me, and I got quite a good business which was eventually bought out by a big London firm of brokers. Then from that I developed other business interests.

36:30 I became a management consultant. I did a lot of travelling overseas acting for insurance companies and getting into computer systems.

I might just interrupt there because we're just getting towards the end of the tape. I just wanted to ask you what contact you had with the French people who helped you?

Well, I decided to go back to France to meet up with the helpers.

37:00 Most of them were still alive, some of the older ones had died. My wife came back with me on I think my second time over there and we met up with them again. Then finally I decided that in the latter years when we were financially able to do it, I said to her, "I think we should go back and get all those helpers

37:30 and get them to one particular venue, invite them to this little hotel near Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises, which is where Charles de Gaulle had his home – and give them a good weekend. So, I did that, it was arranged through a friend of mine in France, and all

38:00 these helpers came together from all over France. They didn't know one another, and they couldn't speak English, none of them. Then I managed to get a hold of a very nice lady, elderly lady who had retired. She'd been a high school teacher of English, in France, and she acted as an interpreter which helped. My French was getting a little bit rusty.

38:30 We all met at this place, and I sort of hired the hotel for the weekend, and gave them a wonderful time. I had taken over brass plaques which I had specially made with the crest of the Royal Air Force Coping Society on it, with an acknowledgement of their courage, and the debt that we all owed them,

39:00 in those clandestine years. I presented a plaque to each one of the families at this little ceremony we had, and it was a very emotional weekend, I can assure you.

What year was that?

I can't remember the year. What was it? '95, yeah that was it.

39:30 **What are your feelings towards those people who sheltered you?**

Oh, eternally grateful. I think they were heroic. I'm a complete Francophile as you can imagine, after that, and I owe my life to them, really. So I couldn't help but harbour very kind thoughts

40:00 for them, and a very high regard for them.

Mr. Innes, I want to thank you very much for being a part of the archive project. It's been a pleasure hearing your stories.

Thankyou.

INTERVIEW ENDS