Australians at War Film Archive

Peter Isaacson - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 11th May 2004

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2027

Tape 1

00:44 My mother and father met in England, just at the end of the First World War. He was an Australian soldier, a lieutenant in the Australian Imperial Forces, and my mother was living in London. My father had been through Gallipoli

01:02 and Egypt and France. In Egypt and Gallipoli he was aide de camp to General Birdward, who was one of the commanders in Gallipoli. They got married and I was born in London, where we lived until I was about six and my father decided to come back to Australia. He came back with a number of

01:30 agencies and opened up a business in Melbourne. I spent my childhood in Melbourne, went to Brighton Grammar and later when I left Brighton Grammar I joined The Age. During the Depression my father's business was pretty rocky and she became a journalist on The Age, when there were very few women

02:00 journalists in Melbourne. This was in the early 1930s. So I then stayed at school and when I was ready to leave school, she got me a job on The Age as a messenger boy. Having come from a private school and having my first job, riding a bicycle around town,

02:30 I was dead scared the other chaps from school would see me in this fairly lowly position. However, it was very good training. I stayed on The Age for quite a few years and then had an opportunity to go into a small advertising and publishing business with a friend of mine, so I did. That was the start of my publishing career at the age of about 18.

03:04 We published a history of Port Melbourne at that stage, it was the centenary of Port Melbourne, and we got the job of publishing a history of Port Melbourne. We didn't get paid by the Port Melbourne council, what we had to do was sell advertising and pay for it that way. So this went on for a while. I led a very happy

03:32 life as a young man in Melbourne, going to parties, having girlfriends. My parents had a house at Sassafras, a country house, and we used to go up there. I had a very good friend, John Knox, whose father was the local member for that area. We used to drive around in his

04:00 Morris A40, or my Austin 8, which was really my mother's, but she lent it to me on occasions. So it was a pretty happy time until the war broke out in 1939, and even that was a good time. One didn't realise quite what was going on. Although my mother had been involved in helping Jewish refugees that had

04:30 come from Melbourne and landed in Australia. She helped to bring them here and secondly to get them settled. This was a job she gave a lot of time to. One got a realisation of what was going on overseas, but when you're young you don't take as much notice of these sort of things as you should.

05:01 But because of my mother's involvement, I met a lot of very interesting people. There was a cosmopolitan area, a number of people in Melbourne at that time, and I met some very interesting people through my mother in Melbourne.

05:32 **Just going back a bit, what line of business was your father in?**

He was a manufacturer's agent. As I said, he brought agencies from England to Australia, and there were agencies for crockery, for cutlery, for toys…and they were very good agencies. But you know in the Depression people just weren't buying.

06:00 So what he did was he closed his business down and joined a company that he had been working for before the First World War, which was called Lamson Paragon. They were speciality printers, they printed all sorts of docket books, and everything was done by hand in those days. You wrote an invoice, you wrote a receipt, you wrote statements and they produced all the stationary for this. So my father

06:30 rejoined the company that he had been working for prior to the First World War. My father was a very, very good salesman. Everything that I know about selling, I learnt from him. So that's what he did after

he closed his business down. And he stayed doing that. He was due to retire at the age of 78,

07:00 but he died just a few weeks before he was due to retire. He worked right up until the end, and I think he enjoyed his life.

And siblings? Did you have brothers and sisters?

I have a sister Joan, who is still alive. My mother and my sister

07:30 both joined the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service]. My mother, during the war, had an attachment and the person to whom she was attached…although she was still with my father, it's a long story, died, and I…I was in England with the air force at the time so I didn't know what was going on. I had met the person….

08:00 He died. And I think to change her life a bit she joined the AWAS as a public relations officer. As I mentioned, she had been on The Age. So she did that and my sister joined the army at the same time in the AWAS and she was a photographer, and she was in public relations, too. So my mother and she worked as sort of a team for army public relations.

08:31 So they filled out the war doing that. When I came back from England, they were still both in the army. My father was in the volunteer defence…the Australian home guard. My mother was a captain and my father was a corporal, I'm not sure, having held a commission in the First World War. And my sister

09:00 was a corporal, my mother was a captain and my father, I think, was a private. So that was what they were doing.

Your mother sounds like a very dynamic woman…

She was. She was a very dynamic person. She was a very good journalist and a very caring person, as I mentioned with the refugees. But quite apart from that, part of on The Age, there was a

09:30 Toy Fund, and at Christmas time she organised this Toy Fund, and my sister and I used to go around the hospitals and give the children the toys that had been sent in by readers of The Age. So I learnt and my sister learnt a big about giving.

So she involved you in a lot of her activities?

10:01 **Or in her life, outside the home?**

No, not really. I was still fairly young. She led her own life to a large extent. One of the things that she did. Quite often she moved. She moved house. At one stage

10:32 we lived in the city, we were probably some of the first city dwellers. We lived at 21 Spring Street, my sister was still at school and I was on The Age. I was working at night. I was at university in the mornings and I working at night. At this stage I had graduated from being a messenger boy to taking advertisements over the telephone.

11:02 I started work at two in the afternoon and finished at 11 at night, so I had the mornings to go the university. I was just doing an arts course. We lived at 21 Spring Street, right opposite the gardens, which was a lovely position. So I used to go off to

11:32 the university and then to The Age. There were very few people living in the city in those days. There was one other interesting family. A Mrs Webbed, who was one of the very first women members of parliament. She lived just around the corner at the top of Collins Street. And so she had

12:00 a family, a couple of girls and a son. So we got to know them. At one stage, I helped her with her campaign. She was a member for Nunawading, the Nunawading area anyway. And she was a great teetotaller, and of course that area was and still is a teetotal area. But, when you say did my mother involve me in things,

12:30 the things that she involved me in was bringing people home, interesting people she had met by being on The Age I suppose. One of them was Helena Rubinstein for example. She was with her husband who was the Prince Gourielli [Prince Artchil Gourielli-Tchkonia]. He was a Russian prince or a Georgian prince, and she of course was the Princess Gourielli at this stage.

13:00 But that was the introduction to Helena Rubinstein, which I followed up when I was training…After I trained in Canada I went down to New York, just for a few days before going off to England. So I called on Helena Rubinstein, who was in her New York office when I was in New York. And one of the regrets of my life was that while I was talking to her,

13:30 just before we broke up, she said, "Oh Peter, have you got enough money to see New York properly?" And I being very prideful said, "Of course I have." So I gave away the opportunity to see New York on Helena Rubinstein. Another one that I recall was Richard Tauber and his wife. Richard Tauber was a tenor, I suppose,

14:01 and his wife Diana Napier, who was a film star. Another one was Alexander Kipners, who was a…he

wasn't a tenor, he was something else. But these sort of people were people who did come to the home, and were interesting to meet. I probably gained quite a lot from being exposed to them and listening to them.

14:30 My father was away a lot at this stage with Lamson Parigan, he travelled the country quite a lot. So living in a flat in the city was very convenient, I must say…Joining the Air force in 1940, and going on the reserve and learning to do Morse code and doing the 21 lessons that

15:00 we had to do and going to those lectures.

I'd like to hear a little bit about your experience with The Age, and your mother's work with the Jewish refugees…

The Age was a family. It was run by a family, the Symes.

15:30 Had been run by them ever since…the original Symes. David Symes had brought the paper in the early 1800s. The executives, the editor was Jeffrey Syme, the chairman was Oswald Syme. The women's editor was Kathryn Syme. The general manager was Hugh Syme, and his assistant was

16:02 Jeff Norris, who had married one of the Symes. And the people who worked on the paper were people whose fathers had worked on the paper. And I was the son of somebody who worked on the paper. One of my best friends was Hugh Lion, whose father was a compositor. So it was very much a family.

16:36 My first job as I said was a messenger boy, and at 10 o'clock every morning I had to load up my bicycle with copies of The Age and go around to the newspaper kiosks, which had been granted to returned soldiers from the First World War. They used to sell

17:00 newspapers and magazines and sweets and things. On the off chance that they had sold out of Ages and needed to have them replaced. I looked around to see if any of my former school friends were watching me. It was a form of snobbery, I guess…

Was this around the city?

Around the city yes, around Collins Street and Swanson Street, Bourke Street…As I said, from there

17:34 I graduated to the answers to advertisements. That was at the time of the Depression, and a great number of the advertisements were for situations wanted, by people who wanted a job. The other big one was flats or rooms to let by people

18:01 who had wanted extra money and rooms to let, so they would advertise these in The Age. And the replies, because they didn't want to be swamped with people, or people coming to their homes, they would give an address care of The Age. One, two, three, four care of The Age, or X, Y, Z care of The Age,

18:30 or 'lonely heart' care of The Age, or something like that. So they had this little booth in the front office of The Age, with somebody there, me, or somebody else. And behind us we had a whole row of pigeon holes. And when the mail came in the morning we would sort the mail into these pigeon holes. So when Mrs 1, 2, 3, 4

19:00 came in and said, "Are there any replies to my advertisement?" You'd pick out the replies and give them to her. One of the other things that I mentioned was people that wanted jobs. Or who replied to people who had a position vacant, so those people came in, too, to get their replies. One of the other things was, some people were rather foolish

19:30 who even wanted jobs or were applying for jobs, and they enclosed their original references. And so one of the things that we did was after a period had gone by, and no-one had picked up the mail, or left some mail still there, we had to open up the answers and take out the original references and send them back to the people.

20:00 So that was a….not quite a high-powered job but a step up from being a messenger. It was a service, it doesn't happen anymore.

So with these requests for work, was there a lot of mail, a lot of people?

Oh, yes. Look, if you put an advertisement in for a clerk, 'Clerk Wanted' or

20:31 or 'Housekeeper Wanted' or 'Maid Wanted'…I mean, we all had maids in those days. The number of replies would be in the hundreds, there was so many people looking for work. Remember this was 1937/38, and leading in to 1939, the Depression was still on.

21:00 The thing that saved Australia from the Depression was the war. It had started to come out of it a little bit, but it was the war that took us out of the Depression. So there was lots and lots of replies. That was step number two. Step number three was to go onto taking advertisements over the phone, as I mentioned to you,

21:31 from two o'clock in the afternoon until 11 o'clock at night. All in handwriting. There was always fun in those days. There was a little group of us that did this. One remembers the fun. Even death notices,

22:03 the funeral directors would ring up and give you the funeral notices and death notices and you learnt, you knew their voice. And of course, the ones we disliked the most were those who rang up at about half past 10 at night with about 10 death notices. Eleven o'clock

22:30 would go by and you would still be taking this. It would have to come to an end because the paper would go to press. And other people, you got to know their voices. Car sales, people who were selling motorcars, car sales people from Malvern Road, and the newsagents also would ring through advertisements. So taking the advertisements over the phone was quite big, and then there was a canvassing,

23:00 people who canvassed the car people or the employment agencies. Those sort of people.

What about the work that your mother did as a journalist?

In those days, the women's pages or the social pages…They were very

23:30 strictly defined. There was the news pages and the classified advertising pages, but the women's pages were a special section of the newspaper. And as I mentioned Kathleen Syme, a very formidable lady. She was certainly formidable in those days. Later on, when I got to know her I did realise there was a heart of gold there. But when you're a messenger boy,

24:00 you didn't see much of that heart of gold, and I don't know whether my mother did either, but they were good friends. They wrote a lot about social events. People who had a ball for their daughter's 21st birthday or 18th birthday. A journalist would be asked to go to this ball and write about it, and write what the hostess wore,

24:33 what the daughter whose birthday it was wore, and a whole list of people who attended. It was very important that you got your name in that list. Government House would have certainly a ball for the Queen's Birthday, a ball for something else. And so you go along. In those days, and I've still got

25:01 one of my mother's dance cards. You had a dance with the numbers of the dances on it, and what they were going to play. All the girls had to get their dance cards filled in by their partners. First nights of the theatre were all written up, and of course the men were in dinner jackets and the women were in long frocks,

25:30 and so the frocks would be described and you'd get your name there. And charity events and notices of engagements. And weddings was very big. And every Monday there would be photographs of the weekend brides. Church notices were also big.

26:02 On a Monday the sermons would be written up, what sermons were given at St Paul's, St Patrick's and so on. They would all be written up. I don't think my mother went to any services, I think they were usually sent in. But all these things were part of the newspaper. Beatrice Neelson was the one who looked after the church pages, and they were on about

26:30 page two of the paper.

So your mother would attend these charity functions?

Yes, yes. And one of the other thing was, almost every Monday a ship would come in. A P&O or an Orient Line or a White Star would come in.

27:00 It wasn't every Monday, but it seemed to always be on a Monday. One of the biggest things was to go down to the ship and interview the passengers. They may be Australians returning to Australia, or visitors, important or not. Because they didn't fly in, they all came by boat.

27:30 So not only did the papers go down, but also the radio. There was a radio announcer called Norman Banks, Norm Banks on 3KZ [radio station], and he had the voice of the voyager and he went down there and interviewed people. It almost always was invariably a Monday. Every now and again, when I was on school holidays,

28:02 or when my sister was on school holidays, my mother would take us down to the ships. While she did the interviewing, we would roam around. But the big reason to go down was to have breakfast on board, so we did that. Strangely enough, when my wife and I came back from a cruise in February, this year, our grandchildren came down and had breakfast on board with us. So that's history repeating itself.

28:31 **You got to see some wonderful aspects of life…**

Well, if you live as long as I have, of course. When you're my age, you will be able to tell your children what went on in 2004 and they won't believe you.

29:00 **So how did your mother get involved with assisting Jewish refugees in Australia?**

Well, I think she got involved because she knew there were problems, she knew there were refugees, people, escaping from Germany, from Poland, from Czechoslovakia, from Austria, from all over Europe. How she got to know, I don't know, but knowing…

29:30 Because she knew, she felt that she had to do something about it. And through various organizations, she set herself to join these organizations and help in any way she could. Which was to try and find them accommodation, to try and find them jobs if she could. And generally

30:00 ease them into Australian society. There was…You've got to realise that there was a feeling against those people who were called 'Reffos.' It wasn't until Australians began to realise that these people had something to bring to Australia,

30:33 with their culture and so on, that the stigma of being a Reffo was removed. And part of the job was not only finding them jobs and finding them accommodation and helping them to understand the Australian way of life, but it was to break down the prejudice against the refugees.

31:00 And it wasn't only the public, there was also government prejudice. The government at that time had a draconian way of keeping people they didn't want out of the country by giving them a language test. And it didn't have to be in their native language, or their natural language or even English,

31:31 it could be anything. There was the famous case of an Egon Kish, who the government wanted to keep out of Australia, he was from Europe…And they gave him a test in the Irish language, which of course they could, he didn't know it. But he was eventually let in and he was defended

32:02 by one of the first women QCs [Queen's Counsels] in Melbourne, Joan Rosenov was the first woman, Australian woman…It would have been the King's Counsel in those days, and she appealed on his behalf, and eventually it got all sorted out. So those were the things, the organizations. And they weren't only Jewish organizations.

32:30 There were Anglican and Presbyterian and other organizations, Roman Catholic organizations, all helping to settle the refugees. We know now what great citizens they've been. Then of course after the Second World War, we got this huge influx. So what we learnt from the relatively small number of refugees who came

33:00 in the late 1930s certainly helped to colour the attitude of people, and also the way of handling them, after the Second World War.

Was your mother personally involved with them? In the sense that she had contact?

Oh yes, and made a number of friends amongst them.

33:33 There were quite a lot of people who used to come to the house and who became very good friends. Gradually it all came together.

Does anyone stand out to you?

Not particularly. There were lots of people who passed by. There was one person who did a lot for

34:00 the theatrical profession, a man called Dolia Rebush. Dolia Rebush had been a director at the Moscow Art Theatre, which was one of the great theatres of the world. He came out here and started a theatrical enterprise of some sort. Mainly putting on Russian plays. I remember hearing that he would

34:30 rehearse these for about a year, then he would put these one, usually at the Comedy Theatre. I think one was The Seagull, but I'm afraid I've forgotten the names of them now. And they used to have a salon every Sunday night, like the old Europeans do, they would have the salons. My parents went to that,

35:01 and I think I went to one once or twice. And this was a mingling of both Australian and those new Australians who would come here, all involved in one way or another, or interested in, art, theatre, all this sort of cultural activities,

35:30 whether they were professional or amateur.

So where did your interest in flying come from?

My interest in flying came from the fact that I didn't want to be a foot soldier. No, I did have a friend at school, Stuart Hemple, and his father was in the permanent air force,

36:00 and on several occasions he took me down to Point Cook, where his father was based. He was a squadron leader, which was a very good rank in those days. In fact, his father made the first flight around Australia in a flying boat. So when he took me down to Point Cook…I did make my first flight down at Point Cook in a Moth Seaplane,

36:30 so that got me interested a bit, but it was nothing special to me. So my interest in flying was, as I say, I didn't want to be a foot soldier, and I wasn't a very good swimmer either.

So Stuart Hemple's father took you up in a…

Well, he didn't himself. The person who took me up was a Flight Lieutenant Gibson. He was known as 'Hoot' Gibson,

37:00 he became an air vice-marshal during the war. Point Cook at that stage was quite a lonely place for the air force to be, but it was the major air force base in Australia. The Royal Australian Air Force started off at Point Cook. That was where it was founded.

37:30 **So did you complete your studies?**

At Melbourne University? No, no I didn't. I was still doing the sort of single subjects. I was doing English, Economics, I was doing a couple of other subjects. But when you're doing single subjects and working at the same time, it's going to take you 10 years to get a degree, and I went to the air force instead

38:00 in 1940, so I didn't finish it. After the war I went back, but instead of doing arts, I was switched over to commerce. But then, I didn't finish that either because I started my own business in 1947 and that took up…all my time.

38:30 Very much. So I did a number of subjects at the Melbourne University, passed a few exams, but never graduated.

So your decision to enlist in the air force…How old were you when you did that?

In 1940, I was 20.

Had you discussed it with your parents?

No, I think I just said that I was going to join the air force. And they said, "All right."

39:02 My father certainly expected me to join something. They just accepted the fact if I wanted to join the air force, I was going to join the air force. I was going to try and join the air force. It wasn't all that cut and dried and easy to get in. You had to do a medical and do a personal interview and make your application,

39:30 what you had done at school and so on. But there we are, I made an application in early 1940 and then they sent me a letter that said, "Yes, we've got your application and sometime in the future we will be in touch with you and call you up for an interview and a medical exam."

40:00 That eventually happened. I did my interview, I did my medical and passed and was put onto the reserve. You couldn't go in straightaway, you went onto the reserve. So I suppose I went onto the reserve in the middle of 1940 and at that time to keep your educational standard up, you did a series of lessons, 21 lessons,

40:30 and you went to lectures and went through these lessons. And you also did a course in Morse code. I remember going to the personnel office in Malvern to do Morse code, and you were taught by Morse operators, wireless operators, in the office.

41:00 So I did that and I eventually got called up in December of 1940. I was categorised as a pilot and was sent to Bradfield Park in Sydney.

Tape 2

00:32 **What did they want to know in the interview?**

I have no idea….I do remember one question, the most obvious one, "Why do you want to join the air force?" I can't remember what I said.

01:00 I remember that was a question. I'm sure they asked everybody that, but I have no idea of what else they asked. The medical exam was very thorough.

Your educational level?

They had all that on a piece of paper. They asked you a bit more about, "What sport did you play?"

01:30 And what your hobbies….Were the questions I would have asked, had I been the interviewer. But I'm just guessing, I really don't remember.

So you were prepared with these 21 lessons you were doing…

02:00 Yes, that was after you had been sworn in. When you were accepted, they gave you a badge to wear in your lapel, that said you were on the air force, lapel. No one gave you a white feather [white feathers were given to people avoiding conscription or perceived as being cowards] for not joining up. I did get a white feather later on, after I came back from England. When I came back I occasionally

02:30 wore civvies, I don't quite know why I did. I think it was a kind of reverse snobbery, but I did. I was in town one day, 1944, and a woman gave me a white feather, which I've still got.

How did she give it to you?

She just gave it to me, in my hands, “This is for you.”

Just on that subject, was that something you were aware of?

03:06 **People giving white feathers?**

I never sort of knew much about it. One read about it, one had heard about it, but I never struck anyone who had been given one before.

Your initial training was at Bradfield Park?

Bradfield Park, yes, I went to Bradfield Park.

03:32 That was quite exciting, the first real…Except for being at boarding school, I was a boarder at Brighton Grammar, except for boarding school this was my first trip away. I don’t think I had been interstate before. We all went up in the train, and we were seen off.

04:00 I can’t remember who came to see me off. But I know one of my friends had a whole lot of girls to see him off, I was most envious. I still see his widow, she is up in Queensland. The mother of a friend came down and gave me a bag of bananas. When I had stayed there, or something, I had said I liked bananas.

04:30 So we off to Sydney by train, then to Bradfield Park. That was quite an adventure in itself. So we stayed there for two months.

So what was covered in your training?

That was all ground subjects. There was simple navigation, there was learning to cope with a gas attack, if there was going to be a gas attack, to shoot a rifle and a lot of drill.

05:01 A great deal of drill. Everyday, every morning we drilled with a rifle and marched around. I remember the whole squad was pulled up once and the office who was drilling us said to me, “Isaacson?” “Yes, sir.” “Isaacson, your appearance is bad and your marching is worse.” So I got ticked off for that.

05:30 But we used to be stood down on Friday afternoon from about four o’clock until Monday morning at 7:30 or eight o’clock. So a couple of times, this friend of mine who had a car, we used to drive down to Melbourne, the four of us. There was a chap called Jeff Reeve, Timmy McCracken, Brethney Little John and myself, and we used to drive down

06:00 and take our girlfriends out on Saturday night. We’d motor all night Friday night, get there Saturday morning, take our girlfriends out on Saturday night and get in the car and come back on Sunday. On the way down we would have steak and eggs at the Niagra Café in Gundagai and on the way we would have steak and eggs on Sunday night at the Niagra Café in Gundagai.

06:32 We got a bit of leave in Sydney, and I had some very good friends of my parents, Eric Kennedy and his wife, and he was the chief executive of Associated Newspapers. He had been the assistant manager of The Sun in Melbourne, then moved up to Sydney. I used to spend odd times there.

07:00 I spent one Christmas there, with the Kennedys. So I was lucky to have some friends in Sydney. And then I was posted to Miranda, elementary flying training, and that was where I went to do my flying on Tiger Moths. Learning to fly…

07:30 **Was the discipline a problem for you at Bradfield Park?**

No, no. You knew that you were going to be disciplined, and we appreciated the discipline and realised that it was important to us.

08:00 We wanted to live in a disciplined, militaristic atmosphere. That’s what we joined for. And they were fairly tough. The sergeant that we had was a chap called Mackintosh, ‘Bushy’ Mackintosh. And then

08:30 there was a warrant officer, a sergeant and a corporal, quite apart from the three officers, who we didn’t see much of. We saw much more of the non commissioned officers. They were the people who drilled us and made us stand up straight and march to attention. Things were done in an even more military fashion

09:00 than now, in that you sort of…your arm had to come up at parallel to the ground. You changed step with a click. It was good. I was quite happy with being disciplined.

Did you have weapons training then?

Yes, I can’t remember if we actually shot the rifle.

09:31 I can’t remember if we did or not, but we certainly carried them, yeah. And I think we had some bayonet drill as well…

So Miranda was the flying school?

Yeah, that was the flying school. Number 8 Elementary Flying Training School at Miranda. I had cousins in Miranda, so that was useful.

10:00 And so we learnt to fly and go solo and had trouble…I had great trouble getting out of my spins and I thought I might be scrubbed. You didn't want to be scrubbed. But inevitably some people did get scrubbed, but I managed to avoid that. I graduated below average.

10:30 **So this was the Tiger Moth you were training in?**

Yes. It was a lovely aeroplane to fly, and of course there is still a few flying around. Not many, but a few.

What's the trick with getting out of a spin?

There's no real trouble about it if you do it properly, and I wasn't doing it particularly properly. They just…

11:02 Yes, you put the stick into the centre, put on opposite rudder and pick up speed and gradually it unwinds and you come out of it. I wasn't putting the stick forward far enough or I wasn't putting on opposite rudder hard enough. I was doing something wrong, but eventually I made it.

You were enjoying it?

Yes, I loved it.

11:34 We had a good time and the people in Miranda were very good, and I got drunk for the first time. It was all part of my education, and the education of everyone like me, who went through initial training school and then the FTS [Flight Training School]. It was the start of a new life,

12:00 and it was great fun.

And do you remember your first solo flight?

Not really. It was probably very much of a pattern. You got down on the ground and the flying instructor, who was in the front cockpit, turned around to say, "Now you're going off on your own, remember all that I taught you." And he clambered out, took his parachute and clambered out and waved you away. And so you would try to remember

12:30 all that you had been taught and you flew around, and I think you probably did one circuit then came in and landed. A sigh of relief that you had actually got that far anyway, which was still a long way from getting your wings, but at least it was your first step, and that was a great relief.

Do you remember your first instructors?

13:00 Yes, I do. I do. Bill Maddox was the flight commander and he died about five years ago at the age of 90 something, up on Bribie Island. And the strange thing is I employed his son many, many years later as a journalist. Don Maddox.

13:33 For a long time, strangely enough, the name didn't click and I didn't think that he was, or could be, related to my flying instructor. Well, he was the flight commander, so he took me on a few checks, test flights, so he wasn't my instructor all the time. My instructor all the time was Bill McGrath, who I think might

14:01 still be alive. But I met him relatively a few years ago. But Don Maddox…I don't know, I was talking to him in the office one day, I don't know what about. Probably about something he was writing or…And he said, "But of course, you knew my father."

14:31 I said, "Your father?" He said, "Yes, he was Bill Maddox, he was a flying instructor at Miranda when you were on course there." And I remember him and I remember Bill McGrath.

So do you remember anything about his training or his instruction?

No, no.

15:05 For some reason I was always a bit ill-disciplined and I remember on one occasion I was flying around, it was a beautiful day, I don't know what I was supposed to be doing. Probably practising false landings or cautionary landings…and I felt like having a cigarette. So I landed the aircraft in a paddock and I was having a cigarette

15:30 under the…laying in the grass quite happily. And of course the flying instructor flew over, took the letter of the aircraft I was flying and reported me, of course. I was planning to go to Melbourne that weekend, but I didn't get there. I was confined to barracks for two weeks or three weeks. I don't remember much else

16:01 about it. But it was a beautiful place to fly, Miranda, very flat. And there were a number of other aerodromes around there.

So there is no problems landing in a paddock?

Not if you pick the right paddock, that's all I can say. I was lucky enough to do that. It was a silly thing to do. I can't imagine why I wanted a cigarette. I don't want one anymore.

16:31 **Was it relaxing though, flying?**

Yes, yes. I mean you weren't up there just to have a joyride. You were up there to practise something. False landings, cautionary landings or aerobatics…And then of course you did your cross countries. You had to do a cross country, so you'd do a bit of navigation

17:00 and map reading and all that sort of thing. That was quite good. But you had to concentrate on what you were doing.

So you were doing these solos but you had an instructor?

Well, you'd do both. First of all your instructor would instruct you in precautionary landings, how to do a false landings, how do aerobatics,

17:30 check your map reading. They would do that, and then you would do it solo. So you would do it under instruction, then you would do it solo practising yourself. And then you'd be tested, and that's why I got below average.

So when you were doing your practise, they were able to observe you?

18:00 No, probably not. They would probably be away with somebody else instructing them. So you were doing it solo and they were instructing another pupil.

What is a precautionary landing?

A precautionary landing is…Well, a forced landing is when something is wrong, and a precautionary landing is when you think something is wrong, but you're not sure. So one is an emergency,

18:30 a false landing is landing in an emergency, and a precautionary landing is when you've got more time to think and you can have more choices as to where you land. That's roughly it.

Any mishaps occur at Miranda?

Not there. Later on in Canada I turned an aeroplane on its nose

19:01 but that was carelessness. That was a red book entry. Red ink entry in my log book, yeah.

So were you disappointed at how they assessed you and graded you?

No. I was just glad to have got through. Yes, I was disappointed, but

19:31 later on I got an exceptional, so it made up for it. But it was a year or two later. But I was glad to have got through. I thought below average was a bit poor. It was below the standard that I would have hoped I would have achieved. And I reckon I should have achieved…

20:00 **But did it compromise…**

No, no. Thank goodness. I think if…No, it showed that I was on the cusp and I had to perform pretty well in my next course to maintain my mustering

20:30 as a pilot.

What about all the theoretical subjects?

Yeah, well, we did those. Usually we were flying in the morning because the…When was I up there? I was up there in the summer, so before it got too hot. And so we flew in the morning and did ground subjects in the afternoon. There was no real problem with

21:00 the ground subjects. I can't remember very much about them now. I've still got a lot of my notes stuffed away at home, from the lectures.

Were you doing astronavigation?

No, not at that stage. In fact, we didn't do much astronavigation at all. We did a bit at service flying training in Canada, but that was left mainly to the navigators.

21:30 They were the ones who were properly and thoroughly trained. We were given some elementary training in the use of a sexton and in the positions of the stars. But of course, to have learnt the stars in the South Hemisphere would have not been that much use to us as we went to the Northern Hemisphere anyway. So it was at service flying training and

22:00 again at operational training unit, OTU [Operational Training Unit]. that we did a bit more on that.

So at the end of the flying school training, did that qualify you to go on to train as a pilot? Or was that still to be decided?

Oh yes. You went into three…The flying training was in three stages. There was the elementary

22:30 flying training school at Miranda, then onto service flying training, which I did in Canada and from there on to operational training which I did in England.

So let's talk about Canada. That was part of the Empire Air…

The Empire Air Training Scheme, yep. So having finished at Miranda, I was posted to Canada, and I was posted onto

23:01 single-engine training in Canada, and was posted to Uplands, which was the airport for Ottawa. So we went across in the ship, the Awatea, landed at Vancouver and we took the train across to Ottawa. We were all violently sick on board.

23:30 Something must have gone bad with the food. So we were all violently sick, but we got to Ottawa anyway. And bedded down at Uplands and did the flying training there. Again, that was having gone from our summer, which was getting into autumn and winter

24:01 when we left, we got into Ottawa in their summer. The Northern Hemisphere summer. So that was good, because that meant our flying training went through smoothly, with not a lot of gaps because of bad weather. There we flew Harvards, which was the aeroplane from which the Australian Wirraway was built.

24:32 And that was good flying and I enjoyed my time in Canada. We were well looked after, made a lot of friends, the usual girlfriends and families. And I had my 21st birthday in Canada.

25:00 When I asked for the time off, my flight commander looked me in the eye and he said, "So you want time off, Isaacson? Just because you are now a man." Sarcastic…

Did you have leave before you went to Canada?

Yes, we had final leave. Yep, yep. Yes. And I took out the girl who later became my wife

25:30 on my final…I think it was her. Yes, it was.

Did you meet her on your leave?

No, I knew her when she was at school. And still my wife.

Your mother and her sister, had they joined AWAS?

No, that was while I was in England.

26:01 That all happened while I was in England. I didn't know much about it. I remember writing a letter back saying, "What's all this about?"

Did you have any particular thoughts, at that stage, about going over to Canada or the UK [United Kingdom] in the air force, and what was happening with the war,

26:32 **and the escalation of the war?**

Not really. One was leading a fairly hedonistic life. We were doing something we enjoyed doing. We were training for something, and we didn't know quite what we were training for.

27:06 We were living very much day to day. We thought we knew what the ultimate was going to be, but without giving it a tremendous amount of thought. When I say 'we', I can't speak for the others, but I speak for myself, and I don't think I was that much different to most people.

27:31 It was a very enjoyable time, looking back on it. And I went down to New York. After I finished, got my wings, I went down to New York. And that was one of the first times they had allowed allied servicemen into America in uniform,

28:00 so a couple of us went down to New York. That was when, as I said, I called on Helena Rubinstein. There was some other people there that I had an introduction to. I met some people at a luncheon…Do you remember a play called The Women?

28:32 At that I met a girl who was playing in The Women. Apart from the grown-ups in the play, it was sort of a teenage…In the few days that I was in New York, I met some interesting people. Then we went back to Canada, we went back to Halifax, in Newfoundland.

29:01 We picked a boat there, the Andes, then we went across from Halifax to England.

Training on the Harvards? How different was the experience of getting into a Harvard after flying the Tiger Moth?

It was quite different. It was far more powerful.

29:30 The instrumentation was different, the speed that it took off, the speed that it landed, it's manoeuvrability…It was quite a change. I'm not a particularly mechanically minded person so it took

30:00 a while for me to learn to fly the aircraft properly, and get an understanding of the fuel system and all those bits and pieces that one had to learn about. But it was certainly invigorating. It was an invigorating aeroplane to fly. Invigorating personally to be flying something with a bit of power.

30:31 But they took…The training was very good. They took you through it very gradually, and the instructors were good. One of the other interesting things that happened there, they made a film with some old time film stars you probably wouldn't even know. James Cagney was in it, Brenda Marshall

31:00 and Alan Hale. It was called Captains Of The Clouds. It was about these bush pilots who flew around the northern part of Canada, in the bush, and then when the war came, they joined the air force. And the air force advisor to the film crew was a very famous First World War pilot called Billy Bishop, who at

31:30 this stage had been brought back into the Canadian Air Force as an air commodore or something like that. But he had won the Victoria Cross and the Distinguished Service Order and I think a Distinguished Flying Cross in the First World War. He had really been one of the fighter aces in the First World War. So it was a great thrill to meet James Cagney, Brenda Marshall and Billy Bishop.

32:01 We didn't do very much. We did a formation flying and they photographed. The other thing we had do was march up and down while they took a sound recording of our feet, marching. I think that was about the extent of my involvement in Captains Of The Clouds. I didn't become a film star. Nobody picked me out

32:30 as a film star or anything like that. But the rest of the time went, as I said, in a fairly hedonistic way. Ottawa was a lovely city to be in. And the people there were very good to us. As I told you we went down to New York, and before that

33:01 I'd gone down to Niagara Falls, which was a great experience.

What sort of pilot did you aspire to be? Were you interested in being a fighter pilot?

Not really. I thought I would probably go onto bombers, or even army cooperation. I was only interested in the army cooperation because my father had been in the army, and I thought

33:30 this would bridge the air force and the army. It was while we were at Ultins that the first fatality…One of the boys on the course was killed in a flying accident at night. A chap called Long. I remember. And that was the first fatality. We had people scrubbed off course

34:00 at Miranda. They got scrubbed and as I said, I was fearful of it happening to me. But there were a few who were scrubbed. And that happened in Canada, too. There was always this fear all along the line of being scrubbed. But we had our first fatality. That affected us a bit. It was the first realisation that aeroplanes were lethal. Could be lethal.

34:30 **This was in Ottawa?**

Yes, yes.

How long were you at Ottawa?

Two months. Each course was sort of two months. Two months ITS [Initial Training School], two months FTS, two months FTS, broken by the periods, like to get to Canada…

What is service flying?

You get up from elementary flying to up to service flying,

35:00 which is the next grade. It's a bigger aeroplane. You know, having…a large number of those who went to Ottawa did go onto fighters, because it was a single…the Harvard was a single engine, and all their fighters were single-engine aircraft.

35:31 **Did you do night flying there?**

Yes. I don't think we did any night flying at Miranda, that I can remember, but we did night flying in Canada. In itself, it was another step forward.

And with the night flying, you obviously had to navigate yourself?

36:00 Night flying was really circuits and bumps. I don't think we did any cross countries at night, not that I can remember. I'm sure we didn't.

And what were the weather conditions

Very good. As I said, it was summer there so the conditions were good.

So after two months at Ottawa, you had leave?

Had leave, that's when I went down to New York.

36:32 And then from there to Halifax in Newfoundland, and there onto the boat to go to England in the convoy.

So what were you doing at Halifax?

Oh nothing. Just waiting for the boat. We didn't do anything. No training or…I think we were only there for a week or so, then the boat came in, we got on it and off we went.

So where did you get your wings?

I got my wings in Ottawa, Canada.

37:00 That was a great day. Vast. And we became sergeants. Or there were a few who got a commission. The top ranking students got commissions. There was probably about three or four of them, I'm not sure how many. And then the rest of us became sergeants

37:30 and we got our wings and our sergeants stripes.

Did you go to Ottawa, to Canada with people that you knew?

Yeah, people I had been at Miranda with, yes.

And what were the bonds between you like?

I had a couple of good friends, who I kept.

38:00 But they were scattered around Canada a bit. Jeff Reeve came with me to Uplands. Chilly McCracke went somewhere else, and Brethney Little John went somewhere else, so they did get scattered around. They put some

38:30 onto twin-engine aircraft and they stayed in the centre of Canada. The twin-engine schools seemed to be around Calgary, Edmunton. You kept a couple, but you got scattered. And that did happen quite a lot. Right through.

So you were training with Brits and Canadians in Ottawa?

No, I had a whole Australian course.

39:06 The courses before and after us, I can't remember what they were. But our course was all Australian. You were scattered around because some were posted onto twin engine, some onto single engines.

39:31 And then later on you got divided up again. Some went to…Fighter OTUs [Operational Training Units] or bomber OTUs or flying boat OTUs, they got scattered around.

Tape 3

00:36 One of the things about going across the Pacific was it was the first…Apart from having come out from England when I was six years of age, it was the first time I had been overseas. In Auckland, for example, the person that I was sharing a cabin with

01:01 had a family contact in Auckland who took us out to dinner and I've still got the menu. And I ticked the number of courses that we ate. But I think the exciting thing was in Fiji, where we marched through the streets of Suva, and the Fijians…It was the first time we had seen anyone

01:33 who was coloured. And the Fijians lined the streets and called out, "Bulla, Bulla, Bulla Malacca!" We were told it was, "Good luck," in Fijian. So that was something that was exciting. The rest of the trip was fairly boring.

02:03 It was a comfortable trip, the food was all right, and we were disciplined. We had to do a certain amount of drill and that sort of thing. Physical jerks and running on the spot and running around the decks to keep ourselves fit. And do some

02:32 fairly elementary navigation, really following on from our elementary flying, just to keep us working and occupied.

Do you remember the name of the ship?

Yes, it was the Awatea. It was a ship that went across to America, it was a well known cruise ship.

03:00 **And who else was on that ship other than the…**

No, it was .just Australians going over to train in Canada.

Just a little bit more on Canada, your training there. It would be good to get a sense of what the Harvards were like.

03:30 Well, the Harvard was built as a training plane. There was a seat in the front for the instructor, there was a seat in the back for the pupil. It was painted yellow, of course, like all training aeroplanes were.

04:00 It varied in other ways from the Tiger Moth - in its comfort. It had a canopy that you could pull over, it had some heating in there. And it also had a much better communication between the pupil and the instructor. In the Tiger Moth it was just a voice tube. In the Harvard, as I recall it,

04:30 it was electronic. It did have radio to the tower, so you were under air traffic control. You were also getting, being trained to use the radio and to follow the instructions of the air traffic control.

05:00 The other thing that was most important there, at Ultins, was that it was a civil aerodrome, too. Although the civil flying wasn't anywhere like what it is now, there were DC3s [bomber] and other aircraft coming in, so you had to be under control.

Is that why you were painted yellow?

No, it was a sort of international…Tiger Moths were painted yellow, too. It was a sort of international

05:32 signatory of a training aeroplane. So when you saw a yellow aeroplane, you kept well clear of it. Apart from that, the major thing was that it was heavier, it was more speedy and you could do rather more

06:00 complicated aerobatics, and you were taught to do more complicated aerobatics. Flying upside down and you did slow rolls in the Tiger Moths, too, but you did them faster in the Harvard.

Was that something you enjoyed?

Yeah, I quite enjoyed it.

06:30 Neither temperamentally nor technically was I cut out to be a fighter pilot, and I knew this instinctively. So when the time came for us to list our choices for what we wanted to go onto when we got to England, I put down fighter pilot after bombers.

07:00 I think I put down bombers, army cooperation and then fighters.

What was required temperamentally do you think to be a fighter pilot or bomber pilot?

I think you had to be a bit more devil-may-care to be a fighter pilot.

07:30 And were quite happy to do it on your own. You probably felt that it was rather more glamorous to be a fighter pilot. You might have even been able to grow one of those big moustaches that the fighter pilots used to affect.

08:00 I think you knew instinctively if you were a loner or did you perform better with a group. I felt that.

Do you think that was a decision that men made very early on in the piece, or was it a process?

I think it was a process because you didn't know really what you were getting into.

08:31 So I think by the time you were required to state your preferences, that was the logical…The logical time to do that was when you finished your service flying training, and that was the time that they asked you to do it. So that was the right time.

You tipped a plane over in Canada?

09:03 Well, I put it up on its nose by harsh application of the brakes. I was taxiing along and I wanted to stop, so I bunged on the brakes a bit too hard. Not gentle. So, another indication that I was more suited to a heavy aeroplane than a light fighter aircraft.

09:30 **And what would have been the upshot of..**

I think I got confined to barracks for a week and got red entry in my log book, they wrote in red, 'Admonished, harsh application of the brakes.'

So this is the end of 1940?

No, this is into 1941 because I went into Bradfield Park in December '40.

10:01 So, we were into 1941.

So the Battle of Britain had kind of been fought?

Yes, the Battle of Britain had been fought. That was mainly September/October 1940, that was the

height of it.

Had you been keeping tabs on what was happening?

Oh yes, yes. We did. I remember early on, my father who was somewhat

10:31 of a pessimist was saying, “Oh, we can’t win this war. They’ve gone into France, they’ve gone into Belgium, they’ve gone into Holland.” They’d overrun central Europe. This was before I left. At the time I was on reserve to the air force. People were pretty pessimistic at this stage.

11:02 Things weren’t going our way at all. The British Army had to leave mainland Europe, they had to get out through Dunkirk. The reserve air asked did I realise what was going on…I suppose I really did realise what was going on.

11:36 It did have an effect on me. The fact that my mother was involved with these refugees and I was Jewish.

12:00 So I had another reason for joining up, quite apart from British patriotism, I had my religious patriotism. That was part of it. And added to that was the opportunities that were there to fly…

It sounds like you had more motivations than most?

12:34 I think we all had some motivations. We weren’t sort of flag waving patriots only. It was partially that. There will be other people who will say different, that their whole motivation was to save the empire, to save Australia. That probably came a bit later you know,

13:00 when Japan came into the war. That was when Australia was really in danger. When I went in, we weren’t in danger at all. We didn’t know much about Japan.

How much news was filtering through about what was going on in Germany with the Jews?

There was quite a lot, particularly from those people who had

13:30 made it out here, before 1939, or during the early stages of 1939, so there was quite a bit. But I don’t think it was understood….The horror of the concentration camps wasn’t realised or understood. And even by governments, whether they understood it or there is some suspicion now

14:00 that more was known than they let out, and to some extent they ignored it, because they were not ready to go to war. And of course, America stayed out of it until they were attacked themselves.

Did you still have family in Europe?

I don’t know. As far as I’m aware

14:30 neither of my parents did have family there. It was inevitable that they would have because my mother’s mother was French and my mother’s father was Dutch. So obviously there would be some relation somewhere, but they weren’t a close family, as far as I’m aware. And my father’s father had come out

15:00 from Lithuania in the 1800s and settled in Australia. So he had brothers…and inevitably somewhere there would have been relations, but I never knew of any of them.

15:33 **How did you see the people in Canada responding to what was going on in Europe? Australia obviously felt very much tied to Britain and the empire, what was it like in Canada?**

No idea. I only got friendly really with one Canadian family. A friend of mine

16:00 and I were taking out two sisters. We had meals with the family and…I don’t think we talked about it very much. But the Canadians were joining in. The Canadian Air Force was very big, and there was a Canadian Army. They were like Australia.

16:30 They were as British-minded as Australia. In the part of Canada where we were, in the east, there was this big enclave of French Canadians, in the province of Quebec, which was next to where we were in Ontario.

17:00 They weren’t very keen on Britain, never had been and still aren’t as far as I’m aware. But apart from them, in the west and in the centre, they were the true blue.

So you embarked from Halifax?

Yes. Well we didn’t do much once we got to Halifax. We just waited around for the ship.

17:31 I can’t remember anything that we did do. I don’t think we were there more than a week. Then we got on a ship called the Andes, and we sailed in convoy. Took us about a week as far as I can remember, and we landed in Liverpool. That was our first sight of war, because the Liverpool docks had been pretty badly bombed and burned.

18:00 So we landed at Liverpool…

What about the voyage across?

The voyage across was uneventful. We did a couple of life boat drills. As far as I'm aware they were just lifeboat drills. And they (UNCLEAR) quite happily in Liverpool and were sent by train down to Bournemouth.

18:30 What was called a Personnel Receipt and Disposal Depot – PDRC [Personnel Receipt and Disposal Depot]. And there we were billeted in hotels or guest houses, left very much to ourselves. We had to parade, I think, once a day until we were posted to whatever place they decided to post us.

19:04 My only interest in Bournemouth really was because my parents had spent their honeymoon in Bournemouth after the First World War, when they were married in 1919, at the Royal Bath Hotel. I wasn't billeted there, but I went back there later and did stay there.

19:31 And we just stayed around Bournemouth. We went to tea dances, they had tea dances on the foreshore. We went to films, met a few people. And waited until we were posted, and I was posted to Lichfield, Number 27 OTU. in Lichfield, Staffordshire.

A tea dance?

20:01 Yes, they used to have tea dances about four o'clock in the afternoon. The orchestra would play and people would go there and have afternoon tea and dance. That was something we hadn't struck before, but it was good to do.

Do you have any memories of England as a boy?

Very few. My grandparents were still there and alive and I still had cousins.

20:39 I can't remember when it was we got leave, but I presume we did get some leave when we were at Bournemouth, so I went down to London and I stayed with my cousins, who were both husband and wife, who were both doctors in London. And they had two children

21:01 who they had sent to America to some friends in Chicago. So they had a spare room, they lived in St John's Wood. So I went and whenever I went down to London, starting from when I was at Bournemouth, I stayed with them and they were very good to me. As I said, they were both doctors and they used to take me out to the theatre,

21:33 and they were members of a couple of clubs in London. They were sort of strange clubs, they were sort of supper clubs or dining clubs. One of them was called the Gargoyle Club, which was quite a famous club. I went there, and

22:02 several other dining clubs and I met some interesting people. My cousin, the female doctor, was quite interested in labour politics at the time. And I met a woman called Charlotte Haldaine.

22:30 She was the wife of a very famous professor JBS Haldaine. He was quite a famous professor. And both he and she appeared on the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation], giving opinions like people do these days still. Not quite like Kerry O'Brien, but the people that Kerry O'Brien interviews.

23:05 So there was an Australian there, whose name might come to me later, who had been the dux of Scots College, and he was on the staff of Herbert Morrison, who was the home secretary at the time.

23:30 So by having these cousins there I did meet some interesting people and was taking to a few different places. I enjoyed going down to London and that went on until I left.

What sort of state was London in when you visited?

24:00 It didn't seem at the time to be as badly bombed as Liverpool, but there were areas there that were just shells of buildings. The West End wasn't too bad. It was down by the docks and down the city area that there was the worst damage.

24:30 Particularly down in the East End, which I didn't get to very often. But the West End wasn't too bad. There were a couple of air raids while I was there. I had another cousin, a sister of the female doctor,

25:00 John Shelton, and he was an air-raid warden. On one occasion there was an air raid while I was in London, and he was around on his beat and we went down into an air-raid shelter. And I saw both an air-raid shelter and into the Underground, in the tube stations,

25:32 where I saw all these people sitting out the air raids. One of them, a little boy, came up to me and said, "Are you in the air force?" And I said, "Yes, yes I am." He said, "Well, why aren't you up there shooting those damn things down instead of being down here."

26:00 So I was admonished by this six or seven or eight year old London boy. I think I was only in London for one air raid.

So what else do you recall of that? Were you in a Tube station?

I was with my cousin, I was doing his beat. He was going around and doing

26:30 whatever it was he had to do as an air-raid warden, and he took me around with him. Which was an interesting experience. The English people were very good, and they were very good to us, too. They had a hospitality organization run by Lady Rider and Miss MacDonald of the Isles.

27:02 You could register yourself to be put up by a family, in the country, or in the city, and I put my name down and I went to some very nice people in Honiton, Devon.

27:34 People called Gundry, Hal Gundry, and she was the granddaughter of Sir John Maddon, and Sir John Maddon was a chief justice of Victoria, and his statue stood for many years outside the public library in Swanson Street. Rose and Hal Gundry

28:00 at Honiton I stayed with. Later on, there was some people at Walsall. The English people, quite apart from their bravery and forbearance through all the bombings and discomfort and lack of heat and food that they went through, lack of hot water,

28:30 really were very good to the allied servicemen who came there. I was doubly lucky having relations. There were others that I spent time with, too. I was lucky.

29:03 **Twenty Seven OTU at Lichfield. What happened there?**

Yes, well, there a great number of Australian airmen who were going onto bomber command. So from Bournemouth they decided what you were going to do - whether you were going to go fighters or bombers or army cooperation or coastal command or whether you were gong to be a flying instructor

29:30 or staff pilot. Just what your future was going to be. And so you were posted to the appropriate flying school. Before I went to Lichfield, I did a short course on beam approach training,

30:00 and that was at an aerodrome in Central England, and that was just a short course on flying the beam, learning to fly the beam and land, on the Lorenz…The Lorenz Beam. I don't think you would call it radar, but it was an aid to get you on the ground in fog or bad weather.

30:30 **Can you briefly explain how that worked?**

In the aircraft you had some instruments which would pick up a beam which was radiated from the aerodrome at which you were trying to land. And because the weather was bad, there was a procedure by which you followed this beam. It reflected itself

31:00 in a screen in your aircraft. So you flew a certain amount of time on one heading, then you turned onto another heading, then you turned onto a third heading and eventually you got parallel or at right angles, directly onto the strip

31:30 and you came into land. So you did this beam approach training. And then I got posted to Lichfield, 27 OTU, which was Wellingtons. And a great number of Australians went to Lichfield, it just happened that way.

32:00 And it was there that we started to fly a really operational aeroplane. This is the Wellington, and it was also there that we began to crew up, because we had just been individuals before and in the Wellington you have to have a crew. So I began to crew up.

32:30 I crewed up with a navigator called Ches Gardner and stayed with him throughout our training. You really only needed a navigator at that stage because the gunners were doing their gunnery courses at other places. And we were taught to fly an operational aeroplane to drop bombs,

33:00 air to air firing, and most important navigation. The navigator and the captain, pilot learned to work together to do a proper flight plan and navigate oneself around England. So that's what we did. And we learned to

33:30 evacuate the aircraft. We learnt what to do if you came down at sea. What to do if you were attacked. What to do if you were to jump out on your parachute. You also did more ground subjects in navigation and communications, Morse code and other communications.

34:01 It was called an operational training unit and you learned to fly on operations. So this went on for a couple of months, and that was broken up by a couple of periods of leave, down to London. And we spent time in the local towns…

34:30 And again, you know, it sounds as though it was all fun, and it really was at that time, used to go into the towns, go drinking, meet a couple of girls that you had met before or been introduced to. And again, that was a pleasurable period. At that stage, the casualties began to mount up.

35:05 There would be aircraft crashes on cross countries and you began to get a realisation of what war was about. We had, as I said, lost one in Canada during training, but the losses mounted a bit more at OTU.

35:31 Not dramatically, but a few crews didn't make it.

Would that have been from simple inexperience?

Mostly inexperience. A lot of it was due to weather, the weather was pretty grim at that stage. Right at the end of our course,

36:01 we were sent off on leave and while we were on leave, I got a telegram, my navigator got a telegram to report to a station that we hadn't heard of before. And we reported to this station, the two of us,

36:30 and we were told that something was on. They didn't tell us what was on. We thought we might be posted to the Middle East or something…But what it was, was to pick up an aeroplane from the station that we had been told to report to and fly it to another station, which we did.

37:00 And it was while we were there that we were briefed as to what we were going to do. And we were briefed to the first 1,000-bomber raids on Cologne. A real operation. So we were briefed on that and we picked up a bomb aimer,

37:30 a wireless operator and a rear gunner, none of whom we had met before. So we did an night flying test of our aeroplane, then we were briefed to go on this thousand bomber raid to Cologne.

38:00 That was our first operation. It was quite an experience. It wasn't a very long trip, Cologne isn't very far into Germany, it was only about four hours. And we were briefed to go in about halfway through the raid, about the middle. So by the time we got there, we could see from quite a long way off the fires in Cologne burning.

38:30 Anyway, we dropped our bombs and we got home without any trouble. I think they lost a number of aircraft on that raid. We had the next day off and then we were briefed on the second thousand bomber raid. This one was to Esson, which was a rather more dangerous target than Cologne, in that Esson was the heart of the Ruhr,

39:00 and the main place where the Krupps Works were and the Krupps were one of the biggest armament factories in Germany. So it was very heavily protected, more heavily protected with anti-aircraft and fighters than was Cologne. The weather over Cologne was perfect.

39:30 It was a real bombers night. Stars and clear…But the weather at Esson had turned bad, it wasn't particularly good, so the raid on Esson was as successful as was the raid on Cologne. And again, a number of aircraft were lost

40:01 but we weren't. That was the end of the 1,000-bombers raids at that time. There was another one about a month later that we were also on, on Hamburg, but that came later. So we went on leave, and the interesting thing was that these 2,000-bomber raids

40:30 did a great deal to bolster the English confidence because everything had gone wrong prior to that. Dunkirk, they had been thrown out of Europe. Japan had come into the war. The Repulse and the Renown [Prince of Wales] had been lost off Singapore. They weren't doing very well in the Middle East.

41:02 Rommel was at the height of his power in the Middle East. Everything was going wrong. So the fact that a force had taken the war to the enemy, instead of the enemy taking the war to Britain, did a tremendous amount for the morale of the English people. You could sense this in the atmosphere in London. My relations were delighted and everybody thought this could be a turning point. To some extent it was, but there was a long way to go.

Tape 4

00:32 **These 1,000-bomber raids, you were flying Wellingtons. Can you tell us a bit more about the Wellington. What it was like to fly?**

Yes, well, the Wellington was a twin-engine bomber. It had been in service since about 1936 or '37 and was

01:00 built in an unusual way, in that the steelwork or metal work was almost in like a basket-like weave. Geodesics, in a basket like weave, and that was then covered with fabric. So right up until the war years we were flying aeroplanes that were fabric covered.

01:30 Now this had a number of good points about it, in that if the aircraft was shot at and damaged, it went right through the fabric and the geodesics were strong enough to resist a certain amount of damage, gunfire. It was a very nice aeroplane to fly.

02:00 As good as the Lancaster [bomber] later on. It was easy on the controls. It was manoeuvrable. It wasn't particularly comfortable, but none of the British wartime aircraft were. The Americans, it was a different story. They were built for comfort…

02:34 And the Wellington, with the Whitley, were the mainstay of the RAF [Royal Air Force] bomber command until the four-engine aircraft took over, in late ’42. In ’41 they were beginning to take over. In ’42, they were going to the squadrons

03:02 in a more plentiful supply. So the Wellingtons did a great job, and we were very, very happy with it. But we were pleased to transfer from Wellingtons to Lancasters. But before that, on 460 Squadron,

03:30 we transferred onto Halifaxes, but we never operated in them. They converted us onto them and then they took them away, and we were very happy with the Lancasters. So after the 1,000-bomber raids, I went back to London, had some leave, then got posted to 460 Squadron where we were flying Wellingtons,

04:00 Mark IV, which was equipped with the American Pratt and Whitney engine. They were very successful and we went to a variety of targets in the Ruhr, down in the South Coast of France, into St Esser and Laguiole, which were

04:30 the U-boat [Unterseeboot – German submarine] pens. We did a little bit of mine-laying off the Dutch Coast. We went into the north sea ports of Hamburg, Wilhelmshaven and Emden. We went to the cities like Karlsruhe and Berlin and Essen and Nuremberg.

05:02 A wide variety of targets, until we were stood down to transfer to covert onto the Halifax and then convert onto the Lancasters. The flight commanders were Australian. There was Billy Brill, Arthur Doubleday, then Reg Bailey. Reg was an Australian

05:30 who was in the RAF [Royal Air Force]. He had got a short service commission in the RAF. The squadron commanders were Australians. When I got there, we had Arthur Hubbard, Wing Commander Arthur Hubbard, then Wing Commander Keith Coffman, then after that a Wing Commander Dulworth. It was at that stage that I left

06:00 and went down to Pathfinder Force.

You talked earlier about your English navigator Ches Garden. Was he flying with you throughout…

No, he got taken away. When we got transferred to an Australian squadron,

06:32 he was sent to an RAF Squadron, or a mixed squadron. So I lost Ches and I didn’t hear very much more of him for about 40 years. And a member of my staff at my publishing company was at a party

07:01 and met this man. “You’re an Australian. I wonder if you know a chap I flew with, Peter Isaacson.” “Oh, I work for him.” So Ches and I started to correspond. He got out of the air force after the war, then went back in and finished up a group captain. And after the war he became the

07:31 chief executive officer of the Thalidomide Children’s Fund, so we started to correspond. At that point, I was going back to England every couple of years. Once when I was there with my wife, we met Ches and his wife, they came down…

08:03 Then a couple of years later we met again, and then, unfortunately, he died. But then a few years later we saw his wife, Arleen, and one of his sons, they both came down to London. We got broken up after that second 1,000-bomber raid and he went back to another squadron.

08:31 **You were talking about the relationship between pilot and navigator and how important that was. Are you able to describe what were the essential factors in that relationship?**

Yes, well like everything else in the crew, the relationship was one of trust. It had to be one of trust. And the whole operation depended

09:00 to a large extent on the flight plan that the navigator had prepared before we went, and adherence to the flight plan by both the captain and the pilot. But all the way, both outwards and coming back to base, all the way the navigator

09:30 had to be continually checking his flight plan and making amendments to it. There were so many variables. The wind could change, you might be flying at a height greater than anticipated, than he put in his flight plan, or lower, all sorts of things could change. And he had to check his course by either

10:00 astronavigation or by getting a bearing on a flame float if it was over the sea, or a flare on the ground. But you didn’t want to drop those things too often, because it gave your position away. And also, to take an astrosight, the aircraft has to be flying straight and level, for a reasonable period of time,

10:32 maybe a minute or perhaps a little bit more, while he got sighted on a star, took one star, took another star, to get a cross bearing. The crew weren’t all that happy about the navigator taking too many sights, and certainly not very happy if he didn’t get the star into his sexton sight very quickly. You didn’t want to mess around too

11:00 long straight and level. So we depended on the navigator to a) check how we were going, number one, and two to perform his astronavigation promptly and quickly. The navigator of course had to depend on the pilot to follow his

11:30 information, but the captain always had the right of veto of course. And if he didn't think the navigator was giving him was right, it was his responsibility to change it. And also the other thing, in going across enemy territory, to

12:00 dodge both night fighters and anti-aircraft fire, and searchlights, we weaved. We went from side to side, from port to starboard and changed our height, our course and our air speed constantly. And so the navigator depended on the pilot to average everything out. That if he did 10 degrees to port,

12:30 he should then go 20 degrees to starboard, so you've got the mean going down the centre, up and down, the same sort of thing. So this trust was there between the navigator and the pilot, captain, all the time. And then of course the whole crew…

13:00 We depended on the wireless operator, if he could get a fix on anything. And we depended on the gunners to see if we were being tracked and to give us due warning. I only…disagreed and went against my navigator's wishes on one occasion, to any extent,

13:30 I might have changed a few odd bits and pieces, and that was once when we left Berlin and were tracked by searchlights and anti-aircraft fire, and a couple of fighter attacks…To get away from these, I went a long way off course and

14:00 for some time we were flying a different course to that that the navigator had set. To get ourselves back on course the navigator told me to go a particular way, and when we went that way we got attacked again.

14:30 I just had a hunch that this was all wrong, and I said, "No, we're not going to do that." And I did something else and for once I proved to be right.

So was it that simple, you use your veto, end of discussion? Or how strongly would a navigator put his case?

Oh, he would put his case.

15:00 He said, "I think this is right," and I said, "No, I'm sorry, we're going to do this." You have got to take the action that you believe is right. And had I been wrong, well, I would have been wrong. I don't think we ever really referred to it again, in any way at all. There was no necessity to do so,

15:33 because we didn't know where we were, and we didn't, because of the evasive action that I'd had to take, for the period that I had to take it, we were both working to some extent on hunches.

Whose responsibility is it then to get back on…

That is my responsibility to get back.

16:03 He didn't know anymore than I did, there was no signpost to say turn right or to turn left. He would be trying to keep track of it on the compass that he had in his navigator's compartment. Things tended to get a bit confused at times.

16:36 **I was just wondering if we could go through the 1,000-bomber raids. I can only begin to imagine what that was like, to be part of such a massive raid. And you had obviously been well trained, but never part of something so massive…**

Well, we hadn't been trained specifically for a 1,000-bomber raid. The only different between that raid and any other, and remember they built it up

17:03 from six or seven hundred, was the fact that they were putting 1,000 bombers over one target in an hour and a half. The only difference really was that you had a lot of aeroplanes around you, and you just had to keep your eyes open very, very wide. But on all raids, the time on the target for the whole raid

17:31 was relatively short, so there was always the danger of mid-air collisions, and they did happen…There was two dangers. One was mid-air collisions, and the second was bombs dropping onto you from another aircraft and that happened to us. And it was actually on the occasion that I was just describing about getting out of Berlin and disregarding my navigator's advice.

18:02 That caused the bombs from above hitting our aircraft, wounding our top gunner and affecting the controls of the aircraft. So that was another danger of a 1,000-bomber raid, of almost any raid when there was a number of aircraft over the target, over the aiming point at the one time.

18:34 **So in that 1,000-bomber raid, you are not necessarily in a tighter formation than a normal raid…**

We never flew in formation, you know, of a night-time. On occasions, if an aeroplane or a couple of

aeroplanes were around you, you could formate on them, but there was no intention of doing so and nor were we briefed to do so.

19:07 In fact, I never did any night formation flying until I got back to Australia and I was instructing at East Sale, which was the OTU for the Southwest Pacific, Beauforts [bombers] and Hudsons. And there I had to instruct in night formation…

19:34 **So what was your overriding feeling when you got back to base from that first big raid?**

Exhilaration. Exhilaration from really having been blooded at last, after six months of training. Nearly eight months of training.

20:03 Two at ITS, two months at FTS and nearly a couple of months at OTU. or a month or something, so at long last you were doing the job that you were trained for, and there was a lot of exhilaration and pleasure, I suppose, to some extent at having got that far.

20:32 **On the Wellingtons, who was navigator bomb aimer as well?**

Yes, navigator and bomb aimer. There was a crew of five. Pilot, captain, navigator, rear gunner, wireless operator…No, we had a bomb aimer, we did. So we had five and the additions to that when we got to Lancasters were a

21:00 flight engineer and a top gunner. My aeroplanes were always called Queeny, Q for Queenie. Maybe that was part of our good luck. My parents lived in Queens Road, Melbourne. Before the war, I worked out an office in Queens Street, Melbourne.

21:34 My navigator, Bob Neilsen's mother, was Queenie, and Ed Vurley came from Regina in Saskatchewan. So I always asked for Q after that. And we ended up with Queeny Six. People say, "What happened to the other five?"

22:00 And I say nonchalantly, "They were all shot from under me." Which of course is not true.

You talked about Cologne and Essen. What were your experiences on those two raids with ack-ack [anti aircraft artillery] and enemy fighters?

Not a great deal. I had a pretty dream run on both of them. Particularly on the Cologne raid which,

22:32 as I say, was very clear and you could see everything that was happening. Essen was not so good, the weather turned bad and it was a bit cloud covered. The later 1,000-bomber raid on Hamburg wasn't that great. And this of course was before the time of Pathfinders to help you identify the target.

23:01 So we had…I was very lucky on those 3,000-bomber raids. We were briefed for another one, I can't remember where it was, but it was scrubbed. The weather turned bad and it was scrubbed.

What generally were the targets on the 1,000-bomber raids?

23:30 **We had Cologne and Essen. Essen being in the heart of the Ruhr, with the Krupps works as the main aiming point, target. Cologne, I don't know why we went to Cologne, they must have had a reason. And Hamburg, of course, because of the docks. But the raids, there is still this controversy that we went out to kill all the civilians…Which was quite untrue.**

24:01 **The job was to attack…There was two reasons. To attack military targets, either military targets or targets that were building weapons. So that was why the Krupps works and Nuremberg and so many others were our aiming point. And the third thing was that air raids over any city,**

24:31 **it was hoped would destroy the Germans morale, and the Italians morale. On the other hand, we hoped that it would boost the morale of the people in the occupied countries, France, Belgium, Holland and so on. But never at any time,**

25:01 **were we briefed to attack deliberately homes and civilians. Always with a purpose of destroying a target that had military applications, military value. And that applies to Dresden as well as to anywhere else.**

25:30 **All this hoo-ha about Dresden is nonsense. It was a military target. At the time it was bombed, it was only 60 miles from the Russian front. The Russians were advancing on Germany. It was a rallying place for the German Army and had to be knocked off.**

26:02 **And also for the reasons of it manufacturing bomb sights and parts for Messerschmitt fighters. It was a military target.**

How successful do you think the raids were generally?

I can only go on the fact that Albert Speer said on two occasions

26:30 that it was due to the bombing by night, particularly by night, that curtailed German war effort. And in

the latter part of the war, in 1945, he told Hitler that it was utterly impossible for them to reach the targets of munitions

27:01 and armament manufacture that he had predicted, because the raids were so successful. It is Speer's evidence that confirms that the bombing of Germans cities, and Italian cities to some extent, but German cities in particular

27:31 and of the U-boat pens in the South of France, and up in Wilhelmshaven, Emden, Bremmen…All were greatly contributed to the downfall of Germany, because they did effect their manufacturing capacity. And that was what we aimed to do.

28:02 **On the operations you were involved in, how were you able to ascertain the success of your plane with your…**

Well, every aircraft in bomber command, as far as I'm aware, when I was operating, was fitted with a camera and a photo flash. And the photo flash was

28:30 connected to the bomb release, as was the camera. So when you dropped your bombs, when you let your bombs go, the photo flash dropped and it was fused by atmospheric pressure and the…

29:02 When the photo flash went off, the camera shutter was open and took a photograph of where your bombs should have dropped. You brought this photograph back. The camera was taken out of your aircraft as soon as you landed, it was taken up to the photograph unit, they developed the photographs and as I showed you in my log book, the photographs were plotted.

29:33 The photograph itself was plotted, and on the bottom of it you can see where the area or the position was plotted, and from those photographs, the position of all the bombs that were dropped were plotted on a grid

30:01 of the target area and the aiming point. And they were able to identify each of these bomb drops from the photographs, and you would know how many actually hit the target area, and how many landed in Farmer Brown's fields elsewhere.

30:31 Not all crews got into the target area, not all of them made their way right up to the aiming point. That was for a variety of reasons. Maybe the defences were too heavy, the weather stopped them, all sorts of reasons. And it was because they found that not sufficient bombs were falling on their rightful targets

31:00 that Pathfinder Force was formed. That is a story of its own. It was headed by an Australian, Don Bennet, ATC [Air Training Command] Bennet, and Pathfinder Force was all volunteers…

Pre-Pathfinder, and especially during those night raids, how did one spot the target?

31:31 I've got to try and remember how we…There were a number of cases, of course, you could find the target by topographical…Because of the topography. You could find Cologne because it was on a particular bend of the Rhine River.

32:00 You could find Hamburg because it was on the sea…Berlin had particular lakes, that you could tell. It was when you got to places like Essen, perhaps Minsk and a few other places, that it was difficult and you were doing it to some extent by dead reckoning. You hoped that you were right. And that was another reason for

32:30 forming Pathfinder Force, whose navigators, whose crews were more experienced and were less likely to make a mistake. Not much better than that. Were less likely to make a mistake than if it was left to the main force. And dead reckoning…

33:00 Of course there were also moonlight nights when the moon was shining and identified points.

It might be good to hear a bit more about 460 Squadron. Where were they stationed when you joined the squadron?

Bretton in Yorkshire. I think that was pretty well where they were formed up.

33:30 And as I mentioned to you before, the flight commanders there, Billy Brill and Arthury Doubleday… Bretton was a satellite. It was purely a wartime airfield. We slept in tin huts. Nissen huts [wooden-framed buildings]. We had a fire in the centre.

34:05 Commissioned officers had a little room to themselves. Flight sergeants, we slept in a hut all together. And to get from the headquarters and the hangars, we had to go across fields. If you were a captain, you got a bicycle

34:32 allotted to you…captains and navigators both got bicycles. And we were really in the heart of a farming area. But you know we were reasonably comfortable, and lived quite a good life, a reasonable mess, sergeants' mess and an officers' mess. It was all right.

35:05 **So that crew you named before with Bob Neilsen, that was the crew you had…**

We actually crewed up at 460 Squadron. We were posted there as individuals and we crewed up there. To start with at 460, when you first went there,

35:31 you had to do a couple of trips as a second pilot. And so I did, I'd done my two trips on 1,000-bomber raids, but once you got to the squadron they wanted you to do a couple of trips. The captain that I went with was a chap called Peter Jackson from Sale. He was lost later, killed later…

36:04 And so I did a couple of trips with him, then I was given my own crew, and then while I had my own crew I got a sprog pilot, and he came with me as second pilot, then he went off on his own…So that is how it worked.

So what is the process involved with crewing up? Was it a matter of it being allotted a team, or did you pick and choose?

Well, I started off with Bob Neilsen.

36:31 I think we sort of sort of looked at each other and thought, "Oh, he looks all right." Billy Copley, Bob Neilsen had known Bill Copley and he said, "Look, I think Copley would be a good wireless operator." So we grabbed Bill Copley, that gave us three. We needed a couple more. I can't remember how we got a hold of Ed Werxler, or Johnny Swain, but

37:00 they came to us. They stayed, with the exception of going off on illness and that sort of thing…Ed Werxler got wounded about 15 trips later or something like that. So he went, we couldn't keep him, he got wounded and was taken off operational flying. His eyes, he got acid in the eyes

37:31 and shot in the leg. An incendiary bomb went off and damaged him. So we lost him and I had to find another one, then I got Allen Richie. He just…had been posted to the squadron from an RAF squadron… I can't remember how he got there, but anyway, he joined us.

38:06 **And do you recall what your first operational mission once you were with 460?**

No, I could look in my book. I've got an idea it might have been a mine laying trip but I'm not quite sure.

38:30 **How did the mine laying missions differ from bombing raids?**

Oh well, normally you got a land fall on the coast and you went so far out, from the land fall on the coast. And you had to drop your mines from a pre-determined height that they told you, you should drop your mines from.

39:00 The biggest danger of that was anti-aircraft fire, because you came down fairly low to make your landfall on the coast…

39:30 And the other danger was the flack ships. They put flack ships all along their coast with anti-aircraft fire. Because you were flying low you were a reasonable target for them. They weren't usually very long trips either, they were fairly short and you could do them in three to four hours, maximum, if you were doing them off the Northwest German coast.

40:02 **And those mines were intended to blanket the area or to deal with a specific convoy or…**

Not a specific, just a general area. Just to keep the place mined. Ships did bang into them.

Tape 5

00:33 As I was saying….there is nothing very memorable about some things. They tend to…if everything is going well, they tend to be routine. Now what do I mean by everything going well?

01:00 Well, the weather is reasonably good, the visibility is good, you can pick out your landfall on the enemy coast, the navigator tells you that you are on course, on track, going in the right direction,

01:30 and once you are getting near the target you are able to identify it, either because people have been there before you, or if you're in Pathfinder Force and are among the first to get there, having dropped your flares to identify your target, you do identify it. With mine laying, mine laying was…we used to call it gardening, I don't quite know why, but anyway you dropped your mines,

02:00 you were gardening. They were generally regarded as being reasonably safe because you didn't have a lot of enemy territory to fly over. You were flying over the North Sea, the Channel, and you were making a landfall, and hopefully if you made that landfall…It was almost inevitable that you would be picked up

02:30 by some anti-aircraft fire on the land, but they tried to give you a position that they felt was fairly free of enemy defences. Having made your landfall you were back over the sea again, and there you had the main danger of flack ships. Ships which were moored along the coast and had anti-aircraft guns on board.

03:03 Because you were low and you were flying fairly slowly, you were a pretty good target for them. But despite this, because you didn't have a lot of enemy territory to fly over to get to your target, then from your target to get back to base, they were regarded as a bit of a piece of cake. Reasonably easy to handle.

03:30 And the losses on gardening trips were not anything like as high as they were on general targets.

Now did you say earlier that you would do a day flight, a practise run to…

Yes, but that was just around the aerodrome. A night flying test, an NFT [Night Flying Test]. You would do that, and that was good and bad. It was good from your personal point of view

04:04 because it meant that your crew were, all of them were checked. The gunner checked his guns, the navigator checked his equipment, the wireless operator checked his, and I checked the engines…That was fine. The thing that was slightly against it, I suppose it didn't really matter, by the activity in England

04:30 around the airfield area, which they knew was around Yorkshire and the east of England, the enemy would know that something was going to happen that night. They'd know it by the activity, because all of the squadrons were doing their night flying tests. So they then said, "Okay, something is going to happen tonight, we better sharpen ourselves up." So that was that.

05:00 **So you always went out having done an NFT, or were there ever any occasions when you scrambled, when you had an emergency?**

No, sometimes after you had done your NFT, not often, but sometimes the whole operation was scrubbed. The weather turned bad over the target, or over England. That was always a let down.

05:31 You could even be sitting in the aeroplane ready for takeoff, on the operation, and flying would be scrubbed. It was always a let down and there was always a bit more drinking that night than normal. The release of tension. One tended to tense up, if you were going on an operation.

06:01 You were geared up.

Other veterans have said they felt terrible feelings of anxiety before they got in the plane, but once they were in it and once they set on a mission, they turned that off…

I suppose it was anxiety. There was tension and I suppose anxiety created the tension.

06:30 But…it was extraordinary, I was only really anxious on two occasions, and on both of those occasions something nasty happened. It was sort of almost a premonition, that something was going to happen that night. And for the rest of the time, I wasn't as concerned. I know I was tense,

07:01 and I was probably anxious, but on two occasions I was almost fearful…and my fears were recognised by something nasty happening.

Can you tell me about those occasions?

07:31 One of them was the Berlin trip where we really got belted around. I can't remember what the other one was, but something nasty went on. There were those two occasions, particularly.

08:02 One of the sad things was on my Wellington crew I had a chap called John Swain as my rear gunner, and Johnny had been with us for the 20 trips, or whatever it was we did, on 460 Squadron. He was from Melbourne, and when we decided to go to Pathfinder Force, which

08:30 was volunteer, Johnny decided…He was engaged, he was about 34, he was the oldest in the crew, and he was engaged. He thought, "Well, I've done 20-odd trips, I've only got this number to do and I've got every chance of getting home." And Pathfinder Force didn't have a very good record of survival,

09:00 and so he decided not to come, so he had to go to another crew of course, and he got killed the first trip that he did away from us. I know his fiancée, now married, of course, with grown-up children. But it was hard coming back and talking to her. Johnny was such a nice man. He was the only one.

09:30 Ed Werxler got damaged, wounded, and he had to drop out of the crew later on, but Bill Croply and Bob Neilsen lasted the distance, until a couple of years ago.

You mentioned earlier that on one of the thousand bomber raids you got hit with a bomb from above?

No, that was on Berlin. That wasn't on 1,000-bomber raids.

10:00 That was one of the nasty things that happened. Yes, we got hit by…

It was a friendly bomb?

Yes, it was one of ours. With the number of aircraft over a target, in a relatively short time, that was

always a danger. Goodness knows how many aircraft were destroyed. We were just lucky it went through and lodged

10:30 in the aircraft....lodged in the elevator cables, which created a bit of a problem.

Could you tell us about that more?

I said that was the one time that we had so much trouble

11:00 that the course out of the target led us astray. We then got in searchlights and we got fighters around us and it was really quite a nasty night. So the evasive action that I took, took us way off course. So we got to a stage where

11:32 we had shaken off the fighters, we had got out of the searchlight belt, and the anti-aircraft fire had stopped, and we could take hold of ourselves and decide, really, what it is that we wanted to do, rather than the enemy telling us what they wanted to happen to us. That was the one occasion,

12:00 as I said earlier, that I disobeyed or disagreed with my navigator. He said to do one thing and I just had a hunch that we should do another. And so being the captain, my view prevailed. And we did and it all turned out all right.

So how did you dislodge the bomb?

It got dislodged in throwing the aeroplane around.

12:30 The only time that I disagreed with the navigator, Bob Neilsen was on doing a course. What was called a Specialist Navigation Course, SpecN, which was the top course for navigators. If you did the SpecN course and passed it, you were a red hot navigator. Bob was away doing this, so I had to take another navigator. And the navigator that was allotted to me

13:01 had had a couple of bad trips, and on one bad trip his aircraft had ditched in the Channel and he had been in a dinghy, being rescued by the Air Sea Rescue Service from the rubber dinghy, and strangely and stupidly they

13:30 put him back onto operational flying, which they never should have done, because he'd had a really time. His morale was low, his whole psyche was quite badly damaged, and they put him back onto operational flying, and he was allotted to me for this particular trip,

14:02 taking Bob Neilsen's place. And on the way back we got into a little bit of trouble and his nerves did pack up. So I had to relieve him. I said, "Look, go and lie down and I'll navigate us home." My idea of navigation at particular time of night, and in the circumstances was

14:30 if I flew due west, I must hit the French Coast. I think we were coming back from Munich, so we were fairly south. So we flew due west and at a time when I thought we would be over the French Coast, I started to come down, lose height. And anti-aircraft

15:00 fire sent me back up. I thought I would let it go for another 10 or 15 minutes, whatever it was, "I must be over the French Coast by now," so I started to come down again, and again anti-aircraft fire forced me to go up. Eventually I came down and I was over the Channel [English Channel]. Once we got back and then next day

15:30 when we had time, when we replotted what had happened was my idea of flying due west was reasonable, but what had happened was it had taken us over the Cherbourg Peninsula, which sticks out from the French coast, further west. That was the first time. And the second time, we were over the Channel Islands, Jersey and Guernsey, which were also occupied by the Germans.

16:05 It was a good idea to fly due west, I could have done it in a better place, and so that was the only other time when I did the navigation.

Did you suffer any damaged from that?

No, that was damage-free as far as I remember.

16:30 **I'd like to talk about briefings, how you were briefed.**

I suppose it was the same as on most other squadrons. We were told about midday or just after that there would be a briefing, that operations were on that night and that there would be a briefing and that the camp was closed.

17:01 The gates were shut, the guards were all there with instructions not to let anybody in or out, and the telephones were all monitored. No telephones in or out to aircrew, or to anybody I think. So it was a closed operation. You were called down to counter-briefing. Before briefing…

17:31 I can't remember now, honestly, whether it was before briefing or after briefing, that we did the NFT. I think it was before we did the night flying. And so we went into briefing and we sat as a crew usually, all the crew together. And you'd go in and up on the wall would be a map of England,

18:01 a map of Europe, probably one of Ireland and the North Sea and all the area around. And from your base to the target, there would be a piece of coloured wool, and then you'd know where your target was, and that would follow the route that you were going to take. So from your place, it would go to a position on the French Coast

18:30 or into the middle of the Channel, it was usually on the French Coast, where you were to hit the French Coast, or the Dutch Coast or the German Coast, wherever it was, and it would then take you in, in probably one or two stages to your target. There would be positions where you might have to make a turn, 10n degrees this way or 10 degrees that way or 30 degrees…But it would show you the route you would take.

19:00 So you would know where you were going and basically how you were going to go there. So the commanding officer would stand up and say, "Okay, chaps, tonight we are going to so and so." And he would describe the reason you are going to go. "You're going to Essen tonight. The major target is the Krupps that are there, it a city of so many thousands of people…" He would give you a word picture.

19:35 He would be followed probably by the navigation leader, the nav [navigation] leader, and he'd go through the route, and tell you anything that would distinguish that route. Forest areas which we be black. Lakes would shine in the moonlight, if there was a moon.

20:00 Any distinguishing feature. Anything that would affect the navigation. He'd probably be followed by the meteorological officer, who would describe the weather that you were likely to encounter on the route, what it was going to be like at take-off, what the weather on the route was likely to be, what the visibility was likely to be, what the height of the cloud was, what kind of clouds,

20:31 whether there was likely to be rain…just the meteorological forecast. The forecast for over the target, the forecast for the trip back, because that was going to be four or five or six or eight or 10 hours time, how it was going to change and what the weather was likely to be at base when you got back to base.

21:00 The gunnery leader would stand up and say what ammunition the guns had in them. Three oh threes, or point fives, tracer…the radio leader would tell us what the frequencies to use were, and we'd told the colours of the day because the colours changed.

21:35 What the various frequencies of the distress signals were. Anything about the communications was special for the day, and there would always be something special. And the intelligence officer would stand up and tell you anything he knew about the target.

22:00 Again a bit about what went on in the city, why we were going there, what the opposition was likely to be that they knew about, over the target and on the route and on the way back. Whether there were any changes…what were the tactics of the German night fighters, what they knew about their tactics. About the searchlights,

22:30 were they in a belt or were they scattered. There was a searchlight belt right down through…from the north coast of Germany right down to the south coast of France, which was known as the Searchlight Belt. And anything that was known about the anti-aircraft concentrations.

23:00 All that went on and then the commanding officer would stand up and say, "Good luck chaps." And off you'd go and have your pre-operational supper. We sometimes got an egg for that. And then you'd go and…

23:31 You might have had a bit of time between briefing and dinner to have a bit of a sleep. More often than not you didn't. You'd go down and draw your parachute and flying gear and get into it and off you would go.

But you'd do your testing first?

24:00 Yes, as I said, I can't remember whether the night flying test was before briefing or after, I can't remember. It might have varied. I just can't remember…It's not important anyway. On return you were debriefed, once you got back. You had to be careful, at this stage

24:30 of the war, 1942-43, the Germans had a nasty habit of sending night fighters over and patrolling above aerodromes where they thought the crew were relaxed and just about to land, and they were at a low flying speed, and just coming in and probably concentrating more on the landing than anything else, they'd shoot you down. And that happened - not a great deal, but enough to cause some concern.

25:02 So you would land and you would taxi to your allotted standing, and you would be picked up by a WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] in a truck and taken to the briefing room, where there would be intelligence officers and the CO [Commanding Officer] and flight commanders, the met [meteorological] officer…

25:34 And the padre would be there and the Salvation Army guy, and they would give you a cup of coffee and a cigarette. Most people smoked in those days, not everyone. So you would sit around a table, the seven of you, or five of you…

26:00 Five when you were on Wellingtons, seven when you were on Lancasters. And you'd sit down and the intelligence officer would take you through the trip. By this time you would have handed in your camera because that would go away to be processed, the film. He would show you a target map and he would say, "Well, where do you think you dropped your bombs." Close your eyes and stick a pencil in the…

26:32 You'd indicate where you thought you had dropped your bombs, and then he would go through the trip, ask you to recount anything special, and ask what the weather was like, what was the target like, all of this. So you would be debriefed. You'd finish that, have your cup of coffee, have a look at the board, see who hadn't come back.

27:00 And then you would get in the truck again and go to the mess and you would have breakfast. And from there you would go to bed, get up the next morning, or later that day. You might be woken up and told, "Okay, you're on again tonight." So you would have to get up. Or, "Nothing on tonight chaps, let's go into York."

27:33 **The maps that you showed us earlier of the targets and the different groups of bombers…**

That was prepared later. I hadn't actually seen that. Bob Neilsen wrote a book The Stars Above, and in his research long after the war, he got these from the Air Ministry

28:00 and so he got some copies done for me. I didn't even knew they existed until Bob found them.

So you weren't debriefed with maps?

Yes, we were. But it was only later in the day when all the information was in, later in the day, when it went up to group headquarters, or I presume group headquarters,

28:30 where they plotted the whole thing and did the report for Air Ministry and the Cabinet. It was from there that they put out the news releases. 'The Royal Air force Bomber command made a successful attack on Hamburg.'

So was it a matter of course that you would see the photographs?

29:01 Oh yes, yes. The next day, by the time you'd got up, all the photographs…The photographs you'd taken, would have been processed and the position on which you had dropped your bombs was shown on the photograph. On 156 Squadron

29:30 we had a competition. Each member of each crew put in a shilling, so there were seven shillings per crew, and depending on the number of aircraft on the operation, depended the total amount of the kitty. So if there were 10 aircraft

30:01 the kitty was 70 shillings, and that was a lot of money in war time. Whoever got closest to the aiming point won the kitty, and that was plotted from the photograph. And we won it a lot of times. It was very important because as I told you when you came back they asked you,

30:30 "Where do you think your bombs dropped?" Then they could prove later on whether you were right or wrong. I've got a photograph there of Farmer Brown's field, we bombed the wrong place. That was on 460 I think. Yeah, it was a waste. I was headed off by searchlights on that occasion,

31:01 and on the left-hand side of the photograph you can see the searchlights. I was caught in the searchlights at the time.

What is the first thing that you do to evade searchlights?

You try to weave your way out of it, turn 90 degrees to port or starboard. You can dive down to it if you were feeling really adventurous. You just tried to weave your way out of it. Throw them off.

31:31 But they had some very powerful searchlights and they would try to cone you, con you in the centre of two or four or six searchlights, all coming in at you, and converging on you. There you were like a fly in a spider web. They would shoot their anti-aircraft guns right up into the middle of the cone that you were trying to get out of.

32:08 **So you worked that out in the moment, at the time?**

You worked out what you thought you should do, and your instincts hopefully told you what you should be doing, you hoped that your instinct was right.

One more thing on the briefings, when you did the 1,000-bomber raids,

32:30 **how were you briefed and what were you told about what part you would be playing and how you would coordinate with the others? You said it was like an hour and a half of intense bombing.**

I think what you were told was that this was a great opportunity to take the war to the enemy, because the army had to leave France and the Repulse and the Renown…and the Prince of Wales

33:02 had been sunk. You were told this was a great opportunity for us to take the war to the enemy. "There

are 1,000 aircraft and hopefully most of them would be over the target in that hour and a half, so keep your eyes open, chaps." There's not much else you can say, no traffic lights.

33:30 **So you weren't advised on how to coordinate with other squadrons?**

No, you were told what time you should be over the target, roughly. You are scheduled to attack at 22:14, and that's when you went in. That's when your navigator was pacing you,

34:00 that you should be over the enemy coast at such and such a time, this pinpoint if there was one at such and such a time, over the target at 21:13. So you had a schedule of the trip, just like a tram or a train.

But you knew what height you needed to be over the target?

Yes, you were given the instructions of what height you were supposed to go in at, and what time

34:30 you were to bomb from 6,000 feet, 8,000, 10 or 12,000 feet…whatever it was for that particular raid and at what time. In the Pathfinder Force this was particularly important because you had to keep the momentum of the flares and the target indicators up, so that when they due to go out in one place you had to renew them in another place.

35:02 You had to conform with the briefing.

Did you always carry the same size bombs?

No, it varied according to the target. To penetrate the U-boat pens in L'Orion or St Lazare, you would carry one type of bomb. If you were going over a city

35:32 which was fairly new and built of concrete and cement, you carried one type of bomb. If you were attacking a target which had a predominance of wooden buildings, you'd carry incendiaries to create fires. So the bomber command would advise what bombs were to be carried. And then I suppose

36:00 group headquarters would modify it for particular squadrons. But basically, the bombs that you took were determined by the type of target.

Were you ever escorted by fighters?

No, not at night time. What did happen on a couple of occasions was that they

36:30 sent out Mosquitoes or other aircraft to make an attack on another target which was not the prime target for the night. A diversionary attack. So that the Germans could be, hopefully, misled into where the real target for the night was going to be.

37:04 They'd attack a minor city and create this diversion and then theoretically the main force would sweep in and annihilate the real target.

You talked about the searchlight belt…

37:30 That was a deterrent. I can't remember how wide it was, it was a few miles wide, stretching from Northern Germany down to Southern France. And this was a deterrent, particularly for getting into the Ruhr.

38:03 We didn't like the searchlight belt too much, but sometimes they could be confused by the number of aeroplanes going through, at different places.

They wouldn't know where to point the searchlights?

They'd know where to point the searchlights once the aeroplanes were there. They had radar control on the these searchlights, too.

38:30 Particularly on the…they had a sort of a master searchlight, and it was very, very bright, almost blue white. That was the one they used to pick up a poor little aeroplane fluttering around, and then the

39:00 others would come up and converge on it, as I said.

They had radar control?

On the searchlights, yes. The Germans were pretty well equipped. Very well equipped.

So what would your tactics be then to get through that searchlight belt?

Well, you were weaving all the time, changing your course

39:31 and your height and your air speed. You just were trying to throw them off, off you and everyone was trying to throw them off his aeroplane. You were going in a corkscrew, you were corkscrewing your way over France, over Germany.

Tape 6

00:34 **Tell me the circumstances that led to you joining the Pathfinder Forces?**

The Pathfinder Force was formed because neither the British government or the Air Ministry were satisfied with the results of the bombing.

01:00 Too many bombs were being wasted and not falling on target, so they decided that they would form a force of experienced crews that would be further trained to get to the target, identify the target and lead the main force to the target,

01:31 and hopefully increase the value of the bombing. They chose as the commander an Australian called Donald Bennett, DCT Bennett, who had been shot down some while before over Norway, and he had escaped and got back to England. And he had been an

02:00 Imperial Airways pilot. He was born in Queensland and had joined the Royal Air Force and then had got out of the air force and was then with Imperial Airways and had flown the top half of what was known as the 'Mao' [?] composite machine over the Atlantic and written several books on navigation and was regarded as the best navigator

02:31 in the Royal Air Force. And an exceptional pilot. They chose him to form Pathfinder Force. He chose a group of people to form the force with him. Senior navigators, senior gunnery leaders, met officers and so on. And also a team of a few people

03:01 who were to be the recruiting officers, and they were all very experienced bomber command pilots who had finished one tour or perhaps even more. And so they decided they would try to recruit the Pathfinder Force from volunteers from bomber command itself. So these…recruiting officers, for want of a better name,

03:32 went around the squadrons and said to the squadrons, "We would like to take some of your experienced pilots. Who can you recommend?" So by this time my crew and I had done about 20 or 21 trips, and I got a DFM [Distinguished Flying Medal] at that stage.

04:00 And we were the ones who were recommended by the commanding officer at 460 Squadron. Wing Commander Hamish McHaddock, he was the recruiting officer that came to us from Pathfinder Force. He couldn't say, "Right, you're going to Pathfinder Force." What he would say was,

04:32 "Well chaps, I'm here on behalf of Pathfinder Force and it's been suggested that you might like to volunteer for Pathfinder Force." So he would tell you a little bit about it. So we thought about it and we decided that we only had 10 or nine trips to go before the end of our tour, and then

05:00 we'd be shunted off to a training station, which we weren't very keen on. So we decided to go as a crew, with the exception of Johnny Swaine, as I mentioned, and at that stage, John Swaine's place was taken by Reg Ascom.

05:34 We had our flight engineer. Yes, John was the only one I had to replace. So we all went down to Pathfinder Force and we were posted to 156 Squadron. Now at that time, 156 Squadron was still on Wellingtons. I had done a number of trips on Lancasters by this time. So the first job I was given was

06:00 to convert the squadron on Lancasters, the pilots. This was a relatively simple job. I trained two pilots first, and then they knew how to fly it, so they then trained a couple themselves. And so over a period of about a month or something like that, the squadron got converted onto Lancasters..

06:37 The squadron was at a place called Warboys, Breeton was in Yorkshire, Warboys was in Huntingdonshire, not far out of Cambridge. Again it was on a satellite aerodrome, out amongst the cows and the sheep and the pigs and so on.

07:02 We had a South African commanding officer called Rivet Carnack. Nuts and Bolts we called him, Rivet Carnack. And he was a great man, he really was, a great chap. So one of the first things, apart from converting the squadron I had to do,

07:32 was for some reason to fly DCT Bennett on some tests flights. I think we were testing some new aerodrome lighting. And I did that with DCT John Bennett. Another thing I had to do was, they were having trouble with some engines cutting out on take off,

08:01 so we had to do a couple of test flights to see if the engines cut out, and when they cut out and so on. Apart from that, we went straight onto operations. We were given a new navigation device called H2S. Prior to this, we had been issued with a navigation device called

08:30 Gee, G-E-E. And Gee was operated from England by two radio beams, or beams, being shot out from different positions and converging over a particular point. From an instrument in the navigator's compartment, and the navigators

09:00 were trained to use this, he could tell where.…It was a help in navigation in finding out where you were. So this thing got superseded by H2S [radar]. And when any new thing comes into operation, it takes time for it to go through and be allotted to all the squadrons.

09:31 So Pathfinder Force was given the first H2S. H2S was the forerunner of…not modern radar, but almost of the present ground positioning system, except that it only worked from the ground and not from those satellites that are rushing

10:01 around the world. H2S was a scanner at the bottom of the aircraft that went around and around and around. And it brought back into the aircraft a picture of the terrain below, so it could tell where a

10:30 coastline is. It could show you a coastline. It could show you a forest by the colour. It could show you a river, it could show you a lake. And so Pathfinder Force were the first to get these because it was their job to help the navigation of the main force. So we were trained on H2S.

11:03 Which was a plus.

So how would you see this scan?

It would reflect in the navigator's compartment. Again, it was part of the navigator's equipment. So we were trained on that,

11:30 and we were given a bit more training on the bits and pieces, to start ourselves up. We were experienced. We had been on operations for six months or more, and everyone was experienced on the…the losses at that time were very heavy. The other thing about Pathfinder Force,

12:00 which scared some people off from volunteering, was that you did a tour of 45 trips. Normally a tour of operations was 30. For Pathfinder Force at that time, you had to do 45 without a break. And if you did 45 straight through, it was regarded as two tours. Then you were finished operating.

12:31 But it wasn't that necessarily that induced us to go down. And at that time, the possibility of getting through that 45 trips was about 17 percent. And that's been plotted…

How did that compare to bomber command?

13:03 Over the whole period of bomber command, the losses were 60 percent. When I was operating, they were about 83 at that particular time. And that's remembering of course that after D Day, and as the Allies moved further into France and into Germany,

13:31 it was safer because you didn't have as much enemy territory to fly over. So the losses diminished, well not straight after D Day [June 6, 1944], they took some time, but the losses did diminish towards the end of the war. But the average on bomber command was 60 percent. As I was saying to Colin [interviewer], the losses on Gallipoli were 27 percent.

14:00 People don't realise that bomber command…the attrition rate on bomber command as a percentage of those that were involved was greater than almost any other, even in France in the First World War. So Pathfinders were trained, and their job was two-fold.

14:31 They were charged with identifying various pinpoints on the route to the target by dropping flares over various points. The main force were coming along…so many of them got lost. But the main force could see these flares and make their way to them,

15:01 and these were at turning points. Now this was good in one way and bad in another. The bad part about it was that it identified to the enemy where the aircraft were going, so they had that job of identifying the turning points. The second job was to first of all identify the target.

15:33 And the third job was to identify the aiming point. Now the difference between the target and the aiming point, the target is the area. The city of Berlin. Well, what was the aiming point? The aiming point might have been the Reichstag. So the Pathfinders would

16:00 come in and drop a ring of flares around the target area. That would identify the target area, and continuously the other Pathfinders would come in and renew those flares. They were called the markers, and the people who came in a bit later were the backers up.

16:32 When the target was identified, other markers would come in and identify the aiming point. And they would drop other distinguished, different coloured flares on that aiming point. As the raid develops, one would presume that aiming point would be destroyed.

17:02 So more markers would come in and move the aiming point to another position in the target area. So theoretically, you would get a line of destruction right through the target area. You can't keep dropping on the same aiming point, otherwise you're just

17:32 adding to the destruction at one point, rather than doing the whole job. And there were different forms of attack. There was what was known as a Parramatta attack, which was usually above clouds. And that

would have been identified by Pathfinders probably through their H2S.

18:02 And that would be a certain type of flare. And then there were Wanganui attacks, and they had all various names for different types of attacks, depending on the target and what it was you were there to do. The backers up would keep the target and the various aiming points that

18:30 they'd identified and which they'd lit up, they would keep them going until the end of the raid and then go home. And main force would be going in and going out and the Pathfinders would be going in and going out. So the Pathfinders were usually first over the target,

19:02 always first over the target and always last off the target. But the same people wouldn't be there all the time, but they did tend to stay their longer because they needed to do some form of identification, rather than dropping their bombs as the main force on the flares that were already there.

19:33 It's fairly straightforward.

What would that period of time be to get the first Pathfinders…

The first Pathfinders would go in, but they probably weren't due to go in for more than about five minutes before main force were due to arrive. They were there to quickly identify…

20:01 The markers would go in, identify the target, that would take perhaps five minutes, then the others would come in to identify the aiming point, and by the time the aiming was identified it might be five, seven, eight minutes then the main force would be on their way in.

On an operation how many planes would be there?

20:35 Later in the war they were doing seven or eight hundred at a time. It depended. I wasn't there at the last stages. I was only up there until the middle stages. It was fairly consistent between two and four hundred. That was about all they could mount at that stage.

21:01 I mean to mount 1,000 bombers, they pulled them in from training command and coastal command and everywhere to build that up to 1,000. The main force at bomber command for many, many months was no more than about three to four hundred.

So were the flares put in where the bomb aimer…

Yes.

21:41 **Did you complete your tour with…460 Squadron?**

No, I only stayed with 460 to do, just over 20. I can't remember exactly how many, 20, 22. And then I finished the…So that was about half, then I finished the other half on

22:00 Pathfinder Force, up to the 45. Whereas had I stayed at 460 Squadron, I could have finished at 30 and then had a rest of six months or a year or something. I might not have gone back onto operations again. I might have been put into transport command or instructors job.

22:30 **So how was it different for you as a pilot, doing it that way?**

No difference from being on main force really. No different. I knew a little bit more about navigation than I did on main force. Not a great deal. I relied totally really, almost totally on Bob Neilsen. And the bomb aimer, he was very important

23:00 for map reading, because he was down there in the front of the aeroplane with a very clear vision. And the navigator and we all relied on him for map reading. So he was very important. The wireless operator…They all had their jobs to do, it was a total team effort. One without the other….

23:33 You knew that, when one of them got injured, or you when you had to take somebody knew, as I explained about that chap who had been down in the dinghy. A crew that didn't keep together were pretty well doomed.

24:00 **Did you always do the same task? As marker or…**

No, backers up or a marker…and then later on they had master bombers who stuck around even a bit longer and directed people. Do this, do that, or the other thing, master bombers….I wasn't there when they had master bombers.

24:30 **Are you able to recall any specific missions that you did with Pathfinder…**

There was the one I told you about where we got lost. I decided against the navigator's advice to do something.

25:00 That was probably the worst case that we had. But apart from that everything went quite well. One of the most beautiful trips I made was across to Italy. That was quite long, but we went in and we went through the Alps to Turin, and it was the most beautiful site, the Matterhorn sticking up there

25:30 on a bright moonlight night, and the Italian night fighters didn't want to know us. For sheer beauty that was a great night.

What do you mean about the German night fighters?

Well, I think we saw one and it was going the other way. We went to Turin and we went to Milan and we went to, I think,

26:00 Letsbeetsia [?], and in all that time we only saw one Italian night fighter, compared to the Germans where they were around you like flies, bees. You had to go through occupied France to get there, and the Germans had their night fighter bases all along that route. The Italians themselves weren't any problem.

26:30 **So what about the Germans?**

The Germans were a problem. Their night fighters were great, they were very good, and they had cannons, too, they had cannons. I don't know the statistics of the losses caused by night fighters and anti-aircraft fire,

27:00 but I would think that probably fighters got the majority, but I'm not sure. Weather got a few people, too, and the odd mid-air collision.

So were you ever delayed or diverted by night fighters?

Yes, I got rather badly damaged coming back from Karlsrure,

27:30 somewhere, and my petrol tanks were punctured so I lost a lot of fuel, so we had to divert and we diverted to a place called Oakington, which was a night fighter aerodrome,

28:04 and so we diverted there and the weather was very, very bad. It stayed bad for about two or three days. We had to stay there and we didn't have a change of clothes or…and we had our pigeons. When we got there, we had our pigeons…we carried pigeons, did you know that? Oh yes, we carried pigeons. They were very important.

28:31 If you came down at sea or anything like that, you would put a note in with the pigeon where you thought you were and send it home. Homing pigeons, they go home. And the pigeon fancier would get his pigeon back and take a look at its leg and ring up and say, "I've got one of the pigeons here boss.

29:00 The crew thinks they're at such and such a place." So we had our pigeons with us. Eventually they couldn't send an aeroplane for us and we were getting a bit bored so we decided to go home by train. We were very scruffy. We hadn't changed our shirts for a couple of days and we had our pigeons with us. We were quite an extraordinary sight. We got into a carriage with one rather puckery British army officer.

29:31 He looked at us in disgust and walked out, he left the compartment to us.

So civilians loaned their pigeons to the air force?

Yes, yes. It was one of the patriotic things that the British did, they gave their pigeons

30:00 to the air force. In fact, there were…on some aerodromes they bred their own pigeons and had a corporal in charge of pigeons.

So pigeons are another statistic we don't know about.

That's right, yes. Pigeons can fly for hours and hours,

30:30 and in all sorts of weather. They're marvellous.

The weather conditions that you were flying in…

The weather was very changeable. As I said, you could be sitting in your aeroplane and be ready to go and it could be called off, scrubbed. And you could go out in good weather and come back and the place is closed in. And if it was closed in, you would be diverted.

31:00 And weather did take its toll of crews, particularly inexperienced crews, so that had to be contended with. And even the best meteorologist could ever be 100 percent sure. But we got fairly good briefings. But the winds would change and all sorts of things would happen, Then the navigator

31:32 from astrosights and so on would try and keep it on course.

The black cloud?

The cumulus. There was that….I think the weather over the Pacific and in the Southeast Asia area might have been even worse than we had.

32:03 I'm not sure, because I didn't do very much flying in the Southeast Asia area. But weather could get pretty bad…

You had situations where you would continue to fly through a storm…

Yes, yes. There was one raid particularly

32:32 on Essen, and it was one of the first times that H2S was used. I think 13 of us were briefed. It was a terrible night, very vicious weather. I think only two of us dropped our bombs on Essen that time.

33:03 **How many flares would you carry in the plane?**

I can't remember. Quite often we would carry a high explosives bomb, too, or some incendiaries. The log book…it usually has its bomb load in red ink.

33:30 (BREAK)

And some 500 pounders too, a mixed load. Then we got onto the 4,000 pounders later on.

So why did you have a mixed load?

34:00 It was good to mix. The incendiaries were there to start fires and the high explosives were to get through concrete, just had a mixture.

So you would be at times having to do more than mark the target?

Remember, on main force we weren't making anything,

34:31 we were just bombing. And on Pathfinder Force, quite often we would carry the odd couple of bombs just to make up the loads. Do something for our pay.

So by the time you had concluded your 45 missions, had you had enough of Pathfinder?

35:03 I suppose I had, but I don't remember being particularly stressed. I suppose I had.

And you were under the command of…

DTC Bennett, yes. He was the group commander and in the time I was with Pathfinder there were, I think, five squadrons,

35:30 and each squadron had its own commanding officer, as I mentioned, Nuts and Bolts Karnack was our commanding officer. So each squadron had its own commanding…Then there were the flight commanders. Our flight commander was also an Australia, 'Digger' Dyson. He lived.

36:00 Bennett, he was way above me in rank and responsibility. The only time I was close to him was on the experimental flights that I did with him, and he was flying. Then we when we were posted back to Australia, we were posted

36:31 back when we had done 42 trips and had three to finish, and he said, "You're not going until you finish your 45. Or if you do, you go…you go without your Pathfinder badge and you go in disgrace." It was the Australian government through the Australian headquarters in London

37:00 that had said they wanted us to fly back to Australia. He said, "They're my men, and they stay." So we stayed and finished our three trips.

You mentioned earlier that you received the DFM?

Yes, I got the DFM on 460 Squadron. That was what was known as a non-immediate award.

37:30 A non-immediate award was for a…period of service. Then I got a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] on 156 Squadron and that was for that trip on Berlin that I mentioned to you. Then I got an AFC [Air Force Cross] later on for the flight out to Australia. Lucky being in the right place at the right time,

38:00 which is basically what it was…There are very many unrewarded people.

So to have been involved with Pathfinder Force from its conception, and to have spent that much time with it, what did you think about the planning and the running of the force?

38:30 **It's standard of achievement?**

It's standard of achievement was fairly good. Nothing could help you if the weather really turned bad, and you were just unable to identify the target…or if you were able to identify the target and you were unable to identify the actual aiming point.

39:03 It certainly did bring more of the main force into the target area. But this business of them lighting up turning points…I think caused some losses that might have otherwise been avoided.

39:30 But it certainly improved the efficiency of bomber command and the strike rate. In other words, whether they damaged the right things or not and dropped their bombs on the right targets. It certainly did that, and it improved the efficiency and value of the force.

40:00 As I think I mentioned earlier, even Albert Speer, who was in charge of armaments and production in Germany said later, certainly in 1945 and later than that, that due to bomber command their production was poor and it was very likely due to the efforts of bomber command by night rather than the Americans by day,

40:30 it was the night bombers that had the greatest effect.

Tape 7

00:39 **I just noticed looking through that log book, the operation you were talking about, the one to Berlin, where it was a bit nasty on the way back. Now you have told us about the aftermath of navigating your way out of that nasty spot. But I'm wondering if you can tell us some more about the precursor to that and this bomb ending up hitting your plane?**

01:05 Well, the trip out was really no problems as far as I can recall it. We got into the target area, dropped our bombs on the aiming point, and all of a sudden this bomb hit us from on top. And it came in right at the mid-upper turret,

01:31 and through the mid-upper gunner onto the floor and almost took the whole of the turret right off. And that caused a great deal of draft of course. And the first thing that the wireless operator, Bill Copley, went back…I couldn't go back at that stage because we went into this dive.

02:02 And that was when both Don Delaney and Alan Richie helped me to get it out, because it was just impossible, the centrifugal force was such that I couldn't do it on my own.

So you're saying it took three men to…

Alan got himself up, remarkably got himself up into the bomb aimer's department, so he was able to push

02:31 and Don and I were able to pull. Then Bill said, "Oh look, I'm afraid we've lost Joe." There was this great big hole where the turret was. But then when we got a little bit stabilised, a bit later on, he found Joe on the floor and helped him onto the bed

03:00 and he was wounded, gave him a shot of morphine, then we sort of continued on our merry way. So he was fairly oblivious to all that was going on. Until then it was a fairly normal trip.

And the bomb…

03:30 That had sort of worked itself loose and was rattling around somewhere…with the force of the chaps pulling and pushing…

The weather, there was one entry there just saying, "Bloody cold."

04:04 That might have only been the weather, or it might have been that the heating in the aeroplane packed up a bit, which made it so cold….for me to make a note of. So it could have been either one of those things. That it was so terribly cold

04:30 or it was just average cold but with no heating inside the aeroplane.

With Pathfinder Force, it was solely the Lancasters that you were flying?

Yes, the Lancasters all the time. It was Wellingtons and Halifaxs on 460 Squadron, but we didn't operate on Halifaxs, they were taken from us. Why they made the changeover, I don't know, but we were very pleased that they did. The Lancaster…although the Halifax people loved their aeroplane.

05:01 You talk to any Halifax pilot or crew member, they liked their aeroplane. We had a number of accidents when we were converting onto the Halifax, which may have been a reason. They had a bad…They used to get a tail storm, the tail design wasn't particularly good and they change it later.

It would be good to hear a bit about the Lancasters now.

05:30 **It was a seven-man crew. What was it like to be inside of one? What was the sensory experience of flying a Lancaster?**

It was very stark. Very stark. They were just two walls of metal, and there was a main spa that went through the aeroplane where the wing was.

06:00 You had to climb over that. The rear turret was down the back. Down the back also was an Elsen, which was a lavatory, then there was the top turret…Then there was the main spa and the photo flash hole.

06:31 Then there was the wireless operator's compartment on the left, with his radio sets. Then in front of him was the navigator with a little desk, a shaded lamp and his dials, his compass, his H2S screens. He

had a curtain around him,

07:00 because he had to have some light to do his air plots and check his maps. Then moving forward on the right hand side there was a panel of instruments, all engine instruments,

07:30 which were monitored by the flight engineer, who stood or did have a little jump seat alongside the pilot, which he could sit on if he wanted to, he stood there. And then on the left hand side was the pilot, the pilot and captain. Then down below,

08:00 down two steps was the escape hatch and in front of that was the front guns, the front turret and the bomb aimer's compartment. Talking about the escape hatch, one of the bad design things

08:30 on the Lancaster was the size of the escape hatch. Statistics purported to show that more men got out of a wounded Halifax than could get out of a wounded Lancaster because the escape hatch was smaller than in the Halifax.

09:02 And this was a cause for some contention at the Operational Research Establishment from a chap called Freeman Dyson who wrote an article about bomber command and about Air Marshall Harris, and he was very scathing

09:30 about Harris, about the command and about the results and what he claimed was its negligible effect on the outcome of the war.

But as far as you were concerned and the crew were concerned…what was your reaction to those sorts of issues?

I don't think we knew that it was too small. Those that got out of it got out of it, and those that didn't weren't there to tell us.

10:06 I think it was proven later on that the escape hatch of the Halifax was superior to that of a Lancaster, and more people were able to escape from a Halifax…

Now you mentioned the top gunner who got wounded.

10:35 **You mentioned that he was given a shot of morphine. What other first aid available and was there actually a stretcher or a bed…**

There was a stretcher, a bed, and we had a first aid kit…I never looked inside it. But it was fully stocked with morphine and bandages

11:01 and gel for burns….I never actually opened one to check on them. I trusted the medical people to see that it was right.

What were you told to do in the case of having to bail out and possible capture?

11:36 Well, we did carry maps that were on silk. They were sewn usually into the shoulder pads, as shoulder padding.

12:00 And we also carried a compass, which was usually fly buttons, brass fly buttons. And one of them had a little shank on it, and you put one on top of the other, and that would show you where north was. So you had those and you also had

12:30 some rations in the aeroplane which you could use. I'm just trying to think if you had anything with you…I don't think you did. And of course your instructions were to try and get away, to escape. But if you were captured, to give no other information than you number, rank and name.

13:03 And…that was all. But your job was to try and escape.

Was that possibility something that crossed your mind at times?

I had a dream that I was captured,

13:30 and I was taken to a railway station, and as I passed through the barrier - I was under guard - as I passed through the barrier, the ticket collector turned into an ape. But

14:00 from that date, I thought that if anything happened to me, I was going to be taken prisoner of war. I can't remember at what point that was…that was the only real dream I had of anything happening to me. I was very lucky.

14:36 **I also noticed in the log book, there was another operation where you received some fire, either from a fighter or from the ground, but there was some sort of fire that had to be extinguished?**

That was coming back from Karlsrue, I think…

15:10 And that was when Ed Werxler got wounded, a night fighter picked us up and shot us up. And Ed

Werxler in the front compartment was hit in the leg

15:32 and his turret was damaged and it was set on fire. He grabbed a fire extinguisher and it went off in his face and it badly damaged his eyes. And the fire was there, but he managed to put it out with the same fire extinguisher that had gone off in his face.

16:01 And that was the end of his operational flying when we got back. We landed away from…yeah, that was the time we landed at Oakington, which was quite close to a military hospital at St Ives, and he was taken to hospital. That was when he finished with the crew.

16:30 They didn't put him back on operations. That was when Alan Richie joined us. Ed got a DFM for that, a Distinguished Flying Medal, for putting out the fire and the other good things that he did that night.

How often did you come across night fighters?

17:02 **Were they a constant threat?**

Yeah, you'd probably see one most trips. If you were lucky…if you saw them and there was any cloud around, you made a dive for the cloud and lose them. A dive or a climb.

17:37 All I can say is fairly regularly you would be attacked by one.

And how well defended were Lancasters?

Well, we had the top guns and the four Brownings at the back. Later on we got a couple of canons

18:02 but compared to the Americans we were fairly lightly armed. We had two Brownings on the back, two on the top…for a long time, we didn't have any underneath,

18:30 no guns underneath. One of the favourite moves of the German night fighter was to fly below you. You wouldn't spot them, it was hard to look down, and they would gradually creep up on you and get below you and then they would tilt their nose up

19:00 and rake you from underneath. That was their favourite way of attacking because you didn't have guns underneath. And on nights, if you had to fly above cloud, on a night where there was a layer of cloud

19:33 and it was dark up top, you were silhouetted against a cloud and that was always a danger.

So were those Browning guns a deterrent at all?

Oh yes, those four at the back were pretty lethal. I think the guns up top were only two…

20:00 Yes, they were lethal enough, but a couple of cannons would have been better.

How long were you flying on most of these missions?

It would vary from four, four and a half hours

20:31 to say to St Lazare, or L'Orion. The Ruhr wasn't that far, four and a half or maybe five hours. You'd go to nine to Nuremberg or Munich, to Italy would have been about eight to nine. So it varied. The Italian trips were quite long, and into South Germany…they were pretty long trips.

21:03 The thing to do was to keep the crew alert all the way home, because when crews got tired, they could get picked off very quickly and very easily, and a lot were. The Germans knew that, and that's why they put their fighters up around the incoming aerodromes, they were…the Germans knew that.

21:30 **There was never an opportunity or a time when one could relax at all on those…**

No, we always had food, we always had a little hamper with us. A thermos, you could have tea, coffee or Bovril, a bar of chocolate and usually a piece of fruit as far as I can remember. We would eat that on the way back. We also had Benzedrine tablets.

22:01 We were given Benzedrine tablets, which of course is a drug. We were given those at briefing, and we were told the approximate time that you should take those. It was estimated at that point you would be feeling tired, these would give you a lift, but the effect should have worn off by the time you completed briefing back at base, so you would get a sleep.

22:34 You were given one or two or three or whatever it was. So we had those. Either Benzedrine or caffeine. They varied them.

And they were taken religiously….

I always took mine. I think all my crew did, the other people did. It was one of those things that you would grow into a habit of doing.

23:04 You were given it and it was supposed to be good for you. It wouldn't be today, you would be up on a charge, particularly if you were a footballer.

In what other ways would you be able to keep the crew alert, especially on the homeward leg?

You would call them up every now and again. “Hi Bob, how are you feeling?

23:30 Is Bill still awake?” It’s the captain’s job to see that the crew were all alert. I completely banned any smoking in the aircraft. Some captains didn’t. Captains were like society in general,

24:00 there were good captains and there were bad captains. It was interesting…you could almost tell a crew that was being badly captained. Something was always going wrong with that crew. It could be the engine didn’t start, or a crew member was sick, there was always some little thing.

24:30 And you knew that the crew….just wasn’t performing and you almost knew they were all doomed. I can remember two crews in particular, and they were…

And it was those sorts of things that…

A continuous run of aborted missions.

25:02 Or…aborted missions, or missions not completed, something….strange.

So you’re basically saying the teamwork wasn’t there, the morale, the heart wasn’t in it kind of thing? Was something spotted and dealt with?

Yes, occasionally it happened.

25:31 That navigator I told you about that I took when Bob Neilsen was away and had been in a dinghy. They should never have put him back onto operations. It was a bad decision by the commanding officer. But quite often, the doctor would keep a very close watch

26:01 on all the aircrew, and he would often advise the CO to take somebody off ops.

So to what extent was your role to be an advisor or a counsellor to…

I don’t think my chaps needed much counselling or advising. Yes, to some extent but one had to be careful not to heavy with them.

26:31 They were men, and in all cases but one, older than me. On the ground they could be a rough and tumble crew…we had a lot of fun together, but some of them went their own way. We all went our own way,

27:02 to some extent. Bob Neilsen and I did have some friends in common. And Alan Richie and I stayed with some people together, so we were a group of friends but we didn’t live in each other’s pockets.

27:30 **So having a good time on the ground helps you with…**

Yes, absolutely. I think if you’re at loggerheads with your crew or any member of your crew on the ground, it would affect your morale and your efficiency in the air. It certainly would, and you would have to get rid of any dissenting member of the crew.

So how did one let off steam once you were back?

28:02 Well, there was a certain amount of drinking. It depended….I didn’t drink a lot, but there were occasions when I got drunk, quite happily, both in the mess and outside. One usually had a girlfriend somewhere.

28:31 In most cases it was transitory, although a number of them married, a number of them broke up after being married. But in London, as I said I had relations there, they looked after me. I had a girlfriend towards the end

29:00 of my stay, we used to go to shows, go out to dinner. The theatres and cinemas started early, about four in the afternoon or something like that, and you might get a bit of dinner afterwards, then go dancing. So you tended to have fairly early nights.

29:31 There were nightclubs that stayed open late. There was a nightclub called The Embassy in Bond Street that I used to go to. Harry Roy used to play there.

What did Harry do?

Harry, of his day, was a great band leader. And Harold Gibson.

30:07 The big band era. There was a lot of life in London, a lot of life, and in Birmingham and Manchester, York, Cambridge, we used to go into Cambridge quite a lot, it was right near Warboys.

30:32 There was a lot of fun to be had and we had it.

We get that impression from the air force guys we’ve spoken to. How serious was your romance there?

It was quite serious for a while.

31:00 I came back to Australia. I had met Anne, I knew her. I came back and Anne was here and the other girl was in England. Anyway,

31:30 I married the Australian. I'm sure I made the right choice.

You said you only drank to excess a few times, but what hijinks did you see the other guys get up to? The kind of mischief you were witness to?

32:05 They didn't do anything that was really bad. There was a couple of hotels like the Regent Palace and the Strand Palace in particular where the Australians tended to congregate. They'd get a bit high and they'd have a game of football in the corridor. They might muck up a couple of the rooms…

32:34 which was not strictly right, but in the circumstances was forgivable. But my lot were a fairly sober bunch. They got up…they never did anything that I would categorise

33:00 as being reprehensible at all. Bob Neilsen had a girl down at Bournemouth and we used to go down there. He would stay with her parents. It was certainly no worse than what goes on today.

33:33 It's hard to think back…life was…while you were alive, it was great. It really was. It was something that you could never recapture. I mean, I think of those poor buggers up in New Guinea and the Solomons, and then later on in Korea…

34:05 Those of us who were in England, the death rate certainly in bomber command was high, very, very high, while you were alive you were living in comfort. And we got six days leave every six weeks in a civilised country.

34:30 In New Guinea they were serving months and months and months without any leave at all. We were very lucky with our circumstances, while we were alive.

It must have seemed a bit dreamlike in a way. You were going on these operations where

35:01 **chance of returning is slim, but when you are back it is absolutely civilised…**

Yes, that's absolutely true. It couldn't be better. You shared with the English the relatively small discomforts, which was…no butter, food rationing, of which there was relatively

35:30 little on the squadron. But all the theatres would going. I think in one six-day leave I went to about five theatres. I saw Vivian Leigh, I saw Ivan Nevaloe, I saw great theatre, great music hall. Night-clubs.

36:01 My cousins would take me to the Gargoyle Club and The Embassy, all on a few shillings a day.

There were tremendous losses as you said. How did you deal with seeing the board and the names…

36:30 Well, it is upsetting for a time, and then there was a officer whose job it was to go around to the hut and the rooms of the people that were lost and pick up their things and make an inventory of them, and you'd see that happening, and it was a bit distressing, but you tended to get used to it.

37:04 Not think too much about it. There was a degree of callousness I guess, but no different from being a doctor, dealing with death, or being a pathologist. Dealing with all these dead people, you don't know them…except for your friends and your crew, you didn't know these people.

37:32 One of the most distressing things for me was when I came back to Australia, and I was flying around on these….in a couple of places, I was put into a room and in the country town, Mildura was one place in particular that I remember,

38:03 it was announced, I don't know whether the radio or the newspaper, that I was prepared to meet the parents of people who were either there or had been lost. I was 22 and I had no experience in counselling or dealing with this,

38:31 and that distressed me. That was when I was back in Australia. Quite a few people…and I got a lot of letters, and I kept them, from people, "Can you tell me anything about our son who was lost on such and such a raid at such and such a time. Anything you can tell us about…" It was later on,

39:00 not at the time, that one had a realisation that they weren't just only these people, there were other people, their parents and their wives, that were feeling the pain.

Would it be fair to say that on a squadron you would not go out of your way to make friends with other crews?

39:30 It wasn't that at all. I think all of our crew, each member individually, had a friend in another crew. I had one chap, Bob Rogers, I don't know what happened to him…I knew him on 460 Squadron, he was in

another crew, and he and I used to go to a place called Holme On Spalding Moor.

40:03 Then when I left 460 Squadron, I left and that was that. Sometimes you roomed with somebody else, but…we made friends outside the crew, but the crew were the closest.

40:33 **Was it always the same ground crew or…**

No, the ground crew were pretty well the same. Yes, you would have a drink down at the local pub with them…I can only speak from my own experience, you tended not to see them on leave,

41:00 whereas you might see your own crew on leave. As I said, I spent some time with Bob Neilsen and Joe Gross and Alan Richie at various times at various places. Talking about that, those two cousins I had in London were both doctors as I mentioned, and the male doctor

41:32 was a bit of a snob. I was on leave, and I got home one day and he said, "Peter, I got a phone call for you. Somebody called Dorothy from Fulham rang you." Now Fulham now of course is very much upmarket, but Fulham in those days, it was sort of the East End almost.

Tape 8

00:39 **You mentioned how you were flying with Queenie, the Qs, that was with the Lancaster, your preference to the Q, the Queenies. Can you recall any other superstitions if you will…**

01:00 It wasn't really superstitions, it was just the fact that there was these coincidences. We weren't at all suspicious that if we didn't fly Q…There were a couple of occasions that were in the log book there where we were flying other aircraft because of damage to ours or it was unserviceable for some reason, and we flew another aeroplane. It didn't worry us at all.

01:30 We weren't particularly suspicious.

We were talking about the ground crew. What was the relationship like professionally?

It was good. We had no problems with the ground crew. As I said, we would have a few drinks together in the pub. We were in different messes of course,

02:02 unless they were ground crew officers. Or sergeants, when we were sergeants we were all in together. There wasn't an air crew mess as such, they didn't segregate us that way. With the Australians, there was no class or position segregation

02:31 or very much rank consciousness. But with the RAF, with the Royal Air Force people, there was much more class, rank and position consciousness. Even in war time, the class consciousness stood out

03:04 all the time.

Where did you stand in that respect? Did you see that as working against the effort in general?

I don't think it worked against the effort. It was just that the English people were used to it, they were used to an officer class and a serving class.

03:33 **You mentioned how before you left Australia you had that friendship with your wife-to-be. How often would you correspond with her, and also your family?**

I suppose I would write to the family probably once a month, every two or three weeks perhaps.

04:02 To Anne? I don't know that I wrote a tremendous amount. She developed other friendships while I was away, several of them, and I did, too. We weren't engaged or anything like that.

04:31 I was only 20 when I left, she was 18.

How much were you able to say in your letters? What would you tell them?

You would only tell things that had happened, not things that you thought might happen. I explained why I was going to Pathfinder,

05:00 I would explain that I had been out with my cousins. Dennis Warner, in his book, drew on the letters to my mother a great deal, because she kept him and we passed them onto him and I think that we have still got them.

05:36 **What was the food like, generally, in the air force?**

It wasn't too bad, particularly in the officers' mess. There was a lot of carbohydrates, there was a lot of bread. There was the odd egg,

06:01 there was baked beans, and there was Spam and Spam and Spam. Fruit? I can't remember a lot of fruit, there were vegetables. So it was fair average boarding school quality, and I had been at boarding school so I knew what that was like.

06:31 It wasn't anything special, but it was edible. We had mess stewards…we had a batman on 156 Squadron where I was commissioned, we had a batman to bring us a cup of tea in the morning and wake us up, press our clothes, clean our shoes…so as far as class consciousness was concerned,

07:00 we were conscious of the fact that we were a cut above the people below us because we carried on this tradition of having someone to look after us.

So you were commissioned as soon as you joined Pathfinder?

I was commissioned just before I went to Pathfinders. I became a pilot officer, and then…

07:32 two things about Pathfinder Force, it was the only formation in the air force that had a special badge. It was a golden eagle on the left breast pocket. And you got a quicker promotion. There were very few pilots in Pathfinder Force who was under a flight lieutenant.

08:03 And if you were a flight lieutenant when you went there, you were most likely promoted to squadron leader. I was flight lieutenant still. I didn't revert in rank to what was my sort of real rank…you were allowed to keep your rank.

08:30 But with the Pathfinder Award, you had to have done a certain amount of trips, and be in the opinion of your flight commander and the specialist officers, competent. You were then given a temporary award of the Pathfinder badge. It was not until you finished your tour that you got a permanent award.

09:01 And if by some chance you were injured, or you didn't finish your tour, you lost your Pathfinder badge. You had to finish your tour to keep it after the war, because it was the only formation in the air force

09:30 that had its badge, there was talk of taking the Pathfinder badge away, and there was such a performance, that was rescinded. And as a matter of interest, the governor of New South Wales, before was governor he was chief of the Australian Defence Force, Jim Rowland, Air Marshall Jim Rowland was on Pathfinder Force and he wore his

10:00 Pathfinder badge.

So you still wear it?

For the first time this year I didn't wear uniform on Anzac Day. But if I do wear a uniform, I will wear the Pathfinder badge.

10:30 **Why did you join Pathfinder Force? What was it about…**

I thought…I thought I was on a roll of good luck. I didn't particularly want to go to a training squadron, and I thought after I finished my extended tour it was possible that I might get an

11:02 interesting job, perhaps in transport command or something else. So I don't really know why…it was one of those silly decisions that you take, you don't really know the reason why.

11:30 **And it was unanimous, wasn't it? The whole crew, apart from Jim Swaine?**

Yes, except for Johnny Swaine, the rest decided to go.

Was there a round table at that time, do you remember?

We didn't sit down formally. I suppose at some stage…What happened was Hamish McHaddon

12:00 came to the squadron and he pulled me aside, and said, "Pete, would you like to come down to Pathfinder Force? This is what it means." I said, "Well, I will have to talk to the boys about it. I don't want to go alone. I'd like to go with them." So I suppose we chatted about it at some time, the next day or so, they said, "Yes, we will come, but John Swain doesn't want to come.

12:30 We will have to find a rear gunner." And then Ascombe joined us…then they wanted an all-Australian crew to come back to Australia, so he left, but he was killed a few weeks later…

So just to be asked to be a part of Pathfinder, how did that sound?

Oh, we were flattered. We were quite flattered.

13:00 But you know…I suppose we were flattered, but it is hard to remember your feelings of so long ago. I guess we were proud.

You mentioned at Miranda, how you passed below average…

13:40 Service flying, I was average, OTU. I was average and off the squadron I was exceptional. I'd rather be exceptional off the squadron than at FTS.

So how do you explain that, going from below average and then in a matter of a year…

14:00 Look, I think the whole point was that I was still alive at the end of my tour. Anyway, it's nice to have in the log book.

So by the end of your tour, when you were exceptional, how do you think you had developed? What did you learn from that intense period of operations?

14:33 Quite early on I learned to be self-reliant, but the thing that I learn the most was leadership. To be able to lead a small group, there was only six men and myself, to be able to lead those people…

15:10 and maintain a friendship with them, but with them recognising that I was their leader. That taught me a lot.

15:31 I learnt to be cool in a stressful situation. And the interesting thing is I think that even in later life, long after the air force, I was able to be cool and…

16:05 cool in difficult circumstances, but strangely enough to be volatile in minor circumstances. Circumstances which I would get worried and annoyed and cross about, which were relatively unimportant matters.

16:32 But when something important happened or a big decision had to be made, I was very much better and I tended to get upset about minor things. Still do, still do. but I think I can cope with the people problems…

17:01 **You think getting peeved with the trivial is the bi-product of coping with the big stuff?**

Yes, yes, I think I was very lucky in the quality of the people that were in the crew. And later on, when people made stupid mistakes or said stupid things or did stupid things,

17:32 I would get cross with them.

Do you want to tell us about the end of Pathfinder? When you finished your tour…

What happened was the…

18:00 by about mid-1943, or just before mid-'43, it seemed to become evident to the governments, America, British, Australia, that there was every hope of us winning the war in Europe.

18:31 And if so, they would be able to release forces to undertake the defeat of Japan. But to do that, they had to have more equipment, more people and so on. The Americans were all right, they had plenty of production…

19:03 And they were going to be the leaders anyway in the assault on Japan. But the Brits didn't want to be left out of it, and so it was decided that there would be a component of the Royal Air Force with the military onslaught

19:32 onto Japan, which presumably was going to be under the command of Macarthur. And so they decided to have an RAF component of that force, which was given the name of Tiger Force. And it was envisaged at the time the build up of the forces in the Pacific,

20:01 for the onslaught of Japan would take place, a great deal of the Far East would still be under Japanese domination. So the aircraft who were going to be involved, were going to be Tiger Force, would have to fly from east to west instead of the normal route west to east.

20:33 Would have to fly from east to west rather than from west to east. The prevailing winds are usually west to east, and that's why all the record-breaking flights from England to Australia went that way. And no single aircraft, and single crew, had done the whole flight from England to Australia, from east to west, and they wanted to make sure that it could be done. So it was agreed

21:02 that a crew would fly a proving flight from England to Australia, from east to west. For two reasons – firstly, to prove that it could be done, and there was no doubt that it could be done, but how it could be done and where they would have to refuel and all that sort of thing. And the second thing was,

21:30 if they did send a force of Lancasters, or four-engine bombers, from Europe to the east, and Australia being the largest land mass and the place where most of the servicing had to be done, at least the aircraft maintenance units and manufacturing units in Australia should see a Lancaster anyway and get to know the aeroplane itself…

22:00 So that was why they wanted to fly an aeroplane…a) a proving flight, secondly to let the manufacturers and maintenance people to see the aeroplane, so that was agreed. Then they had to find a crew to do it. There weren't many, except at 460 Squadron, there weren't many all-Australian crews operating.

22:31 And mine was an all-Australia crew, except for Reg Askin in the rear turret. And I had just about almost

finished my second tour, my extended tour, so I got the gurney, and was posted back. And as I told you, they wanted me to go at one particular time and I still had three trips

23:00 to finish my second tour, and DCT Bennett said no, and so I did my three trips. So I went up and picked up a new aeroplane off the production line, up at Woodford in Cheshire at Avro works [aircraft manufacturer]. Flight tested it together with Bob Neilsen and Bill Copley. Bob on navigation equipment

23:32 and Bill on the radio equipment, and we got briefed at Preswick, which was the dropping off point on the Transatlantic run, Preswick in Scotland. Got briefed at Australia House and off we went.

24:04 Our first leg was from Preswick to Toronto, non-stop. We did that, and we put the aircraft in for a couple of days to have it serviced. And the aircraft was 'tropicalised'. The other thing that it had,

24:30 it had the rear turret removed and the top turret removed, to give it a bit of streamlining.

What do you mean by 'tropicalised'?

I don't know what they do, but they tropicalise an engine to make it work better in the Tropics.

25:00 They put an overload tank in our bomb bay so that we had plenty of fuel. And then from Toronto….we had a couple of days there while they checked it all out, and we flew to San Francisco. I took a safety pilot with me who knew the airways. He flew with communications,

25:30 and I wasn't, nor with Bill Copley, the wireless operator, familiar with. So we went to San Francisco, stayed there a day I think, then we took off. We went to Hawaii. To Hawaii, we landed on route, we had a bad storm over the Pacific, so we landed

26:00 at a little island called Palmyra, where we had some breakfast. We went on to Canton Island, went to Fiji, Brisbane, Sydney. That all went quite smoothly. Don Delaney, of course with Claude Spencer, who joined us for the trip, he had been our rigger on 460 Squadron, our airframe rigger, airframe mechanic. They serviced the aircraft and did a marvellous job servicing it

26:32 with just what equipment they were able to carry, what they could get at the places we came down at.

That must have been a treat, visiting those places in the Pacific you hadn't flown to before. What was that like?

The only problem we had was that tropical storm, and I hadn't flown in a tropical storm.

27:03 We had a bit of trouble with the engines at one point, and some emo [?] fire, which was all right, we had struck that over the Channel. But the engines playing up were a bit of a problem, but they came good again.

27:30 **So that is the sort of things you would be reporting on?**

Well, one of the things that had happened on the trip across the Atlantic, I had lost our trailing aerial, and that gave power to the radio. And across the Pacific, I also lost an aerial in that tropical storm. Both aerials had been lost.

28:00 So we were rather short on communications, so that was a bit of a problem. We picked up a couple of passengers in America. Lord Burley, he travelled with us, and Group Captain Wincott, both from the Ministry of Aircraft Production. And they came out to talk to the Australians about building Lancasters.

28:31 So they were with us, plus my crew. Everything went well, except for that one episode where we again lost our aerials. It was good, it went well.

So you ended up in Sydney?

29:02 We made the landfall in Australia at Brisbane, then we flew down later that day to Sydney, yes. Then a day or so later we went down to Melbourne.

So as you were aware it could be done. So what were the findings, what was the assessment?

29:30 The assessment was that a) that it could be done, there was no need for anything really special, except for basically radio equipment that could ride the American air range and tropicalise the aeroplane. We also said that we thought it was probably unnecessary to remove

30:00 all the armament. Probably not carry the guns, but leave the turrets in place, we thought that would be okay. We put in a report and we told them how many air miles to the gallon we got, and what speeds we flew out. We put in a fairly detailed report. Tom Delaney and I did most of the reporting, Bob Neilsen, too, and

30:30 Bill Copley on radio. So we had a combined report which presumably went back to England. Tom Delaney put in a very comprehensive one of the aircraft engine performance.

And what was the general mood of that journey after the stress and tension of bomber command?

31:01 We were fairly relaxed. Certainly Doc Page and Joe Gross were pretty relaxed. They looked after our luggage. The extraordinary thing, looking back, was how they allowed that aeroplane to fly out here with only one pilot. Looking back, it was an extraordinary decision.

31:30 They could have easily given me a second pilot, but they didn't. So the only person who could fly the aeroplane was me. I mean, there is nothing difficult about flying straight and level, there is nothing difficult about that at all. But if something had gone wrong with me in flight….

And you had those two dignitaries on board…

32:02 Yes, I suppose Wincott, but Wincott was a group captain and I don't even know whether he was in flying practise. He was in the Ministry of Aircraft Production, but he didn't have a flying job. And that was replicated, even more extraordinarily, when I was flying around Australia and taking civilians up

32:31 who had brought a war bond, and I packed 30 or 40 people into the Lancaster. We didn't have seats, they sat on the floor or on the bed or the main spa. Didn't have parachutes, couldn't have got out anyway, and no seatbelts.

33:01 Extraordinary allowances…and then I was allowed to low fly and do all sorts of other things, and so thinking back on it, I don't think anybody gave much thought to the safety aspects. Either of the flight out or flying around Australia.

Flying across the Pacific, hours and hours of the same thing, staying awake must have been difficult at times?

33:36 Staying awake? Well, I know on at least one occasion I got out of the seat, and went back for a leak anyway, and I think I left Don or somebody sitting in the seat. As I said, flying straight and level was no problem. The problem was that I had also lost the use of the automatic pilot…I think that across the Atlantic also…

34:04 so I flew it hands-on all the way, which is something you would never do today. It's quite interesting to think back on.

So once you returned home, what did the air force have in store for you then?

I don't think they were

34:30 quite sure what they had in store for me. They sent me down to test & ferry flight at Laverton, where I put two…the commanding officer and his deputy, John Larue and Jim Harper, I put them solo on the Lancaster. And then they painted the Lancaster and on Australian colours,

35:00 gave it Australian identification, then they planned this War Loan tour. I did some demonstration flights with the governor of Victoria and the governor of New South Wales, Mrs Curtin, the prime minister's wife.

35:30 Then I flew the prime minister over to Perth, John Curtin, and planned these War Loan tours, of which I think I did three. Just flying around taking people for flights and demonstrating the aeroplane and generally having a good time.

36:00 **The prime minister didn't sit on the floor of the plane….**

No, we gave him the bed. It was a pretty bumpy trip across the Nullarbor. A couple of his people got sick, so we put them off at Kalgoorlie, and they got the train from Kalgoorlie to Perth. But John Curtin lasted the distance. He was a very nice man. Gave us a very nice couple of dinners

36:30 in Perth, and then later in Canberra at The Lodge [Prime Minister's residence]. A very nice man.

Do you recall any specific conversations you had with John Curtin?

No, not really. He wrote a very nice letter to my mother, which I've still got, but I don't remember any specific conversations. At that time, I was toying with the idea of going into the Department of External Affairs, the diplomat corps.

37:00 And he said that if that was what I decided, to let him know, but I decided against it. I didn't feel like always being a civil…as attractive as the diplomatic corps was, you were still a civil servant.

As this was a War Loans tour, when you weren't flying, what were you doing?

37:34 I was down at East Sale as chief ground instructor for a time. Then I was a flying instructor down there on Beauforts, which was quite pleasant. I used to be able to get up to Melbourne. Then I was posted to the directorate of flying safety.

38:00 For a time I was in the Department of Public Relations. I think that was in between War Loan tours, just as something for me to do. Then I went into the directorate of flying safety, and there I was engaged in writing manuals of…I can't remember what they were about. I've still got some of the conference notes,

38:30 we were always having conferences, as always happens in headquarters. So I was doing that and then I got discharged, in January ’46.

Just going back to the east west flight, was any official reception when you returned?

39:01 **Either at Amberley or Brisbane or Sydney?**

The official receptions we got, when we were flying around on the War Loans tour, and getting into various places, they often had a reception and blew the trumpet and make a speech about the War Loan and the war effort.

39:32 When I eventually got to Laverton there was quite a lot of press and radio and so on. Then a few days later the lord mayor gave a reception. A couple of the crew got engaged at various points. There was a couple of parties.

40:01 **So were you required to make speeches?**

Yes, that was it. I had made one speech in England. This girlfriend that I had over there, her father had a factory, it was at Wembley Stadium, and he had a factory there, making something, and

40:30 he asked me one day would we talk to the assembled workers in the factory. That was the first speech I’d given in my whole life.

Tape 9

00:35 **Now, you did a flight to Japan for BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Forces]?**

Yes, it was quite early in the occupation. I flew up with Air Marshall Scherger, he was an air commodore at that stage, and he was based on Labuain.

01:00 This was when I was at public relations, and so they wanted someone to go from public relations and I went with him. That was most interesting, because we were there about a week after the surrender. What he went for was to find an aerodrome that the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] component

01:30 of what was going to be BCOF could use. And so we looked at a couple of aerodromes there. Scherger was the one who was important. On the way up there we called in at Manila, where a number of the Australian POWs [Prisoners of War] had been repatriated to, and to Okinawa. Yeah, it was quite a revelation for me

02:00 to see these places. I hadn’t been in the south west Pacific. And to see some of these prisoners of war who were now being…they were being built up there, their strength was being built up with food and exercise and so on. And the remarkable thing was…

02:32 not the complacency, but the acceptance, the acceptance of the Japanese of having lost. And the sort of reception given to us by the odd Japanese person that we met. And their attitude was…

03:02 they might have lost the war, but they still had a lot of…not exactly ‘fight’, but they were not going to act like a beaten people. They still had their emperor.

03:32 And although they were going to be under the control of Macarthur and his staff, they didn’t…they weren’t going to act as a beaten people. They still had

04:02 hopes of being…in fact, one person said, “You’ve still got a land in Australia which we could use.” They didn’t seem to realise…they must have realised that they had lost the war. That was the impression that I got.

04:34 That was just in Tokyo, I didn’t get much further than Tokyo.

So as far as selecting the airfields…

That was not the job of me, but of Air Commodore Scherger

05:02 and the staff that he had taken with him. And he put in a report on a place he visited called Irramakawa [?], and a couple of other airfields, and presumably he put in a report, but it had nothing to do with me. It wasn’t long before I was out of the air force anyway.

What plane did you fly?

A Lockheed Loadstar, which was a

05:30 bit better than a Lockheed Hudson. A good aeroplane.

Had you flown one before?

No, but I did a conversion…I actually didn't go up as the captain. I really flew up as the second pilot, which is what…he knew the Pacific and he had flown Loadstars before. It wasn't my job to be

06:00 a pilot, really. I went up as a member of Scherger's staff, his sort of public relations officer, weaning me into journalism.

So when were you discharged?

In January, 1946. I went straight onto the Argus. I had a job on the newspaper, the Argus,

06:32 where my mother went after she was discharged from the army. She was in public relations, and the head of public relations was Errol Knox, and Errol Knox became the managing editor of the Argus. So when my mother was discharged he grabbed her and put her in as the woman's editor of the Argus,

07:02 where she was. Interestingly enough, she had as her secretary Charmain Clift was on her staff. Charmain had been in the army and the assistant general manager of the Argus was a Howard Kingman, who had been a brigadier I think,

07:30 and Charmain took to being on his staff, because she was in the AWAS. So he gave her a job on the Argus and she became my mother's secretary. And that is where the romance started with George Johnson…

Did you know her personally?

Yes, I knew Charmain, my mother knew her better. I had more to do with George Johnson,

08:02 who was also there. He had been a war correspondent of course and gone back…and he was editing a magazine called The Australasian Post.

So what were you doing there?

I was an assistant to the general manager. Not the assistant general manager, but an assistant to the general manager.

08:30 And then I got out of that as soon as I could, then went onto the editorial staff where I was a general reporter but specialising in aviation. Civil aviation was just sort of coming back at that stage. Ansett was flying and Australian National Airlines, and Qantas

09:00 and Imperial Airways. So civil aviation was starting to be regenerated.

Was that the only way you stayed in touch with aviation?

At that time, yeah. I wasn't that interested in…I didn't want to be an airline pilot. I didn't want to be a pilot in the air force. All those sort of things were to me rather restrictive.

09:34 So…I wanted to be a journalist at that stage, and later on I developed my own business. You probably know this story.

10:00 And I got engaged, and a week after we got engaged, she got polio. That meant obviously that we couldn't get married. So that went on for nearly five years, and in that time I started my publishing business, because we couldn't get married, I didn't have any marital responsibilities,

10:30 I only had to look after myself. She had a family that could look after her, which they did.

And how expansive did your publishing business become?

I ended up….I had a Sunday newspaper called The Sunday Observer, which I had bought

11:01 in a very rundown condition. It was run by a chap called Maxwell Newton. That's quite a story. So I had that Sunday newspaper. I had a daily newspaper called Daily Commercial News, which was a specialist newspaper in shipping and trade. And I had about 40 or 50 other publications. All business-to-business. I had one in travel, I had one in computers,

11:30 I had one in hospitals, I had one in aviation, I had eight tourists guides, one in each capital city of Australia, plus Darwin and Canberra. I had five suburban newspapers, community newspapers. I had an office in every state.

12:00 I was the major shareholder…I had an English partner, we were equal partners with a couple of junior partners in Singapore and in Hong Kong, where we published business to business publications, again in travel, computers, communications, tourist guides. So we replicated the publications I had in Australia in Hong Kong and Singapore.

12:31 So it was quite extensive. At its peak I had about 320 on staff in Australia, plus about 60 or 70 in Asia. The Herald and Weekly Times had a small interest in the business, which they wouldn't sell back to me under the old management.

13:04 When Rupert took over the Herald and Weekly Times, and I had known him, not intimately, but we knew

each other. And he agreed to sell the Herald and Weekly Times share back to me, screwed me hard for it, but all I was interested in was getting that share back. It was only 20 percent. As he said, “Peter, what is the use of a 20-percent share in a private company?”

13:33 So I brought that back and I owned it 100 percent until I sold it, when I was 73 in 1993. We also had published in New Zealand…when I was talked into selling

14:00 by my accountant, who said, “Peter, there is a time to buy and a time to sell. And now is the time for you to sell.” I sold the New Zealand business and I sold the Asian, Hong Kong, Singapore, to my partner who was a large English publisher, I sold the part to him.

14:30 I divested myself of it over 10 years.

So what is your role in the company now?

I haven’t got any role. I stayed on the board of the company that brought the Australian business for five years, and then in 1998 I retired from that. I brought back, with a young man, who was the nephew of my war-time bomb aimer, Alan Richie,

15:01 he wanted to get into publishing. So between us we brought the tourist guides back and he runs them out of Sydney. I own half of it and he owns half of it, but he runs it, I don’t do a thing. So I’ve got a couple of boards now and that keeps me busy. And grandchildren, wife, I’m enjoying life.

15:31 **Tell me about being a trustee of the Shrine of Remembrance?**

Well, after the war they wanted to have a memorial for the Second World War attached to what was the Shrine of Remembrance, which had been established to commemorate the First World War. And I was asked to go on the committee of

16:01 the team, or the committee of the people who were going to raise money for this Second World War Memorial. There was a competition for the design of it. I was quite well known to the deputy chairman of the Shrine.

16:30 The chairman at that time was Sir Edmund Herring, who was the chief justice ant the lieutenant governor, and the deputy chairman was Colonel Camsley, and he asked me to go on the committee, which I did, and we raised the money and they had the competition, and they built the forecourt and the cenotaph and the flagpoles, which became the Second World War Memorial.

17:08 One of the trustees was Admiral Sir John Collins and he had served in the First World War and also in the Second World War, he was commander of the navy. But he was made the Australian high commissioner in New Zealand

17:31 and the constitution of the trustees provided said that when a trustee no longer lived in Victoria, they had to retire as a trustee. So he had to retire and that meant there was a vacancy on the trust. Colonel Camsley and Sir Edmund Herring

18:02 asked me to become a trustee, so I became a trustee, and I stayed there for 44 years as a trustee. Then when Sir Edmund Herring retired, he got sick and tired, Colonel Camsley became the chairman

18:30 and I was asked to become the deputy chairman. So I was deputy to Camsley, he got a knighthood. Then he became 90, and he said, “Peter I am going to retire as chairman. I’m recommending to the government that you be the chairman.” So he did that and I became the chairman. And I had a deputy chairman who had been a

19:00 submarine commander. Bill Little John, who was the brother of Bethney Little John, with whom I used to motor, who was with me on course at Bradfield Park. We used to motor to and from Sydney on those weekend leaves. But Bethney was killed.

19:30 Bill Little John was submarine commander and got a Distinguished Service Cross for it. Bill got cancer and regrettably died. I still miss Bill, he was a great, very, very good, personal friend. Then Dagus Might became chairman. Then the government decided to make some changes

20:02 and when the new government came in, we all got the boot and they appointed other people as trustees. They reduced the number of trustees. We had been appointed for life and they changed that, the whole thing changed. But by that time we had put in frame the enhancement of the shrine,

20:33 so they were able to do the things they’ve done just recently.

Can you give me an idea of what else in your role as chairman you would be involved in, as regards to the Shrine, the development of the Shrine?

21:01 I think when I became chairman, along with the other trustees, we initiated a number of things that have been carried on. For example, we initiated volunteer guides. The only people who had been

21:30 at the Shrine before were the commissionaires, who were appointed and basically, to some extent, part of the police force. There was a Shrine guard, who guarded the Shrine, an armed guard who guarded

the Shrine 24 hours a day, and they were part of the police force. And then there was the commissionaires

22:00 who were members of the core of commissionaires, and if anybody, if people came to the Shrine and they had the time, the commissionaires would try and show them around, but there were only two of them on duty at any time. So we initiated volunteer guides, which were quite important. But the big thing was

22:30 to decide that the Shrine should do more than just be a memorial. Because if the people go to the Shine…as so many people have emigrated to Australia, and as the young people grew up, you could look at this thing and say, "Well, what is a memorial for? What does it do?" And so we decided…

23:00 we formed a committee for the future to decide what we would do with the Shrine, and it was at stage that we thought we should be able to do something in the under-croft, underneath. All that was underneath the Shrine was a heap of rubble, apart from the crypt of course. But all around the crypt it was just a heap of rubble.

23:30 So we had an honorary architect who advised us that, "Yes, we could do something with the under-croft, but we would have to strengthen the terraces." There was concrete cancer and this sort of thing. So really we got moving and got an appeal going and got the money. I went to the government, Joan Kirner was premier at the time,

24:00 I said, "Joan we want 3 million dollars." She said, "Peter, you must be laughing, I haven't got 3 million dollars to give you. But I will give you a million and a half if you will raise the other million and a half." So we set about doing that. We worked very hard to raise that money, to

24:32 get the under-croft…to get the terraces strengthened and rebuilt, and we'd got that far when basically we were removed and a new set of people came in as trustees. But I had already been able to get 5 million dollars for

25:00 the enhancement, quite apart from the 3 million we got to do the terraces. I had got 5 million dollars from Peter Costello, from the Federation Fund, and we had that money. And we had still about 500,000 over from the money we raised for the terraces. So we had gone along way, putting in place the enhancements to the Shrine.

25:30 There were lots of other relatively minor things that we'd done, but those were the major things.

Thank you, it's been very, very interesting.

INTERVIEW ENDS