Australians at War Film Archive

Jacques Ellis (Jack) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:16 **Well Jack, let's hear again about the story of your parents.**

Ok, well Dad of course was born and lived in England until

01:30 about the age of 17, 18, and he left England on a sailing ship and he sailed before the mast down some of those famous South American ports round the Horn and he eventually left the ship here in Melbourne.

What year are we talking?

Oh I'm hard pressed to remember that Martin [interviewer].

02:00 I don't think I've ever thought of the year. He was about 18, he died at the age of 83 about 10 years ago. Work it out for yourself. So I suppose 40, 60, about 70 years ago yeah.

So was he... is this just before the Great War [First World War]?

Yes, it was a few years before the Great War because he

02:30 trained as a builder here but of course the war came along and he joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] in the 5th Light Horse and he went across to... what's originally to Gallipoli, and he was fortunate he wasn't wounded in Gallipoli. And then I think he went back to Egypt and from Egypt to the Western

03:00 Front. He was eventually wounded and gassed at a place called Ypres. Ypres. Many people call it 'Wipers'.

The Battle of Passchendaele was that?

I don't know what the battle was. Dad wouldn't talk about the war. I understand that now. He spoke more to my sisters, who were later and were half sisters.

03:30 Anyway, at Ypres he was gassed and wounded and he lay there in the field and, as I understand it, this young woman who was an ambulance driver was on her own and when she was told the area was clear of gas she went in and she picked him up. Now to pick a man up and put him in the truck on her own called for considerable exertion and

04:00 that exertion later breathed deeply and she in fact was affected by the gas. I don't think they realised to what extent at that stage, but obviously they fell in love with each other and got married and both survived the war and I understand they were married in...what's that town? Where the burghers offered their

04:30 lives to...?

Calais?

No, Calais; that's the place. And of course her parents were in Calais and...

Were they married during the war?

No, well, right at the end of war yeah, right at the end of the war. And I think Dad was able to arrange to either delay his return to Australia or similar. They came out together and they lived here

05:00 in the Brighton area for some time. My brother was born. He's two years older than me. Then I was born, well actually not here because Dad had seen machinery in France that he wanted to use in a business in Australia.

What was his business?

Well he made inlaid cement tiles and they were absolutely

05:30 beautiful. I can remember we put the roof on the Manchester Unity building when it was built. I was only seven at that time but it was a dance floor in a star pattern and it was absolutely magnificent. Oh, he did a lot of big jobs. We re-paved the Royal Arcade, we put a decent floor in the Synagogue; the Jewish Synagogue

06:00 at St Kilda.

Is that like a terratzo style?

No, no it's very different from terratzo. We worked with terratzo of course. Dad made what we considered an imitation terratzo, which is all the little pieces of… and we had good friends in the industry amongst the Italians and they worked in harmony together.

06:30 But yes going back a little; Dad went over to France for this machinery and indeed for reasons I don't know they were in Belgium when I was born. I was born in a place called Watermile, which is just out of Brussels and I swear I knew nothing about it, had nothing to do with it but it's a funny thing.

07:00 It's dogged me one way and another and indeed on a recent return to Australia the customs man told me I'd have trouble getting back into this country. I'd lived here from the time when I was a few months old. I served in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] of course for five and a half years in the Second World War. Here's a man whom I'm pretty sure was mid-European; he wasn't Australian, but he was telling me I

07:30 was gonna have trouble getting back into this country and so there you are. Where do you want to go from there Martin? What?

Well perhaps something about your early childhood. Where did you…?

That would be of interest I think. I remember, of course I remember when my mother died. People don't think that children remember that but

08:00 it was heavy on my mind. I have missed my mother. Right up until after I was married I actually wept for my mother. Fortunately Dad married again. I say fortunately because I had a wonderful stepmother and…

How old were you when your mother died?

Not quite three, coming up to three and she was buried at Brighton

08:30 cemetery. And well of course as a child you get on, you play with things and it comes to you occasionally and of course it weighs heavily. It weighed heavily on me as a child. I find that I'm inclined to be very emotional and I think it's because of the influence of my mother and her race but…

Did you

09:00 **know, did you get to know her family?**

Not at all – one of the things I've regretted. They moved from Calais to America and we never had any follow up address. Dad, strangely enough, was very reticent about it. He wouldn't talk to me about it. In fact at one stage quite late in his life we fell out a bit because he wouldn't talk to me about it and I think that came from the

09:30 fact that when he remarried, my stepmother tried to free us of any load of that nature. She was very good and she thought we had forgotten her, and my brother and I didn't of course. We… growing up at Ivanhoe we slept in the sleep-out outside the house together and we could discuss those things

10:00 without any mention in the house, and we never, never mentioned it in the house and it was only recently talking to my sisters that they thought I'd forgotten all about it, and I was surprised but of course it's understandable. I went, I started school at four and a half, which was young. And of course my name being Jacques Louie was a target for the kids at school.

10:30 Further on top of that I had curly hair so I was known as 'curl' or 'Jacques' and that made life a bit interesting but…

What was your brother's name?

Fred, Frederick and my father's name was Frederick Warburton Ellis so my brother was named after that. When I was born my mother had more of a say and I was Jacques Louis. I'm quite proud of that, don't worry I like that.

11:00 But Dad had been badly gassed of course and he was continually pulled into the Caulfield Military Hospital over the illness that resulted and I remember going in often to see him. At one stage it was almost a monthly visit. He'd go into hospital, he'd be in there for a week perhaps longer and he'd come out, he'd go to work

11:30 and then he'd be taken into hospital again. And he was advised that he should move away from the coastal areas and go into a drier area so we moved up to Ivanhoe and that was satisfactory. And I remember moving every bit of it. I remember the house we first rented to stay in Ivanhoe – it was on Livingstone Street and I remember fishing in the Darebin Creek with a pin and catching a lot of carp and putting them in a

12:00 bath, baby's bath in the back garden and oh, as a child, life was pretty good. I went to the Ivanhoe State School yeah, good friends at the Ivanhoe State School. And strangely enough in the same class was the girl I later married. At that time it didn't mean anything to me; it's just looking back that we know that and

12:30 school went fairly well. I was a pretty successful student. I was a keen study boy. I liked study and having gone through all the grades of that school I would loved to have gone to university, but of course we didn't have the money and in that time of course Dad's worked hard at his business and we did these things like

13:00 paving the Royal Arcade in Melbourne and even the Grand Hotel in Mildura. We did a lot of jobs around the State; Bendigo Railway Station, things like that. So I left the Ivanhoe State School and went to the Collingwood Technical School. I had a good technical bent. I was very good at technical things. I topped the

13:30 woodwork class, I topped the tinsmith class, I topped the workshop class and I was offered jobs all around Collingwood, but Dad needed me at his business which was at Mary Street, Richmond at that time and so I went to work for him and things were still pretty tight. I left school when I was 13 but I went to night school and Dad had

14:00 a whole factory set out with these machines he got from France. They were hydraulic presses which pressed all the damp cement mix to 14 tons to the square inch. See I can remember this detail. I was good at that and we had all these machines installed. He had an engineer come in, Don Clarke, and Don Clarke

14:30 was a very good engineer and I helped him with all the installation of course and at the end of that time he said to Dad he said, "Your lad should be an engineer," he said, "What about it?" So Dad said, "Well OK, if he's good at engineering take him." So I went to work with Don Clarke and of course it went well. I became the head boy quickly. I could sharpen drills and do all the things and I was

15:00 ahead of most of the boys, well, all the boys in the shop. We made a particular fitting, I remember, for somebody's bed maker. A special nut, and we had to make those at 60 an hour, each operation at 60 an hour and I topped that. I was well over 60 an hour and then of course I loved the job and

15:30 I remember I was happily whistling away at work one morning and Don Clarke came out of his office. Don liked a little bit of the turps occasionally and they affected his placidity, if we can call it that, the next morning. And I was whistling away and he says, "Shut up that noise!" and I thought he was joking so I whistled on so he sacked me, and it was a time when jobs were hard to get. I couldn't get a job for a long time.

16:00 I remember I went doing anything and I was burning painter for house at one stage and the burnt paint fell on the hand and burnt a big lump off and it was a hurt. I always remember it. Eventually though I got back into engineering with Robert Boddington's. Boddington's were engineers and millwrights on the corner of Queensberry Street and

16:30 Leicester Streets, Carlton. They were an old firm, a very reliable firm, and the boss, a Robert Boddington, was known as 'young Bob' because his grandfather started the company and so it went on and he was an extremely nice fellow I must say. And in the shop we had a German foreman – Joe, that was Joe Nangles. And Joe

17:00 was a marvelous foreman. He could teach the boys what was what and what have you and of course he'd give you a kick on the tail if you weren't… but it was a good shop. I remember, it was a good shop. And then the war came and Joe was locked up as a foreigner. We were all sorry about that because I don't think you could have got a more true to Australia immigrant than Joe. He was a marvelous fellow. But

17:30 of course, from the time I was a little boy I had built model aeroplanes. I wanted to fly. In fact I remember when we were living at Hampton. I was five, I remember it very well and I was aeroplane mad. If an aeroplane flew overhead Mum and I'd rush out to see it, and so much so that my mother brought me, my stepmother brought me a

18:00 pair of fairy wings and she pinned them on my back and then I knew I could fly. So I went out in the garden and I dragged the steps over to the wood shed and I got on the wood shed roof and knowing I could fly I leapt off. Well I got the greatest rupture in the groin that any kid could have and of course the doctor said, "Oh it'll grow out." It did, it took ten painful years to grow out but I still wanted to be a pilot

18:30 anyway.

Can I just ask, you mentioned your stepmother. How soon after your mother's death did your

father remarry?

I think it must have been about two years, yeah. I don't really remember that. I just remember that I was five and we were living at Hampton with her of course and she was marvellous. She treated us like her own children and

19:00 of course she didn't intend that I should rupture myself leaping off the wood shed. But anyway the war came and I wanted to be a pilot and I went down to the recruit centre and of course the recruit centre they said, "Oh yes you'll have to join as an engineer 'cause that's your mustering, but when you get in just re-muster." Well they were a pack of lies. They knew very well that technical musterings were like gold

19:30 and when I got in there was no hope of re-mustering. And so I went from there I did the usual show-grounds course and what have you. Finished up at Point Cook as a fitter 2A. I liked the work, I wasn't unhappy about any work I had. I did well at that I became a corporal fitter 2. I had my own crew and we did major overhauls on, of all things,

20:00 Hawker Demons; and that was the first aeroplane I flew strangely enough. I was going back to camp one night as a matter of fact. You know, the usual pass ended at twenty three fifty nine – had to be in by midnight. And going across the Point Cook Road there was this fellow walking and I picked him up. He was wearing a flat hat. I didn't know what rank he was and it didn't fuss me much. He wanted a lift and I gave him a lift

20:30 and as we bowled along his hat blew off and of course we had to stop and go back and pick it up. When we got into the camp he said, "Are you interested in flying?" I said, "Oh, give anything to be flying." He said, "Would you like to come up with me?" He said, "I do the weather flight every morning up to 16, 18,000 feet." "Oh," I said, "I'd love it if it could be arranged. I work in workshops though – it'd have to be arranged there." Well he fixed it all up. His name was Jack Buckham. He was the flight

21:00 lieutenant and yes he took me flying in the Hawker Demon, which was gorgeous. It remains in my mind as one of the smoothest aeroplanes I have every flown and of course we went up to 16 or 18,000 feet. I'm not quite sure which now but I didn't suffer from lack of oxygen but it was bloody cold. Anyway we got…

Can I just take you back before the war?

21:30 Yeah.

You'd been working at a variety of jobs?

Yes only for a short time. See I left when Don Clarke fired me for being happy in his workshop. I never lost feeling for Don Clarke. Don Clarke was a good engineer but he used to have a bit too much booze at times and he'd be sore-headed, but then I worked for Clip's Radio

22:00 and I went house painting and I did… but there weren't a lot of those. That was just whilst I was looking for a job back in engineering.

And you were also going to night school?

Well I had stopped going to night school then. I didn't have a train of progress if you know what I mean but when I got back to…when I got the job at Boddington's yes I went to night school. I went to two sessions actually to catch up. I went to night school

22:30 in the afternoon at the Collingwood Tech [Technical College] and in the evening at the Melbourne Tech [Melbourne Technical College, now the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology] and I did more than the normal trade course. And of course struggling now to remember but I did four hours a night most nights. I did a lot of schooling and when I went down to the recruit centre to join and they told me I could re-muster – well I didn't hesitate

23:00 to join up because I thought, 'Well I'll get in and I can re-muster to be a pilot.'

What was the…did you talk about the war with any of your mates, I mean you know…?

There wasn't a lot of talk. Most of the people in the workshop of course were older than me and they had families and they weren't too anxious to get mixed up in the war.

What about your brother?

23:30 My brother I rarely saw. My brother worked with Dad, and Dad and he didn't…well Dad I think was very unfair to Fred. Fred was really a competent artist. He could draw pictures and people just like just naturally and of course Dad said, "That's a sissy business, you're gonna stay here with

24:00 me." And so I never saw a lot of Fred at that stage, but I remember when I went down to do the trade test to join the air force I was passed a couple of drills. They ground the end off a couple of drills and gave 'em to me to sharpen. Well I was absolute expert on that. A couple of buzzer's I gave them back and I can see the man now look at his mate and cop that.

24:30 Well what happened about that I finished up going in as a full tradesman. Ron Sack, one of our full time men, had joined the same day and he finished up as a trainee mechanic and that was not surprising in my view. I was an unusual person. When I did something I had to do it, had to know all about it and so that's

25:00 what happened and of course I went through the RAAF course as a Fitter 2A at the showground. And now Wing Commander King was the commanding officer at Point Cook and every month he held a meeting for those who had a complaint

25:30 and every month I went to see him and I said, "I joined to be a pilot and I've been stuck in here and I want a re-muster." He was an extremely nice old gentleman he really was and he used to say, "I'm sorry Mr Ellis but I'm not allowed to transfer number one technical re-mustering. We need you too much," and so I was stuck there. Along the way of course I got the course for trainee aircrew – 21

26:00 books there were and I studied them and to help me study I got myself put on the fire wagon and the rescue crew and I fished crews out of the sea at night. Engine failure on the take off to the south of course and they'd finish up in the drink.

This is at Point Cook?

At Point Cook yeah, and I swam out a couple of times at night to

26:30 pick up crews that were in the water.

How often did that sort of thing happen?

I think it happened, well I think I can remember three occasions. One occasion was a twin engine Airspeed Oxford and we spent all the next day dragging that out, and of course we didn't save much of it because once the salt water gets into the instruments and those things they quickly corroded and ruined, but I remember on that occasion

27:00 we worked two days straight I think. We were all dead on our feet and anyway that was that, but the years pass. I maintain my visit to Wing Commander King's session every month never missed and he was very nice about it I've got to say. He used to say, "I'm sorry Mr Ellis," until

27:30 one day he said, "Look I can send you overseas. We're sending air crew overseas." Now this unbeknown to me was the air, was the ground crew that were going out to start 458 Squadron, and quite a lot of the boys, Mick Hunter I remember, one or two others and Ted Love went out and joined 458 Squadron. They set it up at Spalding on the Moor, way up northern Scotland.

28:00 Home on Spalding Moor rather that's right and of course I thought no more of it. About a year later though he said to me, "Good news," he said, "I'm allowed to release some group one technical re-musterings to air crew and you've been at it so long you're number one." So myself and Tom Evans from the engineering shop, from the engine overhaul shop,

28:30 both re-mustered and of course that was marvellous.

Can you, could we talk a little bit more about what happened when you first volunteered? What was the process?

Well of course I s'pose the earlier

29:00 stages went quickly. I went and did a rookie's course at Laven of course. I think it was three hundred and ten course about that I think. I remember our disciplinary corporal was a fellow named Lithgow, Corporal Lithgow, and he had some quaint sayings and of course I had a face like a baby's bottom and he'd come along and,

29:30 "Did you shave this morning Ellis?" "Oh yes sir." I didn't even have a razor. I had no fuzz on my face at all but there were things like you know for instance we'd be doing drill and he'd stop the drill and he'd say, "Look, any you fellers interested in golf? I want about six of you to play golf. Yeah? OK we're diggin' a six-holer, a latrine over there. Go and get yourself a shovel."

30:00 And that was the sort of racket that you got used to, the put on various thing. And of course he'd burst into the hut first thing in the morning and say, and shout out, "Time youse was up!" and things like that, which endeared him to us. We quite liked him but that time passed happily.

30:30 I didn't… it was all something different and I quite enjoyed it and then the showgrounds for the engineering training and of course there were differences in aviation engineering to what I'd been doing. There were all sorts of aircraft fittings we had to learn about and of course one of the techniques that we would never have learnt in civilian engineering was how to

31:00 apply fabric to an aircraft skin. Fabric which you dope on and it shrinks according to the 'dope' you're using and finishes up as tight as a board.

What's 'dope'?

Well dope is the paint you put on, but it's a special paint which causes the fabric to shrink.

31:30 Three coats of AWD, I can remember that pretty clearly and then we finished up with either silver oxide or a white finish coat outside and the Hawker Demons [fighter aircraft] of course and aircraft like that were all fabric covered. Indeed when I got to 458 Squadron to fly the Wellingtons [Vickers Wellington medium bomber] it was to find that the Wellington was known as the 'big rag bobbin' because it was fabric covered and everyone thought that

32:00 was terrible because you know everything else was metal covered, but it didn't make any difference. I mean, a bullet went through the thin aluminium sheets of ordinary aircraft without ever feeling it just as they did with the fabric.

What about flammability?

Yes flammability was a problem and if an aircraft crashed and there was a fire well that fabric all burnt off. No doubt about it it was a fire trap.

32:30 Indeed my first take off from the squadron after joining 458 I lost an engine going over the fence edge and cut a great shower of sparks, caught fire to the tail and by the time I got it round and back on the ground it was a good old fire going and of course was soon put out with extinguishers. But that was the danger and I don't think that worried any of us though. We never worried about

33:00 that and anyway…

We were talking about the engineering course. Where was that? At the showground?

That was at the showgrounds, yeah the showground. It was an interesting difference of course to what we did in civil engineering and there were quite a lot of things. Strangely enough woodwork

33:30 became a part of it as you'd imagine because to shape the fabric there was a wooden framework to give it the shape. I mean the fuselage might have been built of steel tube but to give it the shape, well wooden frames were shaped and gave the aircraft a good shape but for streamlining more so than appearance. Wasn't a long course – I think it was about six weeks or something like that

34:00 and from there I was sent down to Point Cook. Things went on there but then we came to this time when Kingy finally said, "You're number one and you can go," and that was just lovely. Well I went to…

How long were you in ground crew?

Over three years I could tell you about that. Can I move and get my log book?

34:30 **I'm interested in the various training exercises and training courses that ground crew go through. You've mentioned learning to use the material and other things. What other skills were you taught?**

I think the main…

35:00 see I didn't touch engines – it was just air frames and at that stage air frames were simple. There were no hydraulics or anything like that. I suppose one of the most important things was security. When you did a nut up on an aeroplane it had to stay done up so it was generally lock wired. We lock wired in those days with copper wire, later with

35:30 stainless steel wire but in those days with copper wire.

How do you do that? How do you secure it?

Well, there's a hole drilled through the nut and when the nut's tightened to the correct tension on the bolt then you feed a wire through that hole and you wind it 'round in a way… you put the wire through and you wind it up as a single wire and you lead it through a lock hole, which is in a position to be applying a

36:00 pressure to tighten it, not allow it to loosen. You follow that and there was nothing special. I didn't find anything special about the engine. I was pretty good at basic metallurgy like heating metal to soften it or kneel it and all those things. I knew all that stuff and I don't think there was much that was

36:30 special to me. It might have been to others but it wasn't to me. We didn't have any machinery. We didn't have the machines that I'd had in the workshop I'd worked in previously. We just took notes of course. We took notes about the size of a bolt that had to go to a certain fitting, stress

37:00 value of bolts of a certain diameter, all that sort of thing but it was all pretty straightforward.

Can I ask you about when you were joining up?

Yeah.

What was the most important reason? Was it for country or was it to become a pilot or…?

Was no I… Of course Dad'd

37:30 been in the First World War and he expected his sons to go to the Second but that, that's not what moved me. I suppose I was worried the Japanese were on the move and I thought I'd sooner be in the forces to keep them out than wait till they get here and overrun us. I was interested in defence of the country no doubt about that. I was very young and I thought that I'd read

38:00 so much about what the Japanese did to the women and children, the countries they overtook and that worried me and I thought, "Well we've got to stop 'em." That was quite a strong part of my need to join. I felt that yeah.

When you say you read this, was that in newspapers or journals or…?

No in newspapers, only in newspapers

38:30 nothing else. Course, I've since learnt a lot of things you read in the newspapers is so much rubbish but I didn't know it then.

Your perception of Australia would have been a little bit different to a lot of your other friends because neither of your parents was Australian and you were of course born overseas although you grew up in Australia. Did that…?

39:00 I don't think that affected me at all. I didn't remember at that time being born overseas of course. I knew my mother was French and France was in the firing line and I was interested from that point of view, and I knew Dad had served in France and so yes I was interested in each of those factors. And I suppose that to

39:30 get into the services as I wanted to go rather than wait to be made to go if the country was invaded was a strong point with me. I wanted to be a pilot of course if I was involved in the fighting and of course that didn't work out quite like that, but they were factors that influenced me in joining yeah.

Tape 2

00:31 **We're talking about when you enlisted and the ideas which…?**

For which I joined?

Yeah, and you were saying that you did have quite a sense of Australia as a country and those sorts of things.

It was… it looked almost as though we were going to lose Australia. The Japanese were

01:00 so strong and it looked very bad. A lot of my friends had already been killed. A lot of friends in the army were up in New Guinea and up there.

This is when you're going to become a pilot? I'm also interested in that first in 1940 when you first enlisted.

That's when I'm talking about then when I talk about this.

Oh OK.

A lot of friends had already been killed yes.

Oh right.

01:30 **Yeah. Course they were army. I knew some but I didn't know a lot of them and of course one tends to forget the individual factors that influence thinking at that stage.**

02:00 **I remember going to… I was at Collingwood Tech doing engineering and drawing under a man named Maxie Fletcher. He was a marvelous master teacher, a teacher and I thought I could talk to him as distinct from my father and I remember saying to him… you know things were looking bad and we were in a drawing class at the**

02:30 **Collingwood Tech and I remember saying to him, "What do you think?" He said, "Oh lad it's up to you," he said, "but I think things are going to get worse." Things are getting pretty bad and I asked him what he thought about joining the air force. He said, "No," he said, "I won't comment because it's a very individual thing." He was a man then of about 60 I would say and clearly he was concerned**

03:00 **at the fact that many were being killed no doubt about it and the country did what but he wouldn't urge me to join. He said, "It's up to you lad," and I can remember that discussion very clearly. I wasn't all that advanced in engineering drawing at the time and of course I left it there I did join.**

03:30 **I can't think of anything else though that led me to join. I was, there's no doubt, I was**

concerned. I thought the country could be overrun and I'd sooner be in the part of the services that attracted me. I didn't… I wasn't attracted to the army although that's where Dad had been in the First World War

04:00 **and I don't think there's anything I can add there because I don't remember, you know, clearly enough.**

Do you remember the outbreak of war in 1939?

Oh very well yeah. I followed it and I remember a thing that has worried me about the Iraqi War. Neville Chamberlain [Prime Minister of Great Britain] who said, "Peace in our time," and of course the result of that was 57 million people were killed. What Neville

04:30 really did was give the Germans more time to get their armed forces and their equipment into better positions and they made a hell of a mess for years. Of course they ran away with the war didn't they? I remember that very well yeah. I watched… I didn't read newspapers a lot but I read about that and I remember Neville coming back from Germany and saying, "Peace in our time."

05:00 And of course I remember when the Germans overran Poland and all the march through France when Churchill took over.

And that's about the time that you volunteered?

Yeah, yes it was. See it's… that started in '39 and I think it was about September '39, wasn't it, that Second World War started cause…

It was the 1st of September

05:30 **the Germans moved into Poland.**

Yeah, well I joined in October '40 so that was a bit over a year later yeah.

And just after France would have fallen probably about then, some time around then?

I can't remember. I can't remember.

The… you… the first.

The Maginot line looked like a beak. White duck, blue duck I remember

06:00 that very well and of course everyone was concerned about that if the Germans could blow over the Maginot line so secretly well they were gonna go a long way and they did, they did.

So the first period of your enlistment you said you went down to Laverton originally and then up to the showground?

And then Point Cook.

And then Point Cook and then how long did you

06:30 **spend at Point Cook?**

About three years.

Now is this… I'm interested that you would be there and not be sent to any squadron? Why did it take so long? What were you doing at Point Cook?

Well I was engineering. I was a class one technical mustering. We weren't allowed to transfer to anything. We were just held as engineers.

And so you were just working on the planes

07:00 **that other people were learning to fly on?**

Oh yes of course. I remember one of the lads from the hangar. I can see him now. I ought to remember his name – he worked in the office. He got a re-mustering to air crew and I picked up his body about nine months later when he with the others were doing formation flying down over the beach forest

07:30 and the aircraft to the side of him came in and cut the tail off and of course he went straight down into the beach forest. We had to dig the noses out about six feet under the ground and of course the crews were just… there's nothing recognisable. They were just a mess of blood and bones and bits and I remember on that trip I damaged that ankle so badly.

08:00 I had a lot of trouble with that and I recently had trouble with it and see getting… I was young and enthusiastic of course to get the motor out, hop in and do it and I hopped in and did myself some damage. But another thing which I remember well; Flight Sergeant Whitely took us on these trips when we went to pick up

08:30 wrecks and the transport driver of the big truck was a bit ham fisted and he asked us about who could drive. Well I'd driven Dad's trucks for the cement business for some time and he tried me out and from

there on I always drove the trucks out to these wrecks. I replaced the transport driver of the trucks and that added to my enthusiasm I s'pose,

09:00 and I remember this trip particularly. I wish I could think of his name. He was a nice fellow and anyway I jumped down into the hole and I did my ankle very badly and it has given me trouble ever since. I think I was fortunate to be able to get into air crew with that injury. They had me hopping about the floor to test it and at that time it held up so there you are,

09:30 but I don't think there's much else there I can tell you Martin but ask me anything that's…

Well just about that time I mean… when did you graduate from the course at the showgrounds?

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

And so then you went to work at Point Cook?

And then I was yeah actually on the job at Point Cook and I was on the job at the workshops and that meant every

10:00 morning we, like simple military of course, we formed up for morning parade at the parade ground was at the… up the north end of the field, then we had to march 'round the workshops, which is on a long road around the airport and known to us as the Burma Road and we'd get in the workshops and start work.

And what planes were you working on?

10:30 Well initially I suppose most of my time went into Hawker Demons. The Hawker, the Hawker Demon was the immediate pre-war first line fighter as far as Australia was concerned. It was, it too was fabric covered with a Rolls Royce Kestrel engine 900 horse power. Nice aeroplane to fly,

11:00 nice aeroplane to work on, nothing difficult about it and of course when we did a major overhaul in any aircraft an engineer was expected to go to assure the pilot he was satisfied it was all put together. I did most of those flights. I was always available if any to go on a test flight yeah, yeah. We did a bit of work on a funny old thing called

11:30 the Walrus [Supermarine Walrus amphibian aircraft]and there was an English pilot who used to do all sorts of things in a Walrus. His name was Speedler Good [?]. Only old timers will remember. He was well on in age then but he was a marvelous pilot, well we thought he was a marvelous pilot and what else? No I spent…

12:00 we got a new aircraft in metal covered a model aircraft from America and I know we were on… they all came on crates and we had to un-crate them and assemble them. I've got an idea it was the Vultee Vengeance

12:30 which was a dive bomber. It was quite an aircraft – used heavily up in the north here and in fact later my training captain at Ansett was one Doug Johnson, and Doug Johnson had a tremendous reputation in flying this thing upside down, do anything because it was feared by some of the crews. But Doug used to go and

13:00 demonstrate it and do such things in it that nobody could say it wasn't good, but I never flew in it. I never did a flight for engineering or anything.

It sounds like this thing where you have to assemble a plane from kits sounds a bit like air for aeroplane models?

Yeah, yes well there you are. I s'pose when you handle 'em out of the box and put 'em all together it's a bit

13:30 like assembling a model.

Did you have instructions or just?

Oh yeah, oh yes it was it was very skilled engineering. It was very… it was well organised. Yes there was no question about not knowing where the bits went or anything like that. The plans were there and you assembled it to the plan yeah. With my usual dash and enthusiasm. I remember we had Clark trucks

14:00 to drag bits about and I was always on the go and I remember the CO [Commanding Officer] of the workshop was a fellow called Ned Annerson who liked his rum, great bloke on the rum. He stopped me one day 'cause I was driving this thing too fast, tore me off a strip. Don't remember much about it though. I just went on yeah. We had a very good flight sergeant –

14:30 an old hand in workshops under Annerson, but with whom we were more in contact and I can't think of his name. I can see his face now but I can't think of his name, but a good man yeah. I don't think there's much more about that I can tell you Martin.

That's all fine.

15:00 **I don't know if intrigued is the best word, but you've mentioned a lot of crashes – about having to drive out and pick up wrecks and things like that. I mean how frequent was that?**

Oh well, I suppose we would pick up a wreck at least once a month. A lot of aircraft crashed. One of the most interesting was at Werribee. I spent some time

15:30 at Werribee on the bits of maintenance we did for aircraft working there and one Anson [Avro Anson fighter] landed on top of the other. They both came in and they didn't see each other and they landed on top of the other and the crews in the top aircraft got off with virtually no injuries. In the bottom aircraft the pilot was a fellow named Hassall Cooper and Hassall Cooper was just a

16:00 nice lad from the country. He's a country lad joined as a pilot and I remember getting him… clearing the way to get him out. I think the ambulance crew got him out but I spoke to him and established a bit of a relationship at that time and then when he was in the hospital at Point Cook under Sister Shu. Isn't it funny how you remember the names?

16:30 Sister Shu was a marvelous person too, but I used to go into the hospital and shave him occasionally, yeah, cause he was unable to shave himself. But he recovered and he went off into Ops [Operations] eventually and I never heard of him, or of him of course. I'd like to think he survived the war but I don't know. I can't remember what district he came from either. Was up country somewhere, something up the Murray way

17:00 somewhere.

These… when there's a crash were they usually fatal or were they usually…?

Yes a lot of them were fatal. I don't… there weren't many that weren't fatal actually. Oh the name of that man from the office came to me then but it slipped by. I remember him particularly. I mean they just… there was nothing of them left. It was just a mess where the cockpit was. It was all smashed

17:30 up in of course and the engines had gone torn them off and gone into the mud and that was a hell of a job to pull that out, but yes most of the aircraft we picked up were fatal. The pilots didn't survive. A few that went in the water off Point Cook they practically all survived. I remember picking up a flight lieutenant and a young Cooper one night. All dark as the

18:00 ace of spades it was and we swam out. I had a very good man with me on the fire tender. I wonder… I can't remember his name because he was a good Joe and we swam out to this Hawker Demon. It was… the tail was still out of the water and they were both hanging on to the tail but…

18:30 **Were you… I mean it seems like a pretty unpleasant aspect of one's job to have to go 'round digging out wrecks and bodies?**

Yes it wasn't a choice job. I know that and I don't know why I was picked for it. Whitely was a pretty curt sort of a flight sergeant but

19:00 I think he was competent. I think he was very competent and he seemed to like me on the job. I don't know whether he chose me or whether I was cast to do it for some other reason but I was much happier. I don't know that I was generally… yes I was happy sitting in the hangar and doing the work they had to do but I think I was happy enough in those jobs too. I didn't have any, I can't remember any particular jobs that I

19:30 would have avoided. The Airspeed Oxford and beach forest; I remember that was one of the worst jobs I ever had especially since I knew the pilot. But it was so bad because the tail had been cut off this aeroplane at about 3,000 feet and of course it had nothing to stop it. It went vertically down and it just bored straight deep into the ground and it was just such a mess, it was just such a…

20:00 and the smell of people killed in an aeroplane is an ugly thing. It's a sickly smell. What else yeah?

What about social life off the base. What did you do?

Yes well of course I had a motorbike in those days

20:30 and I used to go home fairly regularly. It was about that time that I fell in love with the girl of my time at that time, still oh the right time. I think I was lucky you know. I get involved

21:00 a bit with social things now and I see that we've got a divorce of something like 46 percent in Victoria these days. From the time I fell in love with Margaret I've never wanted anybody else. It was a marvelous, marvelous relationship and when I got leave she had been transferred. At that time she was a nurse, a babies' nurse at the Berry Street Foundling Home. And while she was here

21:30 in Victoria, of course it was here in Melbourne area, it was easy for us to get together, and indeed we had a meeting recently with the Past Nurses Association where I was reminded I used to get Margaret back too late to get in the door. We used to hustle her straight through the window but she was then moved up to

22:00 the other side of Dandenong, Warrigal is it?

Pakenham?

Pakenham, Pakenham – that's where she was and so I used to ride up to Pakenham when I had a leave long enough yeah. So social life…

Can I? You'd known her at school?

Yeah that's right.

How did you meet her again?

Oh well, we never unmet. We lived, she lived in Tura Street and I lived in Marshall Street – a couple of hundred yards

22:30 between the houses, but her brother was my best friend. Unfortunately he was killed early in the war. He was a pilot. We both played model aeroplanes together, we did all those things together and he was killed before I got… well, whilst I was still engineering and… but that's not what brought Margaret and I together. It was just entirely separate. You know, we'd been together for years really.

23:00 Ted's family knew that Ted and I were very close and they had a holiday house down here at Dromana just up the street, same street. And they came down for Easter and Christmas holidays and they used to let me come down with them, the children, because Ted and I were so close. Well Margaret was always there but we never had a relationship you know. She was always nice. I always thought Margaret was nice

23:30 but I didn't have a relationship with her. I wasn't much of a bloke for girls. I didn't like… from Point Cook crew down there used to send us out to Brighton, Dendy Street Brighton, where there was some sort of a club and there was always a girl for each of us, but that didn't turn me on. It was a bit of a night out and

24:00 I s'pose different but I wasn't very interested. They were nice girls but there you are. I was just a funny bloke I s'pose and then somewhere along the line Marg and I were layin' on the beach at Dromana when we fell in love. Both absolutely together complete total. We've never varied.

24:30 We've when… I mean we were engaged before I went overseas. I couldn't think of marrying her then because I knew this is an area that's rather surprising. None of us ever doubted that we would survive and yet I wouldn't marry Margaret before I went because I didn't want her to be a widow

25:00 and if we had had a child of course I didn't want that child to be without its father. And that became a very important point with me and of course later on it's a very serious matter. We'll get to it, I don't want to touch it now but social life was good and I always thought social life was good. I used to come home, see

25:30 my parents lived at Ivanhoe and if nothing else I'd go home and you know have a meal with the family and all that. My stepmother was a wonderful cook, absolutely professional cook and we were home for a couple of days she'd turn on a party and have everyone there so I didn't lack, in my mind. I didn't lack any social life and

26:00 of course I could have I s'pose, the way they turned it on I could have had half a dozen different girls but I just wasn't …I thought too that it was quite a nice thing to do. I mean from their organising point of view because a lot of the boys at camp, we're now at Point Cook, came from places distant – far, far too distant

26:30 to go home and so they didn't have any friends down here and those nights where they organised us at parties with the girls there I think they were good. I think that was a well done, a well thought out little social break that was important to everybody yeah.

27:00 At that stage of course the Heidelberg Town Hall had been built and the Heidelberg Town Hall became the jitterbug centre of the area. And I was that age and I could dance and I loved dancing – so did Margaret – and so whenever we could we went to the Saturday night dance at Heidelberg Town Hall.

27:30 But I don't think I can tell you anything more about social life Martin. I …a lot of the blokes could because they socialised more than I did. I had a workshop at Dad's place. I was technically crazy of course. I did all sorts of things. I repaired motorcycles for friends and little things for Mum in the house. I did that more than going out socialising

28:00 and never felt deprived or anything like that. I was happy about it so…

Now your brother at this stage – what's he doing?

He had joined the air force and none of us knew. He wasn't living at home. He was living with a family in Ivanhoe. Nice family the Jones family. Ran the local milk bar. But he and Dad

28:30 had had this contra tom and so Fred hardly ever came home and I never saw much of him at all. I don't even know what he did on the air force. He joined the air force of course and I think Fred would have been in engineering somewhere, but he never told me. It's funny even after the war, long while after the war he came down to my flying school at Moorooduc and I asked him would he

like me to teach him to fly, but he wouldn't. He ran a soldier settlement block up at Mildura with fruit. He always came down with a big box of grapes and a big box of oranges and lemons and all, but he would never… he wouldn't talk about it and I don't know why I really don't. I think possibly because of his argument with Dad

and I think my father was very foolish where my brother was concerned. I think he hurt him unnecessarily and wrongly 'cause there's no doubt Fred should have been a commercial artist. He was offered a job on sight of his work. He was offered a job. It was an important job. It was one of the daily papers. I got an idea it was the Herald. It was one of those and I think he would have been set for life

but Dad wouldn't let him take it. I was a quieter fellow than my brother but my father would never have stopped me taking a job like that if I wanted it and I wonder that he stopped Fred – because Fred wouldn't even live at home so he wasn't under direct control. He worked for Dad for years and he worked. He was a mighty worker my brother yeah.

Yeah he died quite a few years ago of a heart attack. Fred had a partner and he took a partner to his soldier settlement block. An aboriginal came down the coast. He seemed a nice fellow. Fred got on well with him but when Fred died he apparently just left, didn't tell anyone. Fred was found in his house; been dead for

two weeks before he was found yeah. Had a heart attack and there it is. Only heart attack he ever had of course but of course if you're in a bad place and you can't get assistance when you're a heart attack it can be that way can't it yeah?

And your sisters. How old were they?

Pardon?

Your half sisters. How old were they at that stage?

Well Madge, the eldest, is seven years younger than me. Joan is three years younger than her and Judith is about four years younger than Joan, so they're quite a lot younger than me. Judith is very sick today and of course doctors say there's nothing they can do and of course I want her to come off on

the many things that are available alternately, which is what I've done yeah. They're a great crowd. We had a wonderful family life. We never had any arguments amongst us and I know Madge was particularly close to me. And of course money was always tight in those days and so I delivered papers in the morning and sold them at night

and Madge used to come along with me. I had a loaned [bike] owned by an uncle of mine. Wonderful thing – I could load it up with papers and charge round and Madge was pretty common, pretty constant companion yeah. She's still going well yeah.

Can we talk now about your ultimate transfer

and you mentioned how you used to front up every month and ask to be transferred into air crew?

Oh right yes. Well of course when I was granted that move, that re-muster, I was immediately posted down to Somers down here and I was in the team with a bonza [great] bunch of blokes. I have to tell you

they're all dead. Bob Neilson soon rest Neilson and I used to put on mock wrestling shows for fun you know. We didn't know anything about wrestling but wrestling's a big pantomime and Bob and I used to put on this show and everyone used to love it. I don't know any of those boys who are now alive. I know what happened to Bob. He was

a Lancaster pilot – he was shot up in a bombing raid over Berlin badly. He was the only one left alive. 'Course the captain's seat had an armour plate behind it. He was the only one that had that protection. Now when a fighter comes in on to a bomber of course it's in there attacking from the rear and so the bullets come into the back of the pilot's seat and were deflected by the armour plate.

In his aircraft everyone was killed by attacking fighters but Bob. He was still alive. The aircraft was torn apart, I gather was in a terrible mess. He got it as far as Holland. I'm just tryin' to remember which town he was over. He could take it no further so he bailed out and he landed safely and he was grabbed by a mob and hung

from a lamp post. And I thought that was a pretty dirty deal especially in Holland. It must have been… I can't understand what sort of a mob it was unless it was a junior Nazi's or something like that. After the war was all over I applied for a job which was to sort out those things

and I was put on the list, but somebody with closer connections to bureaucracy replaced me and I didn't get there. And I didn't know what their character was who took that place but I know he wouldn't have been interested in Bob Neilson – would have just had it as a job and that's a factor that I feel can influence a lot of things in our life today.

36:00 People with a contact somewhere can get a job that's of value to them but perhaps hasn't the same point as this (UNCLEAR). Anyway we did all sorts of training courses at Somers and I

36:30 passed everything, didn't have any trouble and of course somewhere there's probably a course photograph of us all lined up outside the tents and they were a nice bunch of young men but I was then moved down to Western Junction to learn to fly on the Tiger Moth [De Havilland Tiger Moth training aircraft]. Western Junction is Launceston, Tasmania

37:00 and…

Is that just out of… is that Launceston Airport?

Pardon?

Is that at Launceston Airport?

That's Launceston Airport. It was then known as Western Junction. South of…

Just near Evandale is it?

Yeah it is Evandale yeah. South of that there's another field which was known to us as the Nile. That was our… we sort of all flew over Launceston but to do any individual flying we went down to the Nile, which

37:30 was a big paddock of course, and used it as a satellite aerodrome.

Did you do any actual flying at Somers?

No, no flying at Summers – there was no facility for it.

How long was the training course there?

I think it was about three months. Seemed to be a long time. It may not have been that long but I have a feeling it was about three months.

And did you find that the

38:00 **sort of the study and research you'd done from the books?**

Well I had done it all. Whilst I was ground crew I wanted to be a pilot and I got hold of the course – it was 21 books and I knew it all so I had no trouble down there. I really passed it before.

You mentioned once when you went up in a Hawker Demon. At that point was that the only time you flew when you were there?

No I flew a

38:30 couple of times as the engineer.

Oh that's right.

Supporting a major overhaul you see but that was really the only time I got anywhere near the control 'cause Jack Buckham gave me the controls and said, "Have a go at it," you know. I didn't even know anything. Well yes I did because by day I'd got to know the people who ran the Link trainers at Point Cook and I was always in the Link trainer flying the, you know, the simulators, so I s'pose to some extent

39:00 I had a fair idea what you had to do, yeah. So I was ahead of everyone on Link trainers and I was ahead of the ground subjects because I had the books and I read the course and gone through it all so there you are yeah.

Tape 3

00:31 Bolt was the name of the pilot that crashed down the… struggling to think of his first name but his name was Bolt, Andrew Bolt I think it was, yeah. Very nice fellow killed because of somebody's stupidity. He was leading the formation and the fellow on this side closed in and chopped his tail off. I've taught a lot of formation flying since then of course and I know that should never happen.

01:00 OK.

Pardon me asking just about that period. You talked about how much safety's involved; about, you know, locking nuts off and checking. Were there any occasions where…?

Accidents were caused by…?

Yes.

I don’t know of any, strangely enough. It’s a very simple thing to do and it’s part of the procedure. You don’t put an aircraft together without lock wiring

01:30 and I’ve never known of an accident caused through… yeah.

What were most of the accidents caused by?

Engine failures I s’pose would be a big part. I know the boys that landed in the sea out of Point Cook were due to engine failure after take off and I had an engine failure after take off my first take off from the squadron. Of course I’ve become a bit of a demon about it since. That’s

02:00 I wrote that book because I’m recognised in the aviation as having a lot of knowledge. See I finished up with 28,000 hours flying. I have set up major operations. Fred Laker sent me out to set up Aboheider. Aboheider was an Arab that brought a couple of Yorks [Avro York military and civilian transport aircraft] for him in Beirut and tried to set up an airline. And he was making a mess of it and

02:30 Fred asked me to go out and organise it and whilst I laughed about it at the time – I said it was the case of the blind leading the blind – Fred like I said; “No,” he said, “I think you know what you’re about,” and it was true – I was very successful at it. Since then though I’ve done a lot of things. I became a specialist adviser to airlines with my own office in Mayfield, London for some time. I was adviser to BIC and you can’t get much bigger than that. I

03:00 resuscitated Middle East Airlines, which was a BIC associate company and in much the same trouble as Ansett was here, and I could have resuscitated Ansett no trouble but you see what’s happened with airlines today; they’re no longer run by airmen, they’re run by companies and there’s a section in my book covers it – if we don’t do something about it airlines are gonna run into disaster after disaster. I’ve detailed an

03:30 accident of Qantas in Bangkok – Qantas One that pranged in Bangkok about 1957 I think. It was a just a chapter of stupidities which would never have happened if they weren’t run by a team of accountants. What the accountants want to do is run things as cheap as they can and boy that nearly cost 400 lives.

That was when they went off the end of the runway?

Yeah, you see

04:00 Mick Tullah, the Director of Civil Aviation and Safety Authority – CASA as we call it, he justified what he did to Ansett by saying it was as dangerous. Well Qantas is much more dangerous than Ansett and it’s, the proof is there on their own records and I’ve printed it in the book and I’ve named a lot of names in the book. People say that they’re going to sue me left right and centre. W ell let ‘em try.

04:30 Truth of course is no protection against slander, but there’s a very important factor known as ‘in the public interest’, and there has been so many lives lost through the incompetence of CASA backed by certain members of the parliament that I’ve named ‘em and they can do what they like. I’ve given evidence to two major inquiries into aircraft accidents and that evidence has been buried.

05:00 Now how do you correct a problem that has caused a loss of life if you don’t know what’s caused it so you can’t set up an action to see that it doesn’t happen again and that’s what these members of parliament have done and I’ve named ‘em for it.

If I can draw a parallel to your period at Point Cook; if there were ever an accident there would people be able to

05:30 **learn from it and…?**

Oh yes, oh yes there was. See one of the reasons for engine failure after take off is carburetor ice. We didn’t even know about it then. I became a specialist in it since.

Used to happen to my Renault?

Pardon?

Used to happen to my Renault?

Oh yeah, my word.

When I was about 16 had that problem.

Yeah cars, certain cars get it worse than others. But cars get carburetor ice and it’s course but you know you had…

Not so dangerous when you’re driving

06:00 **along the flat road of course than when you’re in the air?**

Yeah well you can just pull into the side but when you’re up above a bit of tiger country there were what is it? Six people killed out of one of the island resorts only a few months ago remember that? A family of four and a man who’d just been married to somebody. It was at… oh one of the island resorts up

06:30 north. Only happened a few months ago. The humidity at the time was between 70 and 90 percent. Ice is just so… you're just so prone to ice when the humidity's above 40 percent and there's no doubt about 'em and I've been tryin' to teach that to the Civil Aviation Safety Authority for 30 odd years but they're a terrible lot. Oh you've got no idea how bad there's…

07:00 I'm not joking about it I mean honestly they've killed a lot of people and I've said so in my book, yeah. And I've written up the cases where they've killed people that should never have been killed – they're in the book – so I want to see CASA thrown out. I think it's the worst aircraft regulator I've ever worked with around the world and I've worked with a lot of 'em. They're a terrible show. 'Course they're basically bureaucrats.

07:30 They've got themselves a cushy job and they don't know, really know, what the job is. They don't know how to do it. There's one or two pilots in there that are just as stupid but you can only get a job in there if you're stupid. See…

What was administration like during the war? I mean, it's a bit of a different circumstance but…?

Yeah, a lot of accidents happened of course that should never have happened but there's an excuse then Martin in that there were a lot of things we didn't know, and carb [carburettor] ice we didn't know. We didn't even know that when I was working for Ansett.

08:00 A thing came around one time and said you've got to fit a tap under the carb and to do this and that. We're all looking at it with some, you know, interest and we thought, "well this is a bit of a funny thing," but it was due to… it was designed to prevent ice in the carb and it was very good yeah. That's when it seemed to get known in civil aviation. It wasn't known during the war, yeah.

08:30 **Let's take you down now to Western Junction**

Yeah.

Just out of Launceston. This is when you're flying school as it were.

Right.

Tell us about what you learnt.

Well of course we were all shipped down to Tas [Tasmania]. In those days there weren't a lot of movements by air. We went down by boat

09:00 and we were taken to the airfield which was known as Western Junction, now Launceston Airport, and we were all designated flights. We were put into different flights and I forget how many were in a flight. There weren't many, perhaps half a dozen, on each flight and we're all designated instructors of course – both for the ground school and the flying school.

09:30 Because when you're learning to fly you're also learning about all the theory that goes with it. The ground school I thought was pretty good as we knew it then. Of course I now know that a lot of things such as carb ice that weren't included. And we started flying we were given a parachute, which we had to look after, and we had an instructor and any instructor had possibly

10:00 four different pupils because the day'd start and you'd do an hour's session – see might have had six different pupils. My instructor was Ray Revel. He was a nice sort of a fellow and I think a reasonable instructor and we went through to the 20 hours of training in which I was above average, quite a few above average. And then he was posted

10:30 away to Hobart on army cooperation work and I was left sitting out the front of the flight office week after week – not day after day but week after week – with no instruction and I was getting very worried about it. But you've got to think I was very young then Martin and I was quite entitled to poke my nose in where necessary and ask for things. But I didn't get anywhere until one morning sitting in the…

11:00 pretty cold at Western Junction in that time of year – I think it was probably winter. A fellow came along, a Sergeant Burrows. He said, "Are you Ellis?" And I said, "Yes sir," and he said, "Come on, we're going flying." Well he didn't ask me what I'd done or when I'd last flown or anything else. We got in a Tiger Moth and we went down to the Nile and he said, "I'm going to show you about precautionary landings." He said, "You see that white

11:30 patch out there? We're going to drag this out into and drop the aircraft on there." And he did it and he said, "Now see that's how we do it," and he'd take me back to Western Junction there and, "you can come back and practise it." So I took him back to Western Junction – flew down to do it and of course I stalled on the way in didn't I and I smashed a wing off and the under cart off and hell of a mess because I didn't have the faintest idea. See what you've got to do in that exercise is maintain flying

12:00 speed by the use of throttle while you've got the aircraft in almost the stall position, and unless you use the throttle for it, well, you stall and that's what I did. I had no idea. Of course there I am sitting in a bloody wreck and little while there's this racy Ryan, a Ryan S T, all metal, Yankee [American] super duper aeroplane come over, whooshed over the place and did a couple of aerobatics and came

12:30 and landed and stopped alongside us. That was Mr Hodges the CFI [Chief Flying Instructor] and he had a look at it and he said, “How’d you do that lad?” And I said, “Well I don’t know sir ‘cause I don’t even know what the exercise was.” “What do you mean you don’t know what the exercise?” I said, “Well I hadn’t been (UNCLEAR) I was just told to go and you know brought down here and shown something about it and told to go and do it but I don’t really know, understand it.” “Oh,” he said, “You can ride back with the wreck.” And so I rode back when the truck came down

13:00 and loaded the wreck on board and I went back with it. I was called into his office the next day and he said, “Well you’re not meant to fly are ya?” He said, “You can go back to engineering,” and I said, “No wait a minute sir. I haven’t been had any instruction for at least three weeks and a man came down and said, “This is something.” Didn’t explain it to me – I haven’t had it explained on the blackboard as we do with all the exercises. I’ve just been put out there to… with no knowledge and made

13:30 to do it.” He said, “Never mind. Back to engineering.” Well I was a kid and I was frightened of course, but I wasn’t going to give up flying and I said to him, “Well sir if that’s the way it is, I’m gonna talk to my MP about it because I don’t believe it’s my fault. I have sat on the tarmac week after week while everyone’s out there flying and here comes a man without properly explaining the exercise to me and leaves me to do it and I don’t think that’s my fault.” Well

14:00 he’s, “Get out of my office.” He was that sort of a fellow. He didn’t want to have a discussion and so I was sitting on the tarmac the next day and a nice fellow came along and he said, “Are you Ellis?” and I said, “Yes sir.” He said, “I’m Jack Castles.” Now Jack Castles was the only A Grade instructor on the field. He was the top level and he said, “I’m gonna take over your instruction. Come on, let’s go flying.”

14:30 Well he was just marvelous – explained everything and got me doing everything really good before he’d let me go and do it. So I finished the course with no more trouble of course and he said, “Now I’ve got to tell you this; he’s going to do your flight test to pass you or fail you,” and he said, “I’ll tell you this – he can’t fail you because I’ve passed you so don’t let him worry you and we’ll see what he’s got to say when you come back.”

15:00 Well we went, Hodges came and we went flying. He said, “Take me down to the Nile and take me up to 3,000 feet,” and up at 3,000 feet he said, “Do me a steep turn to the left.” I started a steep turn to the left and I could feel his taking over the controls. He started to pull the elevators back and really tighten it and I know what happens then – I’d been shown it – the aircraft will stall

15:30 and flick out and go the other way. So I took my hands and feet off the controls and of course it flicked and he said, “Now look what you’ve done.” I said, “No sir I felt you on the controls and I left you to it.” That wasn’t a popular move. He just dived down and landed and vanished and Jack Castles came to see me later and he said, “Tell me all about it,” and I told him about it. He said, “Yeah that’s what he would do but he said he can’t fail you and I can assure you you’re through.”

16:00 Well I was through alright but Hodges insisted on making an entry in my log book which says “careless, rough and inaccurate”. Well I wasn’t any of those things because I’d been trained by Jack Castles to a very high standard and that did me a lot of harm for a very long time before I had the brains to tear it out of the log book. And I must look at that. I can’t remember but when I got on the squadron of course it was still there

16:30 and I learnt later to tear it out but no, I think I tore it out before the squadron. We’ll have a look in a minute but it was there when I went to service training. You see, from Western Junction I was rostered to go to Canada to finish my service training.

Just before we go there, can I take you back to that that accident?

17:00 Yeah.

A Tiger Moth is a…?

A bi-plane.

Yeah and it’s, I mean it’s a fairly slow plane it’s…

Oh yeah.

It’s not I meant?

Somewhere about eight 80 knots is its best yeah.

How high above the ground were you when you stalled?

Oh I was very close because that’s a precautionary landing – you’re coming in, you got to land in a short field you see and so your approach has got to be as slow as possible but not to the stall

17:30 so I don’t suppose I was more than five or six feet above the ground when it stalled. It crunched the aeroplane quite a bit. The wing was badly damaged. Under cart leg was off and folded underneath but I don’t… knowing now or knowing what I knew then I didn’t think it’d take a lot of repair work – workshop perhaps two days.

You have the benefit of having… I mean

18:00 **that's the work you'd been doing?**

Yeah, I could have done the job yeah so he couldn't have told me about the immense… give me a story about how enormous was the fix job or anything like that. I could have told him. I'm talking about Hodges yeah. I think Hodges was one of those men who had flown for some years before the war and had a fair bit of time, was of an age to be given a position of, you know,

18:30 control and but he was not a good flyer. He might have been able to do aerobatics in his Ryan but he was not a good flyer. That's my view now – I didn't think that at the time of course. I mean he was the top, he was the chief but looking back now as I have over quite a lot of things and with the experience that I now have I would say that he was an accident gonna happen

19:00 somewhere anyway. He died from a heart attack I think not long after. He didn't… I don't think he lasted 10 after that when he died so… but then he was a fair age too. He would have been in his 60s then I'd have said, yeah.

So after that you then this is part of when you were at Western

19:30 **Junction. Is this part of the Empire Air Training Scheme?**

Oh yes, oh yes, all part of the Empire Air Training Scheme. As Mr Shuger once said, 'Empire Air Training Scum' because he had been involved with the son's of rich people who had flown before the war and he didn't view allowing less wealthy people in the flying. Course he was a man that got highly decorated

20:00 over the war. I can't comment on that.

Who was that?

Shuger. I think he was then either wing commander or group captain and was early in the war so he'd have finished up as an air commodore yeah, yeah. And don't think I'm against high ranking officers because I had since then good friends

20:30 who are high ranking officers. Grayshel [?] who is now an air commodore gave me a refresher on the Viscount and a thing we'll come to and I thought he was a nice fellow. Of course now he's an air commodore he doesn't want to give me evidence for the book but it doesn't fuss me much yeah.

21:00 **From Launceston then you were sent to where?**

Yeah I was sent for a fortnight home on leave and then I was sent to Bradfield Park in New South Wales out of Sydney and then shipped via the President Monroe to America.

Now just before we leave Australia…

Yeah.

21:30 **You mentioned before that you were engaged beforehand.**

Yeah.

When had you got engaged?

Oh don't ask I don't remember.

Oh OK it wasn't like in those last two weeks?

Oh no, no. It was probably, oh, perhaps a year before, yeah. A long time before yeah, yeah. I was entirely bewitched. Still am. Pity you won't meet Margaret – she's marvelous,

22:00 she really is yeah. I'll show you a picture downstairs I did of her just after we were married. The professional photographs I threw away and it's my favourite photograph yeah.

So leaving Melbourne you went to Bradfield Park?

Yeah.

How many of you are there?

Well of course the whole shipload was made up at

22:30 Bradfield Park. There was the President Monroe was a troop ship at that time and it was just full of troops being moved from one place to another and I suppose in the air force contingent that went to America there'd have been probably a couple of hundred. There were other troops of course; there were army personnel and navy personnel and I have no idea what their transport was for but the ship was full.

23:00 We all hung in bunks of course you know. Quite good. I didn't think there was anything wrong with the accommodation on board. The President Monroe was pretty fast so we weren't all that fussed about

being torpedoed. I had a marvelous companion – a Basil Sproule. Basil Sproule was a noted organist and musician from Tasmania

23:30 and while we were in Bradfield Park he said to me one day, “Will you come into town I want to go in the town hall and see if I can play the organ.” Well I said, “Yes Bas I’ll come.” I didn’t know anything about how famous he was. We knocked on the side door at the Sydney Town Hall and the caretaker came out and he said, “Oh,” he said, “I wonder, could I play the organ?” He said, “I’m Basil Sproule from Tasmania.” “Oh Basil Sproule oh yes, come in,” and it was like that. Well he made that town hall hum. He could play

24:00 the organ – he must have been one of the top organists of this hemisphere and he was so well known by people who know. Now I’ve never… and Basil taught me piano going across on the President Monroe to the envy of… oh stop that bloody noise you know. But so I never heard of Basil from then since he didn’t go to the same school as me in Canada and I’ve never heard a word whether he survived the war or not

24:30 but from my own…

Famous name in Tasmania though – Sproule.

Is it?

Oh yeah.

Oh I didn’t know. Well Basil was a marvelous fellow, he really was. Very unimpressive – sort of a little bit podgy and never did anything startling. Very ordinary sort of a bloke but a very nice fellow yeah. Anyway we pulled into under the Golden Gate Bridge

25:00 at dawn one morning and I took some photographs. I can remember it so well and then after a bit of time on the ship we didn’t go to a hotel or anything. We were then put on a train and that train went right up the West Coast up past Seattle up to Vancouver. And we had a

25:30 bit of a time off at Vancouver and then we boarded a Canadian Pacific across the Rockies and across to the west coast, the east coast and of course it was it was a good trip. Of course the Americans tip, we don’t and apparently the staff on the train

26:00 needed our tipping to make up their wages to a livable level. We didn’t know anything about that of course. We didn’t tip anybody and just an incident; going over the Rocky Mountains there’s a place called Mount Shasta and the snow was thick on the ground and we look out the train’s stopped on the top. We’re looking out there and here’s this fellow with his underpants only on and he’s

26:30 acting like a warrior, Indian warrior, and of course he turned out to be quite a fellow. He was actually cashiered and put off the course for an exciting adventure. He had on a period of leave down at Buffalo and I’ll tell you about that cause I think it was such a shame he was put off the course. He was ex-army. He’d come back from New Guinea and re-mustered and

27:00 had himself put in the air force. He was not a brilliant scholar or anything but he was a going personality and I think he’d have made a wonderful fighter pilot, I really do, but anyway we’ll come to that. Of course I don’t know whether you’ve ever experienced the Rockies [Rocky Mountains] but there’s a pass there known as Kicking Horse Pass. It is just a fabulous thing

27:30 to see and to travel down. I took a picture of it ‘cause the train was a mile long or something like that and from the back I could get almost the whole train in and Kicking Horse Pass and it’s been a picture I’ve been proud of for many years. It’s now suffering of course. It was Kodak colour at that time and it’s lost its… but still. But it was a long trip across the States of course across

28:00 Canada and I remember very well the stop we made at Saskatoon. I didn’t know it then but an uncle of Margaret’s had a farm there and she’s been back since to visit and he’s been out here to see her. Marvelous fellow. Marvelous fellow. When he came out here he was 80 and yet able to travel and I get a phone call from him or a letter recently and he’s not so well. He’d be 85

28:30 now I’d say but a very nice fellow. Anyway, we hammered through to a place called ‘Trona’. Do you know a place called ‘Trona’? I didn’t know it I tell you ‘cause they’re talking about Toronto but they said ‘Trona’ – “We’re goin’ to Trona.” Anyway we were then… of course all the way across we were leaving groups. Some stayed at…

29:00 oh know it well. In just east of the Rockies but west of the country and…

Round Banff?

Oh no Banff Springs that’s on the way up yeah. No Bance Springs is a lovely place. I should have mentioned it It’s just beautiful. There’s a photographer over there who sells photographs as pictures and he sells a picture of Banff Springs

29:30 which is just… you’d think it was designed just to be a picture. Beautiful. And anyway from Toronto we were put on various trains, went in different directions and I finished up at a place just off Lake in the…

30:00 **One of the big lakes?**

No was one of the smaller lakes. Lake, oh, starts with an O I think.

Ontario?

Ontario, Lake Ontario yeah. And of course I was trained at… God what's the field? I'll think of it. We'll come back to it

30:30 perhaps but I was put in a flight under Jim – Flight Lieutenant Jim. Isn't it silly? Wonderful fellow and of course we were training on Harvards [training aircraft for fighter pilots] similar to the Wirraway here and there were 32 of us and a

31:00 nicer bunch you couldn't imagine and this fellow from the army was in it. Oh I must think of his name but well of course training school I went solo in the Harvard in four hours which was high up. I think I was one of the first to go solo and… oh well they were such good people they we all enjoyed each other. We

31:30 really did – including those in charge of the course. Jim… I wish I could think of his name. Marvelous fellow. And as the training went of course we'd get weekends leave or something like that and I was in the town – can't think of the name of it – one day looking in the window and fellow came up alongside me. He said, "Are you from Australia?" and I said, "Yeah." He said,

32:00 "What about coming out and having lunch with me and my Dad and Mum?" and I said, "Well I'd love to do that." His name was Kirvan Miller. He had an eye problem and he had a physical problem too – I can't remember what that was – but he couldn't get into the forces of course because of this and anyway I went out to have lunch with them. There was old George Miller – was

32:30 a marvelous fellow and his wife… isn't that silly I can't remember her name 'cause they were just marvelous to me. They took me in as if I was their family. I was there at lunch one day and there was a big tall Flight Lieutenant. Ken, Ken McKay was there and he said, "This lot took me in when I was a sprog like you

33:00 and I've been coming to them ever since," and we had a great relationship. It was a lovely family to mix with and yeah there was another one but anyway he said to me, "You know you doing any good flying?" I said, "I'm trying hard. I really want to succeed," and he said, "Would you like a bit of extra flying?" and I said, "I'd love to." He said, "Oh I'll take you out. We'll do an hour every time

33:30 we meet." And so I got this extra coaching. Ken McKay – he was a top instructor and he used to take me out and make me do steep turns round trees and do all the all the things one might do as a fighter pilot. And so I was given a great help along and I became very efficient. Anything that I felt weak on he'd say, "Now what's

34:00 what's the worse thing you do?" and of course we'd then do it. We might do a solid hour of it to get my standard up. And Geardner, Jim Geardner, Flight Lieutenant Jim Geardner was the CO of our flight. Marvelous fellow. Anyway as a result 'course I studied at night. There were ground subjects we had to pass and whilst the boys were goin' out, you know, meeting with the local girls I studied

34:30 and the result was I came second on the course. I was beaten by Aussie Hawkins who was a New Zealander. Oh but you couldn't… all these blokes were marvelous, marvelous young men they really were. And if you were in the first three on the course you could decide what you wanted to do next. And the course was finished and we're all… you know, I got a commission. I was

35:00 a Pilot Officer. There were only commissions given the first three on the course and Jim Geardner said to me, "Jack I've got you on one of the best fighter squadrons in Europe," and I said, "Thanks Jim," I said, "would it be out of place for me to ask a privilege?" He said, "No, you were second on the course. You're entitled to ask for what you want." So I said, "Well, I want to fly airlines after the war and I think I might be better to fly bigger aeroplanes." "Oh," he said, "no doubt about it," he said, "I'll fix it up."

35:30 And he tried to get me posted down to a Liberator training school in Nassau – that's right down in the Bahamas – but I couldn't go because I'd been single trained and they only took multi engine trained pilots down there. So I couldn't get… so I was sent to Summerside on Prince Edward Island to do GR. GR stood for General Reconnaissance and it

36:00 embodied the highest standard of navigation in the RAF [Royal Air Force]. It was good training. Again of course I got the head down and studied hard. While the boys went out each night with the girls and one of the nicest fellows, a Jew, oh I must think of his

36:30 name for you he said to me one night he said, "Come on Jack. Come out and have a good night tonight." He said, "The girls are looking after us. They know that some of us won't come back and they're giving us everything that they can give us," and he said, "They're not cheap girls they're nice girls but they have that feeling for us," and he said, "I'd like you to come." Well I wouldn't. I at all times felt bound to Margaret

37:00 and I had quite a lot of opportunities to go to bed with different women over there and I never did but I stayed in and studied and I topped that course. I was number one on that course and it was quite a quite a feather. And we finished the course, wonderful party the finish of it and a lot of the girls came to

that and they were

37:30 certainly nice people and then we were moved to Halifax. Halifax, Nova Scotia, which was a waiting pool where we were to wait for the ship to the UK [United Kingdom] and I got very sick. I remember I couldn't get out of

38:00 bed one morning and the doctor wouldn't come to see me – I had to go to him or die in bed and it was a couple of days before I could get to see him and it was just a heavy sort of flu or something like that. And in a few days I was able to move again and we were invited by a local family the Faulkner's. They were a church family

38:30 who were constantly taking groups off that station to give them entertainment and I remember particularly his daughter Shirley Faulkner. I never encouraged her to for me or anything like that and but of course I went out there. We were quite a long time at that staging camp

39:00 and I went out to dinner with the Faulkner's and of course half a dozen of the boys and I was in the camp one day and strangely enough Mr Faulkner had been allowed in to talk to me and he said, "Jack," he said, "can I ask a personal question?" I said, "Of course you can. You've been marvelous to me." And he said, "Are you engaged or involved with a girl at home?" And I said, "Yes I'm engaged to be married."

39:30 He said, "Oh well that's nice," and I said, "Why do you ask?" He said, "Shirley asked me to ask you." Now this led to a tragedy. Shirley of course later married somebody else and we read in the paper here she was shot by her husband and killed years after the war. And he said of course it was an accident; he was cleaning a gun but I have no time for that. Anyone who will clean a gun with a bullet in it

40:00 wants to be hung and it's a tragedy that affects both me and Marg because I told Margaret about it you know. And to think that Shirley finished up that way is quite a sadness and…

Tape 4

00:38 **Just before we leave Canada you were going to tell us about the army chap who was in your school?**

Yeah I wish I could think of his name cause I can see him so clearly but we had a long weekend leave and he went down to Buffalo and he liked a bit of drink and he got himself charged

01:00 up and he was knockin' on every door to see that the if he could get into bed with one of the local ladies. It wasn't a cheap hotel it was a good hotel but it was reported back at the camp and the camp commandant was very anti that sort of thing and had him cashiered. Now he was he was in my mind

01:30 a potentially good fighter pilot 'cause he didn't like… he took risks that nobody else would normally take. He never endangered any of us on the course but he did things that much more than anybody else and I think he would have been a good fighter pilot and of course his social extravagance was no draw back to that. I think that he had that

02:00 sort of spirit that would have gone yeah.

What is it… I mean you obviously subsequent to the war… I mean the amount of experience you have as a pilot… What is it that categorises a pilot as a fighter pilot, a bomber pilot, a transport pilot, a whatever?

Well I'm not an expert in this because

02:30 I was never on a category selection board but I believe that a fighter pilot has to have the preparedness to have a go at anything. He has to have very sharp reaction and he has to have of course, as I think we all have, very sharp eyesight. Later on of course I learnt that most of these boys I trained

03:00 with were killed and they were killed because they didn't see an enemy coming up behind them. When you first join a fighter squadron you're paired off with an experienced pilot. You become the number two. See fighter peers is how the fighters operate and the boy at the back has to keep his eye going – make sure there's nothing about whilst the leader is looking for targets. Now, if you don't

03:30 really do this business of looking for enemy aircraft closing on you, you can be shot down before you know it and that is what happened to quite a lot of people. You may have noticed that German aces had in excess of 120, 130 kills. British aces were lucky to have over 30 and this is due to an entirely different

04:00 approach – maybe a foolish approach I don't know. I didn't admire it at the time because keeping up behind the new mug pilot number two was not considered a nice thing to do during the war and I don't think any of us did it. Yeah nice thing to do. Don't worry about it there was a lot of nice things done yeah you'd be surprised. And of course the Germans didn't worry

04:30 about that – they just wanted kills and so many of those kills were the incompetent stupid lazy number two. The new pilot thrilled the fact that he's flying a Spitfire or something and not doing his job and looking out. Generally when an enemy fighter shot down number two he just went for his life into the cloud. He didn't take on the number one with this started –

05:00 he'd know that the number one was an experienced fighter pilot but he'd know that the number two was almost certainly a mug and that's what happened. So I have never, due to experience, due to simple facts of life, never run into a fighter pilot and I've… a German fighter pilot, and so I've never had an association with any but I've always felt that

05:30 they pursued a standard that we didn't. Perhaps we were wrong. The war was kill the enemy and that's what we should have done. But there was that difference, a very marked difference, yeah. Because nobody can tell me that there were better pilots than our aces so why didn't they get kills of that order over a hundred? And it's

06:00 the way we went about it – a big difference.

What then categorises a bomber pilot or a…?

Well you know it's hard to do to put this in this way. I mean I became a bomber pilot by choice but there are some very good bomber pilots. How they chose them? Well of course

06:30 the majority of… well the bomber force became so great – you know a thousand bomber raid took a lot of pilots. During the Battle of Britain we needed a lot of fighter pilots but I don't think we ever had the number of fighter pilots that we finished up having in the bomber force. How they were chosen I don't know because there were some very brilliant bomber pilots,

07:00 very brilliant. And of course some of them flew all sorts of aeroplanes. Some of them would fly, flew fighter aircraft as well as bombers but generally not on a bomber mission. They flew fighter aircraft for planning a raid or drop target indicator or something like that. They didn't, they weren't fighter pilots but they were good pilots

07:30 and they could fly fighter aircraft so I really couldn't tell you why bomber pilots were so chosen. No I can't tell you.

Now you said that you chose to or were asked to be assigned to a…

Yeah, heavier aircraft.

Heavier aircraft,

08:00 **because at that stage this is mid to late 1944?**

Yeah.

You were thinking about after the war?

That's right. I wanted to be an airliner pilot after the war.

Did you know much about the casualty rates in bomber command?

Yeah, quite a lot. I think the general rate of bomber command casualties amongst aircrew was over 30 percent – some as high as 40 percent.

08:30 On our squadron, which was not really a bomber force –we were coastal command and we didn't have the luxury of going out with a thousand other planes. We went out solo and if we were caught by a fighter there was very little chance of us defending ourselves but we only had a casualty rate of 36 percent on the squadron, which I think was good in those circumstances. If we were sent out on

09:00 a daylight operation we were in great danger – if we were caught by a fighter there's nothing we could do. One of the things I always thought was actually criminal by the British authorities was that we were stuck with point 303 ammunition. The Germans, the Yanks, everyone had point five or 20 mill cannon. Now on some of our fighters we… oh some of our fighters we had 20 mill cannon

09:30 but we only had 303 ammunition and when you look at the range of that ammunition it's very different. A point five is good and accurate for almost double the distance of a point three so if you're in the turret of a British bomber with four brownies as we had but with point 303 ammunition a fighter

10:00 could be lining up and can shoot you out of the sky before you're even within his range. It's not a thing that anybody ever did anything about during the whole war, but it worried me. I just thought, "Well what's the hell's the good?" As far as I'm concerned on the squadron when we had, if we picked up an aircraft honing on us, a fighter, well I knew we couldn't beat it and I knew if we got in

10:30 a fight we couldn't outmaneuver it so I reduced the power, dropped the under cart and put down half flap and went as slow as I could. Now we also had a little… what was it? Little – I think it was magnetic – altimeter but anyway we could sit at a low, at a very low height above the water

11:00 which, ‘cause we operated above the water and it was a good thing and I set mine at 200 feet and when there was something coming I hauled off the power, dropped the gear, dropped the flap, got it back as slow as I could and I had that little red light winking back showing I was just under 200 feet. Now think of a fighter making an attack. Fighter pilots always everything’s through the gate and you know flat out and so a fighter pilot might pick you up while he’s cruising at

11:30 5,000 feet and so he’s got that height to lose so he puts the nose down. He’s got his throttle through the gate, he’s flat out and he’s probably doing the thick end of 400 knots. Well he’s closing on this thing and he must have got a hell of a fright as it closed up so fast. We never had one shot fired at us but we had a number of fighters who made a run at us so there you are. And they never came back because you see at 200 feet when you’re doin’ 400 plus

12:00 knots you’re bloody close to the water. You’re damn danger, you’re in a damn dangerous situation. I don’t know whether that’s what that saved us or not but that was my technique and that and I think it was that. I think that I put myself in a position of a fighter pilot and I know damn well he’d have his throttle through the gate and he’d be flat out and 200 feet without a oh radio altimeter – without a radio altimeter you don’t know how close you are

12:30 to the water. See it’s only since the war in airlines that we’ve passed to pilots what we know as the Q and H. That’s the barometric pressure reading. As weather goes through an area of course the pressure is rising and falling right the barometric pressure and that’s the thing that affects your altimeter and if you haven’t got the right barometric pressure

13:00 you can be 500 feet out. Now you just imagine a fighter without that coming in to attack an aircraft that’s got a radio altimeter blinking in below 200 feet doin’ 400 knots – not knowing what his height is really. And of course it’s the altimeter’s goin’ like that – it’s unwinding so fast it’s fantastic. So I think that was the best defence. Anyway it was successful.

Can you just explain the

13:30 **altimeter that you were using?**

Yeah the altimeter we use today…

This is on a… oh well at the time this is on a Wellington isn’t it?

Yeah well the altimeter was this… I mean we take off from Gibraltar and we set it at zero. We didn’t alter it and we might go through an enormous weather change, pressure change so it could be way out.

But the one that you’re talking about where you can… you’re bouncing what? A light off?

Oh the radio altimeter?

Yeah.

Yeah the

14:00 radio altimeter was sensitive to… it was an electronic thing of course and it sent a beam down to the water and back and that in the measurement of the… that travelled you could set it to read for you say… well as we did we set it I think most of us set it at 200 feet above the water. Yeah we mightn’t fly in that all night you know if you’re doing a, you’re searching an area for a sub [submarine] or for enemy

14:30 shipping you’re not sittin’ at 200 feet – you could be well above it – but when you come down you want to know when you’re within 200 feet of the water, but it’s tricky. We did a… I don’t know whether you want this now or later but we did an attack on a sub out from Gibraltar. I remember the night very well.

15:00 We were detailed to do a coast crawl down the west African coach, ah coast right from…

I might… we might talk about that later just so we’ve got it all in context.

OK yeah, OK. Yeah, yeah.

That stuff about Gibraltar.

Yeah, yeah.

You’ve been waiting in Halifax for the past 20 minutes trying to get on the…

15:30 **what was the ship?**

We were loaded eventually on to the Louis Pasteur, which was about the third fastest ship in those days. It was a French luxury cruise liner of course. Been converted to… I think the British had taken it over. When France packed in was in British hands – they used it. Of course I don’t know how many troops were on but it was packed. It was a big ship –

16:00 not unlike the Queen Mary and it was packed. We had about that much between bunks. You know when you lie on the bunk the fellow in front comes down there’s not much space. So it had a hell of a load on it and of course we headed out solo. We weren’t part of a convoy. We were too fast for convoy and we headed out solo for England. At one stage we were advised that we were going up ‘round Iceland

because we were being chased by a pack of submarines

16:30 and I don't think any of us got too excited about it. I don't know I didn't but I remember I had a vision on that trip. I was a little bit off colour and I wasn't sick but I wasn't brilliant. I was never seasick on all the trips I did during the war. I was never seasick

17:00 but I had this vision. It was an elderly short stubby man and tall elderly angular woman and they were in this room with a lot of books on the wall and there was a piano and a fire and carpet of course and they were so clear. I had no idea anything about them of course

17:30 but my father had given me a number of addresses around England for the relations I should visit if I got the chance. Some months later I got the chance to visit Uncle Will and Aunty Lill in Hull and there they were. The room with all the books, the piano, everything exactly as I'd seen it. Now explain that to me. You see, that's one of these things that leaves us wondering how much we know

18:00 about us doesn't it? Because they were exactly as I saw them then and they talked to me and of course I stayed with 'em a couple of times and it was just as if I'd seen them, just as if I had seen them on the boat. Anyway we got into Liverpool safely – no successful or semi successful attacks made by submarine. And from

18:30 Liverpool we were put on the train to go to Brighton, which of course is south England you know. And I was billeted in a… no I wasn't in the Metropol. There were two hotels used for staging troops. One was the Metropol and I was in the other one. But

19:00 I've never told Margaret this – I… my friend told me that he had failed in his training as a pilot and made an air gunner. And of course the training for air gunners was much shorter and he had been in England for some time. And he was with an Australian Lancaster [Avro Lancaster bomber] squadron and I know it was about mid-north of England –

19:30 wasn't too far a train ride and I took a day off to go and see him. When I got to the field his squadron were mostly back from a raid on Germany but there were a couple of aircraft still to come and Tom's was one. And they told me several had been killed on the aircraft but Tom was still alive so I waited. The aircraft came in not long after I s'pose I waited half an hour or something like that.

20:00 And there was one engine stopped and there was smoke coming out of the aeroplane in various positions and the ambulance and all the attendant crews went out to it. It stopped where it stopped – it didn't attempt to taxi back and yes I was assured Tom was still alive but wounded. He was the rear gunner. The

20:30 turret had been severely damaged, took some time for to get him out. And as he came out… I might break down about this but I'll try it… he was on a stretcher. He was smothered in blood and his flying suit squelched of blood

21:00 and I remember him saying… no I said, "Oh Tom!" And I must have said it in a tone that stirred him because he looked up and said, "Oh Jack. Tell Mum, tell Dad…," but as he said the last the blood gushed out of his mouth and he was dead.

21:30 Of course I never told his mother and father because I think it would have hurt them too much. I have never been able to put it out of my mind but it turned out to be only one of many. Anyway Tom was

22:00 the fellow that had been given approval to re-muster the same day as me down at Point Cook. And he said he failed flying because his instructor didn't want to be an instructor and failed everybody so he'd be taken off. And I wonder what people like that instructor – did they ever think of what they did to other people?

22:30 Anyway, that was one of the worst affairs. I think I wept all the way in the train back to Brighton. It took me some days to get over it. Well I had been at Brighton for some time

23:00 when we were advised that six percent of a bomber crew going out to Germany had been lost when they got back to England because of bad weather. The pilots had been unable to get into their airports and had crashed. Now six percent of a bomber force of a thousand bombers is a lot

23:30 of bombers and a hell of a lot of personnel. And Arthur Harris was in charge at the time and he immediately stopped all raids where he wasn't guaranteed the weather would be good back in England when they came back. And he stopped all postings to squadrons. I was waiting for a posting to a squadron and he said, "You've all got to do instrument flying." Now just think of this – I hadn't thought of it before but those pilots were going out night after night without being

24:00 competent on instruments and to my mind they were largely lucky to live through it because the weather in England was never all that cosy. Well they set up a course which we called the BAT course. It was 'Beam Approach Training' and I had to go to Norwich, a place out of Norwich on the wash this side of Norwich to do my training. And I did it on an Air Speed

24:30 Oxford and we… by learning to use the instruments properly we had to land on this what was a relatively tiny air strip blind without seeing. The cockpit was done up with a special instrument training

thing that was a blue screen all over the windscreen and we wore orange glasses.

25:00 That meant that anything through the windscreen was black as night. We couldn't see anything and well I did the course. I think I did about three landings without ever seeing the ground and I've never been more thankful for a course than that. All we had then… of course we've got such beautiful instruments since but we didn't have it then.

25:30 We had a beam which was made up of the signal, the Morse signal T on one side and the Morse signal on the other side, and when they lapped they made a constance – a constant signal which was known as the beam. Now that was electronically directed exactly to the centre of a runway and so if you got on that you knew you were on the centre line of the runway and of course we had to let down on the altimeter. Today we

26:00 have ILS [Instrument Landing System] with a glide slope and it's just Rolls Royce stuff today but that's all we had in those days and it's on that basis that I recommended to CASA in 1983 that we do create an instrument training regime for pilots in Australia to fly

26:30 instrument rated but not good enough to go into major airfields. In other words, pilots flying 'round the country would be able to use that to get into somewhere wherever without risk. They didn't install, they didn't institute it till 19, till 2000, 2000. 18 years later. 17 years while people were still being killed. It's one of the things I

27:00 report about CASA in my book. But shortly after that I was posted out the Middle East – not to a squadron. I didn't know where I was going. I finished up at Ein Shemer – what are the plains, which was then Palestine is now Israel.

27:30 And that's where I was trained to fly the Wellington. And I was lucky I had a wonderful instructor fellow named Stenbridge, Flight Lieutenant Stenbridge. He had a couple of subs [submarines] to his crew. He was an experienced man, very experienced on Wellington's and so I got very good training on the Wellington.

Just before we do Middle East,

28:00 **can I just take you back to England in… this must be late 1944?**

Yes it was.

What was the feeling in England at that time?

Oh semination. They felt that they'd come from almost certainly losing the war in their feelings to now almost certainly going to win it yeah. I found people in England were fantastic. I had a lot of relations of course

28:30 in London and out.

Where was your father from?

A place called… oh went to visit 'em… Aunty Kitt lived at 70 Rectory Road, Manor Park Forest Gate. That's where Dad had come from – Forest Gate.

That's in, that's out of London?

That's London. It's

29:00 to the east of London yeah, Forest Gate. And we still had relations there. Where were we?

We were talking about…

We've just had a beam approach.

We were just talking about England in 1944. You were saying how I think you went and saw some of your relatives.

Yeah oh yeah. I… Aunty Kitt, who lived out in Rectory Road Manor Park, practically all the houses around her were ruined. And she was

29:30 there with a few houses in her street and she wouldn't get in a bomb shelter at night. She liked playing. There was a very simple card game. She and old Bert used to play and they wouldn't give up their game with the activity outside. Goes to show you doesn't it yeah she was marvelous.

And you had another Uncle up at Hull?

Yeah an Uncle and Aunt up at Hull.

30:00 I didn't see them at that time. I seen them when I really in the early days when I went to England and I hadn't seen them since. Her daughter married Drinkwater… can't think of his Christian name but Turner and Drinkwater were one of the oldest established commercial photographers in the area. They did magnificent work. It was him that put me on to

30:30 this – see that that photograph there is from a 35mm negative and that's done on a special paper – Gaveart. He told me 'cause I was a keen photographer and he said, "You know you want a big print Jack – get Gaveart." And so that and the big prints you see there are on Gaveart. But I had other friends around England at this time of course

31:00 'cause as you move around, you meet people and you make, you know, relationships. And they were all I had – misfits. Where was I? When the… oh no I came back for that yeah. No this is before the V1s [German Doodlebug flying missiles] and V2s. This is a long time before the V1s and V2s, yeah.

31:30 But everyone was a bit sort of optimistic about the outcome at that stage. We had had some good wins. Germany of course had attacked Russia – committed suicide in my view. They did fantastically well there you know, the Germans going into Russia. They got a long way.

32:00 Big country yeah. I've flown over a bit of it. It's a vast country but I don't think there's much more I can tell you. I mean we'd got to the stage where you could go into town, I mean I went into Brighton of course because we're at Brighton, and you could go to a Lion's tea shop and have cup of tea and what have you. A lot of those things were re-opening a bit –

32:30 don't know that they'd ever been closed but they weren't as free as they were now. They were becoming much freer yeah.

Can I ask you also about the fact that being part of the Empire Air Training Scheme?

Yeah.

You left Australia in early 1944, mid 1944?

'44 yeah. February '44.

At a time

33:00 **when the greater danger to Australia was perhaps to the north?**

Yeah.

And yet you were posted to Europe. Did you debate that? Did you think about that at the time or did…?

No I didn't. I suppose for purely personal reasons I was hopeful to go to Canada to train. I didn't know anyone in Canada but I was interested in seeing the country.

33:30 No I didn't, I didn't object. I don't know that I had any particular feelings about it Martin. I mean, there were certain number of pilots we could train here and certain number of pilots we could train in Rhodesia and certain number of pilots had to be trained in Canada, and so I was in the lot that went to Canada. And I think I just accepted it yeah.

34:00 **Did you… obviously your surroundings would have been the most important thing on your mind but did you find… did you know much about what was happening in the Pacific war?**

In the Pacific war?

Yeh.

Oh very much yeah yes. I studied, I followed it quite a lot and I was concerned about it of course.

34:30 I can't remember though what had happened in the major wars, I mean in the major conflicts. And they are… then had the big noble battle up in wherever had that taken place? I don't think it had.

Coral Sea?

Pardon?

The Coral Sea Battle?

The Coral Sea Battle.

I think that had probably happened before you

35:00 **went away?**

Yeah might have. I know here too there was a feeling of more optimism than had been the way you know. When we had a Japanese slinging fire off in Sydney Harbour and when we had 'em coming on the islands people were very frightened no doubt about it. And we were frightened we were frightened for our families

35:30 at home – our women folk and our children. You know it's a funny thing away from it anyway whilst I was concerned about those things I wasn't frightened of them. I think if I'd been mixed up in the in the battle and that I'd have had times of great fear. You know when you're in an operation

36:00 that is running you into danger you feel fear. I don't know whether everyone… I did but I never backed off from it. I think that you've got to be a special sort of character to not feel it. But you know, I figure you have to be a bit loose in the head not to feel fear and when you feel that fear of course you're gearing yourself up for greater concentration and all that sort of thing.

36:30 So I think that's essential, probably good but I'll tell you more about that when we're out of England because it become a very serious part. We were stationed for a short time, I was stationed for a short time at a place called South Cerney, which is in the Cotswolds, which is a real picture place of England. It's really

37:00 lovely and on that we were in a section called the Advanced Flying Unit. I was converted from the single aircraft to twin engine aircraft there and I remember sitting in the South Cerney mess one morning with a group captain sitting opposite me with his pathfinder wings on and watching him cry. He wept. He'd been taken off operations because he was

37:30 over stressed and he was not good for operations any more unless that (UNCLEAR) and I felt very sorry for him because I could see that that was the result of being under very great strain. And I met a fellow there that was very knowledgeable. He was knowledgeable in terms of astronomy. I mean

38:00 at the GR [Ground Reconnaissance] school we all learnt to read the stars and position ourself from the stars and that's why this is one of the best navigation levels in the RAF 'cause we did all these things so naturally you learnt a little bit about it but there was a fellow there who must have been I think a university professor in astronomy. I remember talking to him at great length and how he told me that

38:30 study of those things have just advanced so much you know they could now see clouds. I remember him saying these words – they could see clouds in the valleys on the moon. (UNCLEAR) hey yeah but on that station was a tremendous mixture – they were young fellers like us. They were young inexperienced fellers like us come there to do a conversion

39:00 to different sort of aeroplane. And there were the pathfinders who had in fact been retired – the men who had had perhaps three two of their operations on bombers and they were stressed out. Of course, when you understand it three tours on bombers was cruel, really cruel, yeah but

39:30 it was how things were done.

Tape 5

00:31 **We just finished talking about your training in England, the time you spent there and perhaps you could tell me where you were posted next?**

Well I went by sea. It was a good sea trip. We were attacked many times – all sort of silly enemy aircraft but it didn't land a bomb on us or anything else but it was exciting and we went out into the

01:00 Mediterranean of course and we left the ship at… not actually Cairo is it? It's near Cairo, Suez is it? I can't remember. No, not Suez but anyway for our purposes near enough to say and we left the ship at Cairo and there was a bit of time in a

01:30 staging camp and then we were posted to Ein Shemer on the Magido Plain. That's now in Israel. Of course at the time it was Palestine. Yes I

02:00 was then sent to Jerusalem that's right and we were billeted at the Italian Hospital in Jerusalem. Nice place. And I was given, dangerously I think, charge of a German prisoner of war. He was a tough nut.

Were had he come from then?

02:30 I can't, I don't know where he came from but I was made responsible for him and I was given a pistol, a Smith and Wesson 38, to guard him. Look, he could have knocked me over and killed me easily. He was a tough nut. I s'pose he just didn't choose, he chose to stay a prisoner of war. Must have been something in it to seal his fate or something but I thought it was a stupid thing to do and

03:00 for things varied. It was a time when that Jewish organisation were dropping bombs every second night all around Jerusalem. I forget what they called it but it was a major Jewish organisation – you'd know it I'm sure if I could think of it. But I suppose we were

03:30 there to… must have been two or three months and I used to go into Tel Aviv and hitch a ride on a truck occasionally when I didn't have to guard this POW [Prisoner Of War] and what's that place they mispronounce now I hear them on the television. Funny how pronunciations get kicked about isn't it

04:00 yeah. One of the things of that line – excuse me varying just for a minute – but they talk about 'Addis Ababa' but the real pronunciation is nice – it's 'Addice Abarber'. Isn't that nicer?

Really? I didn't know that.

Yeah, when you deal with the locals you get… see and I found it easy to deal with the locals wherever I was

04:30 and I suppose I was in Jerusalem for quite a time because other people came and joined us who later joined the same squadron. Len Teale was one for instance. You might remember he was on television here after the war in that…?

Oh Leonard Teale?

Yeah.

The homicide actor?

Yeah, homicide that's right yeah. Well Len used to read the news as he was under the shower as practice you know.

05:00 We became quite good friends because we later in the squadron we set up a little theatre group and did a few plays and things. But of course Len's gone. He had a heart attack a few years ago and he's gone. I think I'm pretty lucky to still be here you know.

05:30 It was from there I was sent down to Megiddo but to learn to fly the Wellington and I thought that was a well-run school. I was trained by Flight Lieutenant Stenbridge, who had… I know he completed one tour; he might have completed two. He was

06:00 successful in nailing a submarine and I remember we were training on the field one day when there was this big column of black smoke and fire. One of the Wellingtons had gone in and burst into flames – of course killing all on board. And

06:30 I think that possibly made him more rigid about his training on the aircraft for engine failure after take off, because I thought I was very well trained in that and later it turned out to be very necessary because I had an engine fail after take off my first take off on the squadron. From I caught sand fly fever there I remember that

07:00 and I spent a few days in hospital. That was pretty painless excepting yeah excepting that the beds were full of bed bugs – huge great juicy bed bugs that put me off. But after the training I'm trying to remember but I think I trained with the crew. I was

07:30 given a crew and we all… whilst I was being taught to fly the aircraft the crew were onboard doing all the things that they would do and I think I thought that was good too.

How were the crews put together?

I don't know. I can't remember how they were put together but I had, I've got a photo of them on the steps there. My navigator was,

08:00 he was a reporter on the Launceston Examiner – Geoff Suiter and he was a first class bloke. He had been five years older than me I'd say and the other lads were all pretty young. Kevin Walsh, who's the only one I've seen since the war and I only saw him a month ago as I came back from Orange. He lives at Goulburn and

08:30 he came from a family of solicitors. He is now a very sage and experienced solicitor and we spent half a day together. Bob Jaclyn was my co-pilot – tall thin lad, very nice lad Bob. The thing about

09:00 a co-pilot on the Wellington – he was never taught to fly the Wellington and that meant that if I got shot he had to try and make his way and I think it would have been a hard job. Wellington was not a simple aeroplane to fly and then I had Ken Crayyo and Neville Vance as my other two radio operators, special equipment wireless operators. They were all efficient. I had a good crew I thought

09:30 and after the training we were sent back to Cairo and we stayed in a little training camp at Port Thuard, which was east of Cairo. You come out of Cairo and you headed east to this camp. You had to cross some sort of a drain on a ferry, some sort of a channel, but it was the filthiest place I've ever been into. You… it was very difficult to eat anything without

10:00 fisticuffs with the flies and course I caught amebic dysentery as did Geoff Suiter and we were whipped into hospital at… up the coast… oh an historic place. Surely I can remember the name of that.

Haifa?

No, north of Haifa?

Beirut?

No, no. Geez,

10:30 it's a very little town and we had a wonderful nurse, Walura Cedes. I remember her well. She was a girl I'd say about 18, 19. Very attractive girl – looked after us like an angel. I… she came from Famagusta old Cyprus and she was just marvelous because with this dysentery

11:00 they had a thing called the shoofty scope with which they investigated our bowel. It was a very painful business I've got to tell you and the day, the morning, the doctor was going to do she'd come around and warn us first; "He's going to use the shoofty scope." And of course poor old Geoff died. He didn't recover and that was quite a blow to me because I…

11:30 Geoff and I had got very close and so we were there without a navigator for a while and I was then given a young English lad as navigator of all names Steve Search. Now Steve Search for a navigator for a coastal command squadron where you did such things as on line

12:00 searches, square searches and all the rest of it was but Steve was a nice lad. The first night out on a squadron of course he forgot to get the beacons and without the beacons you couldn't find the field coming back. And when I learnt that he didn't have the beacons and we couldn't find the way in I thought, "Well what the hell are we gonna do?" and I don't know how we found our way. I think we had to

12:30 break radio silence and get in that way otherwise we'd have still been flying 'round there lookin' for the field. But OK so that started our squadron life. We were posted up to Foggia in Italy where we joined 458 Squadron. We were in tents on snow with nothing. There was no water laid on or anything

13:00 like that. The only water we got was from the snow we melted and you know, when I look at these asylum seekers complaining about Woomera and I saw the beds and set up they had I thought, "what luxury," because on snow in a tent on a… well a sort of

13:30 put up bed that you have in a tent and with no washing facilities I mean for about three months… they don't know how well off they are. From there we were doing operations up the north, northern Adriatic and it was

14:00 just a way to break into it. I didn't have any excitement on those operations for some time.

What were you exactly doing on those operations?

We were doing searches for enemy vessels. We… I'm having to think

14:30 you know. Yeah we looked for enemy supply vessels. You've got to think about the state of war in the Mediterranean. At that stage the front line was about, oh mid-way up Italy.

15:00 You might remember the casino… what was that casino on the hill? Monte something Casino… ah Casino? They were fighting about that when I got the squadron but we were on the other side of course. That's on the Gulf of Genoa, we're on the Adriatic side. Markue switched over to the Gulf of Genoa when it suited, when there was an operation force to do

15:30 it. But there was still supply ships in the Mediterranean providing equipment and food and supplies generally to the German forces but the front was moving quite rapidly up Italy at the time and I remember looking for these supply ships.

16:00 One of the main sources of supply as an enemy at that time was Yugoslavia – a place called… can't think… you know the coast goes from Venice up round the coast and across the top

16:30 of the Adriatic and then down the Yugoslav coast.

Trieste?

Trieste yes and Pula on that side was very hot. They had predicted anti aircraft guns there and that's not so bad if you're up at 20, 30,000 feet but we were a low level operation. We didn't have super chargers and eight thousand feet was the highest I could get a Wellington and so it could be very uncomfortable going around there.

17:00 **But your role was reconnaissance is that right?**

Well it was to find enemy shipping. If you call that reconnaissance I suppose it…

But you weren't going to… you were going to what alert the…?

No we attacked them.

You attacked them?

Of course.

You bombed them? So you were carrying a lot of…?

We attacked them for some time.

17:30 I think I'm leaving a section out here. I can't get it right but the time came when we were provided with diaphragm bombs so that if you didn't hit the ship but you hit the water close to it the bomb would go off before it went into the water and would be

18:00 deliver a very destructive force into the side of a ship. It became quite useful. At one stage we were given the role of not attacking them but of calling in the Beaufighters [Bristol Beaufighter bombers] to attack them and

18:30 when the Beaufighter's came up we lit them from behind – we dropped flares, parachute flares, behind the ship and I had a lot of time for those Beaufighter boys because when they went in of course the ships could pick them coming in and the flack was just immense, just enormous. They were led by a fellow named Pancho Villa. We knew him as Pancho Villa and he was a

19:00 determined sort of a character. He would go in and of course they used rocket projectiles and the rocket projectile would poke a hole in the side of the ship about six feet in diameter. And of course they aimed at the water line and you put a hole six feet in diameter water line of a ship it does doesn't float for long – goes down very quickly and I think an awful lot of the

19:30 crews of those ships were lost because they couldn't get out in time. A number of the Beaufighters were shot down of course. I know Pancho Villa was killed and that was sad. At one stage as the line moved up and it was north of Venice I was sent up on an air-sea rescue mission for Mill,

20:00 for Jimmie Little. He was in Three Squadron fighters and he'd been missed the day before and I'll tell you this because I think it's shameful and should never have happened. As I said before, I was a non-drinker. Nobody likes people who are non-drinkers. Yes two aircraft were sent up to…

20:30 gee I know these places so well. I'll have a look at the book and get the name of it. We had a… at this stage we had established a field to the north of the… to the north section. Well it's still inside the front line.

21:00 Rosignano. Oh no, not Rosignano – that was the other side. No, Falconara ,

21:30 Falconara and we arrived just on nightfall. Was considered we couldn't do the air sea rescue in the dark. To have lit ourselves would have made us very vulnerable to fighter aircraft, which were just over the hill really 40 miles away,

22:00 so the operation was put off 'til the next morning. My view of that was that by the next morning if they'd been shot down in the water they'd probably gone by the next day but never mind I wasn't in charge. I had come up with a passenger; Squadron Leader Taylor and as we approached Falconara I said to

22:30 Steve Search, "You'd better get me a QDM Steve. I don't want to miss this place cause we'll be over the front line," and Taylor said, "Oh I've been up here with a detachment for six months. I can take you in." So that stopped Steve getting … a QDM is a magnetic bearing to the station. They take it on a radio station you see. Well 10 minutes later we were being fired at by everything. We were right over the front line and obviously he hadn't taken us in there so I said to Steve,

23:00 I turned around and I said, "Steve you get me that QDM." And course I was only a first… a flying officer under a squadron leader I. It was a bit difficult. Anyway we got back to Falconara, landed and Taylor got out and hired a passing staff car and went up to headquarters. I didn't. I spent my time getting the aircraft tidied up and ready for the operation

23:30 tomorrow – fuel, everything. And when I got up to the headquarters the operations officer in charge says, "Oh you got lost coming in?" I said, "Yeah, I was lead in by a squadron leader," and he said, "Oh yes," and he didn't say any more. I think he knew Taylor, we all knew Taylor. And of course my aircraft was set and

24:00 went to bed. Taylor of course had gone off with the other pilot. They hadn't attended to their aircraft and I don't know what they intended to do but it was either Christmas Eve… I'm pretty sure it was Christmas Eve so there were frolics in the bar. The next morning I got up to do my operation and they came out bleary eyed, found their aircraft was unserviceable so took mine. As far as I'm concerned that aborted the whole operation. They weren't in a fit state

24:30 to do an operation and they had no hope of finding Jimmie and of course he wasn't found and he was lost. So we stayed another day and then as we're going south Taylor said, "I'll take this aircraft," and pushed me out of command. See took it himself. I understood then why he didn't do operations. He couldn't taxi the bloody thing straight down the taxiway. Finished up locked

25:00 in a parking bay we couldn't get out of, over-revved the props to try and make a turn where it wouldn't – damaged the propeller. They had to shut down that engine or it would have shaken itself out of the frame. And then he said, "Oh excuse me," and he got out and went south with Bill, Bill Taylor. No, Bill Johnson. And of course I was stuck there with a broken prop and had to wait. Eleven days we had no

25:30 gear with us – no pyjamas, nothing like that. We hadn't even arranged for 11 days and I eventually got the bits, had the work done, flew south and the bigger dig… the big digger said to me, "Oh you had a bit of trouble," and I couldn't hold myself back. I told him exactly what I thought of it and I didn't want Mr Taylor a passenger on an aircraft again.

26:00 It was not an easy thing to say 'cause the big digger was a wing commander. Taylor was a squadron

leader and I was a flying officer but the big digger didn't object. He must have known and I think that he didn't say anything. Oh some time before that I'd been made responsible for crew

26:30 safety training. In other words teaching crews to get out of the aircraft with all the gear you need in a dinghy when you're shot down, when you're in the drink, in the water and well that went on. He asked me would I like to give it up and I said, "No, I enjoy it. It's something to do." So I continued with that.

27:00 Merv Hargreaves had previously done that job but he'd been taken off for some operation – I can't remember what – it was but Merv came to see me and he said, "Listen I've got an idea. We can bomb on radar using this equipment and accurately. What do you think?" And I said, "I'm going to try. I'm prepared to try it Merv." And so Merv and I with our crews took an aircraft up

27:30 when we had a day off and practised radar bombing. We were the only two crews on the squadron that did it. Thing I liked about the squadron, if you wanted to do something like that you just helped yourself to an aircraft. So we both became fairly proficient at it. Lo and behold time came when I was ordered up north. An E boat [enemy boat] was trying to land… well this is the story…

28:00 trying to land enemy agents behind the British lines and they wanted us to find it on radar and direct fighters onto it. Well I got up there. It's a two hour flight incidentally from Foggia up to the area. I got up there and I found this thing on radar quickly and I thought, "Well this is bloody stupid." I had fighters just about knockin' me out of the sky trying to position themselves to get onto this thing to

28:30 shoot it down. It went on for two hours and I called the controller and I said, "Look I can bomb that thing out of the water." "Oh no, no. We've got to do it this way." Well it went on and it got so bloody dangerous and I said, "I think that you should give up and let us bomb it." "No, no, no, no," and bang we had a something hit our left prop. I'm not sure what it was but we had fighters clearing

29:00 our wing either left or right by inches and it was so dangerous. Anyway with the left prop battered the… it was shakin' itself out the frame. We had to shut it down go home on one. Fortunate this time the relief aircraft had just arrived. It was Merv Hargreaves – the only other one who could bomb on radar and he said he put in about an hour

29:30 with this fellow and finally told him, "I'm gonna bomb it on radar," and he bombed it on radar and blew it out the water first hit, for which he got a mention in dispatches.

What's the technique of bombing on radar? What was so new about that?

Well nobody had ever tried it with the equipment that we had anywhere. It was a technique we developed ourselves. You had to allow… See our radar told us how far ahead of us it was –

30:00 so many miles and that means so minutes to fly and so forth. And you had to work out the trajectory of the bomb to hit that point and that's what we practised at. We practised at it with practise bombs down at the home base of course and we'd both got pretty efficient at it.

This might sound like a stupid question but how do you know what you're bombing if you've…

30:30 **all you've got to do this?**

Oh well for practise we had a raft put out. We were well set up for practise. When we came back from a raid we all always dropped practise bombs on a raft being towed behind a ship. Well in this case we got 'em to tow and we got very accurate to it.

But when you're flying up to look for this German ship I mean it's

31:00 **blacked out presumably and it's a dark night?**

You can only see it on radar.

You can only see it on radar. Well how do you know it's a German ship?

Well there's nothing else there. There's nothing else in the area.

So you had intelligence that told you that ship…?

Yes, yes.

Was there so that there was no question that that's what it was?

No, we had good intelligence to tell us what it was and roughly where it was but we had a donkey controlling the operation. I mean if he'd said to me, "Yes you can bomb on radar," I could have had it done in about…

31:30 well s'pose I took two runs and we'd have all been home without a wrecked aircraft. Well the aircraft wasn't wrecked but it was a two hour flight home on one engine. The Hercules 16, which we had in the Wellington at the time, was a first class engine. We didn't worry about it getting us home – we knew it had the guts to do it. We went home and had the prop changed of course but

32:00 Merv got an MID [Mentioned in Dispatches] and I'd done all the roof work so that was… but of course whilst I was a bit jealous I was happy for Merv and a number of things happened after that. We were sent on a detachment to Rosignano and Rosignano's up by the Tower of Pisa and in typical

32:30 squadron form when we got there the bar came with us but no food. Not a thing to eat, not a bloody sausage. And Teddy Love was with us on the ground crew I can remember that and he got a utility and was sent out to scrounge in food. I don't know what he did but he came back with a ute loaded so there you are. We ate but for two days I didn't eat a thing and

33:00 the boys were happy in the bar and gettin' full of booze of course but I wasn't. I had a couple of stouts but that's as far as I would go and it was something I'll tell you. We were in a bad state by the time the food came yeah. The day that the first aircraft got there I wasn't there with that. The SAAF [South African Air Force] the South African crowd had been up there in that area and they were being moved

33:30 and as they went they shot the place up and I mean shot it up real live bullets. Why somebody wasn't killed I've no idea. They were shooting at a bell in a tower but there were bullets everywhere and I just think they ought all to have been locked up because it was just lucky that somebody wasn't killed. Bullets were flying 'round. It may give you an idea though that people on squadron,

34:00 on this sort of a squadron where you virtually to a large extent controlled your own behaviour, some crews got very reckless and that was to tell later. We were only in Rosignano for about oh perhaps a month

34:30 and we did reconnaissance tours in the Gulf of Genoa. As far as I know I never found anything. I had to bomb the town of Malmoco one night and I couldn't understand about that. Malmoco was really a coastal town but really a country town,

35:00 a very small town and I was never given to the bombing of civilians. I know it was a war and all that but anyway that's the only time I was ever asked to bomb a town. I don't know what happened. I hope nobody was killed but there you are and back to Troja. On the way

35:30 south of course we passed Monte Casino, the monastery on the mountain. And I remember I took a photograph of the… I poked my camera out the side and took a photo but there was not much to be seen except that it was extensively damaged of course.

36:00 Got back to Troja and shortly after that… see when we did both of those, both of those stations are right at the north of Italy so we were getting to a stage where no ships could provide either side of Italy for Germany and so there were no

36:30 more ships to be found and bombed and I should tell you yes the one thing I forgot on the Adriatic side. When they were providing supplies from Yugoslavia the supply ships were guarded by what they called a special ferry.

37:00 I'll think of it and those ferries had eight pompom, eight multiple pompom's on board and they were the most deadly things. When the shells came out of those things why can't I think of the name of it? It was just a shower and all you saw was this tracers of course and the tracers only one in six, six times as much. And the stuff was thick and whilst we

37:30 were unable to dodge a lot of that we never got hit so don't ask me why it was just luck.

When that's going off around you

Yeh.

do you get an impact of shock even if it doesn't hit you?

With the pins yes sometimes you do if they're set to explode at your height but they couldn't tell our height and of course that was an advantage. Most of them went off above us.

38:00 Occasionally it was, you know, it was like being in rough air but we didn't have… we didn't suffer any damage from them and we didn't have any what I would close calls except when you could see all these white flashes goin' past you and when you knew they were only a sixth of the total you knew there was a lot of stuff in the air yeah. Sebel ferries – the ferry that they use on that was a Sebel ferry and they had

38:30 these multiple pompom. Very uncomfortable. Well now I think it was about that time that we had two aircraft ditched in the one night. These are the boys I trained to get out of the aircraft and into the dinghy with all the equipment. You know you had what we call… are called a Gibson Girl,

39:00 which was a radio you operated by turning a handle, food supplies, safety jackets, all those things. And all the crews were trained to do that in 40 seconds. Also trained that if the dinghy was upside down how to turn it up in the water and on this occasion two aircraft went in. I remember one of the captains came to me the next morning and he said, "I've come to thank you for your training."

39:30 The other fellow, Lex Porter, wasn't given to things like that. He just ignored me and he… I think he was unhappy at any time but both crews survived so there you are yeah.

Tape 6

00:31 **I'm going to take you back when you were first posted to Ein Shemer and the very first flight you took out of there, because I believe there was an incident at that time with you had an engine failure. Was that in Palestine or was that somewhere else?**

No the engine failure I had was on the squadron, first night on the squadron. I could have covered that for you because I think it is very important. I was of course a very raw

01:00 Wellington pilot – had very little at the time and I think it was thanks to Stenbridge's good training down at Ein Shemer that I was able to cope. But yes after you take off you get to a safe height and you reduce power. When I reduced power the left engine gave a big bang, great shower of sparks and cut and of course

01:30 I knew I was in trouble so increased power in the right engine and went 'round. All the sparks of course set fire to the fabric on the tail. That was it. Wasn't a big fire but it was one of those things. It didn't increase the comfort of the crew or the pilot but we got in. I overshot the runway a bit.

02:00 I landed on the runway of course but I was going too fast to stop in the runway and ran out into the grass level. However, no trouble – taxied in. Of course we didn't have another aircraft for the operation so operation was cancelled and I went to bed with all the crew. The following morning when I came down there were the engineers all working on it and laughing their heads off

02:30 and I said, "What are you up to?" And they said, "Well the reason for your engine failure was water in the carburetor but the fact is there was more water in the other carburetor," so one of those things you see. A little while after that we had a dirty night, a dark and stormy night. Filthy night. I had to take off from the short runway and the aircraft wouldn't lift. I pulled it over the fence.

03:00 We got the fence, I pulled over the fence cause I had landing lights on. I could see the fence and I pulled it over the fence and bumped along the ground a bit and finally got airborne. I was doing a patrol that night up by Mistro Point up the top of the Adriatic and it was a hell of a night because, apart from being bad weather and difficult weather to do anything in, the auto-pilot wouldn't fly the aircraft. I had to hang

03:30 on to it all night and it just didn't fly like an aeroplane – it was very clumsy. We completed the patrol anyway and went home and of course went to bed. The next morning when I got up all the crews were again laughing their heads off. The aircraft had been standing at the squadron… had been short of crews for some time and the aircraft had been standing for some time and the fabric had perished

04:00 and so it had stretched like a bag and it was all hanging like a bag all over it and I think we were lucky that we were able to fly. They were the only times that I had maintenance problems. I think generally the maintenance was very good on the squadron. That should never have been of course. They had a… the squadron had a hard time before that and a number of crews were lost

04:30 and I think there were… I think those two aircraft anyway were left unused for some time and of course this is another thing we learnt then about getting water in the carburetor – there's no way to drain it. It might have it modified of course so we could drain it and all aircraft today they have a drain plug under each tank point in the carb and so you'd drain off a bit of

05:00 fuel and the fuel and water always separate so you can see if there's water. We didn't then and so I was very lucky on both of those occasions.

How many hours would a typical mission take?

Pardon?

How many hours would you be out flying on an operation?

Generally six hours on those ops [operations]. There was two hours up to the… oh no, yes two to eight hours. It was two hours up to the operational area. We generally did

05:30 between two and four hours reccie [reconnaissance] and then two hours back so 'round about between six and eight hours.

Was it a comfortable aircraft, the Wellington?

Oh yeah quite comfortable. Noisy but comfortable and of course we never worried about, nobody even thought of the damage to our ears in those days – we just flew and of course you know the first engine was just there just

06:00 outside the window. The prop just missed the skin and so we got a lot of noise and a lot of us suffered from ear troubles. I, of course as you can tell I have trouble.

You were saying that you ran training courses for crews on getting out of the aircraft if you had to ditch in the sea?

Yeah, yeah.

Was the Wellington a difficult aircraft to get out of?

Yeah wasn't easy.

Why was that?

We had a hatch in the roof – that's where we got out and we all had to lift ourselves up out of that you know.

06:30 It was not easy and we had to take the emergency equipment out. Then mostly of course when the dinghy the dinghy popped out of the wing because of a pressure valve system where once the water was up around there it blew this valve and it blew open the hatch on top of the wing and the dinghy started to inflate, you know, the pressure bottles inflated it and it filled. Now generally it filled right

07:00 way up but occasionally it was wrong way up. Well all the crews were trained on how to turn it over. Big dinghy though, big dinghy for 10 people.

Did it have a roof on it?

Yes we could erect a roof and if you're stuck at sea any time you erected the roof– you needed it yeah. I think going back to that year it was

07:30 good equipment yeah, very good.

How would you get out? I mean what was the process if you hit the water?

Water out of the dinghy you mean?

Yeah, no I mean how would you get out of the Wellington? What was the process for getting everybody out if you did have to ditch the…?

You know I can't remember what we put under that hatch to climb out. It was too far you know – you had to reach up to get it but I bet we put something under it and I can't remember what it was. We didn't have loose seats in the

08:00 aircraft of course because they'd have floated everywhere. Perhaps a box of supplies, you know, we took out and put under there. I can't remember but it must have been a box of some sort because we stood on… we all got out pretty quick smart yeah. I never did a ditching myself so I didn't suffer it but I did plenty at sea. We used to go to a local, if there was in an area where there was a swimming pool we used to go to a swimming pool

08:30 for the practice. We used to inflate a dinghy upside down especially and make everybody turn it over. Everybody in the crew had to do it of course 'cause there was no telling who was wounded. See when an aircraft goes down and maybe because it, in any action, enemy action, and damage to the aircraft and such action could injure or kill certain crewmen so you couldn't say, "Well you're the one," – everyone had to be able to do it.

If someone was injured

09:00 **how would you get them out through the hatch in the…?**

Yes it was difficult and it was part of the job. Somebody had to lie on the top of the fuselage while he was, while the injured man was pushed up and lift him out. And that was part of the training yeah and I don't think we had a case. We had a case with a crew shot down and several killed and taken prisoner of war. That was just off Malta

09:30 and the captain still alive and he comes to an odd reunion. I think he spent about two years as a prisoner of war. Yes, yes he suffers considerably from his war wounds yeah. Nice fellow. I remember he goes, he told us this story about

10:00 Timbuktu a couple of reunions back. I wish I could remember it to tell you because it was a funny story. It was a good story and a funny story yeah.

So how long were you flying out of Foggia?

I don't remember. It'd be in the logbook. I can look it up.

10:30 **And in that time did you have occasion to bomb any subs [submarines] or what was the?**

Well I didn't in all

11:00 the time we were in the Adriatic apart from finding ships and yes we dropped an odd bomb but they were… I don't ever remember hitting anything. The night we had that special op [operation] and I could have bombed the the E boat by radar we didn't.

11:30 Later when we moved to Gibraltar I had two occasions – I very nearly hit a great big troop transport one night. I was sent out on an operation to do a reccie from Morocco right down the coast of Africa for whatever our range was. I think we went down

12:00 about four hours – was a long trip this night and then we came and we did a creep in line ahead search looking for submarines. And on the way down there we had been briefed that there was no shipping in the area whatsoever and we were only about an hour south of Morocco when we got a blip on the radar so of course we

12:30 made for it. Now the normal rule was to… we had a lee light, a search light, on the aircraft. When we had a blip and we wanted to investigate it we lit the lee light but if you light the light far enough away from the enemy ship to let him shoot you down I think that's a bit of a fool move and the official instruction was to light the light a half mile from the target. The radar could tell us how far we were.

13:00 Well I thought that was too far and I used to light up a quarter of a mile from it. We got this blip, we lit up at a quarter of a mile and there's this vast ship towering way up into the… and all we could do we couldn't turn we just had to go up and over it and I think we were lucky to make it because we were just about the point of stall when we were able to put the nose down and go down the other side and I think we probably pulled the radio wires off the top of that

13:30 ship.

So how high were you flying?

Oh we were flying about 500 feet when we struck it. Generally on anti-sub work we flew at about 500 feet. 500 feet gave us a reasonable range with the radar. A thousand feet we were too high, and some may have flown at a thousand feet I don't know, but I flew at 500 feet. Anyway,

14:00 we went on down south. We went as far south as we had to and then we turned back and further off the coast we did this creeping line ahead search looking for a sub. Well we were coming up to it'd been the Straits of Gibraltar when Ken Craiger, who was on the special equipment that night, they called. He had a blip so of course he honed us on to it. Bob Jackson shut down the front like a rabbit to operate the lee light.

14:30 The lee light was operated from a bicycle handlebar sort of a thing in the front of the aircraft and so quarter of a mile we switched on. Bob couldn't find the sub and suddenly he called out, "Pull up pull up!" And I pulled back on the stick immediately on the control column and as we went up I looked out and there was the conning tower ahead of us and above us so we must have been very

15:00 close to the water that's why Bob shouted. Anyway we went straight round. We were too close to them to fire on us. They had a team of blokes on the conning tower and of course they had all the guns there but we of course light out and went round and came around again and there it was about to submerge about to sink – to yeah, submerge

15:30 and we're in a lovely position. We ran across the front of the conning tower, we dropped a stick of depth charges absolutely equally distant either side. Now that's the ideal place to drop your depth charges on a sub. Of course better if it's in the water because it gets the force of the blow. Anyway it was half under water – the conning tower was submerging at that time

16:00 and of course we couldn't tell what happened. We came around again though and there was no sign of it. We searched the area for about half an hour. We were running pretty short of fuel. It'd been a long trip and it was about two o'clock in the morning and after a good search we couldn't find any rubbish on the top. You see when a thing like that goes down there's all the rubbish gets out all sort of things. Couldn't find anything so we went back to Gib.

16:30 At Gib the operations officer on duty was a feller named Bowen, Lieutenant Bowen of the Navy. Lieutenant Commander Bowen one or the other and I gave him a full report and he asked the crew what they said and they supported my report absolutely and he said, "Well goodo boys off you go to bed."

17:00 And I said, "What? Aren't you going to do something about it?" He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Get the navy out." "Oh no, no, no. Don't worry about that." And I said, "Well I do worry about it. We nearly killed ourselves attacking that ship and I think we've done it damage if we haven't sunk it and I want to know." "Oh no, no, no." And I said, "Well I'm going to get the CO out of bed." And I got the big digger out of bed. Now he always used to go to bed with a skin full of booze

17:30 and he came out of out of bed like a bear with a sore head. Oh he hated it I can tell you. He slapped his battle jacket on over his pyjamas and he came down with me to the ops room and then he sat me down and quizzed me about it and then he quizzed all the crew and he was satisfied that we'd made an attack and so he turned on Bowen. He said, "Bowen get the bloody navy out,"

18:00 and he was an ugly man when he was like that. Bowen got the navy out of course and the next morning there were a couple of fair miles and I think a Corvette – small navy ships but effective for the… and when they went out they eventually found this sub surrounded

18:30 by a number of Spanish fishing vessels and the Spanish fishing vessels of course scooted as soon as they

saw the navy – they spread in all directions. The captain of the submarine was the snorkel king of the U-boat hull of the German U-boats. He was a real prize and when the navy ordered him to pull up and be taken in tow

19:00 he dived downstairs. Well they knew what he was up to. A few of the naval officers dived downstairs after him and he was opening the valves to sink the sub. They closed the valves of course and put him under restriction and brought the submarine into Algeciras Bay. Now Algeciras Bay is behind Gibraltar. It's on

19:30 the Spanish side but it's… this area was British possession and I read various reports as these, as the crew were questioned and of course we thought we'd be mentioned about this but the navy boys all got a gong. We didn't get a thing. Now when you think

20:00 that Merv Hargreaves got a mention in dispatches for this radar bombing business and we bloody near killed ourselves it was a bit rich. But the reason for that in my view was that being a non-drinker and not a friend of the CO's – that's why we didn't get one. He didn't like me because I didn't go in and drink with him. In my opinion throughout

20:30 was that he was the… well he overdid the drinking and underdid the fair play on the crew and anyway that was that.

When you say he was the 'snorkel king'?

Yeah.

What does that mean exactly?

You know what a snorkel is?

Tell me what a snorkel is?

OK, the submarine of course when it's

21:00 attacking ships operates under water. You can't see it and every now and again it has to come up to open the hatches and charge the batteries. It needs the air to do it. The snorkel was a device designed obviously by this man which was a big tube that went up, was then drained and then opened to charge the batteries while the sub was still under the water. It was a great advance in U-boat

21:30 warfare yeah. It was one of those advances that allowed the U-boats [Unterseeboot – German submarine] to sink a lot more ships. So for that reason it was quite a catch and well there you are. Another thing I meant to tell you – in my view we weren't an overworked squadron. We did trips and of course none of it was easy because

22:00 we… you're on your own and if you get caught with a fighter you've got very little chance. I was sent on two daylight trips and to my knowledge I was the only one to do daylight trips in the time I was on the squadron. Being in charge of the safety training I had a position of some standing as far as the crews

22:30 were concerned. I don't think it was any standing as far as the CO was concerned but all or most of the crews looked to me for certain things. One night a crew was going out on an op and the navigator was Ken Watts. Now I knew Ken Watts very personally and Ken said, "Jack I don't want to go out on this trip. He's full of whisky again," – meaning his captain. I won't give you the captain's name but there were a number of captains went out full of whisky

23:00 and so I said, "Well Ken if we if we lodge an objection for you now when you're about to go out you'll be charged with LMF – Lack of Moral Fibre – so you'll have to risk this trip but when you come back then we'll take it to the CO." Well he didn't come back of course. His captain did the trip. Nothing wrong doing the practice runs on the dinghy. Before coming

23:30 in to land he flew right down into the water. No judgement you see – full of whisky. He probably had a flask with him and charged himself up as well.

Was it very common for pilots to drink when they flew?

I don't know how common it was. I knew there were two or three that did and I could name one or two of them but I won't do. There's no point in it now but yes some of them drank.

24:00 It was a pity. I s'pose it was a nerve racking thing. I don't know. I didn't find it… I thought we were, we had a light job really. I was always worried when I was sent off on a daylight op because if you were spotted by a fighter that was the end.

What were the two daylight operations you were sent on?

I don't remember. I do remember that when I

24:30 was heading across the Med [Mediterranean] and I got high enough to not pick up a spray at the back the rear gunner'd call out you're too high, because the lower you are lessens your chance of being picked up by radar. See the radar beam doesn't go out across the top of the water it goes out in a loop.

This is radar from ships?

Yeah radar from anything goes in

Goes in a loop so

25:00 **if you're too high you've got to?**

Well if you're just high enough you'd be picked up miles before. If you're right down on the water and that kicks up a spray from your props at the back well then you're not picked up until you're very close to the target and I can't remember what we went out on. I know there was two I did and everyone said how popular I was but…

25:30 **Were these operations flying out of Gibraltar?**

No that was out of Foggia yeah.

Tell me about Gibraltar? What was that like at that time of the war?

Well it was a marvelous runway really. Of course it was about I s'pose at the most 10 feet above the water line and if we were going out on a mission

26:00 where we were likely to contact enemy ships or craft of any kind we took off from the runway and we didn't raise it at all. We just raised the under cart so we kept as low as we could but it was a good runway – it was wide. It had a problem if the wind came in from the west – it came over the rock and it was pretty bumpy. One of the problems we had there of course was the

26:30 Spanish was still on the German side and if we came back in the night those they'd shoot at us. I don't know what they had in terms of radar. I don't think they were well equipped. None of us were hit but it was worrying. See if you came back with low cloud things were very crude when you think of it. If you came back with low cloud there were no electronic

27:00 aids – you couldn't get in. There was a radio beacon which we called an air an aviation, a non directional beacon. Just a radio signal going out in all directions and we got home and make shore over Gibraltar but we didn't know how low the cloud was. We didn't know whether we could get down and so we turned over the beacon. We turned

27:30 out to go south east which took us fairly close to the Spanish coast of course and these buggers'd open up there with their guns and make it very difficult. We had to let down blind to get under the cloud and I don't think any of us had any trouble doing that. I think many of us let down blind and then of course when once we could see we'd turn back and go and land but the

28:00 problem with the Spanish gunners was worrying and we got the navy on the job. The navy had 16 inch guns of course. The 16 inch gun was at that time the biggest naval gun. It fired a missile of a ton and a quarter – big lump of stuff and we figured we knew where the

28:30 Spanish were firing from and we told the navy and they took their time. They lined a gun up and I don't know how the navy do this but I was told they took great pains about it. They even sighted down the barrel and did all sorts of things and they had one of those trenches of… see the ack ack [anti-aircraft] guns were put in a trench of about six or eight guns and they had one that was in line with the gun and they lined it up exactly

29:00 and when it was all set they just fired the one shot and they had a message ready to take over the border to the Spanish to say, "Unfortunately one of our guns has misfired. We hope it hasn't done any harm." Well of course it cleaned out the whole row of guns. It splattered all the crew everywhere but we never had any trouble with them from there on and shortly after that… what was his name?

29:30 Controlling Spain – what was his name?

Franco?

Franco, General Franco. He decided things were getting a bit out of hand so he decided to invite a batch of officers from Gibraltar up to Seville for the affair and I was one of them. I got an order to go up there and course I'd brought an English-Spanish dictionary

30:00 and studied Spanish like mad and learnt later that we should have been the second crew because the fearer is the time to go the fun after the fear see but it was interesting – I got a lot of pictures of it and…

Did you meet Franco?

No I never met Franco. I don't think my Spanish was good enough

30:30 for that sort of visit at that time. Strangely enough I went on learning Spanish and I've had a number of occasions to speak Spanish since and I did a trip to Mexico of course and spoke Spanish. I dealt with Admiral Placiado in solving the unwanted

31:00 Hercules from the Australian Air Force and of course although we sold three of those Hercules to the World Health Organisation and the other five to Mexico, two are customers approved. You had to get customer approved by ICAO and by ourselves and

By who?

Pardon?

Who did you have to get customers approved by?

The International Civil Aviation Organisation –

31:30 ICAO, and by ourself. And we got those sales to those people and I dealt with Admiral Placiado down in Mexico with a friend of mine John Woods who spoke Spanish better than I did and lives in the States. And you know the bureaucrats here stopped them from going because they weren't getting a cut out of it and eventually those aircraft we had to pay somebody to take 'em away. That was millions of dollars thrown away yeah

32:00 and that's what our bureaucrats are capable of. I haven't put that in my book but I think I should have yeah.

When you went for your trip up to Seville was that a sort of a good will gesture was it?

Yeah.

By Franco?

Yes it was yeah and it was a nice trip – we went up by train. Yeah very interesting and I think I was up there for about a week or 10 days. We were taken

32:30 into various things and what have you.

Did you go to a bullfight while you were up there?

Yes, oh yeah and I've got some pictures yeah. Bullfight turns me off. I don't know whether you've been to a bullfight. Yeah poor old bull hasn't got a chance has he? So I didn't, I wasn't very thrilled about it but I think the one thing that

33:00 you've got to recognise in Spain is the girls really make themselves look lovely for those which they wear typical Spanish dress. Very colourful yeah.

When you were in Gibraltar were you flying all your operations down the west coast of Africa?

No, no we did some

33:30 in… of course one of my daytime ones was across the Med. They suspected something was there. I know we didn't strike anything and we were lucky nothing struck us but… and one was now around, we had to go around, we couldn't fly over Spain but we went 'round Spain and we went west of north and

34:00 we were looking at that stage for large obstacles in the water sighted in the water by other vessels which I think they thought was part of the Mulberry – the special wharf made for the invasion. I remember that I think I did about six hours on that op but we didn't find anything. I think it would have been further north

34:30 frankly.

I wanted to ask you a couple of technical questions.

Sure.

One was about the relationship between the air pressure and the altimeter.

Yeah.

You were telling us that if… that the height that you're flying at the pressure of the air can affect…?

Let me tell you about that. You know you see the weather man on the television showing you that this is a high pressure air and that's a low pressure area and the… where it

35:00 travels from west to east on the southern peninsula here and I think it's the same in the northern hemisphere too. Well when the pressure's high the altimeter reads low because that indicates that you're nearer the ground. High pressure… see a column of air above the earth – as you come down the pressure gets higher doesn't it nearer the ground as or the weight of that column of air on it.

35:30 And of course if you sit your altimeter at a time when you're in an area of high pressure and then as you fly along you fly into a low pressure area, well suddenly you're, you appear to have gone up and that's dangerous because if you think you're higher above the ground than you are and you go down to put yourself at that height you can crash into the ground so…

36:00 I don't think this was ever done until after the war. I was flying with Ansett when this was brought in – that we change the Q and H. The Q and H – the Q code was part of the wartime code of symbols that warned us of an occasion that we needed to know about and Q and H happened to be the barometric pressure at a certain point. Well when you set the Q and H

36:30 there was a figure on the altimeter where you could set that and that always corrected your altimeter reading for the correct height.

Well I'll just take your word for it.

You can ring the met man he'll tell you.

I assume that modern aircraft have got instruments which make all these corrections automatically?

Modern aircraft do exactly the same –

37:00 they adjust the Q and H to get the right barometric pressure.

OK.

Yeah.

The other question I wanted to ask you. When you said you were flying the Wellington and the bomb engine flew out?

Yeah.

You were flying on one engine. Now how is it possible for an aircraft to fly on one engine?

Well it's hard with what's called asymmetric flying of course. You've got the pull of one engine pulling you out of true and that means a lot of pressure on an appropriate rudder, a tilt of the ardarmons to help

37:30 the drag on that side and of course enough power to overcome the fact that you've lost an engine. And the extra power you put on adds to the pressure you need to put on the rudder, the pressure you need to put on the ardarmon to hold it straight.

So do you have to fly an angle?

It helps we generally tip in towards the motor that's giving the power because that helps to overcome a bit of the drag yeah.

I'll remember that next

38:00 **time I'm in some sort of air emergency?**

Yeah never fly in a twin engine aircraft where they're only using one engine to save petrol yeah. They don't do that of course. You don't save petrol – you use a lot more.

Right because you have to increase the power so much.

You got to increase the power and that one up in the rich range. You see the cruise range is engine is operating more economically yeah.

Tape 7

00:31 **Jack, were you in Gibraltar when the end of the war came?**

Yep.

Can you tell me about that time?

Yeah we had a celebration, which for Gibraltar was quite a big thing. We flew a formation flight over Gib was a pretty ragged affair in my view. We were not formation flyers you know. We all went out on individual we all did fairly well though and

01:00 and the locals loved it and there were certain celebrities held. It was very small ships. I don't think I got invited to any of them you know amongst the 'haute valloy' of running the isle of the rock, it wasn't really an island. But I did get

01:30 an aircraft to fly back to the UK. Our squadron was then flown back to Anglesea on to… oh what's the aerodrome on the island? Anglesea. And I got one of them which was a very favoured factor. And of course once we got back to England we had to make ourselves known at

02:00 Australia House where we could be found at any time cause there was nothing they had for us and most

of us took a job in the film industry. I did a film with George Formby. It was, I think it was called ‘George back in Civvy Street’ and it was all done on a boat and up

02:30 on the side there was tons of water in a big bucket, great big trough, which they tipped down on to the boat as a wave coming overboard at one stage, but I got to know George fairly well. See George was a motorcyclist and I was a motorcyclist and George’s wife used to drive the directors, the film directors, crazy. She was always saying, “No don’t do this. Do it some other way,” and there was a blow up one time. This was in

03:00 the film studio right in London.

Shepparton?

Pardon?

Shepparton or Pinewood?

No I think it was Gainsborough.

Gainsborough oh yeah?

Yeah.

Gainsborough Pictures?

Yeah and George threw his arms out in the air and went out for a smoke outside and I went out there and he was there and we had a talk. I thought George was quite a nice bloke and of course I

03:30 always liked his films so there you are. I s’pose the biggest film we were in though was ‘Caesar and Cleopatra’ I think it was. Great Roman thing you know.

Jack I must have missed something here but how did you get into the film industry? One minute you’re a pilot and the next minute you’re in the film business?

Well there were a lot of people hanging around London for jobs and I with a lot of others got a ticket in actors’

04:00 equity.

What did you do – just rock up and ask for one?

Yeah that’s all and then you go to the film company and say what have you got going? Have you got anything for me? Well they needed so many extras in so many of these films.

Did you know anyone in the business?

No.

Who’d got you in?

No didn’t know anyone. The biggest film was the ‘Caesar and Cleopatra’ one and it was run by an Australian associate director as a matter of fact. Fellow named Hill,

04:30 yeah. That was a bit of fun but Wilbur Roule and I – Wilbur was a radio operator in Merv Hargraves crew and he and I were friends ‘cause we were both photographers you see and we decided to buy a motorbike and do a tour right ‘round the British Isles. Being in the forces we could go into the canteen and get a couple of bottles of whisky etcetera etcetera and we filled our shoulder bags

05:00 with ‘em and that got us enough petrol to get right around England and Wales – England, Scotland and Wales there you are yeah there you are that’s another thing we did. What I wanted to do of course I… see I had a problem at this stage. I had a guilt complex which I couldn’t get over. All the boys

05:30 or so many of the boys that I trained with as fighters in Canada had been killed. Now I was young. I wasn’t married. I didn’t have a family at home but most of them did. They were all older than me and they had a wife and a couple of children at home but they were all killed. Excuse me I’m emotional about it I’m sorry but I couldn’t help feeling why should I live and they’d die

06:00 and that affected me very seriously until long after I got home and I think it still affects me and so I didn’t want to come home and there was a wing commander or a group captain setting up squadrons to go to Japan. He was located in Kodak House, which Australia House was there on The Strand and Kodak House was along there.

06:30 I forget the name of the street now but not far, a couple of hundred yards along there, and there was Kodak House and he setting up this and I went to see him and after a couple of talks he put me on the squadron to go to Japan and… well it meant I didn’t have to come home. You might think that’s silly. I was in love with Marg of course and wanted to come home and marry her but I couldn’t face anyone at home over this stupid guilt complex

07:00 and I mean wasn’t my fault that… you know… you can’t go just feel according to the facts. You, your

feelings are controlled by the pressures. Well I got on the squadron and he said, “You’ll have to go down to oh somewhere in the west and do an OT [Operational Tour] on Wellington’s.” I said, “I’ve done an operational tour on Wellington’s.” He said, “Doesn’t matter I want you to do my…” so of course I agreed to that

07:30 and two days later the first atom bomb landed in Japan and I hung on and then they dropped another one and the Japs looked like… so I pulled out of it and I came home. Now I got a job in Europe as an investigator of war crimes and I was particularly interested in finding out what happened to

08:00 Bob Neilson I told you before and some mongrel with a contact inside got me off and put himself on it. That wasn’t worth arguing about so of course I came home. I came home in the Aquitania and the Aquitania had to go ‘round. It couldn’t come through the Suez Canal – it was too big.

08:30 Came ‘round the Cape of Good Hope and it was crammed with troops you’ve got no idea. And the troop commander was a British high ranking officer and course he didn’t believe in negotiation with the troops. If they were unhappy well too bad they had to sit there and take it. Well when the ship anchored

09:00 at Cape Town they wouldn’t take it into the wharf cause they knew we’d all bot off but there were lighters coming backwards and forwards the ships all the time to take to take things off and put things on and every lighter went back to the coast loaded with Australians and oh I don’t s’pose there were more than half a dozen troops left on the boat a couple of days. So they went ahead and they loaded the boat up and then they made an announcement.

09:30 They had radio cars going around South Africa; “If you want to go to Australia you’d better board now.” But in that time I made some good friends in Cape Town and they took us up and out into the, up to the Cape and you know various places to be seen so it was interesting. But of course we eventually went back to the boat and the boat pulled out and we came home to Australia.

10:00 Fortunately it docked here in Melbourne first and of course I was off and some of the some of the boys stayed on to go to Sydney and some got off the train to Western Australia etc. But of course the family were there and we were taken home and my mother, my stepmother was almost a professional cook

10:30 and she turned on a party for everybody. Margaret’s mother and father turned on a party in Scott’s Hotel and had all their friends there and so involved. Well Marg and I of course got together very readily and I still had this problem but I didn’t let on and we decided to get married

11:00 and Margaret’s father didn’t like that. He decided it couldn’t happen. Don’t you get they’re silly he had no hope of stopping us – we were committed but he was in the navy and he was in Adelaide and he said he couldn’t come home so it’d have to be put off. We put it off about four times and then we simply sent him a telegram to say

11:30 we are being married at the so and so hotel on such and such a day, we’d love you to be there. He came home and we were married in his house. He had a nice house and it was a wonderful affair, really was. Of course Margaret’s mother must be one of the most beautiful women that have been known in this earth. She was a lovely person and

12:00 so we got a lot of help there but we had a good wedding and she brought us a night in the Windsor Hotel in Melbourne our first night. Gee it was lovely and of course that started us on getting back to be a civilian again.

12:30 I was discharged shortly after. There was no hold up but there were certain courses open to us for training. I wanted to be a journalist. I wanted to be a writer anyway and a journalist looked like the thing that was open to me but the bureaucrats who ran it didn’t give me the chance. You’ve got no idea and I wasn’t able to do it. I’ve always been sorry about that.

13:00 I do write. It’s not just that book – I’ve written other things but I would like to have been had the training that I’d have got with it. I tend to repeat things at times, which is not good writing and there you are. I had a very good

13:30 solicitor in the early days – Allan Hunt who became a state member of parliament and he took an action for me and he kept repeating this business and I, after the action, I said, “What do you keep saying that for Allan?” He said, “Now listen,” he said, “you take it from me. If you make a good point in the court it may be heard and it may not. If you make it twice it’ll be heard. If you make it three times it’ll definitely be heard.

14:00 So don’t worry about repeating.” But it’s not… I use it in the way… it’s not good writing never mind. My book about the Ansett thing of course is a message. It’s not a… it’s not intended to be a novel or I’m not challenging Bill Shakespeare or anything like that but the message is clear. Now I have repeated things in that intentionally because

14:30 what happened to the Ansett employees was just nasty. When you read that paper I’ve given you you’ll understand and I think I’ve only put that in my book as an insert because I couldn’t get the evidence. I think that’s the reason that CASA was used to kill Ansett. CASA’s done a lot of bad things.

When did you join Ansett?

Pardon?

When did you join Ansett?

15:00 I joined Ansett in nineteen forty… ’43 I think. That’s in the book too because Arthur Thompson – who was the Chief Pilot then, who only lives a couple of miles from here – I went to see him when I wrote the book and he was only too pleased to put a… and of course we put the date in. ’43 I’m pretty sure it was. No, no, not ’43 what am I talking about? That’s the middle of the war.

15:30 ’48 I think it was. Yeah ’48.

So you joined Ansett very soon after you… after the war?

No, no after once Marg and I got married and she said, “What’re you going to do?” and I said, “Well I want to be a pilot.” ANA – Australian National Airways was the major airline here then and Johnson… can’t think of his Christian name. Keith Johnson I think it was…

16:00 Clive Johnson – he was the man who did the appointments for staff at ANA and of course it was Essendon. There was no Tullamarine. Essendon was the main airport and I made arrangements to see him and I went out on the appointed day. He talked to me a bit but he said, “Look,” and he had a four drawer filing cabinet and he said, “all those applications for pilots with a lot more time than

16:30 you and you haven’t got a hope.” So what could I do? I went home and Don Strong – one of our pilots on the squadron who lived close – he was the same. He wanted to get a job and we couldn’t and so we decided… oh yes I’d gone back to Don Clarke that’s right. He made me manager of his shop because that hand was

17:00 out and I couldn’t really do a lot of the things I should do for him I resigned and I said, “Thanks very much Don,” and there were reasons I should have gone back to him because I… which I might tell you about but Don and I then decided we were both amateur photographers, we’d have a go at buying a studio and running it and we bought a studio in Dandenong run by a fellow called Howard Corem.

17:30 It was a bit of a joke really. I don’t know how he sold his photographs – they were horrible. They were really terrible and although we were amateurs we did a fair job and I specialised in portraiture and I have done some very good portraits and child studies. I love child studies and so we were fairly successful with the photographic business. During that time of course because the

18:00 equipment was appalling I designed and built a camera for professional work and I’ve got a copy of it in the shop there I’ll show you. I’m overhauling it at the moment to lend to a friend. And whilst we were running the photographic business we decided we’d have another go at getting a job in aviation. We came down to… this is two years later and we came down to Essendon, had a look around and TAA [Trans-Australia Airlines] had

18:30 been formed and because it was new it was running a class to teach people about the DC3 [Douglas Dakota bomber]. See the DC3 was the premier airline then and so we sat in the class and we were there for about a week and the fellow that ran it was a bit of an actor in my view. He used to wear a bean stalker hat a what’s a name pipe and all that sort of thing and he said, pulled the pipe out of his mouth, “You two down the back there.

19:00 Who are you?” And of course a few questions he realised we weren’t on the list. He said, “You’re not on my list. This is very secret advice. You can’t stay in here.” So he threw us out so we went up to ANA’s [Australian National Airways] aerodrome control office which was under the control of a RFC [Royal Flying Corps (now RAF)] pilot from World War I and he was a bonza old bloke and we told him what we’d done. I said, “I…we’ve been in the

19:30 TAA school but they’ve thrown us out because it’s secret information on the DC3,” and we all laughed and we said we weren’t asking for pay or anything we just want to get qualified so when there’s a job we can… “Oh you’re the boy for us. You go down and see Ted Wall,” Ted Wall was the senior instructor in ANA’s school, “and you tell him I sent you.” And we went down to see Ted Wall and he said, “Oh of course. Come in,” you know and of course we did the course. We both got

20:00 qualified on the DC3 for the engineering certification so we just needed an opportunity. Well Don’s father was a friend of man who became leader of the Labor Party.

Jock Evett?

Who?

Evett?

He’s the man that’s the one yeah and he got Don a job in TAA. I was left out in the cold

20:30 and I thought, “well this is no good.” There’s a reason for that too incidentally. Don got married about the same time as I did and his wife died when their first child, our child, was born. It was a very sad business and I felt for Don. And Don went off on a holiday to his in-law’s place in Cottesloe, I think, in Western Australia and I was left to drag the business on my own. It went on for months and I couldn’t

stand it any longer so I eventually wrote to Don and said, “Come on Don. You got

21:00 off your tail and helped me,” and there was a bit of resentment about that so I don’t think his father wanted to get me a job in TAA. But I got to know a very nice old cove at the Royal Victorian Aero Club. You’ve got to think Ansett was a tiny organisation at this stage. They had an Airspeed Envoy, which of course I’d flown in England for my twin conversion

21:30 and they had a Lockheed 12. One could carry 12 passengers and one could carry eight passengers and Dick, Dick Hood that’s what his name and Dick had an eye trouble. He used to wear a tennis eye-shade as he worked on the bench and he used to do a bit of programming for the Ansett crowd

22:00 and he used to keep me in touch and one day he rang me up and he said, “Jack you get out to Ansett tomorrow and see Arthur Tomkin. Tell him I sent you. They’re getting their first DC3.” And I went out and Arthur looked at my logbook and my licence with the DC3 endorsement. He said, “Here, well come on a trip tomorrow down to Tas.” So I went along as a spare you see and that’s when I joined.

22:30 So I was thrilled and I got a command in four years. Poor old Don in TAA didn’t get a command for about, I believe it was seven or nine years. Terrible setback. So of course I had a lot of command out before Don but and I had a wonderful check captain – Doug, Doug Johnson. He’s now 91. I visited him in Sydney when I was up there recently. 91. He and

23:00 Joan his wife are still a great couple and he… I was doing well in Ansett. I got a command as I said in four years. I kept on flying for them and oh yes it used to worry me. The young fellers in Ansett used to talk about the war as if it was a game when I lost a lot of friends

23:30 in the war and it upset me so I moved out. I went to Burma. I flew in Burma for quite a time. Allan Gifford was the chief pilot there and Allan was an old friend of mine. I knew Allen. He in fact wrote to me and asked me would I come and give him a hand. Now give him a hand was important. Union of Burma Airways, which was a… let’s just touch a little bit on the Burma history. Aung San,

24:00 to my mind an absolute idiot, who is the champion of Burma – of course he got Burma its independence – the most foolish thing he could have done in my view. I’ve written a book about Burma and I’ve named the time when it was under British rule as the golden days of Burma because it was the first time in their lives that Burmese had a wage, could send their children to school, had a hospital to go to

24:30 and all those things that, you know, we all think and I think they think is important too. But Aung San was going to get them independence and that meant almost certainly that most of those things’d be wrecked. Well, who was the Labour leader in England after the war? Remember? Followed Churchill.

Wilson?

Who?

Wilson?

No,

25:00 oh you’ll know him but anyway he gave Burma its independence and if ever… I can’t think of anything that was sillier because what could Burma do? They were insisting on throwing Britain out. They, nobody could take over all those British companies that were building Burma and but of course he got independence and he came home

25:30 and had an election and he was the major president. He won the election of course and so one of his political opponents murdered him – he was gone. You know the present girl, Aung San Su Kyi, is his daughter and I knew Aung San when she was about seven. I was in Burma at that time. She was a lovely kid. She is a wonderful woman now – she is marvelous. I don’t class her with her father. Her father did the harm

26:00 but Aung San Su Kyi is marvelous and anyway that was Burma and I and Allan asked me to go up there because they were trying to take essential food and other things into the isolated tribes. Now the history of the isolated tribes is interesting. For centuries one tribe had attacked

26:30 another and the winning tribe murdered all the men and took the women into their tribe. That broke down the breeding a bit but it meant that here was a nation with just millions of women and no men and so that’s what brought polygamy to Burma – the women brought it in. The women had no hope of a marriage if a man had one wife and it was the women that brought polygamy to Burma and of course while I was there I visited homes

27:00 with four wives. Very nice fellow in the in the air force squadron in the air force – he had four wives. He was a friend of Allan Gifford and we went there and visited. We went to visit three or four times but you know where we normally… we as monogamous or whatever we call ourselves, one wife’s enough – I don’t know how you’d handle two but anyway…

27:30 I have a tremendous life with one wife I don’t want any more but we don’t understand and we think that polygamy is all wrong but they don’t. The women have brought it in and the women are patrolling it.

There are no fights. In a house were there was four women there are no fights. A woman that upsets it gets thrown out and she knows her chances of getting another home where she can have children of her own

28:00 is very, very remote and when we went to visit… gosh I know him so well and I can't think of his name, but anyway, when we went to visit him oh in we go you know and he'd sit at the head of the table and Allan'd sit one side and I'd sit the other and order in drinks and the drinks of the lime and water of course and water boiled and

28:30 his first wife might come and sit alongside us. The first wife always has a priority position but there's absolutely no… another wife'd come along and sit one on either side and they'd chat away and the kids'd be rushing around and the kids all loved all the mums and the mums loved all the kids. It was just lovely it really was and I know we find that hard to understand but I've seen it and it was wonderful to see. Anyway we did the job. We

29:00 served the tribes, the head hunters from right up the north. The… what do they call them? I know 'em because I went into their village. My co-pilot was terrified, "Oh no Captain they cook you! They cut you up and cook you!" and I said, "Oh rubbish. Come on. We bring 'em a service and they won't do," and I walked through there the… what are they? Anyway they're a shy lot,

29:30 very shy but you see I worked on the other side. See they're on the eastern side of northern Burma and their main town is a place called Singkaling Hkamti. Lovely name isn't it, Singkaling Hkamti. And it was neat – couldn't get a cleaner… They were on the Chindwin River and

30:00 anyway the Chins, the Moors and over on the western side of course you've got the Chinese county of Unan and the principal people in that area are the Lisu people and they're nice people too but can you understand when before the British came they used to fight each other and kill each other.

30:30 Well the British stopped all that and the British were there for a hundred years give or take a year and so there was intermarriage. A Lisu might marry a Chin and so forth and so there were grandchildren the both sides and it was becoming quite beautiful really was. Two tribes would meet in the forest. Instead of fighting each other they'd all be talking about their grandchildren

31:00 and all that yeah it was lovely. And I worked there for quite a time, about a year I think, but I got to know the people very well and I was always welcome wherever I went. And anyway the Burmese killed their own airline. Allan Gifford, his wife would never come to Burma

31:30 and he had children too – two lovely kids and after a while he said to me, well I forget her name. A nice very neat women – she was, she's coming and so forth. 'Cause I lived in the same house as Allan and I went looking for another house and when he heard he said, "No, no, don't go and get another house we're leaving. She's," he said, "my wife won't stay

32:00 here and I'm going with her and taking the kids. I've been here long enough." He'd been there about 10 years, I think Allan, and when he left, oh one of the other boys became chief pilot and all he wanted to do was get on with the management so he made us fly 140 hours a month. The world maximum approved for pilot's airline flying is

32:30 125 hours a month. Now when you're operating in a country like Burma where the temperature's very high you didn't need a fire even in the midst of winter – it was still too hot – 140 hours is a strain. Nonetheless we all did it for a while but one or two got sick and so forth and so well then we'd had a go. Alec Hair was the fellow that became captain that's right and we'd had a go at Alec Hair and he realised he'd done the wrong thing and he

33:00 couldn't get the management to change it back to 125 so he left and Bob Bithell took his place. And Bob Bithell was hopeless – he let 'em fly us 180 hours a month. Well that was just silly. In a couple of weeks a few of the boys were too sick to fly and the whole thing was closing down and so they really I s'pose they really said, "If you won't fly 180 hours a month you're finished out you go," and so we left.

33:30 I had of course put my money in the bank and they wouldn't let me draw it. I came out of Burma with nothing. We sold wedding presents, we sold everything we could and then I had to do a very dangerous foreign currency deal to get enough to get our fare to London on the SS Derbyshire I think it was. And we did that and we got to England with no money. Fortunately Margaret had

34:00 friends living in Eyling, wonderful friends. Welches like her mother was Welch and went and stayed with them for while 'cause I had to change my Australian license to a British license to get a job in England and the main school was in Eyling and they lived just up the hill. So I did that and I got a British license and then we moved out. We didn't tell them we didn't have any money and we had enough to buy a car –

34:30 an old Wolseley. Good looking car the Wolseley 18 so we could put all our stuff in. What we had left we had to… and we sold all the stuff at Rangoon – all our wedding presents, all our cutlery and oh you've got no idea what we had to sell but we still had stuff that we didn't want to part with, so we got the Wolseley. And then we had to get a job.

35:00 I was looking in a real estate window in Bishop's Stortford, which is up by Stanstead. Stanstead was an aerodrome where we thought we might get work and I was looking in this real estate office late

afternoon one day and the fellow came along and he said, “You looking for accommodation?” And I said, “Sure am,” but I said, “I can’t pay for it, that’s the trouble. I’m out of dough. No money.”

35:30 He said, “Well look, I’ve got a cottage which is being occupied by mother but she died a couple of years ago and it’s empty and if you’d like to use it you’re welcome.” What a Godsend and of course out we went and they gave us a wonderful welcome his wife and of course the kids loved it and they had a great big golden retriever who was everybody’s friend and we went and had a look

36:00 at this cottage. It was damp of course – nobody had lived in it for a couple of years but we lit a fire in the fireplace and got it going and moved in there the next day. We had enough money for the essentials of cutlery and plates and things and we got them the next day and then I had to get a job but we were comfortable at that time.

36:30 Well Skyways we’ve got to get back a bit here. The Labour government under the name we can’t think of?

Callaghan?

Who?

Jim Callaghan?

No.

McMillan?

No, he was a conservative McMillan. We’ll think of it. Anyway the Liberals had taken power and they had changed the aviation

37:00 situation in England. With Labour in power they’d only let BOAC [British Overseas Airways Corporation] and British European Airways, the national airlines, operate. Nobody else. Well of course when the British opened it up a number of charter companies started. Skyways was one and Skyways bought a lot of Lancaster’s that had been made out to civil use. They called them the York. It had a passenger freighter body and it was a very useful aeroplane

37:30 and they advertised for pilots. I think they wanted a hundred pilots. It was an enormous number so of course I popped on the train and went down to apply and all day I waited and I went to see the girl and I said, “You know I’m up from Bishops Stortford. I have to catch a train home. Can you tell me when I might be seen?” And she said, “Oh you’re the fellow that’s only flown little aeroplanes

38:00 aren’t you?” I’d six thousand hours on DC3’s and I thought I was an airline pilot. I said, “What do you mean?” She said, “Well you’ve only flown DC3’s. You haven’t flown four engine aircraft?” I said, “No.” She said, “I don’t think you’ve got much hope but I’ll find out for you.” So she came back a little while and said, “No we’ve got enough four engine pilots, we don’t want you.” So there was another fellow there, nice fellow Mick Gratey. Just out of the RAF

38:30 and he said, “Listen, if we don’t do any good here what about coming around to Fred Laker’s office?” and I said, “Yeah be pleased to” ‘cause it was too late then. It was after five. “So I’ll see you here next Monday.” So I went back home and told Marg the bad news of course because we had no money, we had no money coming in, no resource. Next thing to go was to sell the Wolseley but we needed it so badly for

39:00 travel. We weren’t on a train line or anything like that. Anyway Monday I went down and met Mick Gratey in at Fred Laker’s office in west London and arranged to see the operations manager. Must think of his name – don’t know it.

39:30 Anyway, finally saw him and he said, “Oh well,” he said, “can you fly Bristol Freighter?” I said, ”Oh I’ll soon learn twin engine aircraft you see.” He said, “Well if you can get it on your license you know do the engineering.” I didn’t have to do the flying. He said, “I’ll send you straight out to Berlin.” They were doing a Berlin lift you see and he said, “The

40:00 Air Registration Board do the exams. They’re at such and such an address. Go and see ‘em.” Went ‘round there and the fellow said, “Oh yes, we’re having exams.” I think it was about a weeks time so he said, “If you can, get the notes on the aeroplane and study up. You can sit the exam. See how you go.” Well I went back to Laker’s office and I got a copy of the notes on the aeroplane and Marg always helped me with studying aircraft types. I did them.

40:30 I was ready for the exam the following Monday, went down and I reckon I passed it easy. I finished it early, went through the papers about three times. I was right.

Tape 8

00:32 **Jack we’ve just got to the moment of the Berlin airlift. You’re in England. This is 1948 is it?**

No it was well after that.

'49 probably?

No it was well after that. It was after I left Ansett. It was into the 50's. See the media don't print it. Once the excitement's over they don't print it and people

01:00 don't know it goes on. Went on for years and when I was there the Russians were still shooting up our people. I could tell you about that but yeah well no what we'd done is I'd agreed to set this Bristol exam hadn't I?

Yep.

And I got the papers from Freddie Laker's office, went home. Marg helped me study

01:30 the technical. I went down the following Monday and sat the exam a hundred percent I felt so sure. I reworked the papers and I was sure. As I went out the door the fellow said, "You'll be back for performance this afternoon Mr Ellis?" I said, "Performance? What's that?" "Oh don't you know about performance?" It was new. The Air Registration Board, the British Air Registration Board had raised this requirement of pilots being able to understand the performance of their machine. In other words, at a certain weight and a certain temperature

02:00 and a certain elevation of the airfield it took so many feet to take off. Very good mechanics it was there was no doubt about it but nobody'd heard about it. He said, "Oh go back to your company. They'll tell you all about it." I went back to Fred Laker's office and I went to see Normal Jennings the operation's manager and I said, "What about that?" He said. "What are you talkin' about?" And I went to see Pop Kareris there oh, the pilot. He said, "Don't know what you're talkin' about." And then there's a fellow in a

02:30 sport's blazer. He said, "Oh Mr Ellis. Come and I'll show you about that." And we went over to where there was a desk at the side on a side wall and he laid out all the papers and showed me how the figures worked and all that and he said, "Take you a day or two to study it. Take the papers home but make sure you bring them back to me." So I said, "Yes thanks very much," and as I walked away from him Diane Poland who ran the office said, "You know Mr Laker?" and I said, "No, never met him." She said,

03:00 "That was him." Now he knew more than any of his staff and his pilots or anything else and that remained the case all the time I worked with him. He was the best man I ever worked for in aviation, he really was. Anyway I took the papers home and we studied the stuff and I came down, passed the exam and I didn't even get home. I went in to see Norman Jennings. He said, "Good. Over to Berlin. I've got Chris Couche going over there this afternoon in a freighter and he can introduce you to the aeroplane."

03:30 And I said, "What about home? They don't even know." "Oh well, you can ring them up." "And what about my pay 'cause we got no money." "You just tell me who to send it to and I'll send it." That's what they did. It was marvelous wasn't it Marg. And so I went with Chris Couche over to Germany that night. We landed in Hamburg and stayed at Hamburg that night. It was a filthy night – the weather was terrible. Chris was a good pilot though and he knew the Bristol Freighter well

04:00 and we stayed the night. The following morning he took me out to the Hamburg airfield. It was Hamburg we stayed at and introduced me to a fellow named Case Linktonstein and Case said, "Oh I'll be teaching you," and Case was a Dutchman with that unfortunate of all Dutch expressions. He was overbearing and pig-headed and oh, he was terrible.

04:30 But I flew with Case and on the way down we went from Hamburg to Berlin and the British operation was Hamburg-Berlin and Berlin-Hanover and they were the only routes we did. And on the way down there's the mess of a York spread all over the corridor. The corridor's only so wide and you have to stay in it you see and it was easy to stay in it because there was an electronic beam beamed down it

05:00 which showed on instruments on the panel in the aircraft and you could keep right on the centre line. And I think this aircraft had been right on the centre line but it'd been shot down by the Russians – everyone killed and so that was a sobering sort of a thing. We get down to Berlin and Allen… what's Allen's name… Fermin. Allen Fermin was in charge of the operation. Allan Fermin was a marvelous fellow. Still

05:30 friend of mine today and he said, "Well I'll put you with Casey. He'll teach you about the Bristol." Well I didn't know enough about it to say anything then and of course off I went and we did alternate Hanovers and Hamburgers. And we were coming… the approach we used Templehoff. There were three aerodromes at Berlin. At Templehoff was the one we used. Tremendous aerodrome. It was built

06:00 nineteen sixty… 1936 Olympics as the show aerodrome and it is the best aerodrome in the world today I would say. The hangars are built on a counterbalance – there's no posts on the aerodrome side and aerodrome's can come in with the doors in. Aeroplanes can come in anywhere and big aeroplanes. I'd say the Jumbo can still go in there today. The construction

06:30 is just fabulous. Anyway I flew with Case. Oh yes and I was going to say the approach from the west was through the slotters we called it. Two apartment buildings and you went through the centre. Now the weather in Berlin was pretty well always instrument weather. You're always on instruments and I liked

instrument flying so it didn't worry me. Case didn't like instrument flying. I could tell that from the first time I flew with him. He was frightened of it

07:00 and we were going through there one day and I wear glasses – Woolstencraft industrial glasses which I brought when I first got a Command with DC3's here in Australia. They're over 50 years old. I can show you them – they're in the car. Have you ever kept sunglasses for 50 years? Well of course they cost me a fair bit of money and they're haze piercing and that's why I brought them and we're going through the slot and Case leans over and whips my glasses off and throws them in the back of the aeroplane.

07:30 Well I unclicked my seat and slid back and said, "Well you take it Case." "No, no, no come back here," cause he panicked about instrument flying you see. And I said, "No you've taken the control you fly it." "Oh going round tower, going round," and he was in quite a sweat. Eventually we got on the ground anyway and it was one of the worst aerodrome approaches I've ever seen, ever experienced. And I spoke to Allan Fermin

08:00 that night. 'Course I'd been flying with Case about a week or so anyway. Lot of time on a simple aeroplane I think and so he gave me a command and I then didn't have anything to do with Case and so that was alright. Whilst we were on the lift I was converted to the York which was a Lancaster made out for civil work. And I converted also on to the Tudor. The Tudor was the biggest aeroplane in aviation at the time.

08:30 It was built for the South American run but two of them had gone missing on the run with no trace of what had happened. They didn't know whether their heater, which was a jenatrol heater – we used them in a lot of aeroplanes since then – we didn't know whether that had burnt the aeroplane or they didn't know whether it had had multiple engine failures or what happened. But they had no message or anything else and they were banned from the South American run. They were BOAC's connection with

09:00 South America and so Fred brought 23 of them for about a hundred and ten thousand or something and he brought all the spare motors that went with them and the spare motors that went with them also fitted the Argonaut and BOAC was still using the Argonaut. When they wanted a motor Fred charged them about twenty thousand each so there you are. He made a fortune out of it but it was a nice aeroplane to fly. Big aeroplane but a nice

09:30 aeroplane to fly and of course went well. I was on the run for about what'd you say 12 months something like that? Fair time wasn't I? I overdid it at one stage and they sent me home. Well first of all they sent Marg out because you see we were doing about a month on the lift and then a couple of weeks at home and I had

10:00 accepted a double run one time but I got this problem – I was pretty sick and the doctor out there said he's to be taken home not allowed to fly an aeroplane. He's a passenger and he's got to have six months off. Well that shook me of course and I thought, "This is going to be the end." And when I settled back in England for a while I went down to see Fred and he said, "Jack don't worry about it. You're on full pay 'til you're ready." And I thought that was fabulous

10:30 because it wasn't done much in those days. We in the meantime had brought a cottage from Mary Richardson. Now Mary Richardson was one of the original suffragettes in England and unbeknown to us, 'cause when we went to look at the place it was nice, but unbeknown to us she had a million cats and when we went to have a live in it the cats moved us out. It was appalling the smell and so but we got over that 'cause Dad was a master builder and I did a lot of

11:00 building with him the early days and I ran waterproof concrete floors to cover it all and finished up a lovely cottage didn't it Marg? We had a royal blue carpet on it and we had an antique table painted ivory white and that. It was just looked beautiful it really did and now oh yes and then I was put on the far east run.

11:30 Fred Laker took me off the Berlin lift after that time and put me on the run to Singapore in the York and I enjoyed that. That was a marvelous run and I used to stop on the way at Beirut, at Bombay sometimes at Rangoon

12:00 and Singapore. And two nights off in Singapore and go back the same way you see.

Now is this... what's the airline you're flying for?

This is Fred Laker's. He called himself 'Air Charter London'. He had an office in West London and course Fred Laker got into it. He was wrecking aircraft. Fred Laker was basically an engineer and when the Berlin's

12:30 lift study had two Yorks on the scrap heap well he rapidly bolted them together and went out and started in the Berlin lift and he never looked back. And so I s'pose I did that Singapore run for a year or so didn't I Marg and at some stage along there he sent me out to Beirut to

13:00 do something – can't remember what that was for. Was just a short time wasn't it Marg? And I ran into Bob Gibson. No I was no… I did yes I was still with Fred Laker that's right and I was on the office one Saturday morning. Very

13:30 unusual. You don't see crews in the office on the weekend but I was 'cause I did some photography for

him. He'd brought some shooters and he was converting them into what he called the super trader and I did some pictures that he could use for advertising. So I was in the office Saturday morning and he said, "Jack I'd like you to go out to Middle East." He said, "I've sold an Arab out there a couple of Yorks and he's just makin' a mess of it. I just want you to go out show him how to run an airline." I laughed. I said, "Fred,

14:00 be the blind leading the blind. I've never done it in my life." "Oh but you think," he said, "I can tell you about pilots because you know all my pilots," and he said, "They want more money. They want to get home or they want to get into bed with the hostess. That's what the average pilots are but you're a thinker. You think." And he said, "I think you can do it and I'd like you to do it." And I said, "Well you're the boss Fred." Out I go and I went out there and I took over this operation

14:30 for Abu Heider. 'Transmitted Iranian Airways' he called himself and of course it was in a shocking mess. Oh I mean blind Freddie could have improved it really but it was my forte. I did well at it. Everything fell into place. It took me about a month to get it really singing and of course we got it going very well and we virtually put Middle East Airlines out of business.

15:00 The major business in out of Beirut was to run food and essentials to the oil companies and the Gulf, in the Persian Gulf – the Arabian Gulf they now call it. And Middle East had had that business on their own for quite a time. There was another company – Lebanese International, who flew C46's.

15:30 Now that's a bigger aircraft than the DC3 and that did well but I don't know why but they didn't seem to take a lot of the business. When we got Transmitted Iranian going we took everything. I think there was a second reason. See on the Berlin lift we could load a York in 17 minutes. It

16:00 might sound precise but timing was important on the lift. You had to keep going and we had to do three trips each a day. Each aircraft did three trips and so the loading time was important. The Germans were very good. They… when the aircraft came in they went the doors and out came any rubbish and then in went the lugg – 17 minutes regularly. Well here I am in Beirut with 17 loaders if you please. Not

16:30 five or six like the Germans had. Seven, no 23 loaders. 23 loaders I had and they would take so long to load the York that the eggs'd go rotten. I mean I'm not talking about loading in two or three hours. I'm talking about loading in 24 hours that's how they were. And I pulled them aside one day and I said, "Now listen boys," – I'm in charge of the operation at this stage see. You've got to shake it up. "These things we loaded in the Berlin lift in 17…" "Oh

17:00 that's impossible Captain oh it's…" "Well," I said, "it's not. I've seen it done and you're either gonna do it or we're going out of business," and of course there's a passenger size door there, there's a freight size door eight feet wide there and there's another passenger door. Open 'em all together, put a line in the aircraft. "You load from there to there and you load the main part and you load," and I got 'em going and we got it loaded in about oh an hour 20 or something like that. Couldn't

17:30 believe it, but of course that sent everything over to the Gulf fresh and good and we started to take all the business. Well I didn't think about taking the business from the others. I was just in charge of Abu Heider and it went well. I went back to England that's right and they went so well they were the first people

18:00 to use the 747F as a freighter. How about that? And of course they were the first people to prang a 747, which they did on Athens. And of course there's all sorts of squeals, "I should go back there," and all sorts of things but I didn't want to go back there and I did one or two things and yeah went back with Marg. And we decided our parents were getting old and

18:30 aging and having a few ills and my cousin, who was transport officer for Australia House and picked up the politicians from Australia that went to England, and of course they talked and he was an oral receiver of all the information. He said, "Jack your country needs your advice on aviation as bad as anywhere here. Why don't you go and see if you can do something about it?" Well with our parents feeling crook and in fact having

19:00 some ills and being fairly elderly at this stage plus that we decided to come home. And when we were home we lived with my parents at Marshall Street Ivanhoe and of course it was nice being home we all loved it you know. And phone rang one night and Dad went to answer it. He had the phone in the passage way you know – wasn't like today where you've got a phone wherever

19:30 you want to pick it up – and he came back and he said, "Jack some bloke from the Middle East wants to talk to you," so I went and it was Bob Horn who was the Operations Manager for Middle East Airline – known to us at that time as Muddle East Airlines of course. But Bob and I had a good relationship and we had a few words you know and "how're you going?" what have you and he said, "Jack we want you to come back and do for us what you did for Abu Heider," and I said, "No chance Bob. I've got the kids in school and I'm home and I'm staying." Well every night

20:00 for 10 nights he rang me up and he offered me a little more and little bit more. That made it a good deal and they offered me the right to run the airline entirely. It would be under my complete control, and I would write my own budget, the whole lot so I finally said to Marg, "We're goin' back to the Middle East," and we had a bit of a discussion about it but basically she was ready to come.

20:30 Marg was always ready to come where I was going and this is one of the things that's made our relationship so good I think. And so we packed up and we went back to the Middle East and of course the crews were told that I was taking over the operation and there was a big strike. They weren't going to have somebody come in over them who had no seniority in the company so I called a meeting and I engineers and pilots and I said, "I'll tell you I don't want to come – I'd sooner be home

21:00 but your company's in such a bad way that's it about to fold up." What had happened – BOAC had… BOAC was in charge of this company, understand that, and BOAC had replaced the board at Beirut for a six month period to see if they could improve it. It failed. They did another one for six months – no change. They did another one for six months and that's when they called me in you see. And

21:30 so I called a meeting and I said, "Your company's in a bad way. They think I can do for you what I did for Abu Heider. I didn't want to come. I'm happy to go home but I think your company's going to go broke and none of you'll have a job but you better make up your mind. Have a meeting tonight and tell me tomorrow because if I don't hear that you're on my side tomorrow I'm going home." Well there were a small team came to see me the next day and they

22:00 said, "We've decided we'd like you to stay and we'll work with you." Jacky Mann was the Chief Pilot. Jacky Mann was a wonderful fighter pilot during the war and later you may have read about him. He was taken captive by the terrorists and kept in solitary confinement 'til they nearly killed him. They eventually… this is after this time but it was a pleasure to work with Jack and we got the thing going – it took three months

22:30 to get it in the black there you are. Now that's not because of any smart-alec business – it's the fact is that accountants don't know about aeroplanes. They might be wonderful at balance sheets and all the rest of it but they don't know about aeroplanes and I wanted to do this for Ansett here and I couldn't because the same thing – it is the management that was doing a lot of harm. Anyway so…

23:00 **Jack I want to… I just take you back**

Yeah.

for a little bit before we go any further to when you first returned to Australia.

Right.

After the war.

Right.

You came back in '45?

Was it '45, 46?

'46. '46 whatever?

Somewhere about there.

That's right, cause you… that's right. Now I'm just trying to remember what you were

23:30 **telling Annie [interviewer]. You had an idea to become a journalist but decided…?**

Yeah I'd like to have done study for one of the courses that was available and I wanted to do it yeah.

But that didn't happen. How long did you have leave when you got back before you started?

Oh I was out of everything and I just had to look for a job and of course Marg and I were married –

24:00 Marg was expecting the first child and I had to have something to earn some money and so well I just tried to… I tried to get on this course because then we got subsistence while we did it. But they made it so hard and I just had to give it up and that's when Don and I brought the photographic business yeah.

Can I ask you about those months

24:30 **you know, that first year or two? Apart from the difficulties in finding work**

Yeah.

Did you find it easy to adapt back into civilian life?

Yeah I think so. I didn't have any troubles yeah. You miss having your life organised for you a bit, yeah, there's no doubt about that but I don't think I had any big troubles.

You've told us today about a few things you saw and witnessed –

25:00 **the loss of friends and…**

Yeah.

That sort of thing. Did those images stay with you?

Long time I think. I've still got a lot of 'em and I can't shake 'em off and it affected our relationship, Marg and I, a bit but she was so able to cope. Still astounds me how well she coped. I was unbalanced – there's no doubt about that.

25:30 I must have been hard to live with a bit.

Can I ask you how that…?

Pardon?

Can I ask you how that manifested itself?

Yes I s'pose in being unsettled. Didn't matter – even when I got a job I was unsettled. I wanted to do something else and I didn't know what I wanted to do. I think basically I don't think I got over it for a long time. I had to control myself

26:00 because I had a family coming on and I knew I had to do something to control myself and I did it but it wasn't easy. But I wanted to keep what I really felt from Marg. I never let her know. She knows now of course because over the years one thing and another's come up, but she didn't know for a long time. I don't know that I

26:30 can tell you anything specific. Everything was cloudy for me. All I knew was I had to earn money. I s'pose I ran around a bit like a chicken with its head cut off but one way and another I managed to get enough money together to keep us going.

Did you seek out friends or

27:00 **colleagues from the war?**

Pardon?

Did you seek out friends or colleagues from the war to talk about these things with?

No, no I didn't. I think that the authority were offering some sort of… wasn't talk called counselling then but you could talk to somebody for advice. But I… and I… and yes I had one or two talks and I thought they were useless. I thought they

27:30 talked about things that weren't relative. I can't think now but there was nothing that put me on a way that was gonna solve my problems.

Did you… how did you find out about these things? Were they advertised or did you have… did you see a doctor and…?

Never saw a doctor about it. Teckle – the people who

28:00 were in charge of my doing a journalist course many times and I s'pose it might have come from them. There was no handouts of advice that would cover that. The handouts of advice were the courses that were available and things like that but I don't think there was any worthwhile… any guidance that one felt was worthwhile for solving those problems.

28:30 Given my memory Martin I mightn't… I might be wrong in that but I don't think so. I don't think that I thought I was going to get any help but bureaucrats I talked to about the course of course they were high handed – "Oh you have to do this or else," you know. That was the sort of attitude. Well you can't always just

29:00 fall into a formula like that. You know there are things that you know you've got to take care of and I don't think there was anything other than that that I could… no.

You mentioned your brother had also been in the RAAF though you didn't really know…

Yeah.

How soon after the war did you get back in touch with him?

Two or three years. A long time.

29:30 Fred vanished off the scene. He and Dad had not cemented any relationship and Fred took a… I learnt later that Fred took a soldier settlement block up at Mildura and he was growing oranges and lemons and grapes very successful and I knew him to be a tremendous worker. Fred could work like my father. Dad could work tremendously and

30:00 I didn't even know that he got married for some years and he had four children and an unfortunate unhappy marriage. Just the same so no I had very little to do with Fred after the war, which was a shame. Mark you, we didn't grow up close. He was always bigger than me and therefore

30:30 bullied me which is common amongst brothers I s'pose but as well as that I had my mind and I wanted to do what I wanted to do so I don't think I can add anything to that Martin.

Did you did you dream a lot about your war experiences?

31:00 Yeah I had nightmares. I had a hell of a time with nightmares and I think if it hadn't been for Marg I might never have got over it. She actually nursed me in bed on a number of occasions and I shook off the nightmares. I can't remember when and they went for a long time.

31:30 They overtook me again recently within the last 10 or 12 years and I was in a dreadful state over nightmares. You know your nightmares are unreal – they're not even… well mine are not even a possibility. You know – being shot down in aeroplanes and all sorts of things that were not of my experience. And I had to see a…

32:00 the Department of Vets' Affairs sent me to see a psychologist named Frankston and I told him, "Oh it's nothin' to do with the war. No, no. Must have been something else." Well I just thought to myself, "Well what sort of a liar are you because… And he was telling me that nightmares of aircraft crashing being shot down are nothing to do with the war. So I decided he was an outright liar and I told the Vet Affairs

32:30 I didn't want to see him again and that started a cycle with me – it got me worse than ever. I got into nightmares that I couldn't shake. It went on for quite a long time and somehow I got to see another psychologist – a German and settled in Australia after the war. He had a very high record

33:00 and he's in he's just off St Kilda Road somewhere there and I told him about it and he said, "You're the same as my father," he said, "He was a bomber pilot. He walks the passages and we'll never get it out of him." He… and I said, "He's different to me. I didn't bomb people. He was having nightmares because he was bombing people." I said, "I never bombed people. It was strictly anti-shipping

33:30 and it's not what worries me. It's just these horrible dreams come and take over," and so he said…well, he said things to me. He told me about his father. His father, he told me what aircraft his father flew and I knew he was German. I didn't know until then and his father eventually

34:00 died with this problem – still couldn't shake it off and… but the things he said to me must have diverted my mind from those things because I stopped having nightmares and it trickled off. It didn't stop overnight – it trickled off a little bit less and less and I don't think I've…

34:30 yes I have just recently I had a couple of nightmares but they haven't worried me much in the last since I saw this particular psychologist yeah, yeah.

Obviously Marg knew a bit about your war experiences but did you talk to her specifically about them after the war?

No I didn't talk to her

35:00 at all about it. I was worried that it would worry her. To think I didn't even tell her I had nightmares. She must have known because she did a lot to calm me but I didn't tell her about them and I s'pose thinking about it now that must have been a bit of a mix up for her. She knew I was having troubles which I didn't talk about. I don't

35:30 know what causes people to do that Martin. I didn't want to talk about it. I didn't talk about it and just one of those things isn't it? I don't know yeah. Can't tell you any more about it. I don't think. You might ask a question to find something but I can't think of anything.

Have you spoken

36:00 **at length about your experiences like you have today? Have you ever sat down with people?**

Never even talked about any of them. Never. I've put some in the book which I'd never spoken about in all my life – especially the story of Tom Evans. That is the thing that I s'pose hurts me more than anything. Tom was a nice feller

36:30 chopped to bits. Of course this is one of the things Martin when you have friends who are killed one after another on the stark background. Of course there's Geoff Suiter dying of amebic dysentery. I was getting very depressed. I wasn't worried that it might have been my turn next but that

37:00 didn't worry me it's a funny thing. I was worried more about the people I knew being killed and the fact that I knew a lot of 'em had family at home and so there you are. I don't know why I have found it possible to talk about it recently. When I wrote the book that's my office in there and I sat there at night and I wept about things for quite a long time. I wouldn't go down the downstairs

37:30 because Marg would see it but in a way it was also clearing the way you know of getting it… I was releasing it all, getting rid of it or something so I think that was worthwhile. I've talked more about it since I wrote the book than I have… 'course Marg still doesn't know the story of Tom Evans. I don't want her to know. She knew Tom Evans just as I did. Tom used to come out to

38:00 my mother's place for parties. Not often but a couple of times. My sisters would know of Tom but I've never spoken to them about it either. See there were a chain of things about Tom. Tom was failed as a pilot and he at least was convinced that was because his instructor didn't want to be an instructor and that's a nasty

38:30 thing for a starter and then the way he died was a very ugly thing.

Tape 9

00:09 **Jack I'm wondering if you participated in reunions and unit associations?**

I didn't. I didn't for some time after the war. I knew the boys marched and they used to ring me and say, "Come and march," and I didn't. I wanted to stay away from it and it must have been

00:30 a lot of years before I went to march – I would I think in excess of 20 years yeah. And I used to see some of the old friends. Norm Cuggley was ground staff and he and I knew each other very well and I think I marched the year before he died, maybe two years before he died.

01:00 And others like Mick Hunter and well Ted Love's still alive – he never marches. Ted, he's a funny feller Ted but a good good friend but no. Reunions were too close to it for me at that time and now of course I've got over that. I've been marching with the boys for quite a few years now

01:30 and I'm happy to do so yeah.

What what does Anzac mean to you today?

I beg your pardon?

What does Anzac Day mean to you today?

Well it means we remember old friends. I s'pose that's the biggest part about it. We and we talk to old friends. You see there's still alive quite a few of the boys that I worked with and

02:00 very few aircrew. There's Don Granger is the only, is Don the only one and Don's so sick he hasn't been to the march for two years. I think Don is on his way out. I don't think Don'll march again but yes I like getting together with Don particularly and with others that I knew and nobody talks of ugly things

02:30 in the reunion. It's a good thing. We talk about the good things you know and I think that's what reunions are for yeah.

It's... do you think with hindsight that

03:00 **it would have been better to have talked earlier or is that just impossible to know?**

No it might well have been, might well have been. I really can't judge that. It might well have been but you see – the boys on the squadron didn't have my experience. Most of the pilots that joined that's only when they came into the

03:30 air force the last 12 months or so. I'd been in as an engineer for three years before and it wasn't with the engineers that I remembered the tragedies. They were with people I trained with more than anything else yeah. Some would have known it... I think it was Ian Bolt that

04:00 crashed in that thing in the Beach Forest. I know now his surname was Bolt. I remember it well and it was a short name and I'm pretty sure it was Ian Bolt. Well a few of them would have known Ian but another thing I've found Martin – some people can have a friend killed in front of 'em and yet they throw it off tomorrow. I think Mick Singe was like that. Mick Singe was in the squadron. He was ground staff. He was with the squadron from the day it

04:30 formed up at Home on Spalding Moor and yeah no a good friend of us all wasn't at a reunion – "Oh Tars," I said, "where's Tars, Mick?" "Oh he died." It didn't mean a thing to him and yet I think Tars was closer to him than he was to me so you see – nature,

05:00 nature. Every man is different and I think that determines. My problem is I'm very emotional and I think that comes from my French mother, I do. I think it really comes from there and so I'm very emotional and I think that's a lot of my trouble.

Obviously the war

05:30 **had an impact on you and certainly in the memories that you have of it, but do you think that it changed you in any way?**

Oh I don't think there's any doubt about that. I think I was very different when I came home to when I went away. I don't think when I was an engineer changed me very much but I think after I'd done the training in Canada and knew all those fellers who were killed

06:00 and then served on the squadron and kept getting notices someone else killed one after another – I think that's what changed me. I think at one stage I wouldn't have cared if I was killed but I had a crew

and that was a responsibility. I was so sorry when Geoff Suiter died I

06:30 must say. I miss Geoff yeah.

Do you think knowing about war as you do today that you'd volunteer for the same role again?

I don't know. I feel that if the country which contains our families is threatened yes I'd probably

07:00 feel that somebody had to do something about it. I would… otherwise I would try and see that none of my children or my grandchildren went to… I think it's the most stupid and filthy business of all time. When you see oh, not one after another, but hundreds killed, you know, and it just goes on you see – the stupidity of it. But against that you see the threat to home

07:30 and I think that takes over. It takes over with a desperation if you know what I mean? It's not just something that you analyse and do sensibly. The pressure of it – desperation that something has to be done. I certainly hate war. I don't want to see another war but I don't think we can stop it. Another war will come and another

08:00 one after that and another one after that. Humanity seems to be that block-headed doesn't it? Really does and of course most of these things happen with those in power not the ordinary man in the street that wants a war or starts a war. Mark yet I think with that Moslem situation

08:30 all sorts of lowly people can involve themselves in nasty activities which will probably create a war. When I look at the Bin Laden Al Qaida situation I think to myself, "Well there's hate there." That that's the only way they know to

09:00 dispel it. War. Kill. Terrible business – what do you do about it? I don't know what you do about it. There's another thing though Martin and that is the media. You see I lived in Arabia for quite a time. I lived in Kuwait

09:30 and when the Gulf War was on I rang the media and I said, "Look, some of this thing you're saying about the Al Sabah family's wrong I like to tell ya." They didn't want to know. They want to put over what the story that made most sensation. Well I think they're a liability. I don't know what we do about it. People who want to make money out of sensation will make sensation.

10:00 Yes it's a pity we can't do something about that lot.

The other thing I s'pose is to try and look at it another way – you met your wife during wartime and obviously that atmosphere was part of bringing you together?

I'm sorry I missed the part that?

You met your wife during… I mean you got engaged during wartime and

10:30 **part of that atmosphere of being in sort of wartime?**

No I don't think it had anything to do. We actually… I'm not sure that we didn't get engaged or fall in love with each other before the war.

Oh right.

Yeah because yeah I think we did. Hard to remember back accurately to that time though but we… I don't think

11:00 any of that – the trauma of war had any affect on our coming together. No, not at all.

I'm glad it hasn't put you apart either.

No, no it didn't pull us apart. The thought of having to part put a lot of pressure to pull us together forever I think, yeah.

I think we've probably had a good day Jack.

11:30 Are we done?

I think so.

Alright.

Is there anything else that you'd like to say?

Well I don't know that this actually is a part of the story but it may be. I think there's so much dishonesty in the politics that run our country that whilst I don't oppose the Prime Minister's

12:00 stand he took about the Iraqi War because I knew what the Iraqi's were like and I was of the opinion that that threat had to be stopped. There's such a lot of dishonesty about Government and I think it could lead us to troubles we don't need. I've put a lot of that in my book about the Ansett thing.

12:30 **Tell us again what's the title of the book?**

The Murder of an Airline. One of the things of course that is a driving force for trouble is the fact that the media always sensationalise anything – even if it's wrong. The media sensationalised what CASA said about Ansett instead of analysing it and printing the truth

13:00 and that lead to the loss of jobs for 60,000 people and the loss of savings for two and a half million and the loss of a number of companies as well – putting billions into our treasury. Now we've got to make up that hole.

Well I'd like to wish you well with the book and I hope it achieves some of the things you'd…

Yeah.

…like it to and I'd like to thank you for your story today

13:30 **and…**

Well Martin I can't say that it's a pleasure but I've somehow wanted to do it and I can't explain that. I've never wanted to talk about the war 'til very recently. I suppose I'm disturbed about the country. You see we've got seven thousand if you please multi-nationals working in

14:00 this country that don't pay tax. We carry them. That's corruption and I s'pose it's that you know when you see it. Politicians say we must look after our veterans – what they did for the country – and then you see them doing things that undermine the country and I think perhaps this is one of the reasons I was prepared to talk about this. I feel that

14:30 our country is sick and getting sicker because of these things. I don't give a damn who leads the Labor party and I don't really give a damn who leads the Liberal Party. I think we want a lot of independents in there. We want people who don't have to be ruled by a party line. I really think about it but I'm gettin' on – I'm close to 82

15:00 and I'm not likely to do much about it.

I was goin' to say "Vote One, Ellis".

Yeah we went to the village of Castle Kemps. We were told we'd be foreigners for four generations but I became the councillor at the next election and that was because I was interested in seeing things done for the village which should have been done but weren't being done because of corruption, yeah. And I won for my village sewage which was urgently needed,

15:30 then I won for my village a clearance from… what's this crap they put in the water?

Flouride?

Flouride yeah. They still don't have fluoride in the water in South Kemps Rural District Council – neither should we. When I came out of hospital – I was in hospital in '92 with… what's this thing we've got here?

Heart?

No, no, not… but it's to do with sugar diabetes,

16:00 blood sugar and any rate I came out of hospital about… the good doctor said, "Whatever you do don't drink water with fluoride in it," so I have a rainwater tank in the roof and we don't drink any water with fluoride in it. As far as the children's teeth are concerned of course there's a way to provide calcium –

16:30 calcium and fluoride for the teeth that doesn't affect the water system. If you fluoridate the water system and a man grows lettuces he waters the lettuces and the water evaporates but the fluoride stays there, so when he comes to eat the lettuces he's got probably about a hundred parts to million of fluoride. If you're a brewer as was the president of the

17:00 South Kemps Rural District Council and you're brewing up for beers, all the water that's steaming away is leaving such a strong level of fluoride that you are going to do a lot of harm. He hated me. He was president of Flower's Brewery, yeah. Anyway Martin I've enjoyed it. I think it's good and I hope somehow it can do some good.

Well thanks very much Jack.

INTERVIEW ENDS