

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Kenneth Stanton (Ken) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 8th July 2004**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2158>

### Tape 1

- 00:47 **Ken, thanks so much for your time today and sharing with us. Can you give us an overview of your life for about ten minutes? No details at this point in time. But just beginning from where you were born, where you went to school**
- 01:00 **and where you served and pretty much ending up where you are now.**
- Oh well, I was born in Marrickville and moved from there to Coogee when I was about six. I went to the Marist Brothers. They call it Marcellin now, college in Randwick. Did my Leaving [Certificate] there. And then I was apprenticed at Washington Souls Pharmacy.
- 01:30 I left them and enlisted at Woolloomooloo. I went to Bradfield Park initial training and down to Melbourne. And went across to San Francisco in Matsonia. From there up to Vancouver, Edmonton. And
- 02:00 air observer school in Quebec. And departed from Halifax, then went across in the Louis Pasteur. Landed in Brighton. Went from Brighton down to Wales and did some night training there. And then we went up to
- 02:30 the OTU [Operational Training Unit] in Lichfield, on a conversion unit and then onto 101 Squadron. Or in reverse actually went to 7th Squadron as PFF [Pathfinder Force] and then went to 101 Squadron then back to 7. Then home on the Dominion Monarch through the Panama Canal.
- 03:00 And back in Sydney.
- 03:30 (BREAK)
- 04:00 (BREAK)
- 04:30 **So you were married just after the war.**
- Yeah, married as soon as I got back actually, about a fortnight after I got back. We were engaged already. And then I went back to Washington Souls.
- 05:00 Oh I worked for Souls. From then on I went to a place called Barraba out near Tamworth. And we were there until our eldest son was coming to high school and there as no high school so we came back to Sydney. And went to down to
- 05:30 Bulli and worked there. Then came back to Sydney and worked in different pharmacies till eventually I went with one that I stayed with until I retired. And after I retired I came down to Canberra. And we've been here ever since.
- 06:00 **Children, you've had one son?**
- No I've got two sons and a daughter. And the two sons are here in Canberra. The daughter's in Melbourne.
- Grandkids?**
- Yeah I've got two grandchildren. They're both here. Oh no they're not, I'm sorry. Wait up. Oh hang on. I've got one two three, I've got four grandchildren. Getting away on me. There's two
- 06:30 in Melbourne and there's two up here.
- Excellent and thank you for sharing all that. Now to travel back to the very beginning. What are your very first memories of growing up?**
- Well first memories of growing up were at Marrickville. My Dad died when I was about two years old and I can just remember the surroundings of Marrickville, a very industrial area.

07:00 And also there was a little shop in front of the home where Madam Clubert, some French woman did some hem stitching or something or rather. But I was fascinated by her. But I don't remember a great deal more about Marrickville than that.

**How did your mum cope after your dad's death?**

Oh I

07:30 think the old man had a - they were all New Zealanders except I was born over here. He was manager of a butter factory in Te Puke in New Zealand. And he came over here and I think he was something to do with a milking machinery over here. So I think they were, without being well off, I think they were reasonably

08:00 okay. And then the boys - I'm the youngest one and the next one was six years older than me so there were some boys much older than me. So they were working, two of them were working anyhow. And I think that helped. But we moved from Marrickville when I was about six to Coogee and I have a much more vivid recollection of Coogee.

08:30 **Did your mum ever marry after your dad's death?**

No, no she didn't.

**What did she tell you about your dad?**

Nothing virtually. We were a fairly close family but very private individually, that's the strange side of it. We didn't dwell on the past at all.

**Do you know why your mum and dad came to Australia from New Zealand?**

He got

09:00 tuberculosis which most of the people involved with dairy seemed to succumb to in those days. And New Zealand's climate's pretty hard so he was advised to come over here. Better climate. But apparently he was pretty far gone because he didn't last very long. I guess if I was

09:30 only two when he died.

**After Marrickville you went to?**

Coogee.

**What do you remember of Coogee?**

Oh well the beaches of course, the swimming and all that sort of thing. Used to be a weekend thing - as I say I was the youngest. We used to all go down to the beach in the morning and it was a pretty

10:00 regular thing and I thoroughly enjoyed it of course. And I started school there and went to - gee I can't remember the convent - but anyhow went there. Didn't have pre school in those days, it was infants. And I was there until - I got to sixth class and then I went to Clovelly - I can't remember the name of the

10:30 convent there either but anyhow, and then I went from there to Marcellin College in Randwick and I did my leaving there. And my memories of all that of course, are cricket and hand ball and tennis. That sort of thing.

**I'll just ask you a few questions up to there. Firstly, do you know why you moved from Marrickville to**

11:00 **Coogee?**

No I don't. As I say I was too young to have that discussed with sit down and mind your own business. But I presumed it was - it was quite a nice area but it was very much an industrial area and I think they probably felt that - there were better places to live. But I really don't know because as I say, I lived virtually

11:30 in the home so the outside didn't really affect me.

**Coogee these days is quite built up with units and stuff. But what are your memories of Coogee as far as layout?**

Well comparing it to the last time I saw it - do you know Coogee? Well you wouldn't know Coogee at all. Now Alison Road goes from

12:00 the cliff face basically in Coogee right through past the Randwick Racecourse. When we went there there was a huge gully, sand bottom to it, between half a mile of it I suppose. And at the back of us there was a huge area with a convent on it and that was all that was there. And there were no cars, virtually none.

12:30 There was the tram. And while we were there they brought on the new invention, the buses. And everyone wanted to have a go riding in a bus. Yeah, my recollections were at school basically with the sport. And using the beach. And I used to of an afternoon, on the way home from school go down to the beach and the fishing boats'd come in with the

13:00 fish and I'd spend time watching them. Yeah that's basically it.

**When you were a little boy what did you want to be when you grew up?**

Oh I don't remember ever having any - probably if anything I had - the eldest brother was a solicitor and I probably thought - not really. Apart from anything else it was the middle of the Depression

13:30 and I was starting to know what was going on. What the Depression was 1929, around about that area, so I was just going to high school. So in those days it was a matter of not what you wanted to be but what you could get. I can remember that very distinctly from my elder brothers. They didn't go into what they went into - the eldest one did - but the others

14:00 didn't go into what they wanted to. They got into what they could.

**So what were the names of your brothers?**

I had three brothers and a sister. The eldest one was Bill, the next one was Garnet and everyone called him Joe at his request. I don't know where Garnet came from - it's the only one in the

14:30 blood line that I've heard of. And then there was Roy, he was six years older than me and the others were eighteen months and so on. Oh and the sister was Doris. Doris Melvina. I know the name Melvina came from an aunt. She was conveniently called Mel.

**Did Kenneth come from somewhere?**

No I don't think so. Dad's name

15:00 was Morris. He must've had a second name. I can't remember that. But the uncles, no I can't remember any uncles with a Kenneth in it. It was a real brumby I think.

**Your siblings were a fair bit older than you. Did you spend time with them**

15:30 **or play with them?**

No they were all too - as I say the next one was six years older and Bill was - oh he must've been - oh I don't know. He was doing an articled clerk at the time so he was definitely grown. He'd been to Joey's [St Joseph's] so he did his leaving there. So he must've been

16:00 seventeen or eighteen when I was - God, he must've been - I don't know, I can't work that one out. But he was very much an adult so - I always looked upon him as a Dad, he definitely took my Dad's place. And the second one, he was a victim of the Depression and he went in the bush up in Coonamble.

16:30 In the hope of getting a job which he did. And Roy he came through just towards the end of the Depression and he went into the army and back tracking a bit, being a bit garbled about it - but Bill went into the air force too as an adjutant, he became an adjutant. Garnet had a

17:00 bus run out at Cabramatta. Roy went into the army, he went up to New Guinea.

**Bill, the eldest brother, how did he in some way fill the fatherly role in respect to you?**

Oh I could always felt like I could go to Bill and not always get the answers I wanted.

17:30 Garnet I - we were all very good - we didn't quarrel or anything like that. Got on very well. We all led very private lives, I don't know why. But we didn't discuss things with each other and that sort of thing. I don't know, that's something I never could understand. My wife could never understand it either. She came from the exact opposite.

**School**

18:00 **for you. Infants school - what are your memories of the Catholic education system?**

I don't really remember anything very specific other than the fact that I enjoyed it. Seemed to be very happy and nobody stood over you or anything, cause they were all nuns there. No they seemed to be - my memory of it's very very happy.

**The nuns seemed to also have fairly strict discipline.**

18:30 **Do you remember that?**

No not with us, not with the kids. I think they may have with the girls and that later and I know some pretty horror stories about the orphanages and that. But my recollection of the nuns at St. Bridget's - got it - they were lovely. I was very happy there, really was.

19:00 **Were you a good student?**

No just run of the mill. I got through the intermediate. Six Bs I think it was and I got through the leaving much the same, about five Bs or something like that.

**And sport was important to you?**

Yeah I enjoyed cricket and we used to have what was called hand ball there. But it was like, three walls. The backs are

19:30 open and the end wall is quite tall. You'd had a small rubber ball and you used to belt that with your hand and it'd ricochet off - the same as squash only it was - I've never seen it anywhere else but they had this thing in the school yard there and we used to you know, whenever you could get on you'd have a game. But other than that the cricket, the football. Yeah we used to play in the Catholic

20:00 Colleges competition at Lewisham, Ryde. I can't remember there was only about - I can only remember Lewisham and Ryde and Randwick - oh there was someone else too. I don't know, I can't remember that one.

**And how did you get to the games?**

There was always some good hearted person that would come along. Eventually there

20:30 was a mature student - this was when I was not at the primary school, this was in the high school. That's getting ahead of myself. Shall I skip that and go on later?

**Okay we'll go back to that one.**

Yeah, well in the primary school you didn't go anywhere very much. We walked to school of course. That was probably a twenty minute walk. But that was normal for those days.

21:00 **When you were at primary and infants' school, did you have a school uniform?**

No no. No I don't think you could afford them in those days.

**What would you wear?**

Oh God, I can't remember that. I don't remember.

**Did you have shoes?**

Shorts. Oh yes we had shoes, but we had shorts, I can remember that. But I don't know must've been some sort of a shirt, I just don't remember that that's all. Doesn't register.

21:30 **What sort of mischief did you get up to as kid?**

I think we were reasonably well behaved. We used to - there was a shopping centre close by St. Bridget's down at what was called the loop. And of course we used to dart down there in the lunch hour. And we used to make a short cut across the lawns of the church

22:00 and eventually made a path in there. And the Parish Priest objected. And he let the edict 'you don't do that'. Which we ignored and he had a walking stick and I got it across my backside from him. I didn't go across the path any more. Actions speak louder than words. He was

22:30 a crotchety old thing. He'd been in the First World War as a chaplain. I can remember that quite vividly. Other than that, I don't remember getting up to any mischief.

**Did this parish priest talk about his experiences?**

Oh no, no, in those days they didn't talk about anything. If they didn't say it from the pulpit, they didn't talk to you. I never met him other than via his walking stick.

23:00 Remote control.

**What would he wear, this parish priest?**

Oh it was the ordinary black trousers and coat thing and the dog collar. That was the traditional thing. He was all right.

**And you went to church obviously?**

Yeah, used to go to church on a Sunday

23:30 morning. Walk to St. Bridget's.

**Was there Sunday School and those sorts of things?**

I don't ever remember going to Sunday school. No, I don't remember that. We used to have an hour a week or something at school, religious training, religious teaching. And we always knocked off at twelve o'clock.

24:00 Had a short Hail Mary or something, I don't know, I can't remember that. I didn't object but it doesn't stick in my mind particularly.

**Was religion important to your mum?**

I don't think so. She used to go to church and all that. But no religious things around the house. She had rosary beads and we

24:30 all did. But I don't ever remember any religious pictures or anything around the place. We didn't say grace before meals or anything like that. Yeah she used to pull you up rather smartly if you said anything that was - any sort of a slight to religion or to religious people. But no we didn't say the rosary at home.

25:00 Never thought anything about it but that's the way it was. Seemed to work.

**What about tensions amongst, particularly kids or even adults between the Protestants and the Catholics during that time?**

I never struck it a great deal but it was, definitely. I know there was always - I won't say

25:30 anything derogatory so you won't have to censor it. No there was always a nasty attitude between the - there was a little primary school I think it was, I don't remember the denomination but it wasn't us. So walk across the other side of the road when you go past, that sort of attitude. Not from the nuns, I never struck any of that from the nuns. It was more the, the bloody priests were more inclined to be like that.

26:00 And later on the brothers.

**Can you give me an example of the priests and how they were a bit more...**

Not except that the fact that you know, "We will be saved, but they won't." I don't know whether it was actually put that way but that was the inference, if it wasn't put into words. I can give you a very nasty example of

26:30 - in high school - which affected me very, very deeply. But no, I never came across it myself but I know it was very much the factor of a certain Mark Foy's [department store] - if you were a Catholic you stood a good chance of getting a job but for Anthony Hordern's, well you could forget it, and that sort of thing. But never came up against it really myself.

**What was the nasty example in high school that you came across?**

Well he was - the brother was a - he was a you know, regular brother. But he was also a fund manager so he was a business manager. I suppose my feelings are clouded by the fact that I didn't like him. He was -

27:30 anyhow that's just personal. But anyhow there was an old boy who got married, I'll quote you the words. And he got married down in another church and he leapt forth this day in class about this old boy who'd got married in that tin pot little place down the road.

28:00 I thought, "Well if that's a sample of your Christianity, I'd have a look at it." That wasn't typical, that's why it sticks in my mind. The brothers were great. Ones that I struck. One was a very much a sergeant major and I don't think he mixed with the boys at all. But the rest of them were good, really good, you could talk to them any time.

28:30 About anything. Always cajole them into coming and having a game of handball, cricket - they'd use the cricket pitch and they'd come have a bowl, a bat anything you want. No they were good. Very good memories of them.

**How did this particular example affect you in your views on religion from then forward?**

Well I just thought if that's the sort of bigotry that comes

29:00 from somebody who's supposed to be the purveyor of Christianity and Catholicism. I don't say I dumped it but I was very, very, very upset about it.

**The brothers, were they like teachers at school?**

Oh yeah in those days they were all - oh we did have one lay teacher, but they were all

29:30 teachers, the brothers. Cause they had plenty of them in those days. Yeah.

**And were they allowed to be married?**

No, no. No, I don't like what it was like inside, I never saw it. Some of the boys did, it wasn't barred going into the place or anything like that. But it was a big two storey place. And the outside, they're just teaching and the odd

30:00 times in the yard, they didn't get out of there very much. They were all saying their litanies or whatever it was. We had one bloke, it used to be a stables, Marcellin College and where they'd had the stalls at

the end of the yard there, they'd knocked all the partition out and they used that for wet weather and lunches and that sort of thing. And this

- 30:30 brother used to have his rosary beads and he'd do his constitutional up and down, up and down. Finished up calling him 'Kruschen' from Kruschen salts It got that much that, a lot of them didn't know any other name and they used to call him Kruschen to his face. He took it all in good part.

**Was this brother Kruschen, was he the one that made the comments about...**

Oh no, no.

- 31:00 No I can't even - I've probably blotted him out of my mind. Can't remember his name.

**What were some of the other things that this particular brother had done which you didn't like?**

That was the only thing other than the fact - a personality clash. I don't ever remember seeing him smile. And oh, I don't know, I just didn't like him. And that was before he made that

- 31:30 comment.

**Growing up did you remember being called names by the Protestants and calling the Protestants names?**

No, no, no and I can't ever remember it personally coming up. And certainly by the time - although it was still very prevalent with the Masons [Freemasons] and the Catholics were bitter enemies.

- 32:00 But Washington Souls Patterson and company - old Louis Mile Patterson, he was a Scot and I don't know what Freddy Patterson was. And I went to uni with Jimmy Milner who was his nephew. But

- 32:30 religion never came into it. But Catholics they weren't I'm sure of that. But that was never a problem. Never saw any of that in all the time I worked with them. None of the managers. I don't know any of them, I don't know what their religions were. Don't think it ever came up.

**Was religion though important in Australia back then?**

Oh I think so, because

- 33:00 you see, you had a very big Irish population of migrants. And they were very much bigoted, very bigoted. So it spread through the church, I think that attitude without it being actually verbal. It was the attitude, I don't

- 33:30 have much to do with them, they're not us and that sort of thing. But of course from the hierarchy in the Catholic church, Dr Mannix he was - I might moderate my language. But he was no help. And I had met Archbishop Gilroy and he was another ex AIF [Australian Imperial Force] guy. He was good, quite okay, very down to earth.

- 34:00 And I don't think - Archbishop Kelly was another rabid Irishman that didn't help I'm sure. And this is all my opinion of course. Very subjective.

**When did you meet Archbishop Gilroy?**

Oh he came out to Randwick to the school. Oh I don't know what it was for but he spent a few days there and pressed the flesh and went around amongst the boys and that. But

- 34:30 that's why I remember him because as I say, other than - now this seems starting from the wrong end but Archbishop Gilroy I think was the only priest that I ever met and shook hands with other than being on the other end of a walking stick. Sticks in my memory. I got the impression that we were up here and you were down there, keep your distance.

- 35:00 This wasn't till many many years later that I met a priest just as friend, it wasn't for parish or anything like that. I met him through the bloke that I walked for. And we became reasonably good friends, not intimate but yeah, always asked after each other and how things were going and all that.

- 35:30 I liked him, he was a very nice guy. But outside him, after mass you'd - he'd disappear and the parishioners disappear out the front door and he'd go out into the sacrestial I think it was called. And we'd be off down to the beach and he'd go wherever he went, I don't know. But it wasn't -

- 36:00 if it wasn't frowned upon, it wasn't encouraged. That again, is a subjective view.

**Meeting Archbishop Gilroy - did he have some sort of status. Did he come across as an important person being archbishop?**

Oh yes he was - I think he would've been head of the Catholic Church in Australia at the time. I don't know whether - he wasn't the same guy - I don't know whether

- 36:30 he was at the same time as Mannix. I don't who it was but he certainly was head of the Catholic Church in New South Wales. Yeah. I'd say he would've had quite a good influence.

**Was much of a fanfare put on for him?**

No. No it was announced that he'd be coming out and I think we were all warned to be on our best behaviour or something like that. But nothing else changed. I don't remember any great

- 37:00 fanfare put on. My recollection, he just appeared in class one morning. Took over in the class. I can't even remember what he talked about.

**Just a couple more questions on the church. Do you remember your first confirmation?**

Yeah.

**Can you talk me through what happened there?**

No I can remember it, but I really don't - I remember

- 37:30 preparations for it. We had four weeks ahead - before it you had to go to lessons. And on my first communion I remember that - again this I think was probably because it was with the nuns and much more personal, much more family sort of thing. Then of course we had the breakfast after it and oh well that

- 38:00 stuck in your mind if nothing else did.

**Why what was at the breakfast?**

Oh well just a special do. And all the communion class went to it and they had a lot of goodies. In those days a lot of families didn't have much in the way of goodies. They had basic food but you didn't have frills. I think - my recollection mostly, jam on bread was a good dessert.

- 38:30 It was all right, nobody worried about it, that was normal. So and so's out at La Perouse living in tin sheds and things, so you were still well off.

**Your house firstly at Coogee, can you describe to me what the house was like?**

Oh it was a double brick. Don't know how long it'd been built. It wasn't new, not by any means.

- 39:00 It had - oh gee now - I know it had a lounge - well it was not called a lounge room - we had one of these extension tables with legs that you put in it. And we used to have ping pong on that so that sticks very much in my mind, I can remember that. And that big table with chairs, it'd seat about six or eight. Then there was one, two, three, three bedrooms

- 39:30 and a back verandah which had portions of a - walled off and it was used as a bedroom also. The bathroom was - it wasn't tiled floor. And you had a chip heater with a shower and that. Kitchen

- 40:00 was a traditional kitchen with stove and everything in it. Then there was a breakfast room off that. That was a smaller room. And that was it. The main bedroom was quite large and the lounge - what did they call it? Something in those days. Drawing room, hooray. Got it. Yeah, drawing room. That was quite big. The other rooms were -

- 40:30 and a bed in each room. The others. Yeah.

**We'll just stop there because we're at the end of the tape.**

## **Tape 2**

- 00:53 **Just coming back to your house at Coogee. The kitchen - what did your mum have to cook with?**

- 01:00 Oh from memory it was a gas stove, so it must have been a reasonably modern - it wasn't a wooden fuel stove. I think it was a gas stove. Gas was more common than electricity I would say in those days.

**Did you have lawns?**

And a push mower.

- 01:30 And we all reluctantly took our turn - it was buffalo grass of all things, I can remember that - some things stick in your mind. But it was hard work. Not a lot but with a hand mower - nobody volunteered.

**Can you explain how this push mower or hand mower actually operated?**

Yeah, well it was

- 02:00 two metal wheels with corrugations on them to give traction. And then blades set on a central rod and they had a sort of a curve which allowed them to cut across a bottom blade, a fixed one, allowed them to - if you had it just straight

02:30 it'd go bang and either it would break itself and wouldn't go around. And with curve, used to slide over it and catch the grass in between. And then you had a grass catcher on - that weighed as much as the mower. And then a handle up with a thing and there and you pushed. Oh it was a lot of fun, I can remember that. Fortunately I was too young

03:00 in the early stages, but my turn came and again I didn't volunteer.

**What did you hate about it?**

Oh, it was hard work, very hard work. Summer time particularly, nearly killed you.

**And what did you do about the edges of the lawn that grew along the side?**

Oh, we had those things that we've still got, those clippers. They weren't funny.

03:30 That was the worse part.

**Why was that the worse part?**

Well, it was a long way around, it was back breaking. It was just back breaking. And you had to sort of dig in - you couldn't get away with going around and just chopping off the little bits and leaving it. Mum'd turn her toes to that one up. But yeah it was

04:00 very time consuming too, because it used to take a long while. Cause you can imagine going around and there's a path down the centre. I think there was a path around the side, I can't remember that. But then the back yard that was bigger, no, it was hard work.

**What other chores did your mum get you to do when you were growing up?**

Well I really was fortunate because being so much younger than the others, they all copped the chores and

04:30 I didn't get - I don't remember having to do very much. My sister, she started work during the Depression and she was laid off and she never got back to work. So she was home with Mum so she looked after us virtually. We didn't - I didn't appreciate her till I got older and knew how much she'd done for us and for me.

05:00 But she did all the housework and helped with the cooking. Mum at this stage I suppose, must've been in her fifties. Yeah. Yes. I don't know it's hard to put it in context. But when I was seventeen, eighteen, Mum must've been well into her fifties. Cause I don't think she'd been married

05:30 like they do very often these days, very young.

**A few questions about your mum. What was she like as a person?**

She was very reserved. She was a lovely person. She really was. But not - very loving, but not affectionate. I don't ever remember her sort of putting around my shoulders or anything

06:00 but I never felt that I was isolated from her in any way at all. She was great.

**What did she look like?**

Oh it's hard to describe. I can get you a photo.

**Was she a big lady or a skinny lady?**

No she was short, shortish, I'd say probably about five eight. But she was

06:30 - she'd have been twelve stone I would think. She was big boned as well I think but she was pretty solid. Yeah.

**And what memories do you have of just you and your mum together?**

Oh no I can only say happy and very very fond memories of her. Very loving memories. She was always terrific to me but as I say, this

07:00 private sort of thing it seemed to go right through. I don't know about the old man, haven't got a clue what he was like but I've got a photo in there of the wedding. And of course it's the old style where father stands at the back and lets you know who runs this place. So I don't know but somewhere or other, I can only assume it came from Mum that passed onto the boys. We didn't

07:30 discuss things with her but it wasn't an isolation feeling as well, just the reserve. No, only got very very fond memories of her and all through until she died.

**Did she ever discuss with you her parents, your grandparents growing up?**

No, she would



- 08:00 occasionally put about back in New Zealand. But the boys never talked about – they were born there. The rest of them. But they never talked about it. Very, very rarely. And I think I can only remember there was an uncle who came over, he had the same problem as Dad and he came over here for the cure and died. And
- 08:30 I met or had a lot to do with, his wife. She was gorgeous, I have very fond memories of her. And there was an uncle that came over, another uncle. I have very vague memories of him. Seemed a bit odd actually. Even as a kid I felt he was a bit odd. But the aunties,
- 09:00 yes there was one in Marrickville and one in Newtown and I was quite fond of both those. And the one in Newtown had a good Catholic family, a lot of kids. Had a clutch of daughters and two sons, had a lot to do with the two boys. One of them lived out at Clovelly when we were living at Coogee. And on the summer nights
- 09:30 I can still remember him coming over, walking over for a constitutional, they'd have an hour or so, a cup of tea and then go off. And the other one lived over La Perouse way and we saw a fair bit of him too. But as for the rest of them, we went to New Zealand. Eve and I went to New Zealand for a holiday and we caught up with a lot of them then. And I must say
- 10:00 I liked them, all of them. It's a bit of a first I suppose. But no, they were good.

**What did you get up to with your two cousins that would come over?**

Oh well I was still – they were again, the same vintage as my brothers, might have even been a bit older. So I just – all I can remember is them sitting of an evening out on the front verandah and talking. Oh there's where

- 10:30 Garnet came from. Garnet Mac, Garnet McCormack, forgotten about that, yeah. He went to the country too and he was – oh I don't know what he was doing there, amongst other things he was – I think he was horse breaking from the stories I remember vaguely. But they'd talk about the life in the country. The two Garnets and Bill'd never been there
- 11:00 so – yeah I remember Jack, Jack Mac, Jack McCormack, he'd been to the First World War. And on the odd occasions he spoke but he didn't say much about it.

**As a boy did you want to know about the First World War?**

Oh yes I was very interested in it, yeah definitely.

- 11:30 **Who told you things about what happened?**

Well it came from school really from history more than anything else. There was no TV and no radio for the average Joe. It was 1917 – see, it was all over before I was born

- 12:00 so it was very much hearsay. But I don't know where I got most of my information, I can't remember. But I know I was very – I can remember that – very absorbed with it. I seem to remember it with the school. Would have to have been history.

**Anzac Day, do you remember Anzac Day growing up as a kid?**

Not really.

- 12:30 I can't remember – I don't remember having much to do with Anzac Day before the war. Again I suppose, I remember the limited media outlets in those days and we didn't have a car. So you had Buckley's of getting into Martin Place
- 13:00 or anywhere like that. So we didn't have a radio in those – I can remember Garnet in the very early stages had a crystal set – you know those things you used to have a little crystal and a cat's hair and you'd move it around on it and all of a sudden you'd get a signal and I can still remember saying, Pennant Hills, Pennant Hills and there was a transmitter at Pennant Hills.
- 13:30 Didn't transmit voices just signals. And that was a miracle. So the media wasn't – I don't remember papers. Well I would've been able to read bloody papers until basically probably till high school before you start to read a paper in the sense of understanding and
- 14:00 question what it was all about?

**This crystal set, how did it actually operate?**

Well I don't know. I should've but it was one of those things. It was some sort of a crystal. It looked like a little sparkly thing and it was in a cradle and then there had this other arm which I think it's supposed to be a cat's hair or something, some weird thing. And you used to move it around on it

- 14:30 and somehow or other it would pick up these signals. I think Pennant Hills was about the only place that was – it was the only place I ever remember them mentioning. But I don't know how it worked, I really don't. Was magic. Was good enough for me.

**Family holidays, did you go anywhere?**

There was no such thing. Mostly we couldn't afford that. The only holiday I can

15:00 ever remember was I went into St Vincent's Hospital and they took my tonsils out in the morning and sent me home in the afternoon and I didn't do too well and eventually Mum took me to the doctor. I wasn't eating too well. I imagine the throat wasn't very receptive to food. Anyhow he must've said, "Go on a holiday," somehow or other and Mum took me out to

15:30 Campbelltown, outside of Campbelltown somewhere. Lumea, God what a memory. Lumea, it was a little farm out there. And we had a couple of weeks there, just being fed up and wandering around amongst the animals and so forth. I can remember that very clearly, it was great, it was a highlight.

**The tonsils. Why did you have to have them out?**

Oh, I don't remember.

16:00 Must've had some problem with it - I suppose sore throats or something. Infection, I don't know. At that age, again as I say, down boy.

**How old were you do you remember?**

I can't remember if it was before or after I started school. It was very early; I must've only been about eight. Something like that.

16:30 So it must've been after I started primary school.

**And what was the procedure, did they give you an injection?**

No. We had a crowd there all waiting for the production line. The only thing I can remember is them grabbing my arms and then I got a bloody mask over my face. And smothered me. And then the next thing I know I was being told to get ready to go home.

17:00 I'd come out of it and Mum took me home in the tram. And we got to Coogee, and it was about a mile from the terminus there up to the house. And I couldn't walk, she couldn't carry me. And some kind hearted bloke in a garage, one of the workmen must've spoken to his boss and he okayed it, he carried me. As I say, I was six or eight, I wasn't

17:30 very robust but up hill, yeah it was up hill and down dale. So I never heard his name or anything but I always think, thank God for him, cause Mum couldn't have carried me. Yeah so that was it.

**And this particular holiday, what did you do on the farm?**

Oh I just ate a lot of things, and cause being on the farm they had plenty

18:00 of dairy produce and vegies and stuff like that. And we weren't poor, not when you compared with those around us but as I say, bread and jam was, if you wanted something after your meal, that was it. So you didn't have any frills. So the whole experience, the eating, and they were nice people.

18:30 Very friendly like most country people are. And that was country in those days. And just wandering around amongst the animals, wandering around the paddocks and so forth.

**And how did you travel towards Campbelltown area?**

I can't remember. We went by train a certain distance. I don't remember how we got there, I don't remember the last part of it. Can't even remember how we came back.

19:00 I know they may have had some transport on the farm, a truck or something I don't know, just don't remember that.

**Now we've touched on a little bit of the Depression. What are some of your vivid memories of the Depression?**

Well the fact that you didn't always had what the other guy had. There was a lot of hand down

19:30 of clothing and so forth. Shoes were always a problem cause you didn't have shoes. And they were not these sort of things or the big synthetic soles or leather. So they didn't take too much rough wear. And I know they were a major

20:00 expense and there was always a problem. I know at one stage we had a last, a three pronged thing, which you used to put the shoe on it - slide it on it and then you could take the old sole off and you could buy these leather soles and some stuff to stick them on, plus nails. You wouldn't want to know about it but anyhow that

20:30 gave you a new sole. So you always made sure, before it really got right through, so you'd have a bit of solid stuff... No I can always remember that was always a real problem. That was the only thing, and as I say new clothes were very rare. You always had something hand down. Altered. Mum was always very handy, which they had to be in those days and

21:00 particularly I think in New Zealand, it was a matter of distance then and transport. So she was quite handy with her sewing and so forth.

**So you had one of these things to resole the shoe?**

It was called a last. It was just like – the shape of three soles and it stood on two of them,

21:30 triangular type of thing. So it was quite steady and the third one was up the top and that was the one – like these lasts that you put in your shoes to spread them and that, it was like that. You bring the shoe onto that so it was nice and firm. And you had tacks, not nails, they were tacks. I think you had some glue to start with and then you tacked all around the

22:00 side and then you had to make sure it didn't go right through because they were pretty sharp and uncomfortable. So you had to go, try and hammer them down from the inside if they went through where your foot went through. It was very crude, it really was. But they were shoes, something on your feet and it wasn't everybody who had that so, that was probably the height of it, height of

22:30 the Depression.

**I guess socks would've been a problem then too?**

I don't remember socks being a problem but, you probably took them off when you got home. I don't remember that even. But you probably had to take them off when you got home. There's no reason why you shouldn't. There was grass outside and no such thing as carpets inside. There were all board floors, wooden floors. Linoleum.

23:00 The bathroom was just a wooden board floor. I think the kitchen, I'm guessing a bit here, but I think the kitchen might have had linoleum. I think there might have been a linoleum square in the drawing room.

**Linoleum, is that lino?**

Yeah yeah. Same stuff as you get today.

23:30 **Earlier you mentioned tin shacks at La Perouse. I mean La Perouse is a really expensive Sydney suburb.**

Yeah La Perouse is a rifle range. Malabar and La Perouse, part of it was a rifle range in those days, and was just open country. Obviously they weren't on – I don't know that there was any firing

24:00 ever done. At that time they probably – the government probably couldn't afford it either but anyhow there was a part of it and they used to use kerosene tins and belt them out flat. I don't know how, I wouldn't know how they detached them together. But somehow or other they used to do, attach them together a lot of them like that. Anything that was building material they could scrounge they'd do. And

24:30 it was a – I think you used to pay, those that were working used to pay sixpence or something, sixpence a week or something like that. And so they got a dole but it would have been very very meagre. And it was a bit of work for the dole. I know they had – I don't know whether it was true but the folklore was that

25:00 - I can't think of the name of the lake opposite Randwick Racecourse. Anyhow there's lakes there and they use these guys, they used to drain the lakes and then they'd fill it again and give them a job draining it again. Moore Park. Yeah, so other than that

25:30 the used to do work on the roads too. That sort of thing. But there was a limited amount of that available. We didn't get the dole so we were well off, relatively.

**Just on the subject of where people lived. La Perouse was sort of an open area where some shacks came up. But what about Centennial Park, that's a huge area...**

No see that was more, pretty close to the centre of Sydney.

26:00 La Perouse was out on the perimeter. There was no urban development out there so whatever cropped up there didn't have neighbours complaining. If you'd done anything in Centennial Park you'd have all the hoi polloi around, I know that was a very upmarket area – you'd have had the screams like they do about the lights at the cricket ground now. They'd have had that in tenfold so nobody – I don't think they would've been allowed.

26:30 Unlike the Aboriginal Embassy, I think they would have knocked them down before they got a chance to get going.

**Did you ever have people pass by your home and ask for food or to do jobs?**

No we never actually had that. But we did have people who tried to sing and then'd come and knock at your door. What was even more pathetic and sad

27:00 were professional musicians who'd come and play a tune and then come and bring the hat around, that sort of thing. Oh it was, as I say, we were well off. Tough and all as it may have been for us we – and of

course when Garnet went to the bush, it was one off, how Mum ever paid -

- 27:30 Roy went to Joey's too and I don't know whether she ever paid for him there, she'd have to pay something I think. But they had bursaries and things in those days, the Catholic schools had their own bursaries - I feel he must have had some sort of a bursary because I can't imagine she'd have been able to pay very much towards it.

**These musicians that you were speaking of, did they come around to the home?**

No they'd wander up the

- 28:00 street and basically rely upon people coming out and giving them something. I can always remember one bloke, he had a really very, very good baritone voice. And he sang one of the - I can't remember but one of the popular ones at the time. And then he let forth, after he'd finished and nobody came out and he let forth with a torrent of abuse.

- 28:30 Cursed them all and so forth and I felt, I don't think I've felt as sorry for anybody since, or very few as I did for him because I thought, he must've been really at the bottom of the Depression. Anyhow that was that but I don't ever remember any -

- 29:00 again if anybody came to door I probably wouldn't know. Mum'd answer it and - she'd go to the door with, "Down boy, it's not for you." No that's not right she wasn't like that but no you, you know if it didn't concern you so keep out of it. Wasn't really, children are to be seen and not heard, it wasn't

- 29:30 really that. But it wasn't the thing. I suppose basically if there was anyone at the door it wouldn't be for you, so don't worry about it.

**What sort of things were you eating, what did your mum cook during the Depression?**

Oh I can't remember that. We always managed a Sunday dinner. Other days I can't remember what we had normal times. I can remember we never went hungry that's for sure.

- 30:00 But she always managed to get some sort of a roast dinner on the Sunday. I can also remember that Dorrie used to cook Yorkshire pudding which I hated. But I don't know how you make Yorkshire pudding but I guess its basic ingredients aren't a lot.

- 30:30 No I can't remember that. Yeah.

**Did you grow your own vegetables in the back yard?**

No, no, no. No, it was just lawn. We had a few flowers but that's about it. And the front was nearly all - oh we had a couple of - I can remember those, a couple of hydrangeas but the rest of it was just lawn.

- 31:00 Lawn and path.

**And where did your mum shop for supplies?**

I can't remember all the time but some of the time Garnet was working at McIlwraith's and I think he used to bring the groceries home and probably any meat

- 31:30 or whatever we had, meat, I can't remember. But the shopping he would've brought home I think. And then when Roy left school, that's the one next to me, he worked for McIlwraith's at Randwick and he worked there for quite a while. I know he used to bring the stuff home, again. Because I remember again, on strict instructions, he used to bring home plum jam which was about the bottom of barrel

- 32:00 for me but that was the cheapest. So don't bring home anything else. Yeah.

**So what sort of work did Garnet and then Roy do in this particular job?**

Well Garnet was out there in Broadway, a branch there and it was just a shop assistant. And Roy was - diverging a little - it's

- 32:30 Garnet McCormack, the other Garnet, he was working at McIlwraith's at Randwick, when they had the horse and cart. And for whatever reason, I don't know, he went bush too. And Roy, not following him, but Roy got a job with McIlwraith's at Randwick and they had then progressed to the T Model Ford. So he was

- 33:00 quite a few years he was working for them and doing the Randwick/Coogee area. And I remember they had a little ice chest where the passenger seat would be and they put the perishables in there. And the rest of it just went in the back. The orders were all done up of course and the parcels. Yeah.

- 33:30 **You mentioned that your sister had a job before the Depression but lost it. What happened there?**

Oh well just the Depression, they were putting staff off, being dismissed left, right and centre.

**What was she doing?**

I don't really know. Again see Dorrie was the third in the family so she was pretty remote from me. And although I had more to do with her of course

34:00 after she came home, but I don't know what - I've got some idea she was somewhere out around the Newtown area but what she was doing, I haven't got a clue.

**Just changing the subject slightly, your home, you mentioned a little bit about the bathroom having lino on the floor but where was the toilet?**

Oh the toilet was outside but it was just, it was a brick thing part of

34:30 the original house. It was just like a bit of an L shaped and it was, proper sewerage and everything. Yeah you had to go through an uncovered area to get to it but it was only a matter of two or three yards so it was reasonably convenient.

**And you had flowing water to it?**

Oh yeah, oh yes. Yes

35:00 it was ordinary sewerage system. The pedestal and what have you. Yeah.

**Sorry to go on the side, but toilet paper, was there such a thing?**

No, newspaper. I don't know whether there was - well I suppose there must've been toilet paper in those days. We used to cut the newspaper up and dig a hole in it

35:30 and put a piece of string and hang it.

**And who'd keep the toilet clean?**

Oh Dorrie mainly probably. I never did it I know that.

**Finally high school. You've discussed a little bit about that but more primary. So high school, what sort of subjects did you enjoy while you were there?**

36:00 I think I really, I enjoyed all of them. Maths too. Somewhere early in the piece and I lost the plot and I always battled with that. But as for the others we did Maths 1 and 2. I quite enjoyed Maths. Latin, French, English.

36:30 History, yes History. There were seven subjects anyhow. And I really didn't mind any of them. The only one I really struggled with - I was not as I say, very average run of the mill with all of them, so it was all relatively hard work. It was. But I could cope with it. But the Maths 2 I lost it somewhere and I was always

37:00 fumbling along in the dark. But no they were quite good. The teachers were good.

**You mentioned earlier about going to sport. There was a story about some person giving you a lift.**

Oh yeah we had this mature student. He was, oh about twenty five I would guess, perhaps a little less. And he had a driver's license and

37:30 this was, oh I don't know how old. This'd be before the Intermediate. Anyhow someone lent them a utility and we used to pile in the back of this and go out to Ryde or Lewisham or wherever we had to go, Darlinghurst was the other one I couldn't think of. Take us out there and bring us back.

38:00 Nobody minded. As I say, even in those days cars were not that plentiful so it was quite an enjoyment to have a trip in the back of a ute.

**Was he the coach or why did he do this?**

I don't know. I can only presume that he'd finished his school Intermediate or something like that and he was coming back

38:30 as a pupil, he was coming back for his Leaving. His Leaving Certificate. I never got the history of him. We had another one too but I don't know the history of him at all.

**You went in school till you were about eighteen is that right?**

Yeah, yes.

**Why did you want to continue at school rather than start working?**

Well I think it had been tradition more than anything else. Although Garnet hadn't. Garnet left

39:00 the end of primary school. Bill had gone through. He'd been through leaving and he became an articled clerk. I can even remember them, Garland Seymour and Abbott. Trivia eh. God never mind. And Roy he did his at Joey's also so I think it was tradition and you know that was the thing to do

39:30 as far as Mum was concerned I mean. Oh even then – in those days the crafts, the what's the word for it? Go to tech and so forth.

**Trade.**

Trades. The trades were more significant and from

40:00 my recollection had far more credit given to them or esteem or whatever it is you like to call it than it has now. And my recollections back in – a bit further along of two very good mates who were doing engineering at the tech and they done the Intermediate and gone to tech. And

40:30 yeah it was held in very high esteem compared with the present day.

**We'll just stop there again.**

## Tape 3

00:44 **When you did leave school, you mentioned before, it wasn't a case of what you wanted to do but what you could get a job at. How did you go about trying to get a job?**

Well it was just answering ads in the paper

01:00 that was about all I could do. Because when you got to wherever it was you found that there were a hundred people there and that was just the luck of the game. Even if you were number one there, with that sort of numbers they didn't just have to pick the first one. So it was very, very luck, absolute luck.

**How long did you spend trying to get a job?**

Well again I was fortunate. I worked in a woollen mills

01:30 for a couple of months or whatever. One of our friends worked there in this mills over in Newtown and he came in this day and said, "Hey they're looking for someone over there," so he said, "I've put a word in for you so whiz over." So I went over and of course they already the, knew somebody who knew somebody

02:00 sort of thing yeah, so I got it. I was there for a couple of months only. And out at Randwick I'd got to know – oh to me he was an old bloke – he was probably middle aged and his name was Flattery and his brother was a QC [Queen's Counsel]. They were pretty well off.

02:30 He wasn't married and he just lived in this house with his brother. Big house in Randwick. Be worth a bloody fortune these days. Anyhow after I left school I went up to see him, oh a couple of times, and once he said, would I think about pharmacy at all.

03:00 I said, "I'll think about anything if it's a job." And so he said, "Well I'll speak to my brother who knows Freddy Patterson, see what we can do." So to cut a long story short I go in, and see Doctor Patterson and John Spalding. And yeah the gates were open. I wouldn't have had Buckley's [no chance] if it hadn't been for that. I don't know what would've

03:30 happened, I wouldn't have a clue. I'd still probably be working in the woollen mill.

**Where was the chemist located? Did they have more than one shop?**

Oh yeah they had more than fifty shops all around New South Wales. I was apprentice at Annandale and I spent the whole of my apprenticeship at Annandale.

04:00 And after – I had to repeat first year Botany, so I repeated a whole year. So I ran out of my apprenticeship twelve months early and they wouldn't renew it and then I went and worked as an unregistered up with a chap in Eastwood.

04:30 And I worked with him until – I don't know when I – oh that's right, until I was registered. And then I went back as a registered and worked at Annandale. And the war had broken out at that stage.

05:00 I can't remember how long I was with them after that but quite a while. And then they had manpower in those days, in the Government and they controlled, you couldn't leave your place of employment without the consent of the boss. So I wanted to join the air force. I had a small stint in the army which was enough for me.

05:30 So I thought well the way things are going I'm going to be in it sooner or later so I thought I'll try to get into the air force. And of course Doctor Patterson wouldn't release me. I don't know who put me onto it but somebody put me on to go down to the pharmacy board. There was a Major Hanlon who was the registrar. And I saw him and he said, "Yeah, well the way we can do it

06:00 if you resign, they can't stop you resigning, but you can't be employed anywhere else." But he said, "If you come down here we can employ you as a locum. And we'll give you a release." So I went there and

did a couple of locums and then they released me so I went down to Woolloomooloo and enlisted.

### **Alright we'll come back to the air force**

06:30 **in a minute. Just a couple of questions about your pharmacy job before that. Can you tell us a bit about Doctor Patterson, what was he like?**

I had a lot of time for him, he was a very square shooter, no frills about him. Fairly brusque, but not unpleasant with it. And I didn't have much to do with him till after the war. Didn't have much to do with period. But we only saw him when he came

07:00 In to check the register and then he'd see the manager and say g'day generally to the rest of us. He didn't come around to shake hands to the individual but I never took any notice of that because they've got a hell of a lot of shops they've got to go around to and if he spent all his day shaking hands and saying, g'day Joe, he'd never got around it. But he was very pleasant.

07:30 **Did he interview you when you first got the job?**

Yeah. He and John Spalding was the secretary. No I had a lot of respect for him and he was, as I say very direct. When my apprenticeship was finished they - you could have it

08:00 extended but he wouldn't do it. But I didn't hold that against him, he didn't have to and it was my own fault I had to repeat first year otherwise I wouldn't have to repeat it so I never held that against him. But apart from that the only other incident I have any - well even now it was impersonal contact. But I was working at

08:30 - they used to close at half past seven in those days. And there'd be only one registered on. And I was on that night and a drunk - the front of a pharmacy had a window each side and the entrance in the centre of it like a lot of them did in those days. And this drunk came around and went bang and went straight through the window on the side. So we had a number to ring and an engineer came out.

09:00 And boarded it up and so forth. And I finished knocking off about midnight or something like that. And I got on well with the manager and I liked him but he was a bit pedantic. And when it came to - Freddy was due in, and he said, "I don't know how he'll go about paying for the overtime." And I thought, "Oh well." I couldn't care less. I've got nothing to do with anyhow.

09:30 So I didn't worry about it. Anyhow I heard him. He brought the subject up and Freddy in his usual brisk way said, "He worked the time, didn't he?" in a high pitched voice. "He worked the time, didn't he? Well pay him." Bang that was it, good bye. So you know that was typical. He didn't - no palaver but he was fair, very, very fair. And I always found him that way.

### **What was the process for becoming a**

10:00 **registered pharmacist, what did you have to do in those days?**

You had the apprenticeship which you spent, I can't remember the details of it, a certain number of mornings at Sydney University and the rest of the time you spent in the pharmacy learning the practical part. You did have laboratory work at the university but it was pretty far removed from the actual every day pharmacy and that was

10:30 you had the training for.

### **These days pharmacists deal with bottles all coming in from drug manufacturers? In those days it was a bit different.**

It was entirely different in those days. Most of it was extemporaneous stuff. You made up mixtures. You made ointments; you might have half a dozen, two or three. You made very rarely but you did make -

11:00 the uni particularly made pills. You used to roll thing - tier it out into a pipe and you had things that cut it and then you put it in a thing to roll them so they were round and then you varnished them. But it was still done. And a lot of others, suppositories and pessaries. And cachets, they were a weird thing. They were two hats

11:30 put together made of starch and you used to put, unpalatable substance in one side and then you'd moisten the rim of the other, put it together so it'd stick. So then you could swallow that and it was reasonably easy to swallow and you didn't taste it. You get that occasionally. Capsules used to be a real pain in the neck. We used to get a lot of those. And give you their own

12:00 prescription for these capsules. And the gelatine ones and you used to have to weigh them until you had the right weight and then push them together. But that was ninety percent of it, was that sort of work, was extemporaneous stuff.

### **So what were the common sort of drugs that you were using in those days?**

Oh well Aspirin of course

12:30 was number one. Paracetamol was a goer. Caffeine was a goer. Morphine was a goer. Diamorphine, that

was a goer. Lozenges, some lozenges. There was a lot of drugs. Fry's Balsam and Opium, various

13:00 varieties of those sorts of things. And if you're interested I've even got a BP [British Pharmacopoeia] of those days still here. And a lot of infusions of drugs. Senegar, Buchu and all these things. But various things I feel were the present day were placebos, I don't if they did a hell of a lot of good.

13:30 **Were there any common treatments or brands that were particularly popular back then that have gone away now?**

**Oh yes. Glycerine and linseed compound, this is a classic example. That was a cough mixture and we sold buckets of it, eight ounce bottles everywhere. And the reason, because it had a mixture of opium in it. And of course, yes they felt good. Maybe the throat didn't feel much better but**

14:00 **they felt good. Until eventually the penny dropped and they banned it. And when they banned it Scott's Glycerine and linseed disappeared off the market. That was a Washington Soul line too. Yeah that was - oh yeah another one that comes to mind only because of the connotation, was a thing called Jaygos pills. No I just can't remember but I think it was kidney pill from memory.**

14:30 **And some bright spark, you probably remember, in the days when the Italians first came out there, they were called Dagoes. Well some bright clown put the ad on the radio, "Before the day goes take your Jaygos." All hell broke loose. And there was two Indian root pills, oh Vincent's APC [Activated Protein C] powders and they fell by the - they're still going but of course they had the paracetamol taken out of them.**

15:00 **And the caffeine taken out of them. No they had phanacid in them originally and that was the killer on the kidney so the took the phanacidene out and then they took the caffeine out eventually and just replaced it with the paracetamol. So that's still going of course and Bex was the same set up. They just changed the formula. I can't think of the others, there were a lot.**

15:30 **Yeah.**

**How tightly were these drugs controlled? I mean you had access to morphine and heroin. How tightly were they controlled?**

Everything was restricted to a doctor's prescription and you had to record it in a drug register. But outside that. The funny thing now that estrogens they were not restricted at all. Truckies'd come in and they didn't abuse them, they'd get a dozen or something like that

16:00 over the counter. And no problems. So it's a social thing, it's not really a cultural thing. But anyhow, yes...

**Just while we're on that subject, did you use those in the air force?**

I never did, no and I was never encouraged to. Never saw a bloody doctor in the air force. Only reference of it

16:30 and you can delete this if you like was when they came into give the usual warnings about transmitted diseases, sexually transmitted diseases. "Don't use the excuse you got it from a lavatory seat, that's for group captains and above." And that was about all they were any bloody use for the doctors. They really were. I mean on the squadrons, I never saw

17:00 a doctor. Never had a reason to. But no, no.

**Well we'll come back to all that a bit later. In Annandale you had a clientele made up of who? I mean what sort of people would come into your pharmacy?**

Middle class, it was a middle class suburb. Middle to working class suburb. Really nice people. They were

17:30 as good as anywhere else I've ever been in pharmacy. They were great. No airs and graces. Appreciated anything you did for them and no, they were nice people. Just again I thoroughly enjoyed my apprenticeship.

**Was it, the pharmacist was sort of an important member of the community in those days?**

18:00 **Or were you just like any other shop?**

Oh no, I think, no they did have a very definite function apart from prescription trade. Because they used to - people would come in with all their problems. And you used to get the OTC - over the counter prescribing. And they used to rely upon the pharmacist to be able to advise them

18:30 that the kids got this, or the kids got that. Or they'd cut in with a cut finger or something or other. And they'd never go to the doctor; they couldn't afford to even in those days. You couldn't afford to go to the doctor for most people in that sort of a suburb. So they'd come in and we'd do a bit of patchwork on them and they'd go away happy. You didn't charge them so they appreciated it.



**Were there many different immigrant people?**

19:00 **I mean Leichhardt's just down the road.**

Oh no not in those days. Leichhardt, Annandale was very much Anglo-Saxon. There was a smattering that was starting to get in but no, it was – there'd be the very rare one.

**So that didn't start till after the war?**

Yeah, yeah.

**You failed your botany. You had to work unregistered for awhile? Was that a dangerous thing to do?**

No.

19:30 You had to have a registered there, so I just worked for a registered pharmacy, for a pharmacy in Eastwood. A bloke named Arthur Walker. So you just did the same as he was doing but you couldn't do it without a register there. The same still applies today. You can't operate a pharmacy without having a registered pharmacist present.

**During this time the war broke out.**

20:00 **What sort of lead up was there to that statement? Was it a surprise or did you know it was coming?**

Well I don't think – I think the penny dropped really – well I'm sure it dropped with Britain because it started rearming long before Chamberlain came home waving a bit of paper. "Peace in our time and Hitler's a good guy." But I think the writing was on the wall and I think most people realised.

20:30 I mean you'd have to be pretty thick to see them occupy Czechoslovakia, Austria and all this sort of thing and what was the ... it was called something else then I think.

**The Rhineland?**

Yeah it was part of the Rhineland and that. You'd have to be pretty naïve. But I don't think anybody ever anticipated

21:00 the extent that it would go and particularly Japan. Cause they always had a phobia about the yellow so and so's. But I don't think anybody really expected it to go the way it did.

**Can you tell us about the declaration? Where were you when you heard about the war?**

I was with my girlfriend; she was only at that time. At her home with her family.

21:30 And they had a radio. People were just starting to get radios. And from memory it was nine or ten o'clock at night-time in the evening. Anyhow Menzies came on and said, "It is my melancholy duty..." etcetera. Yeah. Which immediately made you think – had to think, "Well it's all going to change, whatever's

22:00 going to happen".

**What did you personally think? I mean you were a young man of fighting age?**

Oh well, as I say, with trepidation yeah. I mean I wasn't so naïve that I could think that we were not going to be involved. That life would go on the same way. Just watch it unfold then. I did

22:30 a stint as I say in the army, as a reserve. So it was sufficiently realistic to me that I think I accepted the fact that I was going to become involved eventually one way or another.

**Some have said that in Australia in that early period of the war it was a bit of a fool's paradise. That the**

23:00 **Australians didn't understand the seriousness of what was going on.**

Oh course it was.

**Is that what you remember of that time?**

Yes yes. They didn't. I can't remember when they had rationing but there was no blackouts or anything like that. And that had at that stage, had no attack on Australia, not on Darwin certainly. And it wasn't till

23:30 '41 was it, when the subs came into the harbour, something like that. And all they got was from Britain and that was all censored. And yes they heard that they'd – you know in the blitz, that they'd been bombed. But yes they've been bombed, so it's happened, that's a terrible thing. But

24:00 what's bombing? It was a fool's paradise but I don't – I was one of them. And I don't blame them

because everything was censored so you only got what they allowed through and it was very remote. I think the worst thing that they experienced was rationing and that was a pretty generous thing to real rationing.

24:30 **When did that first come in?**

Oh I don't know. I can't remember.

**Was it before you joined up?**

No, I'm sorry I can't answer that one. From memory I don't think so. No I doubt it.

**What were your brothers doing at this time?**

Well the one that was

25:00 the solicitor, he went into the air force. Because of his profession he became an adjutant. The next one, Garnet he'd bought - already bought a bus service from Cabramatta out to Bonnyrigg. So of course that was reserved

25:30 occupation being transport. Roy went into the army, he went to New Guinea. And Doris stayed at home.

**Did your eldest brother go overseas with the air force?**

He went to New Guinea, yeah yeah.

**But they were all in Australia until you went away?**

Yeah yeah.

**Well what happened then with the army? Did you get**

26:00 **called up to it or did you decide to join?**

No it was a volunteer reserve. And as I say I didn't know but I was fearful we were going to be in it whether we liked it or not.

**So what did you do about volunteering?**

I can't remember now how that happened. I just finished up out at Wallgrove

26:30 and spent two or three months there I think it was doing, route marches and cleaning latrines. And kitchen picket at four o'clock in the morning, all the usual things that are very unfunny. Actually I shouldn't say -

27:00 I was registered at that stage and the pharmacist there said, "Well you can have it," and we hardly saw him because you practically got no scripts, very, very few. And I can only ever remember doing one for an Aspirin mixture. So I was left pretty much on my own. But I had it pretty easy. But it was a mindless sort of

27:30 existence. And I don't claim to be brilliant but you do like to think a little bit.

**So what was your commitment to the reserve, how often did you have to go to Wallgrove?**

That was it, three months and that was it.

**It was one three month camp? And what did you think of the discipline of the army?**

I didn't mind it, no problems with it except as I say it was mindless.

28:00 When they were short of something, have an emu parade. That meant everybody walks on and around the parade ground picking up butts and matches and bits of anything at all. Pick up nothing just look as though you were picking up. Just like filling ditches, and digging them and then filling them again. That was the only thing. No problem for discipline, I didn't find that.

**And who were the blokes that were in there with you?**

28:30 **Are they all professionals like yourself?**

No it was a mixture. I don't know what they were - I really don't know what they were doing. What their civilian occupation was. It wasn't something that you asked. You were in the army and that's what you were doing and that's all that was relevant. That's my recollection of it.

**There was during that time a bit of**

29:00 **tension between the militia, the volunteer reserve and the AIF. What did you see of that?**

Well they were called the choccos [militia: chocolate soldiers], and my brother was. He was a choco and he finished up beside the AIF in New Guinea. No I thought that was most unfair. It's the same as in Vietnam. Didn't ask to go. I was told to go.

29:30 I didn't ask to go overseas. So we're in all the same boat. They did what they were told. So don't criticise.

**So what other names did they use apart from Choco?**

Choco was the only thing I ever remember.

**And who would call you that?**

Oh, it was their own bloody army.

30:00 I don't remember the air force calling them chocos. They'd probably start a brawl immediately if they did but their own blokes in the AIF particularly, they couldn't start one with them.

**Was there a lot of pressure to join the AIF or to get into a force and go away?**

No I think it was - I can't

30:30 remember for sure but I think it was voluntary. I don't think they ever had to enlist them. They may have later but certainly by the time the Japs got into New Guinea, they may have, they probably did. But I was overseas so I didn't really know. But I always had the impression that it was voluntary.

**What about sort of informal pressure, social pressure**

31:00 **from women. We heard stories about blokes being given white feathers and stuff like that. Did that really happen?**

Yeah. Yeah that's something that my brother ...

31:30 My brother, the one that had the bus run, he got one. They were ratbags. I never had anything like that from the ordinary people. They're just bloody nuts. I often wonder what they were doing themselves.

**What was the story there? Who were these ratbags as you say?**

The ones that sent

32:00 the white feathers.

**Did they confront him in person?**

Oh no, it was always sent in a bloody letter. Didn't have the guts to front them. Oh anyhow that's history. But that's something that bites deep.

**He had a protected occupation. What was the system with protected occupations**

32:30 **and manpower?**

Well they were the reserved occupation which they could not be - couldn't volunteer and they could not enlist. I mean it was common sense. If he had gone for example, the transport from Cabramatta to Bonnyrigg would have folded or else somebody else would come in.

33:00 And the same thing would apply there. So it was the logical way to retain the infrastructure of the country. If they were a reserved occupation they were essential so that was the way to guarantee it.

**What about yourself? Did you know you were in a reserved occupation when you first started thinking about joining up?**

I knew it, yes.

33:30 Because they published the reserved occupations so I knew that yeah. I think it's one of those things. There's always a loop hole somewhere if you look for it.

**You found that loop hole. Just explain to us how you did it?**

Well I can't remember the origin but somebody gave me the drum

34:00 to go down to the pharmacy board and see Major Hanlon, see him personally. He was the registrar. To see him personally. So I rang up and got an appointment with him and I went down and saw him and told him my problem. That I wanted to enlist but Souls wouldn't release me. And he just said quite casually, "Well if you want to, this is

34:30 what you would do. Resign and come down to us and we'll organise for you - we're not your employer but we'll organise for you to do some locum work." And I think he said they weren't your employer but maybe that was the crux of it. That as my employer, seeing as they were you know getting jobs for me, that they would be classified

35:00 as an employer and he said, "We'll release you." I said, "Right." So I did that. I had to wait a while then for a call up so I worked around - I was still a registered pharmacist so I worked around, I worked up at

the Cross, Kings Cross for quite a while actually.

35:30 Cause that was open twenty four hours a day. So he'd had the day off and then he'd do the night shift. Yeah so that's what I did until I got the call up.

**What was Soul's reaction when you resigned to do that?**

None. I had no feedback whatsoever. As I say, I didn't see Doctor Patterson

36:00 then, I didn't see him till after the war actually. I did once, saw him on Lindfield Station. Railway Station. We just gave a very courteous, no there was nothing nasty about it. It was just an acknowledgment, yes we've met and that was it.

**You got your job back there after the war. Was there some agreement that would happen?**

No. Did I go back there after the war?

**Or did you not,**

36:30 **I might have got that wrong.**

I went - oh Lord my memory's getting - I can't remember. Yes I must've - no wait a minute. No I don't think so. I think there was a period, there was a period after, when I became registered after I was registered.

37:00 Yes there was a period then when I went back, but that was before the war. Yeah that's right.

**So you decided to join the air force. Can you tell us why you chose the air force?**

Oh I don't know, I suppose it's one thing was I didn't want to be in the army. That was for sure. And I get horribly seasick so I certainly didn't want to be in the navy. I also get air sick which I didn't know at the time so what you don't know doesn't hurt you.

37:30 Yes so it only left the other. And I'd had a trip out at Mascot in the days of Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm, had a trip in an autogyro. Found that stimulating so I thought, yes I could handle this.

**An autogyro was a pretty fantastic thing. Can you tell us about that?**

Yeah well it was -

38:00 the difference between a helicopter and an autogyro was that the autogyro had the thing up top. No I don't think it had any rudder control, I think it was all blades of the autogyro. I think they just altered the blades to - we only went around Mascot aerodrome and down again.

38:30 Ten bob I think it was. I know something like that. My mother thought, "What a waste of money!" Yeah.

**Did you have any concerns about the air force in terms of what you were hearing from the Battle of Britain or from the terrible loss rate over there?**

Oh yeah I mean again you'd have to be pretty thick not to realise but I mean look at New Guinea.

39:00 You know if it had to happen as far as that goes I'd hate to have been in New Guinea. But anyhow that's taken out of your hands. No I don't think I really thought about that seriously, well you can't. If you think about what might happen, you just don't do anything.

**Did you talk about your decision**

39:30 **to join up with anyone? Your girlfriend or...**

Oh I think I did with Eve yeah. I probably didn't with my mother. As I say, that would not have been a very personal thing and as such you wouldn't probably - but I think I would've, I'd have had to with Eve yeah. Can't remember specifically the time we were doing it but

40:00 I don't think I'd be so insensitive as to have done that. Although she was only my girlfriend at the time.

**Alright we'll just pause there.**

## Tape 4

00:44 **Right so you went to get permission, you got permission and you were called up. What happened next?**

Went down to Woolloomooloo and we had - oh various tests

01:00 and eye tests and so forth and medical. I think it was only one day, we had the medical and everything

else. And then that was it. Push off and we'll let you know. And the next thing I got the actual call up to - well once again I think we went down to

01:30 Woolloomooloo and we were bussed up from there over to Bradfield Park.

**Was there anything in the medical or the testing that you weren't sure about or you failed?**

Oh yes that was an odd ball thing. They said my blood pressure was high. They said come back in a week, fortnight's time, something or other. I went to one of the local doctors and said, "What'll I do to correct that?" He said, "Oh,

02:00 don't do anything, just relax when you go." He said, "Pounds to peanuts, you've been tearing around down there, doing various tests and everything else. Of course your blood pressure's high." So he said, "Just relax. Don't let them get at you." I said, "Right okay." Which is what I did and went back the next morning and a miracle the blood pressure was all right. That was the only problem.

**So you're bussed off to Bradfield Park. What did you find when**

02:30 **you arrived there?**

Well then life changed. Immediately you had the WO [Warrant Officer] and everybody on your back. And no it was quite good but discipline was quite strict there but it was fair, no complaints. But they did some preliminary checking on your manipulative skills and that sort of thing.

03:00 I think from memory. Anyhow it was there that they categorised you to what you were going to be. And then they sent you off from there to wherever, to elementary flying school or in that case the overseas ones or stayed there but were - I was classified

03:30 as an observer. I think it was about the last observer course that went through. They were the days of the twin engine bombers where you needed somebody who was a qualified navigator, bomb aimer and air gunner. So you get around in the aircraft like a blue tailed lizard. But that's what they were.

**What was everyone's ambition at Bradfield Park. Did everyone want to be a pilot?**

Oh naturally

04:00 everyone wanted to be a pilot.

**What about yourself?**

No, I never did. I tell you what I suppose it's six of one or half a dozen of the other, you think about it. You're in charge of an aircraft. With seven guys. And what you do dictates what happens to them. It's a hell of a

04:30 responsibility. And it's not all the glamour. You've got to be strong. Our skipper was an ex timber worker up in Queensland so he had wrists and arms on him like a bullock. You need it. I mean they've got hydraulics yeah, but it still takes a lot of strength to throw them around.

05:00 So that - I didn't think I was - I doubted my ability to be suitable for that as much as I would have liked. I gained my ambition, I flew one for a short period till a navigator jacked up on me. Yeah.

**When was that?**

Oh that was on a training flight, over England.

05:30 **Any other impressions from Bradfield Park that will always stick with you apart from just the discipline?**

No it was good, conditions were great, we were learning something all the time. So it was, yeah that was fine. And this one as I say, was strict but it was fair even to the example of it. The drill sergeant that we had

06:00 he was as I say, on your back all the time, and everything else. But the guys were all reasonably co-operative. There was nobody mucking around so we got in a reasonably short time, became quite proficient at it. He was very happy. Until the last one, he said it was to be the last drill session. And he took us out on the parade ground and marched us around once.

06:30 And then turn a left turn. And we did the left turn and quick march, and the next thing we were in the bush and he's behind us. And we spent the next half hour down having a smoke and so forth. He said, "I can't teach you anything more, so why worry about it." And here's a bloke that had been on our back so you know, it's not all as bad as it sounds.

**How much respect was**

07:00 **a WOD [Warrant Officer Discipline]?**

I don't know if he had a lot of respect but he was treated with respect, yes. But that was a forced respect. He wasn't a popular guy, let's put it that way. He can't be by almost by definition. It's like a

sergeant major. No such thing as a kindly sergeant major. But that bloke was a typical

07:30 example. Yeah he's strict and later on if - if you muck up or anything like that I don't doubt he could be very - jump on you. But behind it there was a brain. As long as he achieved what he set out to achieve, okay, treat you like a human being.

**Were there names used for him behind his back?**

Oh yeah. It was only - they've all got their own queer ways

08:00 but instead of left right left, he used to say, "Hip right hip right." So they used to call him hip.

**How did you get on with the other recruits?**

Good. No trouble. There was always a bit of chiacking between the ones that had been there for a month and the others that were coming and the next intake. Oh get some in and all this sort of

08:30 thing. Nobody ever took it seriously. I personally never indulged in it. It was pretty puerile. Oh they used to take it the way it was given. It was only the culture.

**And how did air force culture differ from what you'd seen of the army?**

Oh it's chalk and cheese. I think right from the word go, you were learning.

09:00 You were learning something at which you had to become proficient. Consequently there wasn't the sheer boredom of as I say, digging holes and filling them in. So I don't - I can't remember anywhere that comes to mind where somebody was just fooling around for the sake of making a nuisance of themselves. They all had something to learn and it

09:30 was obviously something quite foreign to them. And I mean it didn't matter whether it was navigator, bomb aimer, air gunner. Flight engineers, we never had anything to do with them before we got to England. But they all had - and I think they were realistic to know that necks were going to be on the line according to how efficient or inefficient

10:00 they were. And everybody else was going to have rely upon them so you wouldn't get a very good reception from the rest of the crew.

**And what was your reaction when you were classified to go off to be an observer?**

Oh I was quite happy. Quite happy about it. Navigation was good, I enjoyed that.

**And what was the next step then?**

10:30 Well then as I say, down to Melbourne to Ascot. And we were only there a very short time, did nothing, just a matter of staging place. And then we were bused out to the Matsonia. It had brought a whole heap of Yanks over. It was going back virtually empty. I don't know how long it took us. A month or something like

11:00 that perhaps. We went right down south of New Zealand because the Japs were in at that stage and they were roaming the Pacific. We didn't see icebergs, but it must've been very close. Oh it was bitterly cold. And conditions on the ship were great because as I say, there was so few on it and the discipline was virtually nothing. We had to do -

11:30 man the guns in shifts so that again was - it wasn't arduous. And the galley was always open for you to go and have a bit of toast and something and a cuppa. You could have a cabin on your own or I think from memory I had one guy with me. So you weren't crowded or anything like that.

12:00 No it was - after three days of it. Oh and seasick, cause when you go down the south there, the seas were rugged and I didn't care whether I lived or died. If I had a preference I'd die and that was it. Oh it was shocking. I got over that and I never had it after that. So it was boring but pleasant.

**12:30 When you boarded this ship, what did you know about where you were going?**

Oh gee, I think we knew we were going to Canada, pretty sure we did. I can't remember when we were actually told. But it would've got out anyhow one we got on - the crew would've known which port next they were going. But I can't actually remember the

13:00 incident where we became aware of that.

**So you would have assumed if not known that you'd go to Canada for training and probably over to Europe to be part of bomber command?**

Oh almost certain. From Canada you go either to ferry command which is most unlikely. No you wouldn't go to ferry because they were all professional pilots. Or you go to coastal command or you go to

13:30 the Middle East. Oh bomber command of course. Those were the choices. Yeah. Coastal command,

bomber command or the Middle East, there were the probabilities.

**Did you have any reservations about going off to join that war when the Japanese were in so close to Australia?**

Well again I don't ever remember thinking about it seriously

14:00 because we didn't really know any more over there, than over here knew about over there. And I can't remember the reaction to the bombing of Darwin but certainly we knew nothing, it was only very recently we realised the extent of the bombing of Darwin. I was certainly under the impression that it was one attack and that was it.

14:30 And certainly didn't know about the damage or anything like that. And I think at the back of it, you had no choice anyhow whether you wanted to go home or stay over there. It was immaterial. You weren't going to be asked. Same as you never asked whether you were going to go to bomber command or fighter command or where you were going.

**What chance did you get to say goodbye**

15:00 **to your family or your girlfriend before you left Australia?**

Well we had embarkation leave. And I think that was it. Then after the embarkation leave went back to Bradfield Park and didn't see them again, except for my dearly beloved. She had a bit of initiative. Her brother worked at the - you know the old gas company in Haymarket?

15:30 Well he was working there and he saw the bus loads coming down. And he rang her, she was working at Bryant's and he rang her and said there was a whole heap of air crew. It wasn't air crew, RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] coming down to the railroad. So she went down and got herself a platform ticket. And then

16:00 you can imagine the whistles and so forth. Asked and eventually somebody knew and pointed her out, so she came along to the carriage. And that was the farewell.

**Had you talked about getting engaged at that point?**

We were engaged, we were already engaged. I can't remember now when we did get engaged, but it was

16:30 twelve months or more before hand.

**And why did you decide not to get married before you went?**

Stupidly really because I just thought, I didn't want to - don't want to - I didn't want to ...

17:00 Comes back to me vividly, but I wasn't fool enough to think that it couldn't happen. So I didn't want to leave her with - and I certainly didn't want to get married and

17:30 leave a child. But if I had any bloody sense I would've because no matter what happened, she'd have had - if I came back as I did, she'd have had a wife's allowance. If I'd gone for a row, she'd have been looked after for life.

18:00 Stupid, really was.

**But it's also understandable. There was a risk you wouldn't come back. I mean the odds weren't necessarily that great going overseas at that time.**

Yeah I know but still, even so as I say, if I hadn't come back she'd have been better off.

18:30 She'd have a war widow's pension; she wouldn't have had to ever work again if she didn't want to. So now I - wasn't right in the mind, I really wasn't.

**You would have also got a raise in pay, is that how it worked? Married men were paid more were they not?**

No, no, no. No she would've got a married allowance, wife's allowance which

19:00 was quite considerable cause she was being paid to live without - I made an allotment to her but that was voluntary but I don't know how much she would've got because I never got around to that. But I know she would not have had to work if she didn't want to and also she wouldn't

19:30 have had an medical expenses cause as a war widow she virtually had a gold card. Anyhow.

**It must've been an emotional farewell?**

Yeah, yeah it was. Yeah. I know we all say that but she was a gorgeous person.

**Moving back**

20:00 **to the trip over then, was there any scares, what about submarines?**

No, no, the only submarine scare came; we were in the Irish Sea. And it blared out, "Any man that fires at that sub will be court martialled, it's one of ours." Loud and clear. No, never saw anything at all over there.

20:30 That was our first sight of hostilities at all, was the sub.

**And that was on your way over to England?**

Yeah, down through the Irish Sea.

**And arriving then in the US, what were your first impressions of San Francisco?**

Oh lovely. Lovely place, nice city. People were terrific. They came down to the wharves and picked everybody up. "Where do you want to go?" They were great.

21:00 Really were. Yeah.

**Were they at war?**

No, no, not at that stage.

**They weren't serious about what was - they'd just entered into the war.**

No they hadn't, not in 1942 they hadn't. When was Japan...? Was December...

**Pearl Harbour was December '41.**

Was it?

**Yeah. But they certainly would've been much like Australia I imagine.**

21:30 **They weren't particularly geared up to it at that point.**

No, well I didn't realise that because certainly there was no sign of war in America when we went there. Oh of course there must've been because - yeah yeah. I don't know if they had rationing or anything, we had no sign of it.

**How did you get across the country?**

We went from San Francisco up to Vancouver.

22:00 And we only spent a day there I think it was. I think it was Orca Bay, in the bay there. And then we went to Edmonton and there we really did nothing. They did Morse code training but it was just a matter of something to keep them occupied. We were on leave most of the time. I went down to Calgary and Banff and Lake Louise. You could hitchhike anywhere at that time. And

22:30 I don't know how long, I think about a month in Edmonton. It was really only a staging camp and then we went across to Quebec, a little place called L'Ancienne Lorette, a little village. And civil airport was just outside it. And we spent the next nine months thereabouts, something like that, doing navigation, bombing

23:00 and gunnery. And then down to Belleville in Lake Ontario. It was very pleasant. It was cold, very cold. Snowed like fury and they had to shift us in the end down to St John's, down outside Montreal. The aerodrome was unserviceable. But again I liked Quebec.

23:30 Very nice. We met some great people there. English people but they were lovely, great to us. Met three lasses. No romantic attachment at all, they were just great friends, they really were. One worked for the bishop, Anglican bishop. And one she was much older than the other two but

24:00 she was a daughter of one of the early surveyors of the arctic area. So she knew it back to front. Used to take us skiing but wouldn't go on the easier runs because she knew the area back to front. She'd been with her Dad on it on many occasions. She'd leave us and we'd go off, just break a trail ourselves and we had a wonderful time.

24:30 And as I say the bombing on the lake was very pleasant. St. John's was very ordinary but we were only there for, I don't know how long, a short period.

**I'd like to talk a bit more about the details of this course. As you said it was an observer's course, designed to do a number of roles. Can you take us through the different parts of that training in Quebec?**

Well the main part was navigation so we did a lot

25:00 of dry runs as they call them. In other words they'd give you - they give you the co-ordinates of a certain spot. You set off from there and you go to the co-ordinates of another place or an actual village or something or other. And so on and so on, it'd go on. You might be a couple of hours and then you'd come back to base. And according to how you coped



- 25:30 you'd get back to base. Or you would be lost or fifty miles away or something like that. And then from that you'd go to the actual, they had Ansons and you'd go on actual navigation flights. I found it very difficult because everything was completely covered with snow
- 26:00 so there was nothing much to pick up and it was basically dead reckoning navigation and so a lot of it was pinpointing. I found it very difficult. But anyhow that's as I say, when you did the gunnery - I can't remember where but they used to just have a drogue pull a - or an aircraft
- 26:30 pull a drogue along and then you'd come like alongside and fire at it and the cartridges had colours on them so you'd be able to tell who got how many and so forth. That was done in a thing called a Bolingbroke which was a Canadian form of a Blenheim, twin engine medium bomber.
- 27:00 And we did some of it on the range, gunnery on the range too. And you did a certain amount on the turrets. They had different turrets. So they had - these turrets you used to have to do time in those. You'd have time off of course. But that was it and as far as
- 27:30 a New Zealander and myself, we met these - I met them only through Alan my friend and he said, "I'm going into Quebec to meet a lass there. Would you like to come?" And I said, "Yeah but threesome's not my..." He said, "Oh no there's nothing in it." They were actually going to see her family. I said, "Oh yeah I'll be in that." So
- 28:00 we went along and we spent the Christmas, that must've been the Christmas '43 with them. And we went on the Canadian version of a pub crawl. They had a band which went through all the streets of Quebec and they went into all the offices and everything. Everywhere they went you got shouted a drink and something to eat.
- 28:30 This was the Christmas celebration. By the time I'd finished I was full both ways. Anyhow I didn't actually get stoned, I managed to restrain myself. And we spent Christmas Day with them. There was a younger sister too and the mother. They had a brother and he was over in England with the Canadian Army. Yeah so it was a lovely Christmas.
- 29:00 It gets back to - you can edit it out anyhow. But came Christmas Eve and they said, "Do you want to go to church?" And I said, "Yeah I'd love to go to midnight mass." "Oh there's a problem about that." And I said, "Why?" "Well you've got to book." I said, "You've got to what?" They said, "You've got to book." I said, "I'm not bloody well going, thanks, the day I've got to book."
- 29:30 "I'll give it away." Okay I can understand they have that many they've got to book to see them. But over here at that time, if you couldn't get inside you could stand outside. I was absolutely disgusted. So anyhow I didn't go to mass, I didn't go to church. But we had a lovely day with them the next day, for Christmas Day. And we went skiing
- 30:00 and filled our time skiing. And we didn't have a lot of time off from the flying and that but enough.

#### **Were the Australian airmen generally pretty well behaved?**

By and large they were very well behaved. I mean that in a social sense, yes. They were not so well behaved with the Canadian air force. The Canadian air force are very strict and very

- 30:30 much à la British. And our mob were a bit inclined to take the mickey out of them and they didn't mind it. But they had one practise which got up the noses of - there was one particular course, the course before us. They had a flag. Of course they'd flown the flag in the middle of the parade ground. And every time you passed the flag
- 31:00 you were supposed to salute you see. So all the huts, no not the huts, they were long cabins, permanent things, had buckets of water and access for fire precautions so if there was a fire they could knock down doors and so forth. One morning when we got up - when they got up -
- 31:30 the flag pole was lying flat on the ground. They'd chopped the bloody thing down. But that was the only - that was strictly in service thing. But I never saw any sign of loutishness or anything like that. And never heard anybody complain. No nor should they, they were treated terrifically.

- 32:00 As I say we were made welcome like one of the family, Al and I.

#### **Was the community French speaking in Quebec at that time or English or both?**

Oh mostly French. That's where we see racism. I went to send a cable home on one occasion and bugger wouldn't send it. Nearly had a stand up brawl

- 32:30 before he eventually reluctantly sent it. Well I suppose he sent it, I don't know, I never heard whether they got it or not. But he purported to send it anyhow. And the French don't wear the English at all. The English from what I saw are quite, you know relaxed about it. But there's a French part and the English part. And it's unfortunate
- 33:00 that the English part is up on the plains of Abraham so I was up - looked down on the others down

there. But basically I didn't find any trouble. But the French blokes, they could nearly all speak English anyhow. And they didn't make waves or anything like that.

**The one other part of your training apart from gunnery was bombing. Did you do that there or was that done somewhere else?**

Yes that was

33:30 done at Lake Ontario.

**Can you tell us a bit more detail about what you did there?**

Oh well it's all done with smoke bombs so they were seven pound things they were. No wait a minute I'm getting confused there. The gunnery was done on the Lake, that's right, where you couldn't do any damage. Hopefully.

34:00 But the bombing was done on the bombing range and they were seven pound smoke rounds. And you just - you went up, you found the wind which you did by getting drifts on three different directions and - oh it averages out and you work your wind out from that. You could work your wind

34:30 from the difference between your course and your track. Your course is set by the aircraft, the track is set by a - what was it called? Oh a drift gauge. And it's a thing, it's got two wires going straight up and down and you line it out and it moves this way. You line it up on an object on the ground and if your wind

35:00 is not right, your aircraft will deviate. If the wind is right it'll just run down the drift wires. So that gives you your track. So you confirm it. But anyhow I think we used to have seven of these bombs and you just dropped them onto a target in the bombing raids.

**So what did you do with the wind calculations once you'd calculated them?**

Oh then you have

35:30 to put that on your bomb site, because that then it transfers the drift onto your bomb site. The bomb site again is a couple of drift wires running down and there's one point where it's release point. So if you've got your wind right you come onto the target and it comes, runs straight down the drift wires. If you don't it keeps drifting off all the time. You've got to get - the skipper's

36:00 got to keep changing course and you're never going to get anywhere with it really cause you can't do anything about it. So that's it and when you get to the release point you press the bomb tip and away you go. And when it explodes it sends up a puff of smoke. And they've got a quadrant office which plots where it lands so they tell you what area it is and they phone that back to the bombing department.

36:30 So that was all quite pleasant, nothing very taxing, done in Ansons again.

**How did you perform at it?**

Oh average, just average as usual.

**Was there one, I mean you eventually became a bomb aimer but I'm sure you didn't choose that. Was there one area of that training that you were better at or you enjoyed more?**

No I became a bomb aimer by - well it's getting

37:00 ahead, but do I come to that now?

**We'll come back to it but you became a bomb aimer by default or what was the situation? Just tell us that bit now.**

No, by choice.

**So what happened?**

When we came to crewing up, the way they used to crew up you wouldn't read about it, only the Poms could think up such a chaotic way. You all got into a big hangar and said, "Righto crew up." So you look, "I don't like the look of that bugger." So, "Oh, he looks as though..." You got a bomb aimer or you got

37:30 a navigator. Anyway at this stage I was looking for a skipper as a navigator. And I was close friends with another navigator. And I hadn't crewed up and in this mess I ran into Frank. And I said, "Have you crewed up?" And he said, "Yeah." I said, "Oh good on you, I haven't yet." And he said, "Come on and meet the skipper." So we came over and

38:00 I said g'day to him. And he seemed and he was a hell of a nice guy as it turned out. And I looked around and I still couldn't see anybody and I said, "Look how about we go together, I'll go as bomb aimer and you go as navigator." And he said, "Well that's up to you." And the skipper said, "Yes it's all right by me." I said, "Right that'll do me." So that's how I became at that stage a bomb aimer which changed later again

38:30 of course.

**So earlier on you had ambitions to be a navigator or is that just what they told you to do?**

Yeah definitely. I had never planned to be a bomb aimer, certainly not. But yeah.

**What appealed to you about the navigation side of things?**

I don't know it was just that it was, calculations and that's all. And before I found out differently the idea of being able to calculate

39:00 and do things, I'll be there, change course and I'll be there. And all this sort of thing. A bit like being on a ship, I think. I'd love to be a navigator on a ship more so than on an aircraft. So anyway I think that's what appealed to me really, the main thing.

**The comparison to a ship brings up the question of something you mentioned before. This was your seasickness and airsickness. When you were training in Canada how did that affect you?**

No I didn't have

39:30 any problems in Canada because you're always flying straight and level.

**So that came later on?**

On ops you're doing and the bloody table's coming out. No it's a different proposition altogether.

**So you didn't have any problems at all with airsickness in training?**

No no none at all. Oh there's another reason. Aggies [Avro Ansons] are only just ambling along, you can almost get out and walk if you wanted to and they're

40:00 flying straight and level. And the pilots are bored witless. They were, come over civilian pilots. Or most of them. They were mainly civilian pilots.

**Alright well we'll stop there because we're out of tape again.**

## Tape 5

00:47 **So Ken the bomb sites that you used in training, can you describe them?**

Well it's difficult to describe as I say, other than the fundamental thing was that

01:00 you had these two wires, parallel wires running down from the main part of the bomb site. And on the bomb site you had your height set to set the height and the wind. Had setting to apply both of those. Now if your height's right and that's up to you to settle on the bar. It's already set for whatever height

01:30 you're bombing at. So if the height's right your bomb will land where it's calculated that it's supposed to land. If your wind is right it'll follow the track so it again will go where the bomb goes because that's the track that you're on. And theoretically that's it, that's the way you go. But it's a very simple straightforward thing. As I say

02:00 it's just basically, you've got to be straight and level. As I say I think the Yanks had a gyro, I'm not sure but I think they had a gyro thing which self levelled. But that's why you had to, with the ones that the British had, you had to fly straight and level for maybe a minute, maybe longer. Maybe less. Because if you didn't, well

02:30 you'd throw them all over the place. But I'm talking theoretically here, as I understand, the gyro would level the bomb site for you. But unless you were straight, they'd throw them anywhere.

**Did speed come into the calculations?**

Oh yes, you had a course and the skipper had to use a course and an air speed. And the rest then was the track.

03:00 And the ground speed was out of your control. It was controlled by the wind and the course. So that was it.

**Who was in charge of the plane in respects of coming in to bomb?**

The skipper as far as our crew was concerned was always, that's why you called him the skipper. He was always in control. The culture was that the bomb aimer was in control

03:30 once he went down - got on the bombing run. And that meant that once the bomb aimer got down there and well, I'm being garbled here. There are two things too. It's hard to get it in sequence. The original thing the bomb aimer was down lying flat on his stomach, down in the nose. And he's trying to pick up

pinpoints with

- 04:00 ten tenths cloud underneath you and Europe blacked out, so you can imagine what you can pick up at twenty thousand feet. But anyhow that was the theory of it. Now in practise when they got on, you may have heard a thing called H2S [air-to-ground navigation system], this is getting out of sequence but I don't know whether you can sort that out perhaps. This H2S came on, available, and then I finished up
- 04:30 being with a navigator so we were virtually at that stage, flying as two navigators. And with this H2S I was able to pick up pinpoints through cloud or anything else. So I'd pick the pinpoints up and give him a wind and he'd give the skipper a course according to that wind, revised wind. And when it came towards the target run I'd go down into the bomb bay and then I'd
- 05:00 take over the bomb site and bomb. When that was finished I'd go back up onto the H2S and see if we could find our way back home. With the navigator setting the course. They're doing the major thing, I was really just doing the pinpointing.

**Excellent. Just one side question in respect to navigation. Maths is pretty important for navigation?**

Oh

- 05:30 you've got to - yes you've got to know - you've got to be reasonably good at maths and you've got to be reasonably quick too because you know you're travelling at two hundred and forty knots or something like that. So if you take five minutes to work out your calculations and your wind, it's history because that's where you were five minutes ago and you're a hundred miles further on or knots further on or something. So yes you've got to be
- 06:00 able to concentrate very hard. And as I say with an aircraft doing this and bloody table going up and down, not easy.

**You did mention earlier that maths at high school you did struggle with a bit. Did you get on top of the maths?**

Well fortunately that was with the Maths 2. Although there was trigonometry and all that, but no I never had any trouble with the trigonometry there on the course.

- 06:30 I don't think I learned anything in between so I don't know. I must've picked up something on the course that I'd missed somewhere.

**Coming back to Quebec and your training days, a navigator can be assessed by whether he, you know makes the right destination, the pilot by how he flies. How is a bomb aimer assessed?**

Well, by his accuracy on the target.

- 07:00 Might even have - no wouldn't be - no it's not there. But we were bombing from six thousand feet and I think fifty metres is classed as being reasonable. Beyond that you're starting to get a bit hairy. I don't ever remember anybody hitting the target but ...

**Was there any sort of competition amongst the fellows?**

No

- 07:30 You're just in competition for your assessment. I'm sure it will only show the same thing, average.

**Canada's quite cold. What clothing did you have?**

Oh we had Canadian issue battle dress.

- 08:00 I think we had long johns from memory, I don't think I ever wore them, but I think we had them. And then you had the special hat with the ear pieces like the lumber jackets you see. I think basically that was it. Gloves of course. We had - I think we had some sort of boots too.
- 08:30 Bit vague on that. But we didn't have, we just had their Canadian clothing. But when we're flying of course we had flying suits. But the rest of the time everywhere you went was air conditioned. The base was all air conditioned. So you darted
- 09:00 from one - all the ablutions and everything were all inside, toilets and that. And when you go into town the buses are all air conditioned and heated. And you go into Quebec and you dart from one shop to the next and pull the flaps down and push the flaps up.

**The flying suits, what did they look like?**

Oh it's hard to describe them

- 09:30 but they were fur lined and your boots were fur lined. And the gunners had electric attachments to their boots. Well it was just basically it, fur lined things. Why I'm so vague, I don't remember, because I didn't wear them. The heating in the aircraft came from the manifolds which is fed in up near the cockpit. So

10:00 up in the cockpit and the navigation compartment you're always overheating and the gunners are screaming, and the wireless operator are screaming bloody murder, "More heat." Yeah so I can remember wearing was the fur lined boots and the helmet. We didn't wear gloves cause you couldn't navigate courses and things with gloves. But we didn't need it; that was quite warm.

10:30 **Just explain to the archive why the gunners had, what electrical boots?**

They had boots tied up to the electrical system of the aircraft. They also had, I think they were silk socks, I think it was silk socks and then their big woollen ones. Often when it was winter

11:00 mostly it was winter time. I started in the December and went through to July but the bulk of that was in the winter, leading to and the middle of winter. And you'd be, nothing unusual for it to be ten degrees below on the ground and you'd drop two degrees for every thousand feet. So if you were at twenty thousand, you were minus

11:30 forty odd, minus forty degrees easy. So they had no heating in either the rear turret or the mid upper so they really do it tough. I think just to avoid frostbite they would have to have it. And the same the gloves, and all they were wearing, it was all heated. It was still very cold for them but at least

12:00 I really think it was - this is only an opinion but I think it was probably to stop frostbite.

**Just with the guns, given the cold, did the guns at all freeze up as a result?**

No they never did and I never knew why, never worked that out. I mean I did gunnery although not in Canada, it's still the same. They jammed at times but it was never as far as know, was never through icing.

12:30 What used to happen was the hooks that hold the bombs, they'd ice up. And the bombs wouldn't drop, that happened quite frequently. And when it came down below freezing point, the bloody things'd defrost.

**And then drop?**

Well they'd drop into the bomb bay, but they were barometric fuses so they would go off. But when

13:00 you'd come back you'd have to let them know. Or very rarely let you know - open the bomb doors and let them go over the Channel, making sure we were well away from the navy. Those mad buggers, they'd fire at anything that moved. Yeah no so - but I never heard of the guns freezing up, because once they fired they wouldn't.

**Were there**

13:30 **any accidents?**

We were introduced to the real war in Canada and Quebec. We used to go up to as I say to an aircraft, and this particular day, an easy way of doing it, Bill, Bolla and Crump, the alphabet. So Bill and Bolla go in this one, Crump goes in this one. There's only one in that one. So they collided in mid air.

14:00 Right at training. So it brought home with a jolt, it's real.

**Did you see it happen?**

No no I don't think anybody saw it. It was somewhere out away from our 'drome.

**How did it affect morale?**

14:30 Oh I think it shook everybody up because it was the first. After that they lost a hell of a lot of aircraft in accidents one way or another. And it became just the same as, if you're lost in an op, that's it; well you've got to go on.

**And was there any memorial service given?**

Yeah, there was.

15:00 **When did you know in Quebec that you were moving on?**

We were given, when the course finished. Actually we were at St John when we finished and we were given leave. I don't know how much it was but embarkation leave.

15:30 So we went up to - mate and myself went up to Quebec and sort of said goodbye eventually to the family there. And then we went over to Halifax but I can't remember how long. It was probably a fortnight or something like that. Embarkation leave. We went over there.

**And where did you catch the Louis Pasteur?**

16:00 Louis Pasteur, that was from Halifax.

**Do you remember that trip over?**

Oh yes I remember that. It was choc a block with bloody Yanks. Most of whom had never been to sea before. It was choc a block, they were sleeping on shifts on tables. And leave the table for a meal. And they were vomiting

16:30 everywhere, you wouldn't want to know about it. Fortunately, as I say, I'd had my dose in the Matsonia so I could – didn't even make me sick. And if anything'd make you sick that would. But it was very fast and so she shot across – I don't know how long it took. Very quick trip anyhow, yeah. But it was just a very

17:00 boring trip because you were so crowded, there was nothing you could do. Oh, it was an unpleasant trip, that's all, plus the fact that you were going through the wolf packs, not terribly impressed with that. No we didn't see a thing.

**What was the general feeling about being on the doorstep of the war, was there excitement amongst the fellows**

17:30 **you'd be training with?**

Oh nobody was game to mention it whether you were frightened or anything else. You just pretended it didn't matter you know. I think one saving feature of it was if you went down, I think they worked out you had about two minutes to survive in the Atlantic and by that time your blood freezes and everything stops.

18:00 So at least you knew it was going to be quick.

**So you finally got to England and landed at Brighton?**

Bournemouth. Yeah that was a staging camp again. And I don't know how long we were there, not very long. Might have been a week. I don't think it was any more than that. But we had nothing to do other than – oh I think we went to

18:30 a couple of lectures in the theatre, just to keep occupied. But even going back to the question you asked, I don't see anybody misbehaving. It was really very pleasant wandering around Brighton, there wasn't much in the way of entertainment. But it was a very pleasant place and the people agin, very nice. They really supported you.

19:00 And then we were moved from there over to a place in Wales. I don't know how you spell it or pronounce it, the nearest we'd get was Pushnella, but P.W.L.L.A.I.I. or something [Pwllheli]. And we did I can't even remember what aircraft we used there. It must have been a Blenheim again. But anyhow we did night

19:30 flying and night bombing. And then we dropped the real thing in the Atlantic, just to see what a big bang it makes. And when we finished there and that's the only part in Britain that we weren't welcome. They hated the British, they really do,

20:00 or really did. I suppose they still do. But they had no sympathy with them whatsoever. Anyway from there...

**But you were Australian, that didn't make any difference?**

Oh didn't matter and they hated – Britain was in the war so that was it, anybody who was in the war. I'm not saying they hated us, but they didn't know, didn't want to know you. As against most

20:30 other places at least were happy to say, "G'day where are you from?" and shake hands. But no. Never really worked that out.

**Just when you actually did get to the UK for the first time, at Bournemouth and Brighton, what could you see as far as these places were suffering from the war?**

Oh we came in

21:00 - well I've misled you there. We came in at Liverpool in ship and then we were transferred straight off the ship, straight over to Bournemouth. But Liverpool was just devastated. You couldn't imagine anything like it. Just all this burnt out city. It had taken a pasting.

**And the people. What**

21:30 **impact upon the people did this devastation...**

Well I didn't see, cause we went straight from the ships to the buses and straight over to Bournemouth, so didn't meet the people there. I did in London, and they were philosophical. Just you know, put up with it and get on with life. They were living out of shelters. I spent quite a few nights in an Anderson shelter on leave.

22:00 I spent a night in a hotel in Barclay Square cause I wanted to hear the nightingale and all I got was bloody bombs. No nightingale. They'd all gone, left for better places.

**So while you were in England you actually got caught up in air raids as well?**

Oh yeah well I used to go down to a family down in Croydon.

22:30 And the buzz bombs were on at the time so they were coming over. It was before the straight up and downers, U2's or something they called them. V2s. Before they started. But yeah had enough, sampled enough of the bombing to know I have great respect for the Brits, they're the salt of the earth.

23:00 **So just in respect to air raids, do you remember the first air raid you got caught up in?**

I think it might have been in London itself at Barclay Square, I think that was the first one. It probably was, that was before I met this family down in Croydon. Cause after that I hardly ever went to London I used to go straight down there with them and spend my leave with them.

23:30 When I wasn't with another family in Glasgow doing the same thing.

**Just coming forward a bit, the Blenheims, how did they differ from the Avro Ansons from your point of view?**

Oh they were the last word compared with the Ansons. But they were obsolete compared with the Lance. So they were still using them. From necessity rather than anything else.

24:00 But they didn't have a great load capacity and they didn't have a great range, I don't know what it was. Didn't have anything to do with them like that. But they were classed as a medium bomber. And if you think that the Halifaxes I think - I'm doing a bit of guessing here but I think they probably

24:30 carried about ten thousand pound. So the Blenheims would have been back to I think probably six or eight. It's a guess.

**The trip where you dropped the real thing, your first bombs.**

Oh it was an anti-climax. It just made a big splash. Only did the one, couldn't afford any more.

25:00 **What were you aiming for?**

Nothing. Just dropping to see what happened. I don't think - it was just a gimmick cause it had no real purpose. Had no relation to dropping an actual bomb on operations. And making a big splash was one thing it didn't do. So yeah.

**Had you**

25:30 **been crewed up at this point in time?**

Partly. We had to pick up a gunner and a flight engineer still. Yeah we did definitely. So I was still flying as a navigator at that stage. Navigator bomb aimer. So it wasn't till we went to OTU that I crewed up as a bomb aimer.

26:00 **So what was after this then, from flying the Blenheims?**

From there we went - yeah must've Blenheims there, I'm a bit vague on that but it must've been Blenheims, I think. Anyhow from there we went to, what they call the OTU, Operational Training Unit at Lichfield. And that's where you start your real training in operational aircraft.

26:30 Which were Wellingtons, but they were old Wellingtons. Very prone to motors cutting and they were fabric covered and you had a weird thing, you had to pump oil. And it had a thing with a joystick about that long and you had to pump this oil, pressure against it of course, I forget how many times. But you had to do that to keep oil up to the motors.

27:00 Nobody ever bothered asking, they just hated the ruddy thing. And the oil used to leak of course so all the fabric used to get oil soaked. And if you did prang, then it was almost certain it'd burst into flames. They weren't terribly popular. You couldn't - geodetic construction. A shell'd go straight through and wouldn't

27:30 weaken the thing at all. But they suffered very much from being obsolescent basically. They did have a later marks which were better. So anyhow as I say, that's where the pilot did circuits and bumps on the Wellingtons. And I think we did

28:00 - I think we had a bit of a joy ride there. It wasn't that long. We must have done some cross countries or something, I can't remember, I know we had a ball. Cause we had a lot of time off. We'd hardly got there when they moved us to a satellite, a few miles away. And discipline was non existent; you just had to be there when you had to be there.

28:30 Prior to that, they left you to your own devices. And we managed to acquire a couple of bicycles and we used to travel down the country lanes and wave to the squires in their leggings and so forth. No it was - this must've been - it must've been summer time because we were in summer drill. That was a very enjoyable time, I can remember that.

29:00 Without remembering the details.

### **Circuits and bumps, what's that?**

Taking off and landing in a new aircraft, one you haven't done before. There's a big difference between taking off and landing in a Wellington for example to taking off and landing, particularly in a Blenheim. Blenheim were touchy aircraft from what I can gather for the pilot but not sure about - didn't

- 29:30 seem to have a very good reputation. The Aggies of course, they'd come down of their own accord. But yeah, so they had to take off, land, take off, land until they got it right basically.

### **In respect to the bombing side, the bomb sites in the Blenheims and also the Wellingtons, were they exactly the same as the Avro Ansons?**

Well

- 30:00 I don't - now this is where I'm getting vague because I was still flying as a navigator. I was still flying as a navigator. I don't remember bombing in the Wellingtons. I think it must've been just training flights.

- 30:30 **From a navigational point of view then the landscape of England, was that much the same or much different to that of Quebec?**

Oh no, it was much easier really although because it was so densely populated it had its problems because it was very easy to mistake one small town for another one. And you had to - rely on railway lines and various other things.

- 31:00 Landmarks that were very conspicuous. But it wasn't as bad as Canada; well I didn't think it was. I thought Canada, because of the snow, was very hard.

### **Any stories where you got lost?**

No never actually got lost. I got home I guess, rather than by skill, didn't know we were there until the skipper said, "We're over the 'drome now."

- 31:30 "Oh!" "Oh yeah, yeah of course." Yeah, no we didn't have any dicey do's, not up to that point, the OTU.

### **You shared a bit earlier about crewing up and stuff and how you got crewed up with your particular crew. But at the time when you were all put in this room**

- 32:00 **you'd flown with other pilots?**

Oh yes you had - well until when? No I think until we went to Wales, that's when - no I'm getting confused. In Wales we had pilots, supplied by the aerodrome, so you had a different pilot every time. Cause I remember we had some Polish pilots there and they didn't understand the difference between knots

- 32:30 and miles per hours. They knew they had to go up so they went up and they had to come down, they came down. Yeah that's right. But we - where did we pick Les up? We picked Les up, must've been OTU. Yeah it was. That's right, because I can remember

- 33:00 talking to one of the pilots at training, teaching. And somebody said, "How'd he go?" "Oh he's an Australian." "Oh he hasn't got a bloody clue." Familiar? Yeah so yes, at time we had Les. I can't remember where

- 33:30 we actually picked Les up.

### **But up to this point of crewing up you actually hadn't flown with any of the pilots in that room?**

No that's where we actually picked a pilot up. So they were RAF [Royal Air Force], well they would've been RAF pilots that's right. Yeah. Seems strange how you just go vague at times like that. But definitely when Les -

- 34:00 that's where he did circuits and bumps, so that's where we picked Les up, somewhere along there.

### **And the rest of the crew, where did you get them from? The gunners...**

I think we picked up the gunners. The gunners and the flight engineer - oh God

- 34:30 I've lost it now. I can't even remember where we picked up the wireless operator. Must've been at OTU, but I don't know how we acquired him. It wasn't another one of these, you know go into one of the hangars and sort it out for yourselves, but we definitely had him, I'm sure we had him at OTU. At

- 35:00 the conversion unit.

### **So once you'd crewed up, what were some of the first flights you did?**

Cross countries. It was all cross countries then. Which was fairly hairy because they had the balloon barrages and trigger-happy ack-ack [anti-aircraft] guns. Weather, weather was as big a problem as anything. Cause they used to fly when



35:30 they shouldn't, naturally. Lost a lot in training.

**Can you give me an example of someone flying when they shouldn't and getting caught in weather.**

Oh well not in training actually but yes, coming back more than once diverted to other aerodromes cause it's fog covered and you had to land away and so forth. That happened more than once.

36:00 But the bad weather was probably the biggest weather with navigation because you could take off and it was all right and in an hour's time its fog bound. Rain pelting down, lightning.

**So what would you do if that was happening?**

Best you could. You always had radio contact so you could get back to base and they'd tell you where it was clearing. Divert you to something where it was clear. They had that problem, they miscalculated. They sent them off one night on an op and they worked it out that they could get to the target and get back before the weather was forecast

36:30 to close in. And the weather didn't play fair and most of East Anglia was fogged bound. So they were going around and around in circles and couldn't get down. And finished up they were jumping out and let it go out to sea. All sorts of things. They lost about sixty, seventy aircraft just that way, that night.

37:00 **Were you involved in that night?**

No we weren't actually, we got down. I think it was probably the blokes coming back later. See they'd be a good half an hour, three quarters of an hour probably from the time the first one's landed to the last. So some of the first ones would have got down and then it closed in properly on the others. But we were never -

37:30 and part of our time too, we were on a aerodrome that had a thing they called FIDO [Fog Intensive Dispersal Of], it's some fog dispersal something or other. And it consisted of, down both sides of the runway, they had flares lighting the runway up - well not to light the runway up. It did that but it was there to lift the

38:00 fog. And there were only a few of them, I don't know how many, there were only a few. And we were on 101 Squadron which they had that, and we've come in on that okay. But it was a bit out of favour because if you came back dripping fuel

38:30 it was not the thing to do. She'd just go up like a balloon.

**We might stop there.**

## Tape 6

00:44 **We were just talking before lunch about the OTU, which you told me was at Church Broughton. Where was Church Broughton?**

I don't know exactly how far but a few miles from Manchester.

**And what was that area like. Manchester had been bombed fairly heavily?**

No,

01:00 I don't remember any great damage being done there. But it was, we didn't see a lot of it, or I didn't anyhow. But we were out in the countryside, it was rural, Church Broughton, it was just stuck out on its own.

**And what did you have to do as far as operational training went?**

It was just familiarisation with the operation of the aircraft.

01:30 Which was for the whole crew. The pilot flying it and familiarisation. And us, the navigator, bomb aimer doing the cross countries and that type of thing, getting familiar with the countryside or the conditions more than the countryside.

**You told us about how you crewed up. Can you now tell us a little bit about who the crew was the different personalities within it.**

Yeah, well,

02:00 Les the skipper was, as I say from Gympie in Queensland. And I think he was a timber worker. Oh he would've been about twenty-one probably. Then the flight engineer which we picked up very late, he was a Brit. Don't know much about him, we never did. There was only - most of

- 02:30 us were Australians and the Brits of course went home on leave. So outside the actual flying we didn't see a lot of them. Then was Frank who was a school teacher in Sydney and he was about twenty. And going back would be the wireless operator, that was Eric Cavanagh. He came
- 03:00 from Adelaide actually, I don't know a lot about his history there. His Mum and Dad were separated and his father had a pub in Ipswich in England. And Terry was only about nineteen, he was quite young. And then we had mid upper gunner and a rear gunner. Now the mid upper, he was an Australian. He's a real character.
- 03:30 I don't know anything about his background. I don't think any of us did but he was a real scruffy type and he was a hell of a nice guy. The rear gunner was a Brit, Scott and he was only about eighteen. They were all very nice blokes, they really were.

**Did you bomb straight away or was there a period**

- 04:00 **of time before you got used to each other?**

Oh well we went from there to conversion unit which converted over onto the four engines. So we had some cross country and stuff there on those. Then we went to, what was called a PFF Navigation Unit for further navigation to go to PFF which was Pathfinders, supposed to be the elite. And

- 04:30 then we went to 7th Squadron from there. But up till then that had been more or less repetition work, with just familiarisation with the new aircraft, or a different aircraft.

**So how did the dynamics in that crew work? I mean who was the joker and who was the ...**

Oh Terry was the larrikin, he was an absolute larrikin. He was good fun. And Tom Watt the mid upper he was a bit of a character too.

- 05:00 But I was probably the more - most sober of them all. Les was a quiet sort of bloke but a good sense of humour. They all had a good sense of humour, really got on very well together.

**How did Terry, how was he the larrikin, what did he do?**

Oh well it's a classic, when we'd finished flying we were loafing around the squadron there

- 05:30 while they were finding out what to do with us. And the Cambridge area's a fruit growing area. So we had nothing to do and no leave passes or anything like that to worry about. And they were very short of fruit pickers so Terry and I went picking fruit and we used to get two bob or something a punnet. Anyhow it was all good fun and the trouble was we'd come back at night and there be half the

- 06:00 mess had closed and Terry'd go and chat up the WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] and they'd do something for us. And one night we came home and he struck a grumpy one. Now I must say that the hot plates were not really hot, they were just uncomfortably warm. He picked her up and dumped her on the hotplate when she wouldn't get a meal for us. You could never predict what'd he do. And anywhere he'd go, you'd change

- 06:30 squadrons and he'd only be there half an hour and he'd disappear and he'd come back. He'd know all about it, where to go, who to dodge and everything else. He was a real typical gregarious Australian. Yeah. Yeah they were a good crew, they really were.

**What about within the aircraft when you were flying. Was there humour and larrikinism then or was it all just doing your job?**

Oh mostly you didn't have much chance for humour. No you

- 07:00 were all pretty well on your toes. I've heard of humour. A classic - this actually happened. The crew got in and flak started to hammer them and the rear gunner called out to the skipper, "Get weaving, there's flaks on the tail." And nothing happened and he's yelled at him, "Get bloody weaving!"

- 07:30 It's getting close!" And the voice came back, "Fear not, the Lord was with us." And the voice came back, "He might be up your bloody end but he's not down here, get weaving!" That's supposed to be true. I couldn't guarantee it. But it was a good story anyhow. But I think it was because the actual sequel to that was that the crew refused to fly with him and the CO [Commanding Officer] at the time happened to be a bit of a so and so and, so

- 08:00 he court martialled them and the whole lot were stripped and sent to the - oh I forget the name of the place, but the equivalent of our Holsworthy out here.

**Was that a crew on the squadron with you?**

It was on the squadron but before us. They weren't there when we were there. But it was fairly recent though so there was a quite a bit of feeling about it.

- 08:30 **Was that uncommon to have tension and crew that didn't get on that well?**

Oh I think so. Mostly if crews didn't get on they found reasons to switch, that sort of thing. But I never struck any crew, was not aware of any crew that had that problem. They usually bonded pretty well.

Their necks were together and depended on each other.

**Were there any harsh words ever between,**

09:00 **within your own crew?**

Oh yes you had your odd flare ups but they were pretty rare and didn't persist. Skipper got quite crotchety with me one night and I don't blame him. But we had the wrong - we were always given a forecast wind for the target, run into the target. And this particular night it was absolutely hopeless.

09:30 And I couldn't get the target on the - to go down the drift wire. And he went, left left left. And he kept - and in the end he tipped the bloody thing over. He'd had enough. By which time it was all over anyhow, we were through the target. No, I don't think he was angry. I think he was just frustrated. Never grizzled about it afterwards. No, I think mostly the crews had to get on and they did.

10:00 **What happened to the bombs on that occasion?**

Well it was a stupid thing. I really wanted my head read. As I say we always deferred to the pilot as the skipper but I opted to go around again. So we went around again and we had the same bloody trouble and we finished up dropping it as best I could but it'd be ineffective.

10:30 **We'll come back to that, but I can imagine going around again wasn't something that the crew wanted to do.**

No they said, next time let them know beforehand and they'd get out and walk thanks. Cause we went back straight into the bomber stream too. So it was very hairy. I did it without thinking, but a bit of bloody common sense I should've known better.

**We'll come back to that. We'll make a point to talk**

11:00 **about going over the target. Just before we do, going back to the sequence of events, after your OTU you were sent to a conversion unit. This is the first time you saw the Lancasters?**

Yeah yeah.

**Can you describe the Lancaster for us and give us a bit of detail about that aeroplane.**

Well it was before Merlins and I don't know what the horse power was but something pretty significant.

11:30 It had twin tails, fins, twin fins. It was basic, there was no lining of any description, it was just metallic skin. There were no comforts in it, there was nothing extra. They stripped it for everything that they could to minimise the weight. And the flight engineer spent most of his time standing up.

12:00 Skipper's seat was very basic and wasn't a comfortable thing, he used to sit on his parachute which was not a choice. The aft compartment was reasonably comfortable, you had a table about that long and repeaters for the air speed indicator and course and all that sort of thing.

12:30 I can't think of much else in the nav compartment. We just had a bench seat. And then the wireless operator was back behind the spa. All this was in front of the spar then you climbed over the spar up to the back section. And wireless operator was there on the left hand side with all his gear there. And the mid upper was half way back

13:00 just behind actually, just behind where the wireless operator was. And then you went back past the photo flash tube to the rear gunner and it had the four guns, four .303 Brownings, hydraulic turret. And there was a nose turret which was supposed to be mine.

13:30 Well if you're travelling at two hundred and fifty miles an hour or anything coming in the opposite speed in the dark, it was just pointless so I never used it. Yeah basically that's it I suppose. They were a very good - they would fly on one engine. And we did it, and it does do it. Couldn't hold height, it was slowly going down.

14:00 The skipper was always - they all said it was a lovely aircraft to handle.

**Where did you get into the aircraft?**

Have we got the photo there? Well on the starboard side, the right hand side, just past the mid upper which was I suppose,

14:30 I don't know, about ten or twelve feet from the rear turret probably. Yeah. It was also - in the bombing section there was a hatch there. And you could go out there and there was one above the skipper and you could go out there.

**Was that far off the ground that hatch, did you have to climb up a ladder to get into?**

No you could only get in through the door. You'd get out but you could only get in through the door of the Lanc [Lancaster].

15:00 The Halifax was different, I can't remember. I don't think I ever actually saw it. Again it was all a bit of a

placebo because if you were in trouble usually the G [gravity] would pin you down and you had Buckley's. The bombing hatch, was only about like that, so you'd have trouble getting through

15:30 with a parachute. Wouldn't be easy.

**So that hatch at the front would be where the pilot and the bomb aimer, the navigator would all try and escape through?**

That's right, that was the nearest one yeah. And the pilot might go out the top, it just depends.

**And there was a hatch at the back as well?**

No, there was only the door at the back, that was the only way the rear gunner could reverse his turret, go ninety degrees and

16:00 drop outside.

**Could you stand up all through the aircraft?**

Oh no down towards the tail it sloped and you were bent but mostly you could stand up in it. But you couldn't in the bombing hatch of course. That had the turret on top of it. Anyhow you had no reason to

16:30 stand up there in any case.

**Which part of the aircraft or which role was the most uncomfortable and the hardest to perform?**

Oh the rear gunner.

**Can you tell us a bit about what he did and what the reputation of his job was?**

Well theoretically he was to spot, both the gunners, to spot a fighter coming. Because they'd come in

17:00 from the rear naturally. And also when you got within any sort of reasonable distance you had four Merlin engine manifolds glowing like stop lights. So once you got around you had no trouble picking it out and coming in below and behind it. So that's where most of the attacks took place. Sometimes, oh probably as often as not,

17:30 they'd come from one of the quarters high, come in on a dive. But they were supposed to hopefully pick them up and then we'd go into a corkscrew. It sounds great till you realise that the Browning had a range of about four hundred metres and the fighters with cannon had about eight hundred. So

18:00 you could spray the sky but you wouldn't even hit anything. So I can't understand how the ones that did - the fighters that did get shot down. A number of them did, they got shot down. But really there was no need for it. The mid upper had the same thing only he had a three sixty degrees.

**So apart from being obviously the most dangerous part of the plane**

18:30 **was it also the most uncomfortable?**

It was. Yes because one, it was bitterly cold as I say, in spite of all the heating, it was still bitterly cold. It was very very cramped cause the thing was not very big anyhow, because it had to fit into the outline of the aircraft in the tail which was tapering. And

19:00 they had the heavy flying suit on. It was a devil's own job to get in and much the same to get out. And obviously it felt very isolated down there but it was very dangerous because the fighters would target the rear gunner of course.

**How would the crew communicate to each other?**

We had an intercom

19:30 and there was an on off switch. Went through to everyone. It wasn't selective so that whatever you said, went through to the whole crew. So if the rear gunner said, "Fighter on..." wherever it is, the whole crew knew so you'd be prepared for what was coming then. As I say you were corkscrewing, so you'd be flying all over the place.

20:00 But no seatbelts or anything like that, so you rolled around a fair bit.

**Was the talking within the intercom system limited to things like, fighter approaching?**

No as far as, I don't know what other crews - but as far as we were concerned it was limited to business. On the odd occasion Terry got addicted to music and he'd get a bit of - what was the guy, the American

20:30 bloke that got lost. Oh it doesn't matter. Anyhow their band leader. Anyhow he'd get him occasionally and he'd say, "Listen to this, fellows." And you'd shut him down pretty quickly but other than that, no it was - I mean you couldn't really, couldn't afford to because all eyes, the flight engineer - they had an astrodome up the top where you could take

21:00 theoretical stars with a - what do they call them?

**A sexton?**

Yeah, sexton. A bubble sexton which means it has to be dead level. And you've got an aircraft which by its very nature, flies more or less in circles. And you're supposed to pick a star and if it isn't clouded over.

21:30 I never used it and I never struck any of the other guys that did. But anyhow he'd be up in that searching, keeping an eye, trying to pick up anything. So everybody had that as a background thing. If you weren't doing anything at least you'd do that. But the navigator didn't have time to scratch. And at the time that I was on the H2S.

22:00 Once we got over the enemy coast of Europe the G, which the other, was very good electronic gear but it was jammed by the Germans. So from the time we reached the coast, enemy coast, the only thing we had to rely on was this H2S. And it was great to tell you where you were if you knew where you were because you had no way of knowing for sure what the town was that you were picking up.

22:30 But you could only do that on dead reckoning so, well should be, such and such a town should be coming up in five or ten minutes, and if something came up, a blip came up well you could be reasonably certain that was it. And then the screen used to be just a round one with a scanner thing on it where you could get the direction, the degrees, the bearing. And also the distance. It had a

23:00 marker ring, you could get the distance of it. So with that you had your position exactly, well within reason.

**Was this - cause this hadn't been on the Lancasters the entire time. Was it on there when you arrived on Lancasters?**

No. It hadn't been. We went from them to 101 Squadron which was a main force. And when we

23:30 came back it was on but originally it wasn't. They were just bringing them on.

**But I think before as you said to Michael [interviewer] before, the bomb aimer's job was when there was H2S was to control the H2S set. When there wasn't what did you do on the way out to target?**

Be down in the bomb hatch just looking, trying to pick up something. Because you weren't really looking for fighters because they were not going to come at you from the front.

24:00 But as I say with ten tenths cloud it was really having a bit of a loaf until you got to the target. Sometimes you'd pick up a river or something and you might be able to fit your position from that. But rivers would show up very well at night particularly with a little bit of moon. They show up very very bright. That told you it was a river, it didn't tell you what one, or whereabouts it was.

**24:30 What about other aircraft, was it important to look out for them?**

Well it was - again remembering the whole of Europe was blacked out and we were operating in darkness so you - mostly the only time you realised there was other aircraft you'd get the slip stream and you'd get buffeted around in the slip stream and you'd know there was something pretty close. It might be ahead, it might be the side. But

25:00 you'd increase your vigilance then but you really wouldn't know. Once we got the H2S, that was handy because you could pick up other aircraft. The size of the blip and the speed, a fighter would come in reasonably fast whereas a Lanc would stay in the same position. And so you could pick them up like that.

**We'll just maybe**

25:30 **get you to explain a bit more about the H2S because although we've heard it before it's not a common term that people know about. So for the archives can you explain exactly what it was?**

Yes it was a electronic transmitter which transmitted a beam or a signal. A signal I guess. Transmitted a signal and when it hit an object it would bounce back and this H2S received it in the form of a blip.

26:00 As distinct from something like G, for example the one that they used over on the coast until it was jammed. That used to send a signal out, that was the end it was gone. They'd have a signal from another direction would intersect and that'd tell them where they were. But this thing transmitted and received, it couldn't be jammed obviously because of that. But

26:30 it had its problems. They woke up to in the end the fighters were coming in on the signal, H2S signal so we used to just use it on dead reckoning when a town was coming on, they'd put it on, and then as soon as they got a fix, they'd turn it off again.

**What did a feature on the ground look like on the H2S reading?**

Just a blip on this fluorescent screen. And it was scanning and so it'd be, every time it came there it'd

27:00 blip, blip.

**So how would a blip for an aircraft differ from a blip for a town?**

Well a town wouldn't move but an aircraft as I say, would usually be another Lanc. See there'd be six or seven hundred or more all going to bomb within roughly a half an hour, forty minutes. So they were pretty closely packed. There must've been a lot of collisions definitely, but there was no way of telling what was a collision and what were enemy

27:30 attack, or flak or anything else. "Cause the flak used - German flak was very fierce. They used to have box flak, they'd box you in and...

**Just staying on the H2S for a moment, what other features would appear on it, apart from towns, with other things on the ground?**

Oh rivers, coastlines, coastlines are beaut. It was like a map, you could really pick where you were on a coastline. But

28:00 there's actual identifiable blips. It was only really towns, buildings wouldn't. You know individual buildings or anything like that. Had to be a decent. I doubt whether the villages would, had to be a decent town. There were plenty of those so you didn't have any worries there.

**You described the screen a moment ago, where was that in the aircraft?**

It was right next to the

28:30 G and so forth, that the Navigator had. Right beside it set up on this bench.

**And in the period where you had this equipment, you would spend most of your time right next to the navigator.**

Yeah only went down into the bombing bay when we got towards the run end of the target.

**What else did you find about the Lancaster**

29:00 **when you converted onto it. What was new and different about this aircraft apart from its two extra engines?**

Oh everything was different about it. As I say the crew was increased to seven instead of the five that it had been before. The power of the take off, you know it was pin your ears back when it took off. It was a very

29:30 - in different circumstances, a lovely aircraft for flying. It really was. Although I must admit the first time I got in I thought, "God it looks like a bloody coffin." They were black and felt like one. But no it didn't have any nasty features, it was quite good. Really good.

**Were they difficult things to take off in?**

No no, they took off - I think they used to swing to port a little bit

30:00 or used to swing to port, how much I don't know. But that was an accepted thing and they just used rudder to control it and no they never, the pilots never complained about it.

**What was the noises of flight in a Lancaster? What could you hear when you were up in the air?**

Oh well with four Merlins and no ear pads, you only had this helmet with the earphones in it. So they

30:30 didn't screen out anything. So you couldn't hear yourself. You'd scream. Without the intercom you couldn't, you'd have to do a hand signal which was the fall back in the case of the intercom failing or having troubles.

**Were they standard throughout the air force, those hand signals? Did you learn what to do...**

Oh I think we were told, but I think from memory we worked out our own.

31:00 **So above the din of the engines could you hear anything else? Could you hear the bombs or flak?**

You'd hear the flak if it was reasonably close. Normally all you'd see was a puff of smoke and the smell of cordite. You wouldn't hear it. Not normally unless it was - if it heard it was too close and would almost certainly hit you.

31:30 I only heard it once.

**I'll come back to hearing about the flak cause it must've been a very close call. What other idiosyncrasies did the Lancaster's have? Was there anything, not necessarily what they did wrong, but were you know, a bit strange about them, or a bit interesting?**

No they were a really – I think docile would be the word, docile aircraft

32:00 for everybody within the limits of say, the rear gunners and things like that. And remembering it was a war machine not a civil thing so there was nothing in it – they used to have a piece of armoured plating at the back of the pilots and they got rid of that in the end. I think they reckoned if anything hit the pilot well the rest of the crew were gone anyhow.

32:30 So they took that away. So they stripped them so that they had nothing that was not strictly necessary. It was all bomb bay, in the bottom underneath. At least half the length of it was bomb bay.

**What training did you do in them to prepare yourself for joining the PFF?**

Well that was done at this conversion unit and navigation

33:00 training unit. But only about a couple of weeks there. But I think it again it was more to familiarise them with the PFF because that involved these target markers which – all the main force was connected with that was what they saw on the ground and what to hit, what to aim at. But PFF had to understand the

33:30 markers and use of them and so forth. So I think that's all basically what it was for, because there was only as a say a couple of weeks or something like that, I think, without checking.

**Was there training for emergency procedures?**

Oh yes they had crash landing and ditching and all that sort of thing. There's a couple of endorsements in there to say that we've done the course and all that. Again it was pretty

34:00 psychological more than anything else.

**The pilot sat on his parachute. Where were the rest of the crews located?**

Oh, they put racks around the aircraft and they were stuck on the racks.

**And in a drill for evacuating, what were you supposed to do?**

Well the

34:30 first thing was where to get out. Somebody had the responsibility of releasing the dinghy in the case of the channel. But everybody then went out the various exits onto the wings. And then climbed into the dinghies from the wings. Lancs used to

35:00 float reasonably for I don't know how long, but it didn't go straight down.

**What about the survival in case you were shot down and survived, what information were you given about that?**

Oh we had all sorts of funny things. Buttons, the little magnets that you peeled off part of it and there was a magnet underneath. And silk handkerchiefs. I don't know where the hell they were stowed, somewhere anyhow, with a map of Europe

35:30 on it. And what else did they have? Oh they were always coming up with things. But when a Lanc went down, the G, very few got out. Particularly because the exits were not very friendly and plus the fact that almost invariably they caught alight

36:00 cause the fuel tanks'd go and the whole thing'd go up. And that's if you still had your photo flash that went up, the whole thing'd be incinerated on the spot.

**So what was the first you heard about this Pathfinder Force? Can you explain a bit more about that?**

I don't know where we first heard about it. I would suspect it was when we got to Britain.

36:30 Cause the commander of the 8 Group was a bloke named Bennett, he was an Australian. And he had a long aviation history behind him. And so we got, the Australians were very interested in him so we probably picked it up a bit earlier than a lot of others. But I don't know. I can't remember

37:00 where we first heard about it. I know the first time we took any real notice, when we were told we were going there. I wasn't terribly enamoured because if you were in charge of the Luftwaffe [German air force] who would you pick on? The ones that were going to mark the target, never mind about the rest. Although they tended to be a little bit

37:30 expendable.

**So for the archive again, can you explain exactly what the Pathfinder Force did and what it was set up to do?**

Well it was supposed to be a high grade navigation crew whose job was to mark the target with coloured markers which could be done with ground markers or sky markers. Which meant

- 38:00 that the ground markers were obvious that was the target. The sky markers they would calculate how long it would take for the flares, they were parachute flares, how long it would take them to float over the target if they got there. So that way you'd bomb them in the sky and then your bombs would go onto the target. That's how they calculated
- 38:30 for it to work. And then they had, after every two minutes I think it was, they had back up, still pathfinders. And as the markers started to go out, others and come in and back up on those markers, and keep them going for a half hour or so long as the raid was on. So they were supposed to be top class navigators and
- 39:00 the rest of the crew I don't think - that was the basic function. You had to be bloody good navigators. The rest of the crew...

**So they were bombers just like any other, except they carried these flares as well?**

That's right, the markers were the be all and end all. That was the only difference between them and the main force in the actual practical bombing. Was that they were dropping markers instead of bombs.

- 39:30 Oh they always had a cookie as well but that was just thrown in for good measure.

**Were there just Lancasters in the pathfinder squadron?**

No they had Halifaxes, Lancasters. Earlier when we first went there, only very few months before we went on, they'd had Stirlings. And Stirlings are definitely obsolete, they were. And there had been Whitleys. And they were still using Wellingtons. And they had, what they call,

- 40:00 their thousand bomber raids and they put everything on that, crews from OTU and everything. All available aircraft to make up the numbers so they were still operational. But the main ones, from the time I was on, was the Lancs and the Halifaxes.

**Did they use Mosquitoes as well?**

Oh yeah, Mosquitoes were mostly while we were operating

- 40:30 were mostly used for reconnaissance and weather. They'd go over Europe and come back. They'd leave when we were going to briefing and they'd be back when we were getting ready to go. And they'd bring back weather forecasts. But the trouble was, weather in Europe changes like lightning, you know only a matter of an hour can change the conditions. So you never could never rely upon it
- 41:00 entirely but it helped. And then they'd do reconnaissance after the raid and they used to get up that high that nothing could get at them. Well the only thing that could get at them, couldn't do anything because with ammunition and so forth on board they couldn't reach them. They were a beautiful aircraft. They had those down - you could actually carry a cookie. Four thousand pounder and they had them on some of the raids
- 41:30 they were using those - they used them at times to bomb after the raid was all over in an hour or side and the fire fighters and all were busy, they'd drop a couple of those to stir them up and handicap them, that sort of thing.

**Okay, we'll just have to change the tape.**

## Tape 7

- 00:42 **Just going back to your OTU training time, your first couple of operations was dropping leaflets in France?**

Yeah they virtually did what was called the bull's eye which was the co-operation with

- 01:00 the defences over England. It's being able to pick up the squeakers off the balloon barrage and that sort of thing. Just straight out co-operation with the defences. That was called the bull's eye. And then you did a nickel which was a leaflet raid over houses just off the coast of Normandy. It was pretty innocuous. Some of them were put over France, over
- 01:30 Paris and you got a bit of a caning, but usually it was a bit of a gift. Although we again, we all had our troubles. We had to land in an emergency. We had a 'drome on the south coast of England. And stayed there a couple of days actually before they repaired it, whatever it was. And we flew back to base.
- 02:00 But the nickel was a non event as far as we were concerned.

**So firstly the bull's eye, what was that again? Flying over the...**

Doing basically a cross country over England. And being aware of

- 02:30 primarily of the balloon barrage. I mean you had a warning, it used to have a squeaker thing that would



come over the intercom. That was the main thing to worry about. The other thing was to have your finger on the colour of the day because the ack-ack boys could be pretty trigger happy too. So it was familiarisation I suppose it was really because there was nothing terrible dangerous about it.

### **Were there occasions**

03:00 **that you came under fire under your own ack-ack?**

We didn't. But there were quite a few occasions that they did.

### **And these pamphlets, what did they say?**

Oh just the usual propaganda about Hitler and how the war was going and we were winning it and don't lose heart. I should've kept one. I didn't. But like everything with hindsight, it's great.

03:30 Anyhow, it'd be history now.

### **And what went wrong with the aircraft?**

I don't know. One of the engines was overheating I think from memory, and dangerously. So we put down at this - I don't know, I can't remember how we actually picked the drome but anyway it was a matter of getting down while we could.

04:00 But both engines were still going when we landed. Made a normal landing. We had a funny one up in the north of England on a training flight. And this was when we were in Lancs from memory. But I think we lost an engine. Now for some reason

04:30 we wanted to put down and this aerodrome was lit up with the runway lit and everything. Everything was going. So we did a circuit and called them up and answer. And called them up three or four times and no answer. We had an Aldis lamp aboard and we flashed the colours of the day plus a message and permission to land. And got no

05:00 answer, didn't seem to be anybody home. So in the end Les said, "Oh bugger them, here we go." And went in. Nobody knew we were there. Unbelievable. Spent the night there. I don't know what it was but something - I think we only had one day there and then we flew it back. We flew it back anyhow.

### **And what was wrong with the aircraft then?**

I don't know, they didn't

05:30 tell you cause you could find out if you went to ask the ground crew. But then you had the problem of the engineers, the electricians and you go to one mob and they were, "I haven't got a bloody clue, all I'm doing is this."

### **So at what stage were you first assigned, what, 7 Squadron was the pathfinders?**

Yeah.

### **At what stage were you first assigned to that?**

Straight from OTU or NTU

06:00 which was the Navigation Training Unit for pathfinders. I went to that and I think it was a fortnight only there. Again it was just I think, familiarisation with the things that were different, as I say target marking and that sort of thing on the PFF. And then we went to Oakington, 7th Squadron. We got there just around about Christmas time.

### **Was it usual for crews that hadn't really done any sort of major bombing**

06:30 **overseas to be chosen for pathfinders immediately?**

Oh I think - see at that time, the shortage was air crew. And so they just had to have them, that's all there was to it. So they had to scrounge from - the main force squadrons were very dirty about it. They naturally - they're picking the ones that were classed as being the best and taking them

07:00 so they weren't very happy about it at all.

### **So during this training with the pathfinders from your perspective as a bomb aimer was there anything different to what you had to do?**

No nothing different. As I say, other than being you know, explained the different flares and the ground flares, ground markers and the sky markers and the various colours. And the backing up procedure.

07:30 That type of thing was - it was purely target marking was the only thing any different. The rest of it was all exactly the same. The bombing was all done on a distributor once you let them go it went off at set intervals and the camera came on at the appropriate time. The flash'd go off at the same time so no it was, all just a fine tuning,

08:00 I suppose, really.

**So could you just talk me through - there's the flares that come down but there's the ground flares as well is that right?**

Yeah, well if it's clear, if you can see the target they put ground markers and they're coloured. Coloured lights. They glow for about two minutes roughly. And then they go out and then the backers up come in and pop another one down

08:30 before it goes out. So they keep the target lit. There's nothing much more to it than that as far as the PFF is concerned, really. If as we were saying, if there's ten tenths cloud which there very often was well then they'd use these sky markers which were the

09:00 same sort of thing only with a parachute. So they'd drift down and they were calculated, so that if you aimed at them your bombs would go onto the target, carry onto the target.

**With the ones that drifted down if there was wind blowing them away, could you tell the aircraft to adjust their drops.**

No, no, that was - I presume although I don't know, I presume they made some sort of general

09:30 allowance cause you'd very rarely get a case where there was no wind and they would have again, the same as we did the forecast winds. So they would make a judgement on how far they would drift according to wind direction and speed. It's pretty much guess work, as a matter of fact they more or less admitted that. They said, "Well if you don't -

10:00 if you're half a mile off target this time, well you won't have to go back there, will you?" Get a bit crude but that was the idea. It was carpet bombing or area bombing was what it was actually called. So never mind whether you actually hit the target, if you flattened a square mile or something that like, there was a good chance it'd be your target and maybe other targets would be in it anyhow.

**The flares that**

10:30 **drifted down, would they also only go for about two minutes?**

I think it was all about the same. It would've been because they were the same type of thing. And whatever pyrotechniques they used to light them like that. The sky markers, the Germans used to call them Christmas trees cause that's how they used to -

11:00 be like a stream throwing down these lights.

**So that means all the planes following the pathfinders had two minutes to drop their load, is that right?**

Well not because as I say, the markers would be replenished all the time, so they'd each have their own time on target, was designed,

11:30 you know in your briefing you were given your time on target. So it was up to you to navigate to that time and theoretically there'd be some sort of order, which there was. But, oh, places like Berlin, it was like George Street. There'd be bloody Lancs everywhere and fighters everywhere and flak everywhere. It was like day,

12:00 lit up like day. With the search lights - particularly if it's cloudy, the search lights on the bottom of the cloud would be like that and light it up. In the meantime the fighters are throwing in flares along the route into the target. So we had no trouble seeing what was going on.

**The flares, were they just one colour, or was there a ...**

No they had various colours designed to stop the Germans copying

12:30 them. And combinations of colours. There might be, say reds go down for a certain period of time and then they'd switch to greens, that sort of thing to try and out fox the Germans.

**Cause the Germans were doing what?**

Oh they tried - they used to have spoof targets. They'd build wooden

13:00 cities outside Berlin and they'd show up as a good blip. And they had lakes, there were some lakes around Berlin so they put a few more into make it a bit more difficult.

**Well 7th Squadron, when you arrived there were you greeted formally by them?**

Not really.

13:30 From memory you just reported to your section, bomb aimers to bomb aimers and navigators to navigators. Pilots to pilots, where they had their senior officer who was in charge of them. That's where you got a greeting. It was just as a new crew and that was it, settle down. Yeah.

**Did anyone sort of show you the ropes**

14:00 **or around the place?**

No. No they had – the WAAFs used to have vans and they'd take you to your aircraft and any time you had to go anywhere for an air test or anything like that. So they knew the place back to front, so you could've – some of them had push bikes and they'd go around on those. But there was no formal greeting at all like that. They had

14:30 a macabre sense of humour in the bombing section. You walked in and you were greeted and on the wall they had – you know the old English battle axes? Those things with the – they had one of those hanging on the wall with red paint all dripping from it. Delightful. That's where you reported each morning because the battle order'd be up on that and you'd know

15:00 whether you were on or not. And from thereon if you were on well you had to be – it was left to you to be there and you knew what you had to do, and God help you if you weren't. But if you did that then nobody bothered you. I don't think we any did any PE [Physical Exercise] the whole time I was on the squadron.

**Well could you talk us through your first operation from when you first saw the battle order up?**

Yeah well it's a pretty complex thing. It starts early in the morning

15:30 about half past nine or so, depending upon what time you take off. You start there where you report to your section. And the bombing leader or the nav leader will give any last minute information that they have about tactics and so forth. They don't know at that stage, I don't think they even know the target. But it'd be just general things, if they've had a report that the flaks been moved somewhere and it's particularly

16:00 heavy there. And anything they've got from reconnaissance about fighters and that sort of thing. And then it's left to you and the normal thing was to go and check your aircraft. If there'd been anything wrong with it the previous night or the previous time, you'd do an air test. And if everything was okay well that was it. Well then you'd go back and probably that'd be all over by half past ten.

16:30 Give or take, I don't know exactly the time but it was something like that. Then you'd have, if it was a late take off, you know, night time, or six o'clock or something, you'd have lunch. And then you'd go to the general briefing, which the whole squadron would attend that, all those that were on ops. And they had the big map on the wall with the route lined out with wool.

17:00 And then each leader would give his talk to you. The navigation leader would give the course, the route, the air speed, all that sort of thing which would vary from crew to crew obviously. Well the route wouldn't, I think as a general rule it was try to pack them all together, you're less vulnerable that way. But

17:30 each individual crew had its own idiosyncrasies too I suppose. After that was over then we'd go and have what was called an ops meal. Used to be bacon and eggs, or something like that – was a real treat. From there we'd go to the parachute section and pick up your parachutes. And

18:00 that'd be about an hour before you were due to take off, we'd go and do that. Had the time between the general briefing and doing that would vary according to take off time. When it came for you to go out to the aircraft the WAAFs'd pick you up in a covered van thing. Usually one crew to a van, sometimes there'd be two.

18:30 They'd muck in together. And she'd take you around to the aircraft. And you'd get out and have a cigarette and so forth, and have a last check of anything that you thought was worth checking. And then we'd wait then for the CO'd come around and wish you good luck and so forth. And then just wait for the time

19:00 for – you used to get a signal to get into your aircraft. Can't remember how we got that but you had something to get into your aircraft. So you get into the aircraft and then the ground crew'd pull in the trolley and start the motors. And they'd check the revs and everything else, the skipper would. And then I think there was a light. I can't

19:30 remember, there was some signal. Probably an Aldis light and you moved out of the dispersal into the perimeter and made your way around cause they're all just following each other around. And then you queue up behind the take off point until you got a green light and then you move onto the runway. And then just open the throttle and go.

20:00 **So the first operation you went on, were you a pathfinder flight?**

No we weren't markers. No you – only again you had to do quite a few flights so that it was okay before you become a marker. So we got – blotted our copybook. On the first flight, I don't know whether

20:30 it was something – the stub of the wing, main plane was billowing and going like this. And we had an Irish flight engineer and he wasn't the keen type, he wasn't interested really. Why he ever joined I don't know. But anyhow, oh he created a fuss about it and we didn't know any different. It was the first time we'd ever had a full bomb load on. If we'd thought about

- 21:00 it we'd know that with about thirteen thousand pounds of bomb load there's got to be some give somewhere and it would have to billow a bit. So anyhow we turned back, we aborted. And that, I don't know an hour's flight or something. And it was daylight, so we could see it. And not happy. Then we did the second one and to this day I don't know what happened but everything went, all the electrical stuff went haywire.
- 21:30 The gyro rolled, fell over, the repeater fell over, the P4 [magnetic compass] went haywire. And there was no ifs or buts about it, it did. And we just couldn't fly a course and we had to come back again. Well they checked it the next day and according to the instrument makers there was nothing wrong with it. So they said, "Right back to main force." So we went back to 101 Squadron. Oh we went to 101 Squadron and there we flew for ten or twelve
- 22:00 flights or something or other. And they decided no you go back to 7th Squadron. So they sent us back to 7th Squadron. The only startling thing was at 101 Squadron they had a maniac of a CO and he issued you the orders, "You will fly straight and level." So everybody flew straight and level, like hell they did. But scared the daylights out of us anyhow. So when we survived that and then we went back
- 22:30 to - we didn't fly straight and level I might say. We went back to 7th Squadron and from then on, well the thing was, we're going to go no matter what, if the wheels fall off, tough, we'll do without them.

**Well just on all that, one piece at a time, firstly this one particularly flight, the wings are waving and stuff. You've got a full bomb load. Did you land with the full bomb load?**

Yeah, oh yeah. Oh she was all right to land

- 23:00 with a full bomb load. Yeah no problem about that. Easier to land than to take off with it. Sometimes - a lot of the runways were war time so by necessity they were relatively short and built before the heavies with the big bomb loads were taking off. So sometimes it was a bit - you had to hold them down right to the very end and then drag them up.

**Who did you**

- 23:30 **report to once you got back on the first trip?**

Well the skipper had to report to the squadron CO. And the rest of us just back to our section leaders. Didn't say anything, didn't do anything much, wasn't really their concern. Cause there was nobody to point the finger at. Naturally you didn't say that the - on the first occasion that the flight engineer had

- 24:00 dropped us into it. It wouldn't have been fair because we still didn't have to take what he said - and he had - was a relatively experienced, so he just didn't want to go, that's what it was too.

**And was anything said to the pilot from the CO?**

Oh he got a barking from them. But it was all said by sending us back to main force.

- 24:30 **Okay the second flight, how many days later was that to the first?**

Oh I can't remember. At that time it'd be a couple of nights, might even be the next night. But very soon after anyhow, it was very soon.

**And did you take this Irish engineer?**

No, no, no. We had our permanent flight engineer by that time. This other one was - that brings up still relatively and in chronological

- 25:00 order - we had a little eighteen year old rear gunner, this little Scot. And this pilot used to have to go on a second dickie for one trip and so we were spares, hanging around. And another crew were short of a rear gunner and they took him and he never came back. It was on his first flight. Yeah so that

- 25:30 brought it home to us too pretty strongly.

**How does that actually affect a crew or base when planes and people don't come back?**

Oh you got that way you can't let it affect you, it's just - we went away on leave for six days on one occasion there and came back and there wasn't a crew that we knew. So you just

- 26:00 you get - oh it affects you but you just get to where you've got to do it, that's it. Ignore it, it's part of it and it's not going to go away by getting upset with it. We even had occasions where crews have come on and they haven't even had time to unpack and they've never come back. Not the usual thing admittedly.

**This second trip. Where was that to?**

- 26:30 We never got out of - I think it was Berlin from memory, but we never got out of England. You know it was just impossible. The bloody P4 compass was wagging all over the place and the gyro it toppled and the repeaters had toppled. Everything - there was some electrical problem I don't know what it was. But anyhow, they obviously thought, you're a bit chicken hearted

27:00 and so send you back to the main force. We'd just settled nicely in main force and I was doing Lanc trainer as second pilot and enjoying it. Then just of course as we were really getting settled in, go back to 7th Squadron, start all over again.

**So was anything said to you?**

Not to me personally and I don't think it was to any of the – other than the pilot

27:30 perhaps. I don't know whether the flight engineer. No responsibility come back to the skipper and he never mentioned it, other than the fact he got a bollocking but he didn't say exactly what had been said or anything. And I don't think he was even told we were going back to main force. I think it was just done and that was it.

**Can you share with us the difference between main force or 101 Squadron**

28:00 **and 7th Squadron from a cultural point of view?**

None. I don't think – I never felt that any of the guys that we met on 7th Squadron felt they were better than the main force. They felt they were better air crew because they had better tools, better equipment. But outside that, they were capable of making big mistakes and poor navigating and everything else given the right set of

28:30 circumstances. No I never saw that. Main force had a bit of, oh they think they're better than everybody else. I could understand it.

**Better tools, better equipment. Specifically what sort of things?**

Well we had had extra training, and navigation training. And we had particularly the H2S. The G which they'd

29:00 relied on before cut out as soon as you got over the enemy coast. The Germans'd jam it so from then on you were flying on dead reckoning which is about, which way's the wind? Oh I think it's that way and hope for the best. Literally. And the H2S changed that, because you could still make mistakes as I did on one air – tragic occasion. But fundamentally – if

29:30 you could pick up a wind that gave you – that was the crux. And with H2S it gave you the opportunity. If you could definitely identify a town you could get a wind. And if you got a town, soon after you crossed the coast, that would give you a guarantee, you'd know where you are so you could use that wind for the next. And dead reckoning should identify the next town

30:00 for you. So it did help you immensely. But it had its traps.

**What was the occasion where you made a mistake?**

Well that's further on, do you want it now? It's out of chronological order. Well we did a – I can't remember which one but one of the rural towns. Anyhow it doesn't matter which one. One of them and we'd been routed in and to

30:30 come out, they gave us a course out because that's where the flak was light. Well we came in, we bombed. I could see the target that night, I was down in the bombing bay. And all of a sudden there was this God almighty bang and a big flash of lightning. Ping! I could hear things hitting. And

31:00 anyhow everything was okay. The four engines were going. And we got out, we ran out of the flak. And then one engine packed up. And then the hydraulics, we started to feel oil in the side of the cabin. The hydraulics went. And we were relying on, strictly on H2S.

31:30 Cause we came out of the target in a hell of a hurry and didn't know what course of wind we'd been flying on. And I started trying to pick up something on the H2S and I eventually picked up a town and I thought it might be that and then I picked up another in, according to the map in a reasonable position. So I thought that'll be, that's right –

32:00 identified that. And then I picked up the third one, so we're home and hosed. So we got the winds and everything. And the next bloody thing we could see the coast line of Dieppe coming up dead ahead. So we did a ninety degrees to port without any explanation and got out of the way pretty smart. And afterwards when we did a post mortem there were four towns approximately the same but about fifty miles south. And they

32:30 lined up with these other four. Cause not knowing where to start from, I picked them up and fortunately with the coast coming up, I could pick it out on the H2S very clearly and knew where we were then. But I can imagine the flak blokes'd sitting there, "Oh yeah, got this sucker. Bugger him."

**Did that particular trip affect your return home and petrol?**

33:00 No, we flew home on three engines but that was no problem. We didn't lose height on three engines, that was no trouble at all. We landed on three engines but we found we'd burst the tyres, well one tyre was burst. So when he landed of course, with the hydraulics were shot, we could get the under cart

down to begin with but you had oxygen,

33:30 compressed air I suppose it would've been. And you could use that in an emergency and you could put the wheels down but you couldn't get them up again once they went down. So he got the wheels down, you couldn't see anything wrong with the tyres from inside, they looked okay. But anyhow we suspected there might have been a problem. So when he landed he was prepared for it and one tyre burst.

34:00 He held it up well and didn't leave the runway till the end. And as soon as he got off the runway she bogged down. And he got a bollocking for that, for blocking the runway, which was bloody ridiculous but still, that's the way things were with them. It was blocked certainly, but I don't know whether they had to divert

34:30 or not. There was nothing he could do about it. It's a miracle he got the thing down without cart wheeling us. He held it up, definitely held it up.

**And this particular operation, was that with 7th Squadron?**

Yeah that was 7th Squadron.

**Just coming back, leaving 7th Squadron and going to 101, did you have the same plane or did you get a new plane as you go?**

Oh no,

35:00 the popular film version of having your own aircraft, maybe, I don't know, maybe there were some that did have that. But as far as we were concerned you had whatever aircraft was serviceable. And if your aircraft was unserviceable well it went in and you took whatever was sitting there. So the log book gives the different aircraft, almost a different one every night.

35:30 There was no having your own - as the matter of fact that one that we got clobbered in, it was a new one. And they took it off to maintenance, we never saw it again. As I say it was really peppered with the flak. Holes this size in it.

**The two operations you did with 7th Squadron before you moved on, did they actually count?**

36:00 No no they're aborted and as such they don't count. We aborted another one but that did count because we were halfway to Berlin I suppose. And we got boxed by searchlight; they put a box of those and the flak at the same time. So we were did evasive action, dived and cork screwed and all sorts of things, but they kept

36:30 moving us ahead and eventually we managed to get out, but we were down about ten thousand feet and hadn't got a clue in the world where we were. And while we were trying to make up our minds in which direction to go, another lot copped us so we had another twenty five minutes all told it was anyhow. And when we came out of that, the G was okay - H2S was okay and we're

37:00 over the bloody Baltic Sea. So there was no point in going on there. We'd have been on our own by the time we got there and pretty futile so we turned back. But that was counted as an op because there was usually a fighter waiting. As soon as the searchlights went out a fighter would come in and finish you off. But I

37:30 don't know whether it was true but we had a Mosquito squadron on the aerodrome with us and there was, somewhere, I don't know who told us, someone told us that the Mosquito saw us and came in and there was a fighter and he harassed him that much - they had a very short range the fighters. And oh this is going back a bit, but going back onto 101 we had

38:00 - what was it called? Cigar. Airborne Cigar [equipment for jamming enemy radio]. And of all things there was a Russian Jew who spoke perfect German and he had a second radio set and he used to tune into the German fighters and give them conflicting instructions. "Ignore that, that's

38:30 British interference," and give them another course and in the end they'd finish up not knowing where they were going, running out of petrol and all sorts of things. When it was successful. Then they brought on the equivalent of Tokyo Rose, had some obscene name for her, a woman who took over and then they put microphones in each of the Merlin engines. So when things started to get a bit interesting they'd turn all four microphones on.

39:00 Let them have the blast of the four Merlins in their ear. Which to some extent would affect them I think. There were a couple of occasions where this Airborne Cigar guy chuckled because he had them in chaos.

**So did you have anything to do with this Airborne Cigar guy?**

No no no. He was an extra bod, an eighth bod in the crew.

**But not in your crew**

39:30 **in another crew?**

No he was with us, yeah he stayed with us while we were there. But when we left he stayed on the squadron, on the 101, he didn't come with us. He continued as this running interference.

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

Oh he was a nice guy. Little Russian Jew. Cockney. He was a hard doer.

40:00 **And you had him for the whole force but just for your particular aeroplane?**

I don't know. I don't think there would've been too many fluently speaking German air crew. So I think it might've only been one. Well you'd probably only need one. I don't know maybe you'd clutter it up for yourselves

40:30 if you had conflicting ones. I don't know that.

**And you also took up this lady after this Russian Jew?**

No that was the German controller. I can't even think of her name now, it was something obscene, I can remember that. But she was - they put her on because so that we couldn't use the RAF guys to

41:00 masquerade. Used to get a real good falsetto.

**We'll just stop there.**

## Tape 8

00:44 **You were about to tell us something. Maybe you could start from the beginning. It was about Monica.**

Oh yeah. Yeah well this was, as I was saying a round glass piece

01:00 instrument on the cockpit dash. And if you were scanned by a fighter or ground control, you would get - it would light up which warned you that there was a fighter being vectored onto you. And we found that every time we turned the ruddy thing on it'd light up. No sooner turn it on than it'd light up. You'd turn it off

01:30 and leave it off for a while, and turn it on again, and it'd be off for a while then on it'd come again. So we thought, "Oh blow this for a joke, something's not adding up." So we never used it. We turned the ruddy thing off and left it off. Now there was another bloke that I know, a friend that was in the - over in England exposed to this and their experience of it was, that it was used - through the

02:00 intercom used to go 'pff pff pff'. This puff puffing noise, and it drove the crew to distraction so they turned it off. But that was an earlier or later version I don't know which of the same thing. But it turned out later, they found out, that they were vectoring onto this Monica. So it was one vectoring onto the other.

02:30 Just one of those things that are insoluble. But we didn't know for sure but it was too much to be just coincidence.

**Can we go back a little bit to when you had these aborted operations you talked about. Was there talk about LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre] on the squadron and were you accused of this?**

No no we were never accused of it.

03:00 I didn't hear of any. There was some talk you'd hear about some crew that had been scrubbed because of it and that. But never came in contact with it. They weren't paranoid about it. And I don't think, nothing in my experience, I don't think there was ever justification, or very rarely. Because nobody ever refused to fly.

03:30 And once you took off you were on your own and that was it.

**Getting back to your operations, were there any routines that you always followed. Anything that was almost like a ritual or a superstition?**

No I don't think so.

04:00 I think there was one which we always found necessary. It wasn't a superstition but we found it necessary, the last thing you did before you got in the aircraft was relieve your bladder because you'd better do it then, because it might be another six hours before you got a chance. But other than that wasn't a superstition. No we didn't have any that I can ever remember.

**Was that done on the tail wheel or any particular place that you'd have a leak?**

Oh no

04:30 I think they usually did it on one of the tyres or something or other. But again I think that was more convenience. That's where you were gathered around the wheels.

**Brings up a good question though. How did you deal with those issues in the air.**

Well if you couldn't do anything about it you just had to relieve yourself and the ground crew were not happy boys. Because any leak had to be investigated. They didn't know

05:00 what it was. So they always had to identify it. But we never found it necessary to - might have been - want to relieve the bowels a few times but that was not a physical requirement.

**Was there any kind of place onboard the Lancaster where you might be able to relieve your bowels?**

Oh yeah they had

05:30 what was called the Elson, it was down between the, on the starboard side between the door and the rear turret. It was just like a four gallon drum, six gallon drum thing like that.

**Another thing I wanted to ask you - a bit more information. Your**

06:00 **experience of getting conned where you managed to lose your bearing, what was that like in the aircraft when you got conned?**

Well to be quite honest it was terrifying because he was just throwing it all over the place. Wouldn't have been surprised if the wings had come off but he was not going to give in on it so he was cork screwing and diving, as I say we went from twenty down to ten thousand feet.

06:30 And started to get into the range of light flak and we just outran them, as I say getting over the Baltic - our next problem was we had to keep clear of Kiel. The German navy was just as touchy as the British navy. So we came down the Baltic and eventually

07:00 reached the channel and back home. It was a three or four hour trip, I think it was so. Oh there was a sequel to that too. There was an island called Texal off the Dutch coast. And I don't know who had the bright idea but I did it, so I'll take the blame. We were coming back and we had the

07:30 bombs still aboard. We hadn't dropped them. I think it was purely and simply because we were too busy to get down to the bomb bay because as I say, we were thrown all over the place with no seat belts or nothing to restrain you. And really bouncing around in the aircraft. So we're coming back and somebody had the bright idea, there's an anti aircraft battery on Texal, how about we bomb

08:00 them? So we zoomed in and I did a salvo, dropped the lot in one go. And bloody near the lot came back up. They were just waiting for us and let us have the works. I think they must've been sprogs [new recruits] or something cause they didn't hit us. There was plenty of smoke around but they didn't - never laid a hand on us. We didn't do that again.

08:30 **Did you know who they were?**

On Texal. Oh there was a German anti ack-ack battery we knew that. But it was a matter of bombing the open countryside or dropping them in the channel. The channel was just about full of ships and bombs. I think it must've risen a few feet. So it was a matter of taking them back which you don't fancy that either really unless you've got to do.

09:00 Could be done without a great deal of - just defuse them and land. But in our wisdom we decided we'd do something constructive.

**You took us through the operation before to the point of taking off. I just want to know a bit more about what happened on the rest of the journey. Your targets were generally where? Where were**

09:30 **you flying to?**

Oh it was all over - you can look at the log book there, but the Ruhr got a real pasting. But there was Essen and Arnhem and Düsseldorf and Duisburg. They got almost nightly attention from some part of the air force. But I did Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Berlin.

10:00 What other places? Mannheim. I can't remember the others. We did a daylight on France, on a marshalling yard in France there. They used to have, later in the stages of the war they had what they call a master bomber.

10:30 He used to circle around up top and correct their bombing if they were on, they were on a red and they dropped short by half a mile, quarter of mile, he'd tell them, over shoot that and go crook on them and so forth. They had a pretty dicey life naturally, so they always had a deputy. So we were chosen as a deputy on

11:00 a daylight. We had a fighter escort but in actual fact we never had to be used.

**So can you tell us a bit more about that operation. Again it's a bit out of order but we'll go...**



There was nothing much to it. As I say, it was daylight that was the only unique thing about it. Was the only daylight we ever did. And we had the

11:30 spits up on top. And from memory I think - well it was a marshalling yard so they'd probably just have co-ordinates. But I can't remember for sure whether they escorted us all the way there and back. I think they didn't, I think they probably escorted us to the target and then shot back and left us to it. Because again, they don't have a big range to fire a round and use petrol.

12:00 **As the master bomber's deputy, did you stay above the target a long time?**

We didn't - we didn't orbit the target at all. We had our bombs aboard and we bombed. But we were prepared to use the markers if he went down.

**Getting back to that list of targets you mentioned**

12:30 **before, what was the one that you most feared, or the one that was most difficult?**

Oh, Berlin. Fighters were like bloody flies. They had - you probably remember Hamburg which had a fire storm there. Well they got a lot of the survivors from that, the ack-ack gunners from that they put them in the big tower in Berlin.

13:00 They had an axe to grind so it was deadly. So between the search lights. You could see everything going on. You could see the aircraft going down and fighters attacking. It was literally, almost as bright as this.

**What happened then as you approached your target, say on a raid to Berlin. What would you as the bomb aimer have to do?**

13:30 **Can you take us through it step by step?**

Just keep my eyes on the drift wires and the target. You don't get time to worry about what was going on around you. And as I say, you had to be straight and level. So you had about a minute I would guess where all hell was breaking loose around and that was the most difficult part. The usual thing was, the bomb's gone, get the hell

14:00 out of this. It was almost a creed.

**What was the creed again?**

Get the hell out of this.

**So just step by step then. You have a bomb sight similar to the one we talked about before?**

Mm.

**And what would you have to do, just as far as manipulating that sight over the target?**

Well you manipulate it with a pilot, the skipper - direct him left left. We had a thing in ours, left left

14:30 relatively quickly said, means get moving. And if it was left, left, that was just small correction or right whatever it might be. And then when you got the target coming down the drift wires, steady for steady. And just keep calling steady, steady as long as it was in the drift wires. And so you had make sure you fused all the bombs before - first thing you did.

15:00 And set the distributor going which set the interval of the bombs. That's about all. Plug yourself into the oxygen, don't forget that or start singing Annie Laurie or something. And that was basically it.

**So setting the fuse and the distributor. What did you actually have to do to do that?**

Well the fuse was a switch; you just put that on and it

15:30 fused all the - well the bombs were already fused I think really. But it connected the bomb releases and it was called fuse though, fuse them on. But anyhow that was the one where the bombs were all on hooks and that opened the claws, and that used to open. So you had that turned ready

16:00 for when you got the target. And as soon as you got the target you pressed a bomb tip and away they all went, hopefully. I think that was all we had to do and then the distributor again, put the switch on that and that was like a rheostat, used to go across and release the bombs at regular intervals. And the

16:30 photo flash was synchronised with the bombs so. I think they were synchronised with the cookie.

**What sort of bomb load did you carry? Was it always the same?**

Oh no it varied according to the target. But always carried, a cookie was always mandatory, the four thousand pounder. Then you'd often have, depending upon the bombs, because the bomb stations,

17:00 with some bombs they'd overlap the next stage, so you couldn't get another bomb on that one. So you'd have sometimes two thousand pounders, there was also incendiaries. They were in cans. Used to just

drop off and they'd fall down. And then was phosphorous bombs which I was never very happy about that. That was

- 17:30 how they set things alight when they didn't have any other choice. They were devilish to have that dripping all over the place.

**So what would you see? Say you're coming into Berlin and there's lots of stuff going on around you as you've said, but you're concentrating on these two lines. What would you see line up? What would the target look like from your position?**

Be a target

- 18:00 marker. Half the time you wouldn't be able - particularly if you were back a bit in the attack because by the time I got there the attack got going there'd be that much smoke around that you couldn't really see the ground. You could see the markers through it but you wouldn't be able to identify the target. But theoretically the markers were on the target, a factory or something like that. A munitions plant or something.

**Would you see anything**

- 18:30 **else?**

Not a thing cause as I would say, probably seven times out of ten we'd be ten tenths cloud so you couldn't see anything through it anyhow other than the markers. And the other occasions the smoke and that would obscure it. We used to bomb off the H2S.

- 19:00 You could pick up a blip on the H2S. If everything else had failed you'd pick up a blip which would be in Berlin, that's about all you could say and let them go. That was just wanton bombing really, cause you couldn't take them back.

**You showed me some**

- 19:30 **photos before taken from the camera that was setting up. In those there are some points of light and fires. Would you see things like that as you came in and away from the target?**

Oh you could see the fires from miles, half an hour you'd see them. But yeah there was no problem about that.

**What would they look like?**

Oh smoke and glow, a big glow. That's

- 20:00 mainly what it was, just a big glow. You'd see that coming into the target too if you were in the middle of the raid, you'd see the target lit up with the fires. Oh yes. This is a bit out of sequence. While I was at 101 Squadron, I went with another crew one night and - Leipzig,

- 20:30 or Stuttgart, I can't remember. But anyway it was way down the south east in Germany. And I was in the bomb bay the whole time. They didn't have H2S. And we couldn't see anything and we went on and on and nothing happened. And then the rear gunner says, "Hey there's a hell of a lot of lights and things behind us." So then

- 21:00 we turned around and there was the raid going on behind us. And ahead of us lit up was Lake Constantine in Switzerland. So he obviously hadn't got a clue where he was or anything. Again on another stupid occasion we went back and it was all over and we dropped our bomb load. So they're all too busy, fighters have probably run out of fuel and went back for refuelling. One last kite, let him go silly bugger and that's it.

- 21:30 **Given that often there was confusion about navigation and marking the targets, were you ever concerned that you weren't dropping them on what you were supposed to be dropping them on?**

Oh yeah it was always a worry. There was one case where they didn't know about it - I don't think I was on that one. But they were bombing one of the industrial cities, a big one and

- 22:00 I don't know what went wrong but the markers went down wrong and they'd landed squarely on a little small town. And of course the whole bloody thing, they bloody near wiped out the whole population and everything there, it was slaughter. There was quite a stink in the RAF after that but it was unintentional, it was just one of those things in war, I'm afraid. But as I say, people don't realise.

- 22:30 Just think the whole of Europe was blacked out so there was nothing to indicate a city or anything like that, it was all just a black void. And then you had, very often, lousy weather with cloud. So even if nothing else was wrong, the cloud would stop you seeing through it. And before they got the H2S,

- 23:00 it was all done on dead reckoning and it was pathetic.

**What if anything did you see of the results of your bombing?**

No, you never saw that, thank God. But that's not

23:30 right. We did once see the result of it. And it was just before the Normandy landing and they were targeting marshalling yards and so forth. I think it was a marshalling yard at Lille, I think Lille. We went in in moonlight at six thousand feet. And there was hardly a bomb dropped outside the marshalling yard. And the smoke and stuff

24:00 came up, six thousand feet. You could see them landing then, you could see the devastation. But that was the only time really I saw the ground. Oh and D Day. For that we went up.

**Was that an opportunity, did that make you think about what you were doing more, being able to see it, or just...**

Well that one didn't because it was military, purely

24:30 military so you didn't have to worry but I think most of the guys were not happy with the civilian casualties but get back to it, what happened in parliament? He set the ground rules, it's no use being another Chamberlain and saying, "Oh we won't do that." It was - and I think the German people didn't know a lot of what was going on in Germany but I also think

25:00 they didn't want to know. I don't think the Brits had any choice. As I say that wasn't - I do know from the history that initially they refrained from bombing in Europe. They were doing the shipping ports and things like that.

25:30 **Tell us about D Day, what was the lead up to that and what were the rumours around about what was going on?**

Oh well there'd been rumours, I mean obviously the build up of troops and that. But it had been kept pretty well within Britain apparently because the Germans don't seem to have been aware of what exactly was going on. But we were briefed to fly but we were not told the target. And then it was postponed and then it was scrubbed.

26:00 And then it came on the next time, a couple of nights later whatever it was. And we knew nothing about it until we got into the briefing, the general briefing. And then they said, "Over onto the Normandy front," and then they said straight out with it, "You're on the gun batteries." And there was silence then and that was the first we knew about it. And we took off about twenty to four in the morning and

26:30 we went over and it wasn't daylight, but I can't remember, it must've been enough light by the time we got there, there would've been enough light to see them. But you couldn't identify anything really, they were fortifications, you could see that. But concrete things, half a mile thick sort of thing.

27:00 But let the whole works go on them and I think it silenced them completely because the concussion from it would've killed them, it would've had to. Or even if it didn't they'd be so crazy they wouldn't know what they were doing. And we were coming back and I got down from the H2S set to

27:30 just have a look at things in daylight. And looked down the channel and here, I don't know how many thousands of ships there were. And I'm the nose too with a box seat view of it. Just choc a block with bloody ships of all descriptions. And it was probably half an hour before they actually landed. I'll never

28:00 forget that.

**Where were the gun batteries that you bombed?**

They were up above the beach on the heights above the beach. They weren't that far up but they commanded the beaches.

**Obviously there was a huge**

28:30 **amount of shipping. Was there more aircraft in the sky than usual?**

Oh while this is going on the Dakotas are going over with gliders taking paratroopers over. And I don't know how many but the sky was just thick with aircraft. But at least it was daylight then so you could see where you were going.

**What were your emotions on seeing that**

29:00 **huge force massed up?**

I was just flabbergasted I guess. I just couldn't believe it. It boggles the imagination of so many ships in such a congested manner and yet they remained organised. I don't know how many individual ships there were or vessels of various kind. But it had to run into thousands.

29:30 But all this time I think Rommel had an idea but Hitler was quite convinced that it was going to be up near Dieppe and up along there. And the Brits did something that was quite cunning really. They had gun navigators and these were really top guys. And they had aircraft

30:00 orbiting across the channel over towards Dieppe and that area and they navigated so that each time they progressed a little further at the rate a ship would go, a naval vessel would go. So they transversed the channel just doing that, just going around and around in these circles. On the shore as far as the Germans were concerned it looked like another armada coming across the channel up there. And I

30:30 think that – well according to the records that definitely fooled them. It was one of the reasons that they held off from Normandy until it was too late.

**Who were you flying with at that stage?**

7th Squadron.

**You were back with 7th Squadron. So how long was your stint with 101 Squadron?**

Oh I don't know might have been

31:00 a couple of months perhaps. Yeah, probably a couple of months. That would take it into February and I finished up in July. So yeah.

**And what was your tour of operation and what was the quota you had.**

Well on PFF you had forty five straight and that was it. On main force you had

31:30 thirty and then you were screened and go on in structuring. And then you had twenty. I did about thirty-five, I think it was, without a break. And at that stage the invasion was on they weren't talking about breaks and I was getting in a bad way

32:00 with the air sickness at this stage so they called it quits for me. And then of course we were organised to be sent back to Australia. And by the time we got back here of course it was basically over and they didn't need. Anyhow they wouldn't have had the aircraft so it was a foregone sort of thing.

**You**

32:30 **mentioned the air sickness before but we didn't really discuss it in any detail. How did it affect you?**

Well after looking at that then I found I was even having it in the Ansons. You just feel so nauseated you can't vomit but you wish the hell you could and it gets in the end to, "Oh I don't care whether I'm alive or dead," sort of thing. I was all right on straight and level stuff like that, it was no problem.

33:00 But if we got into any, you know heavy cork screwing and bouncing around, that'd get the better of me in the end. But they were okay about that, they said, "Righto, call it quits for now."

**How did it affect, how you did your job as a bomb aimer?**

Well it didn't until I went and saw the CO because I was feeling at that stage, I was getting to the stage

33:30 where I didn't give a bugger what was going on and I obviously wasn't really doing my job. And what worried me the same as it did over being a pilot, was the fact that the rest of the crew were being jeopardised as long as I was involved in any way with the navigation. That wasn't fair on the crew.

**Were there words within the crew about it? Did they talk to you about it?**

No, no, no.

34:00 Oh, it wasn't uncommon not by any means.

**What happens inside an aircraft when it starts to corkscrew? Can you give us some idea of what that craziness is like?**

Well you get the G force straight away because you go down, straight down five hundred feet or so and then straight up the other way and then roll over – not roll over but change course again going up and

34:30 then keep on doing that. Well depending upon how vigorous it is, your eyes start to pop out, you lose vision, you can't co-ordinate. Your eyes literally start to bludge and you can't co-ordinate. And it's very uncomfortable of course as well. But you bounce around in the aircraft, there's no restraining things.

35:00 Then she goes down and when she starts to come up again the table comes up and you have the devil's own job not to bang your face on the table. And it goes the other way and you come off the seat and you hang onto it for grim death. We pulled the seat out – we both hung on like this and the

35:30 G it pulled the rivets out. And of course I was about eleven stone and Frank was somewhere around about the same so you've got twenty two stone, whatever the G force pulling, it's not surprising it gives up the ghost.

**Was there an occasion where you were conned and went into the flak.**

36:00 **Sorry, there was one where you had a near miss with flak. Was that the closest call you had?**

Oh yeah, yeah definitely. That's the only time we were hit and lost equipment.

**What was the flak like in the aircraft, what did you see, hear, smell?**

You didn't see it, you didn't hear it.

36:30 Unless it was very close you wouldn't hear it. There'd just be this puff of smoke and then you'd smell the cordite. Even from a fair distance. But you could smell that. And basically that was it. But if you heard it it was like when we copped it, we were too close. Otherwise you wouldn't hear it. And the other interesting thing about that too - when we had a look at the aircraft

37:00 the next morning, it was still on the squadron, apart from the hole in it. The inner port air screw, the boss where it goes into the engine is about that big. And a piece of the flak had cut right through, half way through it. And this thing had been rotating around the cockpit. So how it didn't

37:30 snap I don't know but it didn't, but we didn't know, so it didn't worry us.

**What sounds did the flak make when it started to hit the aircraft?**

Oh well it was just metal on metal. A bit like, depending on the size of it, be a bit like gravel hitting it I suppose.

**What goes through your mind when you hear that, given that you don't hear it very often?**

38:00 Oh it's all over before you can worry about it I guess, that's probably it. One decent sized piece came between Frank and myself, about chest high. I don't know where it finished, I never saw it in the aircraft but it was a decent lump. But we didn't hear that. Or weren't aware of hearing it. It wasn't until the next morning when we had a look.

**How do**

38:30 **experiences like that or just the general experience of having to fly operations so much, how did that take a toll on your nerves and your physical body?**

Oh I never - you used to have what they call flak happy. It's people who twitch and go on and all sorts of silly things. There's quite a few of them acted very strangely but I didn't feel that it really affected me that way.

39:00 There was no suggestion of counselling or anything like that. It was just part of it. I wasn't really aware of - it was only when I got home and I was at my mother's place and I wasn't aware of it but she lost patience in the end. And she said, "For God's sake will you sit still." So I must be

39:30 jiggling around. I wasn't aware that it was a problem. I don't have nightmares, but I don't suppose a day goes by when something doesn't come to mind.

**What comes to mind most?**

Oh there seems to be a multitude of things. Certainly getting hammered by the flak and the conning. Because that went on for so long.

40:00 Again the three guys going before we even got into it in Canada. And some of the guys I've got to know too on the squadron. You didn't get to know them very well because you were a unit to yourself. The same as the WAAFs - well in my experience the WAAFs didn't want to know you. They were not nasty or anything like that but

40:30 there was only two all the time I was on 7th Squadron that'd go past and say, g'day and shake hands. They weren't nasty or anything like that; they just didn't want to know you.

**Because you might not be around tomorrow?**

Well I think some of them might have had the experience and a lot of them might've had the experience and didn't want it.

41:00 I don't think any of our crew were chasing anything romantically but to be in feminine company for a change was quite a thrill.

**We'll talk about how you managed to relax if at all or blow off steam but we'll have to change the tape again.**

## Tape 9

00:42 **We were just talking about humour and you said your CO was...**

And he said, told us that we'd have the night off.

**Oh sorry go back to the start of the story. It was just before...**

Oh before D Day and we were having, scheduled to fly and it was off and then it was on.

- 01:00 Kept these postponements and scrubs and so on. And so this – came over the tannoy [public address system] and said we're having leave for the night. But we must let him know exactly where we were. So if you're with a family somewhere you could leave the address and so forth. Phone numbers anything that's available. But it's not enough just to say that you're in a haystack, we must
- 01:30 know what haystack. Which over went well with the boys of course. Particularly when it comes over in a cultured British voice.

**I mean just in regards, Chris [interviewer] was asking off camera about staying with families. Can you tell us about a family that you stayed with from Glasgow?**

Well first of all there was the ones in Glasgow. And Jim

- 02:00 used to...

**Just begin the story about how you actually got into contact with them?**

Well it was in one of the clubs. This woman, I must've been looking a bit dismal or something because she – she was in her forties I think, and she asked me where I lived and so forth in Australia. And then eventually she said, asked me what I was going to do and I had nothing that I had in mind.

- 02:30 And she said, "Would you like to meet her family?" And I said, "Yeah yes I'd love to." And she said, "Oh I think they'd be very happy to see you." So she gave me the address and I went out there. Well they treated me like their own son. They were terrific. And he drove buses, all night shift stuff for the coal mines and things like that. And Jim
- 03:00 was a mechanic in a garage there invalided out. And as I say, the other one had this – a couple of times he took me on a tour in it so I saw more bits of Scotland. And yeah they were nice people, really really nice people. And she was a doll, her mother.
- 03:30 About three quarters of an hour walk back into Glasgow. And we used to sit and talk and talk and sit. I'd wake up to find the last bus had gone. Looks like I've got to walk home. Well that's all right. Before I'd go she'd bring out a little flask. "He's some whisky, drink that, it'll keep you warm." Never missed. Had a funny do there coming home one night. Cause
- 04:00 that was the colour of the uniform and the police had the same colour in Glasgow. And they've got these, what they call closes, we've got – very similar to this, a walled in thing with a number of units in it. There's a lot of them and of course they're very dark places. And I was waltzing home this night and in the shadows on the other side I saw this
- 04:30 bloke move out. And I wasn't thinking anything about it at all but as I walked on he angled over and as he got close to me I saw it was a copper. And he said, "Oh it's all right I thought you were one of us." He said, "Where are you going?" And I said, "Into Glasgow." And he said, "Take my advice. Walk along the middle of the road and only move off for a car or something." But he said, "You're in dangerous territory here." So he said, "Don't be a fool."
- 05:00 Walk in the middle of the road and don't waste time. Get out of it as quick as you can." Fool's walking where angels fear to tread.

**What was the danger?**

Oh, the Sauchiehall gangs and that, they had there even in the war time. Gangs. Criminal gangs.

**Did you ever come across any of these criminals?**

No never saw it. Just as I say, just in the lap of the gods the way things happen.

- 05:30 But the copper was quite serious and he meant it.

**Why was it important to you or to airman like yourself to actually stay with families, have a home stay?**

Well I think – see I was three or more years over there and I think most of the guys would be the same. They miss their families. And all you see is day in and day out is guys.

- 06:00 You miss it. As I say missed the feminine company too. Not romantically at all but just to be able to sit and have a yarn with them. And have a beer and that sort of thing. And I think that was fundamental to it. You felt at home and it was the very thing that was missing over there, no matter
- 06:30 how nice people were in the street or so forth. It still wasn't – we got quite intimate with the families. Well I did. And I know the skipper had a cousin over there and he used to go somewhere there. He used to go there on his leave. And Frank and I went into London once or twice but then he got tangled up with some family too where again, it wasn't a

07:00 romantic thing but he was with some family and he used to dart off there. And I used to go to Croydon with that family. Spend a few nights in the Anderson shelters.

**That was with the Croydon Family?**

Yeah, because they took a bit of a pasting too.

**How did you get connected with them?**

Well that goes back to Canada. The family that I was with there, their

07:30 son was in the Canadian Army. And he'd met this lass over in England and he married her actually. And of course he was - he went to their home and all that sort of thing. And then one of the girls in Canada

08:00 she had a letter from him recently and she said, "Oh I had a letter from John. You're going over there, would you like to know somebody to go and see?" And I said, "Oh yes sure." So she gave me the address and when I was on leave I made my way down there and made myself known. And how I came to turn up there. And oh they welcomed me with open arms. It was terrific.

08:30 **You mentioned that they all copped a bit of a pasting in respect to air raids?**

Yeah, down the Croydon area did, yeah.

**When you were caught up in air raids did that reflect back to you what you were actually doing overseas?**

No, I never addressed that. I think you don't want to know about it. I think that's the base of it. I don't, as I say, they were all coping the buzz bombs and so forth so

09:00 you'd have to be unlucky in an Anderson shelter to - and the port area where you - multi-storied things where a place could come down over the top of you and you'd be in greater danger there. But I never really, I don't think I really felt in any imminent danger there. And I was only a couple of nights in London when the blitz was on.

09:30 And we bombed one night on the squadron. But no I don't remember that ever.

**The Anderson shelter, can you just describe for me what it looks like?**

Oh it was well the outside just looked like nothing. It was just a hole dug in the ground and they had some sort of

10:00 metal reinforcing inside just to stop the earth falling in and out I think. It'd be - well I don't know whether they varied. The one I was in would be, oh twenty feet by eight or ten. And it had bedding down there, so you climbed into bed and went off to sleep if you could.

10:30 **Food and water as well?**

Oh they had emergency rations but not as a permanent thing. They were left there yes in case for any length of time you had to have water particularly. But other than that we ate - never had a meal down there - always ate in the home. There was a lot of damage around the Croydon area.

11:00 In residential and business area.

**And the air raid on the squadron, what happened that time?**

Oh there was an intruder and I don't know what size bomb it was but he came in at low level and just dropped it and it had a dramatic effect. It hit a hangar, I think there was one or two aircraft in it but

11:30 there was some dope there and it went up in a flash. So you could go home and say, "Yes, he saw the fire and it was wonderful." But as soon as the dope had burnt out there was practically no damage done. Hell of a noise but outside that no.

**So it was just one plane?**

Just the one yeah, an intruder. Didn't affect us anyway really. The artillery boys are the ones

12:00 that - they had about a month of pack drill every night cause they never opened up. It was all over before they - they weren't expecting, they weren't used to it. And oh you know you can understand. But of course there were brick bats flying in all directions after it. These poor devils bashing around in the square for an hour when everyone was having tea.

**While you were at**

12:30 **101 Squadron, the airport was on a farm wasn't it?**

Yeah. Now that's a point. Those photos, you got them there?

**I think they're over in the corner there.**

Well that'd explain it even more but you can't see it on this anyhow. Yes it was on a farm and there was

a Squire Martin as we called him. I don't know whether he was called squire or not, and his wife.

13:00 And he had two or three daughters. Anyhow the whole family had been purloined by the land army or the army and what have you. And there was only this couple on their own so they didn't do very much on the place. All they had was WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, a few WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and that. And they had a smoke room there with all hams hung up along there. Now

13:30 how long they'd been there, where that was from, I don't know. But I don't think they had a piggery so I think it's probably come from the past. But somewhere, I don't know, have no idea how it started but somewhere there used to be, some of the air crew used to go down there of a morning and they'd collect eggs and do a few odd little jobs like that and then have a cup of tea with them. And it became an Australian tradition

14:00 more than anything else. And crew after crew would go down there. As one left another would come and again, it was a lovely break from the squadron. And we thoroughly enjoyed it. And there's a photo there with a whole lot of us there in the room, just having a sing song and what have you that night. And again they were a lovely couple. But they were

14:30 unfortunate too. Because runways were built as best they could and they had their farmhouses below the runway and only about a hundred yards past the runway. You know cause whenever the lights'd go on, they'd know it was on and these Lancs loaded would take over and sink over them and - so they used to go into town. Ludford Magna was

15:00 - it's not a big town, I never went in there, it was only a village I think. But they used to go in, get away from the place until it was all - everybody had taken off and then they'd come back in the night. Yeah so they had a very very uncomfortable few years.

**You've spoken a bit about staying with families, a bit about meeting**

15:30 **this farm couple, but with all the stress and anxiety that there was with what you had to do, I mean how did fellows like yourself relieve the tension?**

Well I don't know, I really can't put it in words. I know one way was of a morning, a sunny morning, outside the flight offices, once we knew we were on, we'd sit like old men outside there and snooze. There was nothing to do and we just literally

16:00 relaxed that much that you'd sleep. Snooze off and fill in the time that way until you had to start doing an air test or do whatever you had to do. And without being conscious of it I think you probably did it two ways. You learnt to physically relax, consciously relax and second you, just put it out of your mind.

16:30 Can't do anything about so don't worry about it. And I think you can develop that technique.

**Was alcohol important to fellows?**

Yes it was. I could never handle a lot so it was never a real problem with me. But yeah they used to get on the turps a lot. Apart from the relaxation of it, it was dirt cheap in the messes and you could get spirit and everything.

17:00 As a matter of fact they had a very sad situation there. The section leaders were supposed to do a certain number of trips per month. I don't know it might have only been one or two or something like that. But there were a few of them there who had got into the habit of - they rostered who was on and off sort of thing. And they'd

17:30 been sitting on their backsides and dodging the issue. And we got a new CO in and he picked it up. So he picked everyone of them as his crew, for his crew. The gunnery leader and I don't know whether it was the bombing leader. But anyhow the gunnery leader and the nav leader, about four of them he picked as his crew and some odd bods for the others.

18:00 And they were done to the eyeballs before they took off. They took off and never came back. It was inevitable. I don't think they'd have been capable of a coherent thought. Silly bugger.

**Chris did ask you earlier about LMF and obviously in respect to also you relationship with 7th**

18:30 **Squadron after the first two failed mission.**

No there was never anything said or suggested to us. It was more or less put as sprogs. You know don't know which way's up.

**But did you come across men who couldn't handle the pressure?**

No not really. But you wouldn't hear about it if you did because they wouldn't make a great fuss. The squadrons wouldn't either. They'd ship them off quietly and that's it. But I am not aware

19:00 of anybody, hearing of it happening at all. Not on main force or PFF.

**We've also discussed quite a bit about when you were coned and coming in under ground fire, but were you ever actually attacked by aircraft?**



Yeah about our third or fourth, where a JU88 came right across – well it looked like – you saw a tracer with it and it looked to be about

19:30 a couple of feet above us and he was just too high with his elevation.

**So just in respect to that where were you going and what happened as you were...**

Well I don't know what the target was, I can look it up in the log book but I can't remember what the target was. But we went into a dive, straight away dived in towards it. He was on our starboard side, when the gunners picked him up.

20:00 They picked him up around about the time that he fired actually. So if he'd have been accurate we'd have copped the lot. But he just went into a steep dive straight away in the dark and never saw him again.

**You may have touched on this, but what were the signs that a German fighter could pick up a Lancaster at night?**

20:30 **Was there anything visual they could see?**

Well the main thing was the four red manifolds glowing – they were red hot and they were glowing like red stop lights. And if you come up from behind it's a dead giveaway. There's nothing you can do about it, so that's it.

**And this German fighter didn't leap on your tail again?**

No never saw him. Very hard to pick you up again. It did

21:00 happen at times but you have to be pretty lucky to have to predict what the bomber was going to do, where it was going turn and that sort of thing. I think mostly you'd have to wait to get a vector from the ground again before you took him up. By that time there'd probably be another half a dozen around to take a vector. I'm only presuming that.

**You also mentioned earlier an occasion where**

21:30 **you were able to fly in with one engine. What happened there?**

Well that was on the Ruhr, Duisburg. Yeah. That's when we came in and got hit by the flak and had trouble finding our way back and so forth. But when we came back to base and skipper told them that we'd lost an engine and they gave him pancake and so he came in.

22:00 **So he only lost one engine, he didn't lose three engines?**

No only lost the one. No it'd had been dicey getting home. I think it'd be dicey getting home on one engine probably. I don't know, you wouldn't have much fuel so yeah, probably could. But you couldn't maintain height.

**So there wasn't an occasion where you came home with**

22:30 **only one engine?**

Oh no, no. No that was the only time we actually lost an engine. The other times when we landed away it was some other malfunction. I don't know whether – could've been overheating, I don't know.

**So when did your tour start to come to an end?**

Sometime

23:00 in July '44. Yeah.

**And where were you sent?**

Oh yeah, that's another story too. We were sent to a place called Inverness, right up in the north of Scotland and it was just a staging place to get rid of us out of the squadron. Cause at that stage they had more than enough air crew and aeroplanes

23:30 were the shortage. So they sent us up there and it was the station that was way out in the scrub. The only thing you ever saw were a few crofters' huts around, a really crude place. So we used to go into Inverness to have a meal and there was nothing there, no entertainment or anything. But we'd go in there to get off the station. And some bright spark spread the story that

24:00 this was a station for demented air crew and the locals apparently believed it, because they walked across the other side of the street rather than go near these demented people. Of course needless to say the boys played it up too. Yeah. The only time I've ever had a ride in a Rolls Royce. You wouldn't believe it, the taxi from the station at Inverness was a Rolls Royce.

24:30 Very, very old, but still a Rolls Royce.

**And you were flying up there?**

No, no, we were just at a loose end. The next thing was to go down to Brighton where we got ready for going home.

**Before we head home, mail. What mail did you receive while you were there?**

Oh we had

- 25:00 things that were called air letters which went by air somehow or other and it was always very late but yeah, it was pretty regular. I don't know how mine was. That was something I found very hard, to write. Couldn't settle down to writing and never sort of thing of anything to say without involving
- 25:30 the air force. And Eve's got a stack of letters still there. She's a real sentimentalist if ever there was one. Yeah. No mail was pretty good and we got a lot of parcels, comfort parcels from the Red Cross and that was - didn't finish that part of Washington Soul. When I came back,
- 26:00 Manpower control was still in and I was in a bit of a dilemma. I thought, "I don't know whether I want to be pinned down with Soul." I didn't know what I wanted to do at that stage. So I was talking to one of the guys I'd been friendly with before I went away and he said, "No no don't be trapped into it." I said, "Well I feel a bit lousy." And he said, "No forget about it." And so I made arrangements to see Doctor Patterson and we had a very amicable
- 26:30 and pleasant meeting, he was quite nice to me and that. And then I said, "Well I'm sorry but I'm going to - I feel very self conscious about doing this and it's really a shame but I'm - I don't feel I can come back to you." He said, "Yeah it's all right. Okay, well I wish you all the very best." That was it. All the time until my air force pay was more than a civilian
- 27:00 pay, Souls made it up. And the girls all had a comfort funds and they used to send - get these parcels together and send those over. And two or three times a year I'd get those and then the Red Cross and parcels from home and that. No, we got a lot of help like that.

**Well just in respect to mail, you were struggling knowing what to write other than anything on the air force.**

- 27:30 **I mean what would your fiancée and your mum write to you and other family members?**

Well that was pretty well all just the family news at home. Because Eve had three sisters and a brother, two brothers. Three sisters and two brothers. And her mother was still alive. So they had all - one brother was in the army, the other one was working at the gas company. He was a reserved occupation so he

- 28:00 couldn't. And the girls all worked and all lived in the same place. They were not married at that time. Oh one was. And that's where her mother was living with the eldest daughter and they eventually graduated there too. So there was always the news about the family direct and then the grandchildren and things that were happening in Sydney.
- 28:30 That was nothing, you couldn't say very much anyhow because the censor'd go through it all and cut the tripe out of it. So, nothing more depressing than to get a letter with all bits cut out of it. No I found that very hard, but I think I did a reasonably honest effort.

**And comfort fund packages. What**

- 29:00 **sort of things did you and other people receive?**

Oh, cakes and cigarettes. They seemed to be the main things I remember. Cakes and cigarettes. Plum puddings. Yeah, mainly that. I suppose there must've been biscuits at times too.

**Did you share it or was it...**

Oh yes, usually. On 7th Squadron we had two to a room, it was a peace time station

- 29:30 so it was pretty good. So I think everybody would have shared with their mates, yeah.

**Just changing the subject, just the nationalities. The British and the Americans, what did you think of them in respect to the flyers?**

Well the Brits as far as I'm concerned are the salt of the earth. The Americans are unfortunate. They have a saying 'overpaid, over-sexed and over here'.

- 30:00 But to compete with the pay that they were getting it left the poor old Brits dragging the anchor. There was a lot of - I wouldn't say it was animosity because they did appreciate the fact that the Yanks were there as again, there was a little bit of, they didn't come in until it was worth their while or they basically had to. In the meantime they'd been bartering islands and God knows what for their munitions.
- 30:30 And that sort of wrangled I think bit with them. No but they were pretty good. The services didn't get on well at all. To the point where Cambridge had one pub that was air force only and another one that

was Yanks only. And they both respected that religiously. There was never any trouble. But as soon as they got together, there would always be a brawl.

**Were you ever around**

31:00 **when one of these brawls...**

No because as I say, I always went to the pub where it was all the RAF and the rest of that. That was about all, the only places you'd go are really those sort of things or some of the service clubs. The TOC H Lounge, Talbot House. They'd always have coffee and tea and

31:30 seemed to have biscuits and things like that if you'd go there. But that was about the only other entertainment you'd get. But down in London you'd get the Windmill Club and places like that. And one, and it was one of the hilarious things I'd ever seen, was Flanagan and Allan. You wouldn't know them probably but they were comedians, British comedians and oh, it was absolutely hilarious. But there wasn't too much of that on either

32:00 because they couldn't afford to have that sort of thing. Oh and there - our blokes used to love to have to put down at the Yank aerodrome because oh God blimey, steaks and ice cream and God knows what. The Yanks were always very good in that respect. The odd guys that I met that had to put down on an American air field,

32:30 they were welcomed.

**Travelling home for you, is there anything interesting that happened on the journey home?**

No I don't think so. We came home on the Dominion Monarch. Was comfortable, wasn't crowded. And came home in February '45 so

33:00 the war had just about fizzled out in the - on the sea so we had a pleasant trip all the way. Came down the Panama Canal. Through the Panama and the food on it was quite good. Nothing elaborate, but it was quite good. There was no discipline. And most of us were commissioned by that time anyhow so they just left us to our own devices.

33:30 There was nothing to do. We played five hundred until we were sick to the sight of the cards but that was about the only thing we could fill in the time. Five hundred and pontoon. Pontoon was an incestuous thing. You had your crew and you started off with a certain amount of money and when you lost yours you'd borrow it from one of the crew. You'd get track of it, you'd definitely keep track of it.

34:00 And eventually he'd lose and you were winning so he'd borrow it and it just kept going around. The crew never got anywhere else.

**Was it hard breaking up from your crew when you eventually came to that point, in respects you might not see them?**

No because our mid upper gunner - to start with the flight engineer that we had who was grounded right from the word go, to

34:30 fly below ten thousand feet. So that was the end of him, he left. And then we got odd bods until we got one British bloke permanently. The mid upper gunner he was grounded. I suspect it was ulcers or something like that. He had some stomach trouble. The rear gunner, we had a couple of odd bods fill in and then we

35:00 got a bloke coming back on his second tour on the main force. We had him until he only had - he had of course the twenty so he'd finished his tour before we'd finished our first tour. And then we got odd bods again. And the two that didn't fit in with the crew, they came as a package. They were mates and sort of kept to themselves.

35:30 So we didn't have any real affinity to them and the mid upper had gone. So we got a new bloke and he was a nice guy, we got on very well with him. But we didn't have the bonding that we had had with the others. And the wireless operator, he was grounded, he had suspected lung cancer but it wasn't. He had a shadow on his lung anyhow and he was grounded, and by the time he came out of hospital, we'd finished.

36:00 When I finished then Les crewed up with another crew which was basically a completely new crew. And he only did about two trips and they didn't come back from a trip. A place called - oh forget - Boljet or something in France [Bolbec]. Only just over the coast. A night fighter must've caught up with them I think.

36:30 So yes there was a breaking up there but not the expected way. He was the only one of the original crew that was on that. And this other wireless operator, he's up in Caloundra. Been up a couple of times to him. He's a terrific bloke. And navigator. We used

37:00 to go to a PFF meeting in Sydney once a year. And that's the only time - at this stage when we'd moved away, only time that I was in contact with him was at this night and they were announcing he had died. I think it was cancer of the stomach because he had some problem before we finished flying. He'd

finished the same time at I did, he was grounded. He hardly ate, he played with his food and he

37:30 just couldn't seem to get it down or something. But he never let on what was wrong. And we had a few years after we got back here when we lived closer to each other. I was living in Allawah and he was living in the next station down. And then we moved up to the bush, up to the country to Tamworth. You know after

38:00 - we were for a while in the pharmacy out at San Souci and then we went from there up to Barraba outside Tamworth. And I was there until the eldest bloke came to high school stage and they only had, I forget what they used to call it, but it didn't go to high school, it only went to sixth class. So he bitterly opposed

38:30 going to boarding school and we had three of them. So the little country pharmacy wasn't going to cope with that so we thought, we've got to face it sooner or later so we came back down to Sydney then.

**We're just coming towards the end of this tape now so I guess just a few questions. Firstly seeing your family and your fiancée what are your memories of greeting them?**

Ohh. Had her spoilt.

39:00 Eve came up, we came back to Bradfield Park. We landed in Sydney and Eve came up to Bradfield Park and met me up there while we were in the station. We were having a meal actually and, if she'd a bit later I'd have been three parts stoned.

39:30 Yeah so a fortnight later, that was a fortnight - oh, about a fortnight later we were married. And we had fifty eight years of it so we can't complain.

**Anzac Day, what does that mean to you?**

Oh it's quite significant.

40:00 I don't know whether, Australians really appreciate how much that they owe to the service men, New Guinea and all. See nobody can tell you what New Guinea really was like. You can't describe it. It's the same as you can't describe raids on Berlin and places

40:30 like that. You can put it in words but you don't get the feeling. Yeah so to me, and it's coming true more now, in more and more of the young people, seeing more of it and taking more notice of it. I think down here the last Anzac Day I think they had the biggest mob they've ever had

41:00 both at the dawn service and out in the march. Plus the fact you meet some of your mates although we don't, the air force crowd don't because there's not that many of them came back. So the ones that we knew are really over, if they're alive, are in England. They're RAF.

41:30 I've got a great mate here. Two of us, three of us go to pitch and putt. And one's a RAF and the other's an ex coastal commander who did it in England of course. And yeah, they're very precious to me. I don't know anybody that was

42:00 on the squadron when I was there.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**