Australians at War Film Archive

Kenneth Dwyer (Noel) - Transcript of interview

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Some parts of this interview have been embargoed.

The embargoed portions are noted in the transcript and video.

Tape 1

00:39 **Great, okay so Noel could we start off by you giving your summary of your life from start to present day?**

Yes well I was born in 1924 in the suburb of Waverley. I went to public schools, Waverley and Randwick, that's primary level then went for secondary level to Sydney Boys' High

01:00 School, where I was in the army cadets in third year. Progressed to my Intermediate Certificate and then went to work in the public service of New South Wales. At age seventeen I joined the Air Training Corps and knowing that at eighteen I would need to elect to go into the services and this is exactly what I

01:30 did do. I enlisted in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] at eighteen years of age and went through a whole series of training from Initial Training School at Bradfield to pilot training at Temora where I failed. And then went to a navigation course at Cootamundra, bombing and gunnery at Evans Head

02:00 and that's where I received my wings in for navigation, bomb aiming and air gunnery. And then proceeded overseas by the United States Sea Corporal to San Francisco and did a five day trip across to New York. And stayed there six weeks and then proceeded across to Great Britain, landing in Scotland. And

02:30 about March '44, April '44 and then went through another series of training school over there until finally I reached the 460 Squadron which was an RAAF squadron, thirtieth of March 1944. And did a small number of operations before the war ended. And then reformed on the squadron to

03:00 go out East to Japan. But fortunately that never happened and we were sent home and was discharged. Then returned to my normal, earlier employment with the New South Wales Health Department where I sat for various examinations and progressed through various jobs, publicity. Was seconded to Royal visits organisation in '52, '54. And then went on to

03:30 other jobs as Secretary of a mental hospital, then won a job with the Kosciusko State Park Trust. And when that was abolished, became chief administrative officer with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. And during that time I married, had a couple of boys and continued on till I retired in 1984. And since retirement

04:00 have been living a fairly quiet life but mostly engaged in doing family research and collecting records from all over the world. And which has kept me very busy really. But that's about it in a nutshell.

That's fantastic, yeah. That's a, you know very concise and clear life summary, thank you for that. So

04:30 **we'll go back to the beginning now and we'll just go back and go into the detail of what you've just told us there. So for the record, could you tell us when and where you were born?**

I was born at Waverley, which is now called Queens Park in, on the twenty-first of December 1924. I was

the second son in a family of five children.

05:00 Mother and father were both the children of Irish immigrants. Which their parents came to Australia in the 1850's, 1860's and both of their ancestors came to Victoria and some stayed in Victoria. But on my mother's side they emigrated up into New South Wales. And I really

05:30 grew up knowing my mother's side of the family rather than my fathers. And in my family research I actually published an amateur family history of about a hundred and fifty pages. But I wasn't able to, even though I did do a lot of research into the Dwyer side and found a lot of, sort of living relatives in Ireland and England etc., I wasn't able to get enough on them to do a

06:00 proper family history like I did do with my mother.

Tell me a bit more about your mother, what was she like as a person?

Oh she was a gentle person, a kind person. Very protective of her children. Most protective really, you couldn't say, do anything against the children neighbour-wise or

06:30 in any way that she wouldn't get her hackles up and go into battle for them. And you know try to right a wrong as she saw it. And but she was really gentle to us but she was widowed when she was about forty-eight and she had to assume the responsibility of bringing up a family of which, you know children that

07:00 hadn't really grown up you know. And that was a rather tough time for her. And she wasn't a very well person at that time either. She had various forms of cancer and she also lost her sight too when she was in her fifties. But she was a wonderful mother really. And like most of us say we've got the best mother in the world, I still say that because later in life

07:30 when I did marry and my marriage broke up and she should have been in a nursing home, she spent five or six years in this house here, blind as a bat and frail when she should have been in a nursing home. If it hadn't been for her I wouldn't have been able to have kept my two boys together or have done anything to bring them up. And which is something I was able to do because of her. And she never once complained that

08:00 in fact that I didn't know that she couldn't see at all. She always said that she could see a little but I discovered one day that she couldn't. Couldn't see a thing, she did everything by feel. And cooking, ironing, everything. And when I discovered that I put a stop to it and said to myself I've got to do this myself from now on, which I did very willingly because I couldn't let her continue to do that you know, in the condition she was.

She sounds like a

08:30 **remarkable woman?**

She was, she really was.

Now you mentioned during your childhood that there would have been you know incidences with the neighbours where she would have, she used to stand up for you. Could you remember and particular incidents where she did that?

Oh yes. I had an older brother who was a bit of a rebel, you know at the times. He would kick over the troches and not having a father, he would not do, I suppose, what he was told.

09:00 And if he was told to stay home as a punishment and he wouldn't, Mum would have to resort to chasing him round the yard, catching him. And well I can remember sitting on him one day cause he was screaming out at the top of his voice saying Hail Mary's you know. And the neighbour stuck her head over the fence saying, "What are you doing to that boy?" you know. "I'll report you to the police." And Mum gave her a good earful you know,

09:30 told her to mind her own so and so business. Nothing to do with her you know, which it really wasn't either. And that lady got the name of Madam Thump from now on, or from then on really as it was. And no she had troubles bringing up some of us you know. We weren't all goody goodies or anything. We were normal children, we'd get into scraps with one another. Like a lot of families did in those days, they may

10:00 still, I don't know. I know when I was raising my two boys there was always scraps you know. And I never thought it'd finish, you know, but it did.

So tell me more about your brothers and sisters?

Well depends really, my sister was the oldest in the family. She was auburn haired, she was quite a good style of girl. She was very popular with the boys I know that. She seemed

10:30 to always attract older boys and I used to call them the chain gang actually. But no she was very popular. She worked at Station 2KY as a receptionist. And she was always going in for stations promotions you know, where she had to get dressed up for balls and things like that, and looked very attractive and so forth. And I think

11:00 mum was rather worried you know what trouble she might get into with the radio announcers. And I know she had to go into the station every now and again and warn them and so on you know. Which wasn't supposed to be done, I know Val was quite upset about Mum storming in there and telling them she'd sue them and get the police onto them and all this sort of thing. My brother, Terry, was a normal boy. He used to, I suppose you might be, he might have

11:30 been termed a bit of a larrikin in those days. He knocked around with a few boys that I don't think Mum thought very much of. But he was a good hearted fella and he did so much for Mum really, when she had no husband to do it. He did quite a lot of jobs around the house, he wasn't trained for it. He put a complete new, at fifteen, he put a new fence right around the

12:00 property and he'd never done anything like that in his life you know. The fence still stands today. I've been back there and seen it there you know. So, says something for him. He put a roof on, a skillion roof, he used to do painting jobs. And he did that all through his life, even when he grew up, he used to do that. He was a very good son to my mother. She'd only have to say, "Can you help me with painting the house inside, outside?" And even

12:30 though he lived in the country, often he would come down on his holidays, week or two, and do these jobs for her. But he was regarded as a bit of a scallywag I think generally, but he was a good hearted one really. And unfortunately he was a heavy smoker and he died in his late sixties from lung cancer. And it was very sad really cause he was a good hearted person.

13:00 **And did you have another brother as well?**

I did have a younger brother yeah, young Bill. Well he wasn't very good scholastically and he didn't do so well in life. He died at an early age, about twenty-five. He was employed as a motor mechanic. And he had a fall from a high place inside a garage and broke his leg. And in the

13:30 course of being laid up, he was given sleeping tablets and things to help the pain, you know, so he could sleep. And as soon as he was able to get away on crutches, he went up to the local shopping centre and he had a couple of beers and that connected up with his tablets. And... (Interruption)

We'll get back to,

14:00 **so before we were visited by the Mormons, you were talking about your brother Bill.**

Oh yes well he'd, as I said, he'd gone up to the local shopping centre, this was when we lived at Ashbury. He went up to Kempsey and to see the doctor, got some more of the medicine that he was taking then went across to the hotel, had a couple of drinks. And he had an immediate reaction and was brought home

14:30 in a taxi. I was at uni [university] that day and the doctor rang me or he rang the uni for me to go to Western Suburbs Hospital. And he said, "He's gonna be all right," you know, but when I got there he was dead. And that was, he was only twenty-five. So it was, they put it down to misadventure because there was no other cause, he didn't know.

15:00 I'm sure he wouldn't have wanted to die, he liked life you know. But and it made me conscious that you can't mix drink with anything that was hydrochlorate I think they called it. And I got some more knowledge of that when I worked at mental hospitals, with the dispensary we had there. They used to give hydrochlorate to babies and things there you know, little tiny doses of it.

15:30 I couldn't understand why they did it, it was to help them sleep sort of thing. And I was all against this. I'd had a wife who was a nurse and she was giving it to my oldest and I just took it off her and poured it down the toilet you know. After having that experience with my own brother you know.

Mmm its a very, very sad story.

I didn't think babies should have it. Anyway, that's just by the by.

Well look getting back to your pre war life, can you tell me

16:00 **a bit about your father?**

Dad was, as I say, he was the son of an Irish immigrant who I've since found came from, his father, or my grandfather, Thomas Dwyer, came from Kilkenny. Emigrated here around the 1860's. And Dad was born at Ballarat or at a place called Sebastopol. A lot of names have come up, Cherry Tree Flat and Cambrian Hill

16:30 and so forth. I've got it all in albums now since my research. And he was, he had a lot of dealings as a farm boy on the, they had a twenty-five acre block I think down there. And he grew up as a farm helper then he became a miner and looking for gold. And went around the country, so was his brother Jack who was at Broken

17:00 Hill eventually. And Dad ended up at Mount Morgan mines, looking for gold in Queensland. And he, poor old Daddy used to always take tickets in gold and casket lotteries and things. And with, shared with others, and he used to win bits and pieces every now and again. And he did, in one share of something he won, he won enough to

17:30 pay off the family home at Waverley. Which would have been worth in those days about a thousand pound, the land and the house. Worth over million now from prices in Bondi Junction be worth about a million and a half. But federation house and land was only nine hundred pound in those days. And so fortunately the Depression wasn't so bad in our home because the house

18:00 was paid off. But Dad then after he settled down and married, he became a telegraph linesman. Putting up telegraph lines and things, you know for the PMG's [Postmaster General's] Department and he went away to the war in, twice. During the First World War the first time was, I see from his discharge certificate, he

18:30 because he was farming, farm boy and knew horses, he went to Egypt with the Second Re-mount Unit. And there's a photograph I have of him with his leggings on and he's got his riding crop under his arm. And I think he was there for two fifty days when the unit was disbanded and brought back to Australia. And a year or so after he came back he then joined another expeditionary

19:00 force, a Australian naval and some military expeditionary force and went to New Guinea, Papua for two hundred and eighty-four days. And I've got photographs of him there amongst the natives and so forth. When he came back from that he then, because he was in the Postmaster Generals Department, and the job of a linesman was pretty strenuous

19:30 you know. Being out in the weather, up poles and stringing wires and so on, he become a postman. And he, that's the job he had up to the time, that some years before he died. He died in the military hospital at Randwick in 1937. Aged about...

How did he die?

Well he died from tuberculosis; he caught it up in,

20:00 up in New Guinea under the conditions that they had to live. They were sopping wet at times and not changing into dry things and it was conducive to this sort of thing. So he died of that in Randwick Military Hospital in February '37. And he's buried at Randwick cemetery. So but he was a good man. I can't,

20:30 I never knew him as an adult and I wished I had because I would have loved to have been able to in my research that I've had to do on his side of the family, I, whilst I've found lots of distant relations I've not found out much about his life personally. Its only a bit of hearsay here and there. He, I do remember, I mean I can remember him as a young

21:00 boy, being nursed on his knee. He used to sing songs to me, strange songs of the day. Funny songs I suppose you know, people wouldn't have ever heard of them now. My mother said that I never should, play with the gypsies in the wood. And song, Can she make a cherry pie, Billy boy Billy boy, can she make a cherry pie charming Billy, sure she can make a cherry pie quick as a cat can wink his eye,

21:30 and so on you know. He used to take me sometimes on his rounds with him as a postman. Not very often. He used to get free passes to local theatres from, not too many local theatres, but there was a place down near, down from Charing Cross called, well it was the Bronte Bughouse we called it, had an earthen floor, tin walls and tin roof. Now that was in the thirties,

22:00 that's the standard of the theatre then. And he came with me, took me there and we sat on stools and things. I remember seeing Gerry Brown in a film, couldn't tell you the title. And he'd take me shopping with him to what was the equivalent of supermarkets now. But I think there was a place called Farr's Markets up at Bondi Junction. But often, and he took me sometimes to Anzac Days.

22:30 He took me down into Martin Place, he wasn't very well. And he'd either have me on his shoulders or he'd stuck me up on the, one of the ledges of the Commonwealth Bank up there at the top of Martin Place. Martin Place in Elizabeth Street I think or Castlereigh Street. But he didn't do it very often cause he wasn't very well. He was going down hill. I remember him with affection because he was a kind man.

23:00 Well I was very lucky I think with parents, he and Mum got on really, really well. And but I didn't know him personally as an adult and this is one of my great regrets really.

How old were you when he passed away?

I would have been, '37, I would have been twelve, twelve I suppose. I remember I'd just got the results through to go to Sydney High.

23:30 And my mother had told him that it was in the paper. And he got the paper and he couldn't see it in his bed in the hospital. And so she on her next visit go and show him where it was cause he couldn't believe it at the time. It was fairly, well he didn't think it was possible you know to, for one of his kids to go to Sydney High. It was supposed to be an honour in those days. It was supposed to been a very, it was one of the GPS [Greater Public Schools]

24:00 schools. And but I was very lucky, I'd gone to Randwick Primary School for sixth class and we had a woman teacher, a Miss Boswood. And she got practically the whole class to Sydney High, she was terrific really. I think she, I think there was only two or three out of the class who didn't go there you

know. So you can put it down to the teacher I'd say really rather than anything else. We must have had some contribution to it

24:30 ourselves. But the teaching was very good.

What else do you remember of your teacher, Miss Bosweld was it?

Miss Boswood.

Boswood.

Boswood yeah. Well she looked like my mother actually. She was a matronly woman with her hair tied in a bun at the back you know. And same sort of stature as Mum was at the time. And that's my image of her. She was very efficient and not, and not

25:00 like some teachers where you know there was no strict discipline. But there wasn't any need to be strict in that particular class for some reason or other, we wanted to learn. No it was a good class overall really. I enjoyed school, always did, enjoy school.

So what kind of books would you read as a child?

Oh I liked, well like most kids at the time, if you could get them,

25:30 I mean it sounds a bit silly I suppose, but I suppose Robinson Crusoe and Swiss Family Robinson were two of the earliest books I can remember. And then there was a series of books that I really loved, and I've still got copies of them somewhere in one of my shelves. I've got eight thousand books stashed around this place. And I'm about to give away to my grandson, books by Ryder Haggard who wrote books like Allan Quartermain and King Solomon's

26:00 Mines and Nada the Lily and so forth, wonderful boys' adventure books. And books by Edgar Rice Burrows, Tarzan series and so on you know. They were the books that I loved when I was a boy. And Treasure Island. You know and things like that, boys adventure yarns. But the Ryder Haggard ones I really liked, they were great.

Sounds great. So what else did you do for entertainment

26:30 **around this time?**

Oh well they were simple days you know, there was no television. Radio was just coming on, Dad made some radios. But well we were active, well we had nothing really. But like all the families in the street, we'd meet, the boys, there were a lot of boys in the street and we would form, we only lived about a couple of hundred feet from Queens

27:00 Park which had about thirty cricket pitches there. And we'd play cricket every moment we could on these pitches. And there were enough of us to form two teams, they may not have been full teams. But the number we could get together, ten or twelve or fourteen, we'd split into two teams and we'd endlessly play cricket you know. And we really enjoyed it. We also

27:30 did a lot of swimming. And we would walk for miles to the nearest beaches. From where we lived, quite a long walk, but we didn't mind. We'd pick up chaps, other chaps I know along the way. We'd go past places, doors'd open and other chaps would join us and girls. And by the time we got to the beach we might have been twenty or thirty strong. And we'd go

28:00 to Bondi, to Bronte, to Tamarama. Sometimes to the Clovelly but they were the main ones. This had to be on the weekends of course. And at other times we would kick a ball around the yard. We would play rounders in the street you know hurling a ball up in the air and someone would catch it or maybe they called it brandings, I forget. But Saturday after-

28:30 noons we'd to the local theatres. Mum was always able to find sixpence for admission which you got it was, that's about five cents these days. Plus threepence for an ice cream or a penny, I mean you'd get penny ice-cream then, which'd be a cent. But there were board games too. But they were just coming in, games like Monopoly.

29:00 There was mate down the street, he managed to borrow a proper game of Monopoly and he made one up himself on cardboard and made up the money and made the counters to move and the little houses. And we'd go to one another's house and we'd play Monopoly endlessly you know on days where we weren't down in the park. And then we had dogs too, and we'd go running down around the park with the dog with the ball, the dog chasing and bringing it back.

29:30 And if it wasn't in Queens Park, we'd go to Centennial Park which was adjoining. And cause that was a real adventure land in those days, with plenty of trees, duck ponds, water lilies, bark trees and so on you know. There was some old canon up on one part, we'd go and get astride them and so on. Things that cost no money really. Whereas, I often smile these days

30:00 kids do, if you said you'd have to walk to the beach they' die. You know might be two or three miles that we would walk, we walked to school. And this is something that amazes me now. Children now have to be driven or they have to go on a bus. Maybe times have changed in the sense that its more dangerous

perhaps for children to get to school these days and they have to be taken there. I rather think they're a bit lazier

30:30 these days really. We thought nothing of it, it was the only way to do it really, and we enjoyed it.

Well it sounds like you had a, quite a lovely childhood.

Oh it was a, sort of a down beat Huckleberry Finn type time. You know simple and you know lots of activity, and fun with your mates, with your friends. And time passed pretty quickly,

31:00 really.

So you mentioned that your dad made radios?

Well radio was wireless as they called it then was coming in and he was a crank on this. He, there was a magazine called the Wireless Weekly. And at first they made the, oh I forget the name for them, they were a sort of crystal sets, that's what they called them, little crystal sets. And you used earphones with them and be something called the cat's whisker is involved in it. And

31:30 they were small box-like things. And that was the era when, and they were pretty primitive sort of things and made larger ones which were on legs, and they had valves and things in, made lots of valves. Valves, you wouldn't know what they are I suppose unless you saw them. But they were powered up things with dials and proper

32:00 positions with the stations. The dials and things are made of bakelite and there was a speaker. And you could tune into your 2KY, 2UE, 2GB, bla, bla, bla. And Dad used to, Dad made not only the crystal sets but he also made the first proper wireless and he had trunk loads of bits and pieces that he had to buy to put the things

32:30 together. Which he got all the details from, from these Wireless Weekly's. Which were very uninteresting magazines, I found them when we were clearing out the Waverley home when Mum shifted. And they were not the modern type things with plenty of photos and so forth you know to make it interesting. They were rather deadly things with just line drawings in them and so on you know. But Dad did do this and then course when he died, Mum

33:00 sold the piano which was there and she swapped, it was a good piano. And she swapped that for what was called a radiola, a Fisk radiola, which was a state of the art radio in those days, a floor model. I think it might have cost forty, fifty pound or something. But that for a piano and that's under the house now. All

33:30 going to pieces and rusted but I can't part with it cause its something she got you know. Something that she had something to do with. But...

So you mentioned, just getting back to your dad again, and the fact that he was in World War I, did you ever talk to him about his war time experience?

No I didn't, you see this is what I regret when trying to put the, what I've got is a bits and pieces of

34:00 a few mementoes of things that he brought back, there's on the shelf over there. There's an old vase type of thing, there's a couple of, there's a sort of petrified bean which we used as a baby rattled, which is inside the urn over there. The urn was Egyptian, the rattle or the bean was from Aden and then there's a couple of little

34:30 boots which is supposed to have been made by Turkish prisoners of war with a coin, with a Turkish coin in them. But, and he also brought home some ivory elephants which my older brother got and God knows where they are now. But no, we never talked to him about it and he didn't seem to, not exactly want to talk, I'm sure he would have talked if someone had asked him the right questions. Its, we were just too young to probably be interested enough

35:00 to ask him about these things. Its one of my biggest regrets that I hadn't asked him about anything of his early life, it didn't occur to me really in those days.

Well you yourself...

I was too young, I was too young.

Yeah, you were quite young, you were twelve yeah.

I was too young, I was out playing cricket. Or brownies, running around with the dog and so forth. And Dad of course was, he used to get up so early I never saw much of him. He used to get up at four thirty in the morning. And

35:30 then he used to go to bed early and he was a rather shadowy figure while he worked as a postman. He had two rounds a day and plus Saturday morning you know. Not like these days where you're lucky to see them once a day. You certainly don't see them on Saturday. And he was out hail, rain or shine, walking. Whereas they, often around here they've got a motor scooter type things you know. So he did it the hard way but then he was in hospital for years, so from the time

36:00 perhaps I was nine he was in hospital. And I didn't really see enough of him as an enquiring lad with a sufficiently developed brain to be thinking about these things you know, about his war experiences.

Did you know of any other people that had served during World War I?

Well I know that only since, I know that his brother Jack from Broken Hill was over in Egypt

36:30 with him. And I know, oh yes my mother's two brothers, Uncle Wal and Uncle Mick both served in France for three or four years. And Uncle Wal particularly had a very harrowing time there. I, since I did my family research I was able to get his service record. And I,

37:00 he never spoke about his service but he had a heck of a time. And he was gassed, he was bayoneted he was shot. All sorts of terrible things happened to him. And he was patched up sometimes in a field military hospital, sometime somewhere in France at another city, and sometimes repatriated over to England. But always brought back to the front again. And you just

37:30 cannot believe that they would do this sort of thing, you know repeatedly patching people up and sending them back again, and again, and again and again. How he survived I do not know. And of course it hardened him a bit. Uncle Mick, the other brother, also had a lot of time over there, three or four years. But he was in transport and didn't go through what Uncle

38:00 Wal went through. And but neither of them really spoke much. And I had a fair bit to deal with them because they used to, even though one lived in Albury, Uncle Mick, and Uncle Wal for a while lived in Sydney at next to my grandma's place, just one street away. He eventually moved to Tamworth and I only saw him when he'd come down to visit

38:30 his mother, who was my grandmother of course. And saw enough of him up till the time I enlisted you know. I, and of his family you know. I knew a lot about them you know. I wished I'd known as much about my father's brothers and sisters as I knew about my mother's brothers and sisters.

So you mentioned briefly that your family was generally

39:00 **okay during the Depression because of the win that your father ...?**

Well they paid the house off.

Yeah. But you must have seen the effects of the Depression on other people perhaps. Could you describe what the Depression was like?

Well things were tight, my Dad was lucky in that he was permanently employed with the postmaster general so he had an income. But there were plenty of

39:30 signs of how bad things were. My grandma had two houses, she lived in one in the next street down at, which was called Newland Street. And she rented it to a man, Mr Heelan. Now things were so poor, that man had a wife and two daughters, and he was a tradesman and he was out of work and he couldn't get work. But he would get up early and get the paper,

40:00 the Herald, and look for jobs. And he didn't have a car of course, no one had cars in those days. But and all he had was a big pair of scissors. And he would go and cut people's lawns with that scissors. Now that was, that sounds hard to believe but that's what he did. And he didn't have anything else other than these huge pair of tailor scissors you know to cut a lawn with. And he must have cut it sufficiently

40:30 well, you know to get something for it. Now...

We'll have to leave it there because we've just come to the end of a tape but we'll continue it on the next tape.

Yeah okay, all right.

Tape 2

00:32 **So Noel you we were completing the story about your neighbour who used to cut people's lawns with scissors.**

Yes, yes, he, well I just used that as an illustration of how terrible it was to get a job for by anybody, even though he was a qualified tradesman. He was able to, with my Dad, build a, you know an extension on the back of our house and do a separate

01:00 outhouse building, a laundry and so forth and do tiling work. You know all timber and wall cladding and roofing. But at that one stage he couldn't get a job so he would do anything to get some income in to feed himself you know. And its just something that stuck in my mind that someone would have to go and was able to do a job with a pair of scissors to cut a lawn you know, where he didn't have the proper equipment. But he was prepared to do it that

01:30 way. I can't imagine anybody being able to cut a lawn with a pair of scissors. But that's what he did.

Amazing yeah. Now you mentioned, during the tape change, you mentioned other things that you saw that were to do with the Depression around your area. Could you describe?

Yes well not far from, as I mentioned earlier, we had Queen's Park and then there was abutting Queens Park was Centennial Park. But between the end of Queens Park and part of Centennial was

02:00 an area we called the sandhills It was a big area of white or yellowy sand with a lot of scrub on it. And during the Depression there was a lot of relief works carried out. Rather pointless ones, they just had scores and scores and scores of men with horse drawn drays. And the purpose was just to have them gainfully employed and the gainful employment seemed to be moving heaps of sand from one side of the

02:30 square block to the other side, for which they were paid oh you know the dole. But I don't know how much it was but it was pretty mean, it was compulsory that you had to do some work apparently to earn the dole in those days. The same as the current government requires young people to do work before they get you know social welfare payments. Which is still called the dole anyway. But

03:00 no that went on within half a mile of where I lived and went on for long, long time. We did have people calling at our place. I never saw much of it but people, swaggies [swagmen], tramps, or whatever is the right name for them, used to come and asked could they, was there any work to do. And Mum never turned anyone away, there was no work to do but she would give them

03:30 some food. She would make up some sandwiches or whatever she could afford to give them at the time, wrap it up for them. And they'd go on their way. But they were always willing to do work you know whatever it might have been. And in those days it was possible to give them work to chop wood because people did chop wood you know. There's a lot of people in these old Federation houses had fire places, and

04:00 you needed wood to be chopped. And I know Dad and Mum used to get bags of wood and bags of coal you know delivered to put in the fire places. And so you know but I don't think we ever got anybody to do anything because with my brother around and Mum, I mean they were able to chop wood, all you needed was an axe. No Mum was good hearted. She did

04:30 what she could for them. And she couldn't understand how she could get such a succession of people coming to her place. And we found out later that once you, once someone was given something they sort of left a mark on the fence in some way so that anyone else coming would know that that was okay to go there because people would give you something sort of thing. But we didn't know that for a long, long time.

05:00 Some people just couldn't give anything cause they didn't have it themselves you know. They were struggling without an income themselves you know. Dad didn't get much of an income, it might have only been a couple of pound a week, thirty shillings a week, which would be between three and five and six dollars now. And that was regarded as an average, ordinary wage in those days you know.

05:30 **So what kind, how did your father's illness and death affect the family?**

Well it probably affected me, I didn't even know he was dying, really. I know that when it was, one morning I woke up and everybody was very quiet and did, going around not talking and whispering everything. And I asked what was wrong and nobody would tell me.

06:00 And all of a sudden I just said Dad's dead isn't he. And no one would admit to it and I started to cry. And I found that this was so. He had died overnight and it was bad cause Mum then only got a proportion of what his pension would have been, his superannuation, from the Post and Telegraphs and he did get a small

06:30 portion of a war pension. But it wasn't a great deal but it was better than nothing. And considering she didn't have to pay rental , she felt herself quite lucky. But she was a pretty prudent sort of woman, she's a good cook, she never wasted anything. She did a lot of sewing and there was lots of hand me downs. I know she used to convert a lot of Dad's uniforms into school trousers, shorts and things for us when we were smaller.

07:00 She was a good home maker, a good house keeper and so on. She was very frugal. In fact she was so frugal that she was able to save bits and pieces. Because Dad, every now and again would say, "Oh I should go home and see Mum down in Victoria at Horsham." But he said, "But I haven't got the money." And Mum'd say, "How much do you need?"

07:30 And he'd say, "Oh I need a couple of pound," you know. And she'd say, "Oh I might be able to help you," you know. And he'd say, "Help me, where are you getting that from?" you know. And she'd say, "Oh I've been able to put a few two shilling pieces away here and there," you know. So she'd disappear and she'd come out with two or three or four pound, whatever it was. And off he'd go to see his mother. This was about pre 1927 I think cause his mother died then. And but

08:00 he'd only be down there a day and he'd be back cause he wanted to get home again you know. But I know when we were going to get towards, no, one day she wanted an old shed cleaned out. And she asked my older brother to, it was next to the laundry, it was part of the one structure but whereas the

laundry was made of brick and had a proper roof on it, the other side of

08:30 the laundry wall was an old wooden shed, about the same size, with full of old timber and old hardware, builders hardware and empty cans and bottles, a real mess, and it had an earthen floor. And Mum got the idea that the place should be cleaned out. So she asked my older brother to clean it out. So he got the rake and raked all this stuff out through the door and a great pile. And he was going to put it in garbage

09:00 tins and she came out. And instead she, she'd broken her leg at the time, and she came out on crutches and she said, "Don't put that stuff away at the moment." And Terry said, "Why?" And she said, "There might be something there I need," you know. And he said, "What would you need amongst this junk?" And she said, "Let me have a look." So she said, "Just rake it away," you know, "Just rake it away." And she said, "No it's not there," and, because, she said, "Go in and rake a bit more." So he went in and he raked the earth and

09:30 out come a bottle, an old jam jar. And she said, "That's it, that's it." And of course the lid had rusted in, it took a lot of effort to get the lid, or I think we had to break the top of the jar. And inside was probably about a hundred pound of notes that she'd stashed away there for a rainy day. And they were all decaying. She nearly died you know.

10:00 Oh she, I could see her face now where she'd done this as a sort of, you know, Mr Fraser had said, "Put your money under the bed," she'd put it in a bottle under an earthen floor. And the weather, the cold and different dark, dank conditions had affected it even through the glass and the you know stopper on the bottle. Anyhow she was devastated and thought it was useless. She took it up to the bank and they gingerly took it

10:30 apart and said that there was enough numbers still on the notes to enable them to give her new notes for most of the ones that were there you know. So, but it was just an indication that she had been able to, during the Depression, somehow or other save up money for a rainy day.

Well that was very lucky.

Mmm but she was very frugal, she was a good cook. Good, plain cook and she made

11:00 do from things you know. She never wasted money and she was always able to find enough money to send us to the local Star Picture Show or Regal on a Saturday afternoon with sixpence and threepence and so on you know.

Now you mentioned that you managed to get into Sydney Boys High, to Sydney High. And while you were there you were involved in the school cadets.

11:30 **Could you talk about your experience in the cadets?**

Yeah well in the, sorry, in the cadets I wasn't, I was too poor to get a uniform and I was only in it for my third year. I was only there sort of big enough then really to be in the cadets. And they were looking the, '39 that would have been I was in the cadets, towards from about June onwards they wanted, the war had sort of,

12:00 pardon me, broken out. And they wanted extra people in there and especially as there was gonna be a camp in December at Holsworthy. So we used to you know do some drill in the gymnasium there at Sydney Boys. But the big highlight of that time there was to go to Holsworthy with the cadet regiment. And I was a young boy

12:30 with, I think I was still in short pants there. And the colonel or Captain Wiltshire from the regiment handed out a three-o-three rifle to all the boys each you know. And it was a proper rifle, it was in working condition, we used it to fire on the firing range. The only things we didn't have were the bullets to put in it. So here's yours truly given this rifle, nearly as big as

13:00 he was and told to get to Holsworthy. Which I lived at Waverley then so it was getting the tram into Central and the train into, out to Holsworthy which around was past Liverpool way. And it was interesting there on the train, here am I sitting in one of these funny box carriages with a, with this rifle

13:30 on the floor with the barrel pointing up. And there was a dear old lady sitting opposite to me there, very motherly looking lady. And she was eyeing me with this gun. And she wanted to know what I was doing with it. And I told her I was went to Sydney Boys' High School Cadets and was going for a camp out at Holsworthy. And she was very interested in it but very concerned that I was such a young looking little boy with this huge gun.

14:00 And she was very solicitous for me and what might happen to me you know. And she said, "Do you know who I am?" as she looked at me. And I said, "No, I don't know who you are." And she said, "I'm Mum from Dad and Dave." The radio program which was on 2GB you know. And she said, "Don't you know Mum?" And I said, "Oh yes, I listen to it every night,

14:30 Monday to Friday," you know. It was the most popular program except for Martin's Corner on 2GB. Which probably you've never heard of either of them really. But it was, everybody turned on Dad and Dave at seven o'clock at night, there was Martin's Corner came on at six thirty I think and then came on

Dad and Dave. And went on for years you know. But Mum was there watching me with this gun. So anyhow, but she was

15:00 quite chuffed about the whole thing. So we went to Holsworthy and for about a week's camp. And it was very interesting because I think it convinced me that the army wasn't for me when I turned eighteen. I enjoyed the week there, a lot of boys my age were there, they were only, I was only fourteen, they fifteen, sixteen, seventeen. And

15:30 we slept on these straw palliasses they called them. They were just a thing made of hessian that you went to a tower-like building and got armfuls of straw from and stuffed them into the palliasse and then tied the end up and you took it off to a hut and you laid it on the floor and that was your bed sort of thing. And wasn't very comfortable I can tell you. And we did

16:00 drills, and did route marches and did made an obstacle course there. And we spent a day on the rifle range firing at targets. And that was like being, it was so desolate that rifle range, so dry. It was a hot day and there was just one little tap there in an inaccessible place, where, when you did turn it on warm water came out of it. It was fun firing at the targets

16:30 and getting your results back you know and so forth. I enjoyed that part of it but I didn't enjoy the whole day in the hot sun. And …

You mentioned that you realised that the army wasn't for you.

I thought…

What was, why was that?

Well I thought it was a bit uncomfortable, life, if you had to be sleeping on palliasses and you, then there

17:00 was a few fights broke out between different older chaps. And there was blood over faces and I was spending half my time mopping up people's faces and getting blood off them. Doing a sort of first aid work on them. And I was getting and I did become friends with a captain or a major there. Young fella who, probably wasn't any more than twenty-three

17:30 or twenty-four, and he was quite a nice young man. And he took an interest in all of us. And I sort of had him as a role model really, as a person. And in fact he told me that on a certain date he was going with his Unit and meeting in Hyde Park where they were going to assemble. And he was being posted to Darwin and I was so impressed with what he was about to do that I found my way

18:00 in town and farewelled him at the Archibald Farm, because he was sort of a role model. But getting back to your question, why had I formed this opinion, I thought perhaps the navy or the air force might be better. And of course knowing I was going to be eighteen, I suppose I had a self preservation instinct in me as to what might be a more life preserving activity. And

18:30 watching more films and having watched All Quiet on the Western Front, years and years before, I formed the opinion that the army was a place where the casualty rate was pretty high. And maybe it'd be more amenable to get into somewhere, and I had to make sort of mental decisions as to whether it'd be better to be in the navy. I found there'd too much water there, too far to go down. And I

19:00 thought the air force'd be safer actually, and little did I know. No, I really thought the air force'd be a safer place being high up in the air. Probably naive, I admit, cause it wasn't as it turned out. But that's what I sort of settled on then as the war went on and the Battle of Britain was going on. That I, there was a fighter pilot called Paddy Finnegan, he was an Irishman.

19:30 And he was one of the heroes of the Battle of Britain. And with Bluey Truscott and others who, that they were always on the news you know how many they'd shot down. And he was, became idolised actually. You know with the younger people and he was sort of an idol of mine at the time, Paddy Finnegan. And I remember when he got shot down over the English Channel, you know I was completely devastated because his last words were

20:00 as he plunged into the Channel was, "This is it chaps." And I thought 'Oh God, he's gone,' you know. And so things weren't really safe in the air force. But it was because he was there that I'd firmed up my view that the air force was for me rather than the army, and probably also rather than the navy. And it was when I was seventeen I joined the Air Training

20:30 Corps. And I virtually made a decision that the air force was for me if they would accept me. I didn't know whether they would accept me or not even though I was in the Air Training Corps. at the time.

So where were you when war broke out?

When war broke out I was in third year at Sydney Boys' High, Sydney Boys' High School. I was doing roughly my Intermediate Certificate at that time, or about to do it. In the next

21:00 month or so. So…

And what do you recall of the outbreak of war?

Not a great deal. The I've been trying to think actually where I was, what had happened. I do remember the Prime Minister saying we are at war. It is my melancholy duty, that came over the radio at the time. And of course there was a great lull for a while where didn't seem to be anything happening much.

21:30 Because Germany was pressing on against the other countries of Europe and hadn't done very much. And then they decided they'd start bombing London and Coventry and Bristol and other places. And this is where the air force, the Spitfires and the Hurricanes came into their own. And one knew that well no, as I say I was only fifteen,

22:00 I didn't know how long the war was going to last, it could have been over by the time I was eighteen. But as I approached eighteen I knew I had to make some sort of a decision and get into something. And as I say I made it when I went into the Air Training Corps. when I was about seventeen and a bit. And joined the Rose Bay Unit.

So tell me more about the Air Training Corps at Rose Bay?

Well someone at work,

22:30 one of the doctors recommended that I ought to join the Air Training Corps. He knew I was a junior legatee, he said, "Why don't you join the Air Training Corps." He said you know, he said, "You, that'll enable you to get into the air force quicker, that, if that's what you want to get into." I said, "Well I thought you know if I didn't get into something quick I might have been drafted into the army and I didn't want to go into the army." So I

23:00 went into the Air Training Corps. really as a leg into the air force. And I also got a letter at the time which is in my records. Shows you how silly people can get, or how keen people were at the time. From the Vice President of Legacy at the time addressed to the RAAF asking them to expedite my enrolment in the air force cause I was keen to get in. But

23:30 my sons look at me with horror now when I tell them about this. Cause they can't believe anyone could be like that you know. They said they wouldn't do it. I said yes I think you would if there was a war on and things were getting desperate. And things were, things were building up. Remember in '41, I think it was '41, the Japanese were coming into the war. And things were getting a bit scary you know. There was

24:00 the Pearl Harbour, there was the mini, sort of mini subs in the harbour, sinking the [HMAS] Kuttabul I think it was. There was the submarine off Bondi was firing shells across suburbs. We had blackouts on, we were all told to blackout our windows. I was making wooden frames to put around all the windows to bold in.

24:30 An air raid warden's hut was established just on the corner of the property sort of next to where we lived, there was an air raid shelter built opposite in the front garden of a place, they excavated it. So, and the Japanese were getting closer and closer and it looked as though we were going to be invaded. And I think when things get that close

25:00 anybody with any thought in their mind would say you know you just can't not be in it, you've got to do something you know. That's what I say to my boys, you, if you were involved in that situation, you wouldn't want your family, your mother, or whoever, your sister or brothers, if they were younger you know, subjected to invasion. Its best to know, tackle them you know whoever might

25:30 be threatening you, away from where you lived rather than on your doorstep before you make your mind up you know. That's how I felt you know. And I didn't know where I was going to go once I did join up. It could have been New Guinea, it could have been anywhere, you know I didn't know I was going to go over to England, really, you know.

So around this time did you have a sense of Empire?

Well its

26:00 strange this you know. I suppose in a way one did, it was just the times. It might be felt that with a name like Dwyer, that Irish roots sort of thing and with the Irish reactions that were in the colony, early colony and so forth, the Irish weren't particularly liked.

26:30 And they regarded us as rebellious and seditious and all this sort of thing, but the funny thing was I never, I grew up not realising any of this. It might have been in the older generations. At school we would salute the flag and sing God Save the Queen. And we would

27:00 at Sydney Boys' High especially Anzac Day, we had Anzac Day ceremonies. We had speakers who would come and in the great hall and talk to us about their war experiences. And we would sing recessional and do this, that and the other. And to mind I think there was a feeling of Empire. We used to look at the maps with all the red splotches and take some sort of pride that there was a place as big as this, that was all

27:30 part of the one sort of country, in a way you know. And everybody looked upon, in those days, that England or the British Isles anyway was the homeland. It was, may have been drummed into everybody I don't know. I had no particular feelings myself that I was, I regarded myself as Australian really. Not

Irish or

28:00 British, I was Australian, I was very proud of being an Australian, still am, sort of thing, you know.

Did you feel like you were enlisting to fight for the Empire or to fight for Australia?

I was fighting for home, I was fighting for my mother and my family and Australia really, as far as I was concerned. It wasn't for Empire, no, no, it was Australia was threatened. We had the Japs [Japanese] pretty close. And I

28:30 had a Dad, a father and his brother and a mother with two other, her brothers had gone away. And I thought it was one's duty you know if there was a war on, to contribute too. I felt it'd be shameful if I didn't do something. I don't say that you know immodestly or anything like that. I just thought it was ones duty to contribute, really. And

29:00 at no stage thought that I wouldn't, really. I, it only problem I had was which service really. And I was convinced really, and I do say this in all honesty without, I was convinced that once I had enlisted, I'd be killed, I really did, that I wouldn't come back. And I used to say that to everybody, especially in America and they couldn't believe me. Cause the young people my age I spoke to there

29:30 were appalled, when I'd tell them this. But I'd say to them well there's a war on over there in England and its pretty serious. And cause they were in different other things. They were administrative, they were , they had so many people that they wouldn't have ever seen any front line action probably you know. The ones I spoke to cause they had so many in the army and so

30:00 forth you know. I mean I got on famously with them, we met hundreds and hundreds going through the [United] States. And you know we'd talk about aspirations in the future and I said well once I get in, I said the casualties are very high, over there you know and I don't expect to come back. And they just couldn't understand how I could be so negative. I used to just tell them I was realistic that's all.

Just getting back to Australia and,

30:30 **and Sydney around this time, when you talked about the Japanese subs being off Bondi and coming into the harbour etc. What do you recall of those particular incidences?**

Well I can remember explosions, they did hit different parts around Bondi I believe. There was gunfire. And I can, they used

31:00 to put the old siren on you know. The air raid siren used to go to warn that there was an attack of some sort. And it was incredible that we were so far down the coast that you know that we were being attacked in some way. It was token attacks I think, when you look at it in retrospect now. But I know we had people knocking at the door during these things and they wanted Mum

31:30 and everybody to go over into the air raid shelter in one of the houses opposite under the lawn. And Mum refused to go, she said she didn't want that falling in on top of her you know. She'd rather stay where she was. We had to have hose at the ready. We had to fill the baths up with water and things like that. We were told to get under tables, things like that you know. But the main thing was the blackouts to make sure that no light escaped. And I'd never done

32:00 any carpentering in my life till I'd done these blackout rectangle with wooden frames and sisalcraft and little sort of bolts on them that bolted into the sides of the window frames. But had to make them for all the main windows in the house.

What, just for me, because I didn't, I'm not actually familiar with this term, but what is sisalcraft?

Sisalcraft was a papery substance,

32:30 with tar in the middle and stout sort of a papery each side. And they usually put it in ceilings or they used to as a sort of a insulation under tiles. It was fairly thick, fairly thick. But it was the only stuff they had I think, that in those days, they used to make it in huge rolls you know. It was bitumenised

33:00 paper, very thick paper, smooth both sides. And you could cut it into shapes. And of course you cut it into rectangles to put, to tack onto the wooden frames you made up. And they gave a good blackout if you measured the timber right, you know. And well they were the most suitable things. Everybody was

33:30 sort of given access to the little tiny slat-like timber and enough sisalcraft to make these things. I don't know what people would have done who didn't have someone to make em up. I didn't think I could make them up but I did. It was a bit of a panic with the hoses. Of course the hose, the hoses we had only fitted to screw, you know the ones you screwed on to outside taps. If you brought a hose inside you found you couldn't screw it on to the taps

34:00 inside, cause there's no threads you know. You had to have plenty of buckets and things, you had stirrup pumps you know with a, used to put one part of the pump in and you'd sort of push pressure on a pedal and water would squirt out you know. If you needed it, we never needed it as it turned out. But...

You've got a remarkable memory.

Well because one did it you see. I can't perhaps remember dates,

34:30 places exactly but well they were pretty, well what can I say interesting, but they were a bit scary times. Cause you didn't know just how it would develop into anything worse. And I can't think of anything worse than having you know. I used to think it was, say if the Japs, see they had the Brisbane line then. We didn't know about that, the Commonwealth Government had decided they'd just abandon the rest of

35:00 Australia and they drew a line from Brisbane to Sydney and they were only gonna defend the area between Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. They were gonna let the enemy take the rest of Australia and sort of win it back some other time if they could. So that was how scary it was.

So what was the mood like in Sydney around this time?

Oh well business as usual I suppose, at work

35:30 it was. I can, I was only young remember. But I suppose those who were getting ready to turn eighteen were starting to get a bit serious about things. I think my mother was worried. I know my grandmother was worried, she was seeing, she was getting the, bit neurotic you know seeing little Japanese crawling up and down the walls of her house, she lived on her own.

36:00 They were in sort of Newland Street. She was old, she was in her eighties you know. So I suppose if that happened to her it was happening to others. People who perhaps lived on their own who were aged and didn't have anybody with them. But so many people were already away in the forces you know. It surprised me that there were nine hundred thousand Australians

36:30 under arms in uniform at some stage during the war. Now probably the population was only six million, six and a quarter million. Now that was a hell of a lot to be in uniform.

Yeah its remarkable.

That was a tremendous war effort. And that included loads of women who went into the services too and went into the land army and things like that you know.

Now just before we get to enlistment, I want to just,

37:00 **make it clear the work that you were doing around this time. So can you talk about your work and how you got that job, after leaving school?**

Oh the Public Service, well, yes it was pretty simple. See there was a Depression on and it was very hard to get jobs. My sister got the job because Dad was a bit of a union man and station 2KY was a labour council so she got accommodated pretty quickly there cause through his union

37:30 connections. My brother Terry got a job by sitting for a railway exam and he got a job in the railways. And I was made to sit for the public service exam. And the results didn't come out for a while. So in the mean time I had to apply for jobs. I applied for several, had a few interviews. I applied for a junior in a Solicitors office, didn't get it, they thought

38:00 I was too qualified. Because I had the Intermediate Certificate. Went across to the Australian Glassworks at Botany at Waterloo. And one of my teachers sent me there. He thought 'Oh you should get a job there,' but didn't get it. And the problem was I think is I stuttered. I was a terrible stammerer, couldn't get a word out, which you might wonder at now. And then I applied

38:30 for a job with the Sydney Country Council which you is Sydney Electricity, Energy Australia. And I had a most disgusting interview there cause I stammered and I knew I hadn't got anything. I just felt like shooting myself when I went out of the interview. And then applied for a job at the water board as a junior clerk and got it. And I started there for, they interviewed me and

39:00 so forth and accepted me and I started there and was there for six weeks. It was a good job, junior, for twenty-five shillings a week. And then at the end of six weeks I got a notice from the Public Service Board that I'd won a place with them, there I'd been successful the exam and about fifty applicants were successful out of the whole state. And I was told to report to them.

39:30 And I had to make my mind up whether to stay with the water board or take the public service exam, or take the Public Service job. Decided the public service was probably better cause it had a lot of departments, meant more chance of promotion, more moves you know between departments. And that's what I did, and as soon as I accepted the water board was a bit shirty with me. And I was put as a junior clerk in the board of

40:00 health on the princely sum of about twenty-seven and six a week.

Okay well we've just come to the end of a tape so we'll continue the story on after that.

Yeah, okay.

Tape 3

00:33 **So the water board was a little bit peeved with you at this time?**

Well because they'd gone through the recruitment process and they must have found me okay you know. And I actually didn't do what I was employed there to do really. I was, it was a peculiar thing, I'd had a fight with my brother before I started, my younger brother. And we were fighting up in the back yard

01:00 and he was near a fence post. And I took a swipe at him, he dodged and I hit the fence post and I broke my fifth metacarpal. And I had a big bit of metal there and I couldn't write. So even though I was starting at the water board, you know, almost the next day, I couldn't go into the job. And they put me there in the messenger's box for six weeks you know. I didn't have anything really much to do except answer bells

01:30 from the chief engineer and the deputy engineer. The deputy engineer by the way was, eventually become Sir William Hudson on the Snowy Mountains Authority sort of thing. Really it was a light, pleasant job. And eventually I would have gone in, when my hand had fixed up I would have gone in, but that was the story. I felt it was better that I leave the water board, because there was more diversity in the public service and I didn't know where I was gonna go in the public service.

02:00 **And where did you go in the public service?**

Junior clerk in the, at the board of health. I occupied an office that was vacated by Marcus Quinlan who became the first labour director of state lottery. I still got his, some blotting pad somewhere, stuck in a box, one of those with a handle on you go like that. But I, all the senior staff had been

02:30 progressively going to the war. So I was more or less a junior to the secretary of the board of health, who was Val Boyle, Sir Valentine Boyle. He was a great boss, he was desperate for, you know having lost his senior staff, for someone to help him. And he was a great mentor and tutor to me. He started to

03:00 get me doing top level stuff almost from the time I started there. And he wanted me to review files and to make summaries and submissions to the board of health and I was only fifteen, and really a much senior person's job, I wasn't sure what I was doing. But anyway it'd come back with circles and red and things everywhere. And that went on for a few months you know and with less circles and less

03:30 red. And eventually they didn't come back at all, and they'd go straight in as Minute papers or submission papers to the Board of Health on various diverse subjects. Various types of drugs that they had to consider. And one strangely concerned this area where I lived, here now. One was the disgusting state of the Ryde Sanitary Depot which is this area where they used to scour

04:00 the pans from the toilets that they used to collect and take down the end of the estate and bury or scour out. And the health inspectors had reported bad practices by Ryde Council. And I had to put in a major summarise submission on that, not realising one day I'd live on the damn estate you know. But anyway I got very good training under him for the three years I was there. And it was probably research

04:30 and summations and making recommendations. And that was to point the way for the rest of my life virtually in a way.

And was the board of health also dealing with hospitals and other institutions?

No it dealt with mainly things that concerned sanitation. And pure food and strangely, well it was a combined thing. It was the board of health and

05:00 the office of the director general. And the Doctor E. Sydney Morris was both president of the board of health and also the director general of health. And it, I'm a bit wrong there to say that it didn't have connections with the others, cause it did. It did control inspection of private hospitals through its health inspectors. It did run baby health centres,

05:30 the building of them, the subsidies to local organisations and the building of them. And they staffed them. I don't even know if they go now really. They had various clinics, tuberculosis division, industrial hygiene division. They had a venereal disease division. They had, they looked after leprosy patients, in fact I used to have a string of leprosy patients coming to my office as

06:00 well as venereal disease patients to get tram tickets and bus tickets and rail tickets, so they could keep appointments and things. And I used to immediately rush down to the wash basins and wash my hands before the next ones come. I used to also admit old people into old men's homes and old ladies homes. They used to be the Lidcombe State Hospital and the Liverpool State Hospital for elderly men. And

06:30 the Newington State Hospital and home for elderly women. And I used to, when I say admit them, I used to do the administrative part of it, the medical part was done by the hospital admission depot that I visited every day over in Macquarie Street. They'd arrange the bed then I'd arrange for all the transport and the notification of the police and so forth. And we also regulated noxious trades.

07:00 Between Central [Station] and Mascot there used to be all these boiling down works, knackeries, used to pong you know. And these things were all around the state and they call them noxious trades cause

they dealt with fats and boiling down and skins and things like that. And we had to issued licences, which was quite a big task in those days. Oh lots of things. We had convalescent homes for, one at Strickland, one at

07:30 Carrington at Camden where people who were you know in need of a holi, you know people who were run down, were admitted. I used to arrange admissions to those too. And they did have other functions, and I just can't probably think of it at the moment.

Sounds like a very busy job?

Well I was only one of many. We also had a nice library there, which I spent a lot of time in.

I was interested

08:00 **to see, to hear what you said about lepers. Of course leprosy has been stamped out. I mean it hasn't been a factor for quite a long time now. Where were the lepers of Sydney?**

Well they were scattered around Sydney, but there was a Lazarette at Little Bay, out Maroubra way. And there was buildings out there where they used to admit them. Might have been several dozen used to be admitted there if they were in, if they were in an advanced state.

08:30 They used to have to get smears taken periodically to people who were suspected, who were contacts of members the family. And the result of the smears would indicate whether they had to be admitted to the Lazarette or not. So well you, I don't think it operates now, I don't think it operates now but it was certainly operating in the forties. It was operating when I came back from the war.

So how many, approximately how many leper patients did the state have at that time?

09:00 Well several dozen, several dozen, it would have been under a hundred, would have been under a hundred. But there was lots of things you folk don't know about.

No that's quite a portfolio, that's quite a major one. So moving on to the process of your enlistment, what do you recall of that?

Well as I got closer to eighteen and I had this letter from Colonel Munroe

09:30 of the Legacy club. I presented that to the recruitment depot at Woolloomooloo. And went, started to go through the process. They carried out a medical and I passed that, flying colours, A1. And went through the other procedures of different tests, I can't

10:00 quite remember what they were. But you had to take an oath of allegiance and then you had to report on a certain day and you were taken up to Initial Training School, up at Bradfield Park. Which has probably got some nice housing estate on it now. Bradfield was two places, it was Initial Training School and it was also embarkation depot sort of thing. You went there to go overseas too, at times.

10:30 And disembarkation too, we returned there from overseas. And there we did a couple of months work you know. Different air force, rules and regs [regulations] and air recognition and Morse code, stuff like that, I can't remember it all.

When you say air recognition, you mean aircraft recognition?

Yes, aircraft recognition.

11:00 And oh they gave you a great manual, and they selected you towards the end, they wanted to know what you wanted to become in the air force and you applied and you had to be interviewed by a small selection panel. Most people wanted to become a pilot so, I did. But I did a, I passed to go down to Temora,

11:30 to Elementary Flying Training School. And if you didn't solo there within seven or eight hours, you were taken off, you were scrubbed as they called it. And there was two complete huts of scrubbed pupils while I was there. The more than who were still in training you know.

So just moving the story down to Temora,

12:00 **can you tell us a bit more about the training there?**

Well its Tiger Moth training of course. They were very good little aircraft you know to train on. You, they had a chief ground instructor that taught you some of the rudiments about engines and principles of flight and everything. But the main thing of course was getting inside a Tiger Moth and going out with

12:30 an instructor. And being taught how to handle the controls. And to find your way around as you were handling the controls. I'm afraid most people who fail that, were too young. I regarded myself afterwards when I was scrubbed as being too young to be alert enough as to what was going on. I was gaping around,

13:00 looking at the landscape below, at little townships, rivers, railway stations and so on. And not concentrating enough on the art of flying. I could do the circuits and bumps, pardon me my nose is

itchy, and take offs and landings you might say. And could, there's an art to controlling

13:30 even a plane like a Tiger Moth. There's a natural torque in the engine which either makes you view to the left or the right, you just don't go straight unfortunately. And you've got to learn how to control the plane to make it do a straight take off you know because there's hazards otherwise.

So you have to be constantly vigilant by the sounds of it?

I do believe so and I believe I was really at that stage, too young to and,

14:00 I couldn't even drive a car, there were no cars to drive you know. So to do an aeroplane, to drive an aeroplane, even a training plane I would say is much more difficult than learning to drive a car. People spend far more than six or seven hours learning to drive a car, really.

Now what was your instructor like at Temora?

Oh they were different ones every time you went up, you went up with a different one, really. I think one of the instructors we had, I think his name was Brain. I think he became

14:30 one of the top notch men with Ansett, after the war.

Oh Lester Brain?

Lester Brain, yeah. I think he was the chief flying instructor. He may well have been the one who scrubbed me, I can't remember exactly.

Do you have any specific memories of Lester Brain?

No. No. There was an interesting character there as an instructor but no one wanted to fly with him.

Why was that?

Well his name was Falstein, Max Falstein. Who used to run

15:00 a jewellery business in the city. And they called him Slapsy Maxie ah Slapsy Maxie. And I think everybody thought he was too erratic and too dangerous to want to go with, no one wanted to fly with him. And ...

Was there any anti-semitic ingredient?

No, no, not at all. It was just he was a bit of a ratbag I think. No one wanted to fly with him. And I not sure whether

15:30 he killed himself in an accident eventually. But as I say, about two thirds of those who went to Temora seemed to get scrubbed.

So why were you scrubbed?

Well I couldn't land properly, I landed about fifty foot above the earth. When I pulled out to level off I was still fifty, and of course if you do that you, then you fall down you do the Kangaroo hop you know. Boing, boing, boing, boing. And if you don't learn to

16:00 solo properly, to take off properly and to land properly within seven or eight hours, they can't, at that time they could not afford to spend any more valuable time on you. I would say anyone could learn to fly if you had, you know, sufficient time, say, fifteen, twenty hours. But you certainly, you had to be pretty good to be able to do it in seven or eight hours. Really.

And time really was of the essence by the sound of it?

Oh that's right, they couldn't afford to waste resources

16:30 on people who didn't have the natural aptitude towards flying. And I don't think I had the natural aptitude to be honest.

So how did it feel to be scrubbed?

Terrible, you felt like a leper. I knew what it felt to be like a leper. Everybody felt like a leper and the morale was very low. And they wanted to get rid of the scrubbed pupils as quick as they could because they felt like they were affecting the others who weren't scrubbed you

17:00 know. Course there was great friendships between everybody and naturally those who were scrubbed were upset you know. And didn't know just what would happen to them, what sort of re-musterings they would get. Whether it'd be air gunner or bomb aimer or navigator or what you know.

So what was the remustering that you obtained?

Well I thought the next best thing was a navigator. And I applied for that and from Temora went to 1AOS [Air Observers' School]

17:30 which is Cootamundra which is practically next door. And that was Avro Ansons and that was straight

out learning to navigate, doing plottings, taking fixes and so forth. Avro Ansons a very safe little aircraft. Although there was one student, one pupil there who only looked at them and he said he refused to fly in them and that was it, he was out. He just didn't like the idea of them,

18:00 you know. They looked too flimsy for him. Which might have been put down to lack of moral fibre. I don't think it would have been it was just his natural reaction to seeing something that he didn't believe could take off probably or be safe you know. I don't know what his mind was really, but I remember that very well.

And so how much time at Cootamundra was spent on flying and how much time was devoted to class room work?

Oh it was split pretty

18:30 evenly I guess. I was a bit young there too I felt. There was a lot of ex army fellas in our courses. I got a photograph there of the course at Bradfield, which then went on to Temora and Coota [Cootamundra]. And you'll see a lot of chaps there who are older than just the eighteen year old ones. They were in their either twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two. There were a lot of

19:00 soldiers came across from army camps to join the courses and they were a bit more wiser than the eighteen year olds. And I found that in doing what we had to do is navigation. When they sent three pupils up with each Avro Anson with the pilot and it was a matter of sharing time

19:30 and doing the work of getting down in the nose and taking drifts to you know work out wind speeds and things like that, and to correct courses. And the older chaps used to, they were older than me, used to push you out of the way and take over you know. And I found that I wasn't doing as good as I should do. And I was getting quite worried about this. And it wasn't till the final trip we made on which we

20:00 were going to win our, you know become navigators or not, it was a trip that went down to Mallala in South Australia. It was a very long trip. Went right over the mallee, over Hay, a place called Nhill. And that was my particular leg to do. And I did a very good plot and you know right on the ball the whole way down. And I was shoving people out of the way myself on

20:30 that trip cause I was desperate to be able to get through you know. And I got a good mark on that particular plotting you know. And it was only because I had to you know sort of make my presence felt and to, well to assert myself really. That's what it was, to assert yourself. Cause nobody else was worried whether you got through or not. They just worried about themselves really.

Now could you describe the process of doing a plot?

21:00 Well its a bit more complicated and you know to, its best seen to be done. With any navigation you go from one place to another, from point A to point B. And when you, you could do your ground work before you take to the air. And whoever is organising the, like on the station

21:30 squadron or even an air field will tell you where you're going. So you spend hours before you go with your maps and you're marking it up, you're joining the particular legs up with solid lines you know, just to show you the route that you're taking. And under ideal circumstances if you're going at a certain speed, you know what time you will

22:00 get to the, or to your final destination. But when you're doing it in various legs, you know what time you'll get to, well we once, we'll say you're starting from A and you might be going to E. And you'll be going from A to B, B to C, C to D. And you'll know if you're going at two hundred miles an hour, which we didn't go that fast at training schools, they couldn't do that. But you did that's,

22:30 you could work out your ETA, that's your Estimated Time of Arrival, quite easily from the time that you left. You'd look at your watch and say well its nine o'clock now and if we're going at two hundred miles an hour and its two hundred mile leg just, we'll get there in an hour's time. But that's in an ideal world. When you take off, what you assume is that you're going in a straight line doesn't work out, because you're blown off course. Either to port or to starboard,

23:00 or you're going into a headwind which pushes you back or you've got a tailwind which is blowing you forward. And depends whether you got a clear day around you, whether you're above cloud or whether you're under cloud you know. So to find out where you are, depends on a lot of factors. Whether you got clear sky around you and clear view of the ground or whether you

23:30 up above cloud or whether you're using radar or what. But there's simple thing is you've got to find out where you are. If you are, have a wind at right angles to you, after say half an hour, you're off course and you're not going to get to your destination. So you've got to tale a fix, you've got to find out where you are somehow or other. You can do that in certain ways if its, if you, you can probably do that

24:00 by map reading. If you've got someone down in the nose, like I could get down in the nose and I could map read my way, I'd map read my way from England down to the heel of Italy and back you know without using any navigation apart from map reading. Because you're picking up on points of coast line and islands and the shape of towns and bays and things like that.

And so to do a good plot, what were the essentials for doing a good plot?

Well you had to

24:30 find out where you were, and it mean, what means there are at your disposal to find out where you are. Well in the, when you're on the Avro Ansons you didn't have much to tell you really where you were. You had to do it visually often. You'd have to do it by sort of by guess and by good by map reading, cause there was no other way.

Obviously you had a compass as well?

Oh well

25:00 yeah the pilot had a compass, I mean he was setting the course on his compass. You'd have to tell the pilot what compass route to take or what to set the compass at. But you had your dividers, you had sort of a computer thing where you made calculations, if you knew the wind speed. But you'd have to find where you were so you could work a wind speed. You'd find out where you should be, if conditions were perfect.

25:30 But then you'd, where you actually were, you'd join up and that was where the wind had sort of pushed you to whether port or starboard, whether forward or backward or whatever, you'd join it up but you had to find out where you were first. Now you could that by map reading or you could do it sometimes in the early days but it didn't work for most people I know, you'd do it with a sextant. You'd get, you'd take fixes on the stars and things if it was

26:00 night time and that was hopeless. But in war time you used radar to give you fixes. There were equipment, one was called G, one was called H2S. They're very complicated systems, this is when you got to the squadron.

We'll deal with those processes later of course.

But you had to work out where you were in actual fact, compared with where you should have been. And that

26:30 gave you two points to join up and you had to work out what the wind speed was and what angle it was coming from. And from that you would then use your little calculator thing to work out a new course to give to the pilot to get to point A or whatever it was. But you had to do this repeatedly because you might get to areas where the wind was changing you know. And its a constant exercise

27:00 of taking fixes of where you actually are compared to where in theory where you should be sort of thing.

Well thanks for that description, that's ...

Oh its very rudimentary.

But you're the first person that's actually described for us manual navigation as opposed to you know radar style G or H2S type navigation, so that's good.

The best is map reading if you've got a clear day and you

27:30 can keep your eye on your map that's beside you and with your route shown. And you don't take your eye off the map, you're looking, comparing all the time. And as I say I sort of map-read my way for a thousand or more miles you know by you know just looking at points on the map really.

Now once you'd finished your training

28:00 **at Cootamundra, where did you go?**

We went to Number One Bombing and Gunnery School at Evans Head. Which, where in theory you're supposed to learn astro navigation for taking fixes on the, using a sextant, using stars. And you learned, you did bombing on sort of practice ranges with practice bombs. And you did gunnery exercises where you would fire at things they called

28:30 drogues, which were like great wind socks, that were pulled by other planes towing them and you would be firing at the drogues. So it was a pretty intensive course, the bombing and gunnery school.

How were your scores with the drogue?

Oh average I suppose, I wouldn't say I was marvellous, average. It was, I was average, wasn't ...

Now you said that you were

29:00 **supposed to be studying these things? What, does that imply that there was some difficulty there at Evans Head?**

Well did I say that, supposed?

Yes, yes.

Well I'm just wondering in which way I meant that now, whether it was the Astro Nav. Astro Nav was a

very difficult thing and with our two feet firmly on the ground and at night time, we would each have a sextant you know. And you'd have to line up on a star in the sky, and

29:30 you'd have to identify the star first, take an angle, sort of fix on it, like a measurement off it and then go to tables and work out you know a position on the ground. And you have to get two stars and where they sort of came together was where you were. But I know when we did it on the ground, most chaps ended up in Siberia even though they were at Evans Head. So how on

30:00 earth people found their way around in a bouncing aircraft, looking through a plastic bubble or a perspex bubble, I don't know. It was, no wonder they developed radar eventually and no wonder now they got satellite stuff where they know precisely where they are. It must have been horrendous in the early part of the war, doing night raids, just trying to do it just by astro navigation.

Now I believe that at some point and I think it might have been at Evans Head,

30:30 **that there was some problem with the attitude of the ground crew?**

Oh yes we, it was very, we weren't treated very good at Evans Head. It was bad station. The ground crew to me gave the impression that the place was there for them. And that we were just unnecessary nuisance to them. That we were just interrupting

31:00 their social life you know. And that was a feeling we got in England at different places too. But at Evans Head they seemed to dislike aircrew trainees. This is what I found. And it was, we, our morale got very, very low there at one stage. They had about twenty-three or more DIs, drill instructors who were more or less people who were there to

31:30 push you into doing things, spying on you, making you march at the double, pick up this, pick up that and so forth. They were all under the control of a WO [Warrant Officer] sort of disciplinary, whom they had at most places. I don't know what they call the one at Evans Head but at Temora they called him the Screaming Skull. But they had a nasty type

32:00 at Evans Head who was threatening us all the time. In fact just about everybody threatened us on the, we got there from a long train trip from Sydney and tumbled into an empty hut and went to sleep and the next day when we woke up we had our leave banned for a month. And we'd only been there over night. And the reason was that the outside of

32:30 the hut was strewn apparently, and I hate to say it with a lady present, with beer bottles and condoms. And they blamed us. I mean nothing to do with us. Really. It was the outgoing course apparently. And we had, fortunately had, and we were told we'd have all leave cancelled for a month and we were outraged at that. At the injustice of it. Sounds funny I suppose when you hear this. But we fortunately

33:00 had with us a fella who was a barrister in his private life, work life, Gordon Carmichael, he became a judge later on. And he was more than outraged, he was adamant he told the CO [Commanding Officer] that we weren't involved in such nefarious and pernicious practices. And that he wanted us all court marshalled if we were going to be accused of this you know. Which sent them

33:30 back peddling very fast. And our leave was restored. But it was a very bad place. They couldn't think up things enough, the place was ridden with dysentery. The kitchen must have been badly cleaned and everything. Because all they served was sort of meatballs which, when you ate them you spent the night lining up at the latrines and you were, two and three in the morning

34:00 you know, you were there, lining up. And then there was no decent water to drink. It was all sort of contaminated water. And the only decent thing that you could get as a trainee was believe it not something quite mild, was flavoured milk that came in from Lismore or Casino. And then some great spark decided he'd cut that out from the canteen so that was stopped. And morale got

34:30 so low at one stage you know that we, well we just had to press on regardless I suppose. But things changed about two thirds the way through the particular course because the top administration changed. And we got two RAAF chaps had been on, had done war service over in England, both decorated, Wing Commander White and Squadron Leader

35:00 Jewel came in to take control of the station and they could sense that there was a you know, that morale was rock bottom with the aircrew trainees you know.

Somebody else must have known?

Oh well there was an FO [Flight Officer] Walker there and he was a real 'b' in every meaning of the word. But he was like a bull dog who just seemed to hate, every body hated aircrew for some reason, I don't know why.

So with, with the,

35:30 **with the new brass arriving at the top…?**

Well they called a meeting of all the aircrew in the theatre with the former administration, except the top rung who'd been moved on. With all the WO Disciplinary and FO Walker and all those there. And the fella said, "Chaps," you know this is how they spoke, "Chaps we've only been here a few hours, we can

sense you know a lack of morale here. We know something's wrong, we don't know exactly what it

36:00 is. But we've arranged this meeting in the theatre, if you want to whinge, whinge now." So one after the other you know, the fellas got up. I got up, I know that and I whinged and I whinged and this Walker was getting up and, "Don't listen to them, they don't know what they're talking about, they're only trainees you know." And, "Shut up, shut up FO Walker, shut up." We were heard out and things changed overnight you know. We got our

36:30 stuff back in the canteen and you know we could drink something for a change instead of drinking stuff that sent us off to the loo. The, there was a softening amongst some of the DIs [Drill Instructors] but the senior man was still a nasty type and he was trying to whip us into shape for the marching out, when we got our wings presented, because we were going in all directions there and he was pleading with us in the end. "Oh fellas, just for the

37:00 ceremony…" He said, "Just for the ceremony, you know. Do it right, do it right." You know cause some, he'd say attention and half'd keep marching up, wheel right, some would go left you know. And he was gonna be responsible for it you see. So he was pleading with us in the end to go and do it the right way.

Were people mucking up and deliberately messing the system up, with by marching off in one direction…?

Oh yes, yes, they were determined to go and put him in the pooh really, the pooh you know. They were gonna

37:30 show him, you know, bugger him sort of thing. Cause he was supposed to be in charge of the ceremony for the march you know and he couldn't get us to do anything the right way. We did do it the right way when it came to the ceremony cause we'd be in front of Wing Commander White, Squadron Leader Jewel. We put on the best show we possibly could you know. I wouldn't say it was perfect but it was but it was the best we could

And did the attitude of the ground crew improve?

Oh we weren't persecuted, we were really

38:00 persecuted up to that time you know. But they were just in their attitude generally, the attitude wasn't as deliberate, it wasn't as nasty as it was. And there wasn't that much resentment shown. But it was really resentment, I, as I said it looked as though we were, I think that sometimes we wondered where they got some of these blokes from. Whether they went through the prisons or somewhere you know.

I was

38:30 **going to say the whole place sounds like a concentration camp?**

Well it wasn't good and some people, I rang my mid upper gunner over the weekend, just to catch up on his memory of it. And he couldn't even remember anything, he's up in Townsville. And but the only thing he remembered was the first death that we had up there.

At Evans Head?

Yeah. The chap in the bed next to me, he knew his brother,

39:00 you know who apparently refused to fly again, the brother, after the boy next to me was killed in a unnecessarily in an accident. You know with one of these pilots, stooging, getting bored and shooting up a, they were bombing control tower you know that did the …

Actually if we can cover that in the next, at the beginning of the next tape, because it sounds like quite a significant story.

Well…

Tape 4

00:33 **Noel, could, we were beginning to cover the story of this very unfortunate death. Could you just tell me that story from the beginning again?**

Well at Evans Head was the first instance of anybody dying in the air force that I was connected with. We naturally lived in ordinary wooden huts. And the chap next to me was a young fella, my age, his name was Doug Grimsay.

01:00 As I understood it then he was the only son of, or only child of the family. And because we were alongside one another we were the same age, we were very friendly and used to chat and talk. But unfortunately, and we used to, Evans Head used Fairey Battle aircraft. Now they were different to Ansons, they had been in the war as fighting aircraft.

01:30 They were I suppose I remember now, they were single engine, very heavy aircraft. They pilot up front, they were solid metal. And they had a rear cockpit which two people could fit in, two trainees. One was able to crawl down and lay down up towards, under the pilot's seat and could do bombing from there.

02:00 And the other in the back seat, then the rear cockpit was where the firing was done from for you know for gunnery. And we used to do like alternate trips. We used to go into the bombing range, the practice bombing range. There was a wooden tower that took, did the reading of where your bombs fell. The you know angles and they

02:30 plotted them in other words. And after Doug went up with another trainee and with a pilot, whose name I thought was PO [Pilot Officer] Cropper. But Lynn doesn't believe that's the name but that's the name that's always stuck in my mind. And they'd done their work for the day, they'd dropped their practice bombs and shot off a few

03:00 rounds of ammo. And the pilots didn't like these trips much, taking trainees around, they regarded just stooging, it wasn't to their liking much. They liked to throw the aircraft around a bit in the sky you know. So this, and it wasn't unknown for this to be done. This particular pilot decided he would shoot up the bombing tower you know, plotting.

03:30 And get up to a height then come you know, diving down at it and doing a wingy around it you know in a circle. And doing, did this for some time. Until at one stage, unfortunately, his wing hit the tower and it, the aircraft flipped and plunged into the ground and exploded. And the whole three of them were incinerated. And it cast a great

04:00 pall over everybody, over every trainee. Especially when they knew what the, what had happened, that it was an unnecessary type thing, it was something that could have been avoided. The pilot could have come back like he should have. And he would have been okay and his two pupils would have been okay. And to me that was shattering cause he was beside my bed and we you know

04:30 exchanged you know comments on all sorts of aspects of our lives together. Past and present and future. And I liked him very much you know. He was a really nice young fella. And I suppose really, I don't mind admitting it, I cried and cried and cried you know that night and for time to come. Especially from the point of view it was so unnecessary, you know. And

05:00 unfortunately that was to happen in the future where people got killed in training that I knew. One of my very best friends, two of my very best friends were killed in training in England at Scapa Flow by friendly fire [fire from your own side]. And that was unnecessary too.

Well that's a very tragic story there at Evans Head. How far into your training at

05:30 **Evans Head did that actually occur?**

Oh that was fairly early in the piece, certainly in the bombing run, after two or three weeks, yes, two or three weeks.

It must have left you feeling, well here we are training, we haven't even hit the real action yet, what's it gonna be like once we get there?

Well you didn't, frankly at that stage being young and uninitiated into things, you didn't think it would

06:00 happen during training. But since I've grown older and a little perhaps wiser, I've read a book by John McCarthy of The Australian war memorial called The Last Call of Empire, which I've got over there on the pile of books. And he says there was one hell of a lot of the official statistics of people killed in the war is not the whole story. There is so many hundreds

06:30 if not thousands killed in training you know. The figures are horrific sort of thing and you don't hear so much of those you know. So you know my idea of the air force being a safe place as a seventeen year old was sort of given a bit of a dint you know with that happening. But I guess it was a conditioning dint. I mean

07:00 you know one doesn't like, want these things to happen. And it could have been me, it could have been anybody you know. It could have been someone I didn't even know who wasn't beside my bed. And I wouldn't have probably had such strong personal sorrow and feelings about it. Though I wouldn't have you know really cared for it having happened. But when its so near to you that

07:30 its a bit upsetting, or a lot upsetting really.

Its very difficult, very. So at this stage was your training under the auspices of The Empire Air Training Scheme?

Well its my understanding that the whole lot was Empire Air Training Scheme, whether it was in Australia or whether it was in Canada, or wherever. Its something I've never really worked out but I, from reading John McCarthy's book,

08:00 it was a plan drawn up before the start of the war, when the Dominions etc. got together and they decided that if there was a war they would, the Dominions etc. would set up this scheme to feed

trainees or to have trainees being trained in each of the Dominions you know at schools. And I understand that's why all these places were set up. I can't imagine that it wasn't, I can't say with any authority that it was.

08:30 But going on what John McCarthy said, it seems as though it was an you know essential part of The Empire Air Training Scheme. It was simply that there was not sufficient space or places here to train everybody, so some went off to Canada and perhaps some in Rhodesia or somewhere. But out here it was all Australians you see. But by the time you got to Canada there was a mixture.

09:00 Australians were being trained in Canadian places too you know. I've some mates from work who trained in Canada.

Now you're referring to yourself and your fellow trainees at Evans Head, how many were you in your particular batch of trainees?

Oh well they on 41 course, which I was on, I suppose there'd be about forty, fifty or so in 41 course yes, forty, fifty.

09:30 At the max, sort of at the maximum I'd say.

And apart from the chap that died, did everyone get through the course?

No, no not everybody got through. In fact some didn't get through Cootamundra even. I know there was a number were left behind there, half a dozen or more were left behind. I remember we had a farewell at a Cootamundra hotel, where the ones who didn't

10:00 get through were, attended the dinner. And I felt awfully sorry for them cause they're decent, I've got a photograph of some of them there. They were boys from you know Bradfield Park. One chap I remember very well, name was Lyons you know, he may have become a gunner in the end I don't know. But he was a good type you know. But no one really wanted to become a gunner if you could avoid it.

10:30 **Just taking the story from when you were qualified and you had this parade at Evans Head, what happened to you next?**

Well we had a bit of leave and before we knew it we were on a train which took us up to Brisbane. And we got there overnight and we spent overnight in an army camp at I think it was Yeerongpilly or something like that. Yeerongpilly or something like that. And next day or that day

11:00 had the best meal I've ever had there, the whole air force I suppose. Good Australian stew, it was beaut. Full of meat and veggies, it was really nice. And then we were put aboard a boat in the evening, one of Henry Kyser's Liberty ships, called the USS Sea Corporal. It was it's maiden voyage from America. It was picking up five hundred

11:30 Arm, you know sort of Yanks [Americans] to take back home and about an equal number of Australians to take on their first leg to get to the UK [United Kingdom]. And I was looking at my log book at the back before you came, in fact I wanted to study that log book for a long time so as to remember something here and there more accurately. But it took sixteen days to get from Brisbane to San Francisco. Which is fantastic, really.

12:00 **That was good sea travelling for that time?**

Oh yes, it was non stop, my word.

What was the average sea journey duration at that time for that same …?

I don't know, I don't know but I reckon that was quick. It was very quick, it was almost as good as a sailing ship that brought a post card to my mother in 1905 from San Francisco to Bethanga in Victoria at, that only took about three weeks.

12:30 But the ships, more later days, seemed to take longer than the early ones. But sixteen days was fantastic, we landed in San Francisco. And we were met by American army band playing Lay that Pistol Down Babe, Lay that Pistol Down. That was meant for the Yanks of course on board, not for us.

Just before we look at other aspects of that journey, did you have a chance to farewell your family in Sydney?

13:00 Oh we had the leave, yeah, we had a week's leave. It was mainly mother. I don't think my brother, oh my younger brother was there, yes but my sister was in Melbourne and my older brother was over in Port Augusta in South Australia so I didn't see him.

What had your mother's attitude to your enlistment been?

Well I was surprised, I thought she would fight it really, being a widow and

13:30 everything, I thought she wouldn't even sign the papers you know seeing as I was only eighteen. But she did, she did. And she never raised any, I don't think she wanted me to join up but she never was vocal, to my recollection. And as I grew older and thought about it, I thought 'Gee' you know 'I've heard so many traumatic instances with others,' you know. I know, I was talking about the two chaps who

14:00 were killed over Scapa Flow. One of them was the son of a boss in the Health Department. And his wife never forgave that boss because she refused to sign his, you know for her son to go. And Basil, was the father's name, he signed up, much to his reluctance. But course the boy wanted to go, he said, "I've gotta go Dad." And he

14:30 went, and he happened to be aboard that plane as I mentioned that went down by friendly fire.

Just moving back to the trip aboard the Liberty ship, what were the conditions like aboard the ship?

Well it was, we didn't know what good or bad was as far as ships went. And the, it was pretty boring, The,

15:00 there was a padre there, who looked like somebody out of a Speak Easy. Yankee man whose main job was to hand out bibles and packets of Chesterfields, Lucky Strike or Camel, not packets, cartons of Chesterfield, Lucky Strike or Camel cigarettes. I didn't smoke, that didn't matter, the others did and they got mine.

That's quite a padre actually.

Oh yeah well that was, oh yeah, well they were strange people.

15:30 The boys reckoned if they ever had a chance of going to a next war they'd come back as padre's assistant. That was the joke.

They had all the lurks did they?

Well that was the easiest job really, or in the comforts fund too. Padre's and others who were welfare officers and the chaps reckoned that's the job to get next war you know. Hand out all the goodies for, tins of fruit, chocolate

16:00 bars.

Fair enough.

Whatever. Yeah no the conditions, we were in hamm, not hammocks, stretched canvass between on rectangular framed iron frames and a stretched canvass with a rope you know. And crammed into compartments. We, the feed, the food was Yankee style stuff. You'd get porridge with figs and maple syrup and everything

16:30 dumped into it you know. Every now and again they'd bake a bit of cake or something. You didn't get much else really than that. But oh we got oranges. Sunkist oranges from California. But you had to do physical culture to get an orange. You'd get up on top of the deck there and you'd do half an hour of physical culture just to get an orange. But and if you got some

17:00 kitchen duty, which we volunteered for as Sergeants, NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers], the kitchen was you know they liked you to do some sort of duty. So we went down and we got in the kitchen where we got our hands on cake and stuff. Extra oranges and so on. So that was one sort of duty we didn't mind doing you know.

Now before your departure, did you have any girlfriends that you would have been writing to as you progressed?

17:30 Well didn't have anybody really. Its only later when I had a few girlfriends. But I suppose there was one at work that I, wasn't exactly keen on but she was a nice girl, Pat O'Keefe. And she did write to me and I wrote to her during the war. She was the only one though. I rather liked her sort of thing.

You clearly saw some prospects

18:00 **there?**

No I just liked her. She had a pert little nose and she was a nice girl. Don't ask me how or why, I just liked her.

Fair enough. So you kept up that correspondence throughout the war?

Oh throughout the war, I think I was a selfish beast now come to think of, because I didn't take up with her when I came back. I was a different person by the time I came back.

Do you think she was expecting you to take up with her?

I don't know, don't know. All this worried me as a young boy. I

18:30 was very naive really, with all due respect to Rebecca [Interviewer]. No the fellas were naive, a lot of them were in those days. They were innocence really, they're not like the blokes these days.

So naive in what sense?

Oh not worldly, not worldly, not worldly. Naive when it came to dating with girls. Not like the Yanks you

know who were real groovy guys you know sort of thing.

19:00 We were probably a lot shyer and everything you know. And didn't get involved really too much sort of thing.

And probably it was a sense…?

Maybe we're odd bods, I don't know. But anyway.

It was probably a sense of not knowing what moves to make as well?

No. Well we were a bit scared of getting caught. And I say this quite frankly, that always had a feeling that if you asked a girl out she'd want to marry you, you know. And this happened in England you know. You'd take a girl out and two times and

19:30 she'd say, "What about us?" And you'd say, "Ahh. Why. What. Yeah."

What would happen then?

On well you'd sort of disappear. Disappear you know. You couldn't live on seventeen and six a day you know. But...

That's what you were earning at that time?

Oh well it was better than twenty-seven and six a week. And I was, which was less than that, it was about five and something, five and

20:00 six a day wasn't it, per working day back in, back in the office or some might probably have been a little bit more than that.

Oh that would have been your wage at the…?

Oh well that was the one I started at. It would have got a little bit marginally better but not much. The highest pay for the head man in the public service when I joined was about five sixty-five pound a year. Which multiply that by two and that's the number of dollars. And that's even you had to pass exams.

20:30 And you know go through lifetime and there's only one job like that, that paid that you know in each department. Now you got plenty you know.

Just to swing back to our chronology here, what happened when you arrived in San Francisco?

Well we were billeted on Angel Island. Which was an island in San Francisco Bay, it had an army camp on it.

21:00 A most fantastic army camp. They had things called PXs [Post Exchange – American Canteen Unit], these were sort of super canteens. You could buy anything in an American PX. From a pin to an aeroplane almost, to a steam engine or a boat or anything. They were really marvellous things, they were like Department stores really you know. And as you went further inland the PXs got bigger and bigger and the facilities. You know you had your own churches

21:30 and theatres and everything on, in the American camps you know. We lived in huts where there was proper bathrooms at the end you know, proper toilets. You didn't have to go out to some separate building where there was some primitive latrine or anything. They had proper beds with mattresses, sheets, pillows.

Must have seemed like paradise?

Well it was. So we were billeted on Angel Island, well it was only overnight and we managed

22:00 to get a ferry across into San Francisco itself. We only had about ten or twelve hours leave and it was just a mad rush up and down Market Street, San Francisco, staring in front of window shops. And every time we'd stop, we'd get surrounded by a huge army of Yanks. Wanting to touch us you know, Austria, you know seeing our patches on our shoulders. And wanting to talk to us, you speak English.

22:30 Yes, we speak English sort of thing. But they were very kind, they wanted to invite us into restaurants and things for a meal and everything. The most kindest people in the world the Yanks were, when we were there. We were there for a few months as it turned out, in my case, not in everybody's case but in my case. When I say few, that's a bit exaggerated, six, seven weeks anyway.

Why were you there for that long?

I got a very terrible disease

23:00 in New York. Sore throat, hoarse throat, couldn't talk. Big headache and had to go to a medical place, which other, I felt like collapsing. And the Yanks diagnosed it as Acute Catarrhal Nasal Pharyngitis. Slapped me into hospital there in New York on Governor's Island. The other one was Angel Island San Francisco.

23:30 It was Governors Island in New York. And I was in there for about three or four days with Acute

Catarrhal Nasal Pharyngitis. The nurse'd say, "Dwyer, have you irrigated this morning?" And I'd say, "Yeah I've been to the toilet." "I don't mean the toilet, have you irrigated?" And I thought, 'What does she mean,?' you know. I thought she meant have you been to the toilet. What she meant was had I had a drip of saline coming down from a huge bottle going down

24:00 my throat you know. "No I haven't." So ...

Talk about culture shock.

Oh culture shock yeah, walking on the 'sidewalk', going on 'elevators', instead of lifts and so on, you know.

So for how long were you in that hospital?

Oh about three or four days. And then I had the rest of my time was leave. Was probably about, we had a, you know from 'Frisco we went on a

24:30 troop train across through Chicago and oh, you know on a Pullman things, we had all these sort of things. And then we ended up in New York. And by the time we come out of hospital, there was about eighteen of us with this. And eighteen of us had a, we found that the whole draft of air force we came over with, landed in San Francisco, landed in New York had gone on overseas. And we were left behind.

How did that feel?

25:00 A bit panicky at the time, initially. But every day that passed, we felt better. We felt great. We were looked after very well, amazingly well really. There was a family in Connecticut by the name of Derby who made a practice, there was an Anzac Club in New York and they, used to be for Australians and New Zealanders. And they used to billet Australians

25:30 out to people in the community for long weekends, Friday to Monday. And the Derby's in Westport Connecticut were, we were, we could pick anybody but they said, they're a nice family you know, you want to go to Westport. And we said, "Oh yeah," there was another Australian whom I hadn't met before Bill Jordon who was a South Australian, he was a pilot. So Bill Jordon and I went up to the Derby's home at Westport

26:00 Connecticut. Which as I said earlier was five mile away from hundreds of dozens of scores of Collins Villages I didn't know about in those days. And they liked us so much and we, the time went on for so many weeks, we went back there every weekend and became quite fond members of their family. They had a son who was Five-F who couldn't, wasn't,

26:30 good enough to go into the war. Daughter Fran, who was in the WAVES [Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service], or whatever they call the navy girls. And the husband was a, I don't know what his name was now, Mr Derby was a scientist of some sort who sampled ore bodies from all over the world including Broken Hill, ore bodies. He took us to his laboratories, it was the

27:00 Door Company of some sort by a nice little river with a mill and everything. And we were made features of the family life there. We used to go bowling in a bowling alley once or twice a week, while we were there. We'd never seen ten pin bowling before, we loved. that. They had visitors over to be displayed to the American friends. And we visited

27:30 the adjoining home of Harold von Schmidt, who was an artist of some repute. Who did, made most of his living from doing covers for Saturday Evening Post. And who, as a gesture, did charcoal portraits of every Australian that visited the Derby's. We went there on a Saturday afternoon and, Bill and I, and he, within an hour he'd done a complete charcoal portrait of each of us, full size. I've been

28:00 trying to find it, all I can find is a postcard copy you know. But...

That's quite a generous gesture.

Oh it was, it was good. And he mailed that home to my mother who got it after some time and she put it in a frame and thought it was pretty good. It did look like me too, more than that looks like me, but it looked like me as I was then you know. You could see it was like the photo in my pay book actually. But it was so like, you know, I couldn't

28:30 believe, it started off by drawing an egg, it did. That's how he started off, he did an egg. He said you do all this by drawing an egg shape and then the egg shape developed into a proper face you know. And he was marvellous. And oh yeah and while we were in New York we did a few things. We went to Arthur Murray to teach you how to dance in a hurry. Cause there's a big ball at the end, Waldorf, the Anzac Ball. And

29:00 we were supposed to go and we thought we better learn to dance. We, I had gone to about so many lessons at Bondi Junction in a little one room place, on Saturday afternoons and wasn't much good. But so Bill and I went to Arthur Murray's studio there in New York. Oh my God.

Why do you say that?

Oh gee you go up so many floors in the elevator and come out into a

29:30 great plush carpeted place, walk for about half a mile down to a woman behind a desk there. And cause we'd rung up first. And we were just ordinary average Australians on a very small daily rate you know, hardly got paid anything compared with Yanks. And she's all dressed up with her hat on and furs and everything. And took our name and wanted to know why

30:00 we wanted to learn to dance. We said, "We're going to the Anzac Ball at the Wald…" "You're going to the Anzac Ball?" you know. "Oh," she said, "well we'll have to give you a trial first and then we'll…" We said, "How much does it cost?" And she said, "Depends on the number of lessons. And you do the tango and the rumba and you do this, that and the…" And we said, "Oh we can't do that. We can do the jazz waltz and the gypsy two step," something like that. And she said, "I'll get Rosita to go and try you both out." So

30:30 she pressed a button and this gorgeous brunette came out, Rosita, to, she took us into a studio room, big long room. And I thought 'I'm not gonna get up here, I'm getting out of this place,' you know. I said, "I can't dance," you know. And Bill reckoned he couldn't dance too, but he was getting up, she put on sort of music and he was dancing around the place with her. And I'm saying to myself, "You ruddy liar, you said you couldn't dance," you know. "You're doing fine," you know. And

31:00 course she finished with him, came over to me, I said, "Look, lay off, I'm not getting up, I said I really can't dance." "He told me he couldn't dance and he can you know." She said, "Let's give you a trial," you know. I said, "I can't dance." She said, "Come, come, come, come," you know. So I got up and she turned the music on and I'm staggering around. And she said, "You got wonderful poise," you know. Poise! And she said, "Oh you did that step, excellently," you know. And I'm saying to myself 'Oh I can't be as bad as I thought I was,' you know.

31:30 Course all soft soaping you know. So, she said, "Oh you don't need that much you know," sort of thing, "You'll be right for the ball you know." So we went out to the lady with the fur around her and her hat and you know everything and Rosita gave her some report on us. And I, at that time, I said, "Gee Bill, I don't know how much this is gonna cost, I don't like this at all," you know. And so the woman started to run through you know

32:00 there's the basics this and then there's the extra and then there's something else. And it was going up, we probably had about thirty, forty dollars on us for the whole time you know. And that was a lot of money for us. And his was running up into the hundred and fifties already you know. And we said, "Oh look we have to think about this madam." She said, "No, well you haven't got much time, the big ball's on." I said, "Yes but we'll have to have a think about it you see." So we were backing away very

32:30 quickly. Even Bill said, "Let's get out of here quick," you know. "Arthur Murray may learn," that was his motto, "Arthur Murray taught me dancing in a hurry," you know, we laughed our heads off afterwards. He taught, didn't teach us anything in a hurry, we're the ones to get out in a hurry you know. And every time I told that to my mates when I got home they used to laugh their heads off at it too, things, this is how you got trapped you know.

That is a very funny story. And so you went to the ball, what…?

Yeah we went to the ball but we didn't dance much. It was

33:00 a big charity thing. They were, you really had to pay thousands of dollars to get there and there was big hob nobs of New York there abouts were there, they were raising funds for this, that and the other. And it was a nice night, it was a good, nice things to eat. And there were some good guests there. There was, I don't know if you remember, oh you wouldn't remember him because you're too young, but there was Alan Jones there

33:30 who was a wonderful singer in his time. Father of not Tom Jones but of other Jones's. He used to be in musicals of the '39's, 40 with Janet MacDonald, you wouldn't even know her, you're too young. But the Firefly, that was where the Donkey Serenade, have you ever heard the Donkey Serenade.

Yes I have.

Well he sang that you know, he was a great singer in his time. Then there was Celeste Holmes

34:00 in there. She, I think was in Oklahoma, one of the stars of Oklahoma the stage show, were there. And I used to listen to the seventy-eight records of Oklahoma at the Derby's. It was the, couldn't stop listening to it, I thought it was fantastic you know. And I put it on half a dozen times or more. And then there was sort of Jimmy Durante, the comedian was there, putting on an act

34:30 you know. So just the entertainment was worth being there, and the occasion, the big ball room you know, it was real plush. And we felt as though we you know we were in a place that was worth being at you know sort of thing.

Well this was the place in New York at the time?

Well it was the Waldorf Hotel in the Waldorf Board Room, ah Ballroom sort of thing. We went to other places, I got a photograph there somewhere

35:00 of, with, I think its Bill Jordan in that, we're at Jack Dempsey's Broadway Bar there, we're in New York which was just a restaurant you know. We went to the Biltmore Hotel where there was some sort of

function on. There was something else that was interesting, we went, oh that's right. It was in a snow storm there, and we were walking along and

35:30 somebody sang out to me. And it was someone who'd come in the draft after us. On another ship and another mate from Melbourne, Sir Battle Exton, he was an officer, old Battle. And he said, De-Gen, and I thought 'Gee whiz, who's calling me De-Gen and through the snow flakes I could see this short, chunky figure and it was Battle. And I said, "Oh what are you doing here?" "Oh." he said, "We're catching up on you".

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

39:10 **You're a great mimic. We'll, we're at the end of another tape here, so we'll just stop recording.**

Are we, gee.

Yeah.

Tape 5

00:32 **Okay so Noel you were about to tell us a story about a 'two for one' incident?**

Oh yes this was another day in New York during a snow storm. I was walking along Fifth Avenue and a voice called out, "Hi De-Gen," which was my air force nickname. And I peered through the snow and I saw a short, squat figure, and I'm getting close to recognise that its one of my colleagues from, of course 41. And

01:00 it was a chap by the name of Battle Exton from Victoria. And I was surprised to see him, he was a commissioned officer from the course and they had followed us on a later boat. And we were, you know frankly overjoyed to see one another cause it was so unexpected and we decided we must have a meal somewhere and sort of have a good old talk you know. So we started walking around and we passed a restaurant with a sign in the window, two meals for the price of one. And we

01:30 looked at one another and said gee this sounds great, fits our pocket you know, two for the price of one, we'll go in and we enquired tentatively when we went in, did it mean what it said. "Yeah, two for the price of one," and we said, "That suits us." And they lead us to a table and then they brought up two young ladies to sit beside us. And we said, "What's this for?" And they said, "Well this is the two meals for the price of one, these are your escorts for the day."

02:00 But we said, "We don't need any, we've just met one another after being separated." The girls are looking at one another, you know saying 'Gee what's strange about these fellas' you know. And we said, "Really we don't need em, we just want two meals for the price of one you see." So all right, okay, sort of thing. So we got two meals for the price of one and the poor girls just had to go away. So, anyway, no that's just a little incident but does make you chuckle.

Only in New York hey.

New York, let's chuckles.

02:30 **So what happened when it came for you to leave New York?**

Well it finally came, we were all, we had a very nice man in charge of RAAF troop movements in New York, Squadron Leader Kinnear, who came from Benalla in Victoria. And he was always checking on us to see how we were. And because he couldn't get a troop ship to take us, he organised a week for us down in Washington. He said there'd be all sorts of things down there, balls and

03:00 everything he said, "I've got it laid on." And we're all ready to go on the Friday of that particular week when he rang up and said, "Sorry fellas, I've got bookings on a troop ship for you," you know. And he said, "What do you think about it?" And he said, "I can get you off it if you want." And we looked at, Bill Jordan and I looked at one another and I said, "We would like to Washington but we've been here long enough,

03:30 we think, you know really we think we ought to go." So that was cancelled and we went aboard the Queen Elizabeth, which was quite a nice thing really. It was an enormous ship. I think Joe Louie, the boxer was on that ship, he was a Staff Sergeant as a sort of DI in charge of about twenty-odd thousand American troops, that they were taking over and we had a tiny

04:00 little space somewhere down in the bowels of the ship, where we could, like a broom cupboard, but we were happy. And we got a job making sandwiches for senior Officers and so we had plenty of food for ourselves that way. And it was about a five day trip across to Gourock in Scotland. And I think it was one of the proudest moments of my life when we, we're in fog most of the way, going across the Atlantic. And

04:30 there was a little funny thing happened there one evening. Over the broadcast system came a very Irish voice and I do forget what the name, the priest said he was. But we'll pretend it was Father O'Flaherty. He said, "This is Father O'Flaherty here. He said I've been advised that we're going through enemy submarine infested waters. Confessions will be held

05:00 in my cabin on deck three, cabin number four hundred and sixteen immediately," sort of thing. So that was a good timing that to get people to confession. But anyway that wasn't the most amazing thing that's happened. After the fifth day we were still in fog and we're up on deck and all of a sudden we couldn't see a thing around us, but all of a sudden we burst through the fog and honestly it was a most spectacular sight

05:30 I've ever seen in my life. I could hear just about every band playing in the world because the Queen Elizabeth, we didn't know it but it must have been some sort of a convoy or had joined a convoy and here it was steaming through as far as the eye could see, a huge convoy of merchant ships and war ships, destroyers, cruisers, didn't see any aircraft carriers. But there was Sunderland flying boats, there was

06:00 Spitfire, Hurricanes weaving around, the water was being churned up and it was just fantastic to see this, it was off the coast of Northern Island obviously, that was a rendezvous point. I could hear Rule Britannia, Britannia rules the waves because that's just how it felt like you know. The Queen Elizabeth didn't slow down, it just went at the speed it had been going, it was ploughing through everything you know. And I, it just made me feel so good, so safe at that time.

06:30 But only lasted a little while of course then we soon at Gourock and landed, that was in Scotland by the way. And we think we might have stayed overnight there and then we got a train down to Brighton to a holding unit and had to wait around there for a while.

So what, how long were you at the holding station at Brighton?

Oh about six weeks I think. And at that time it was getting on to

07:00 D-day, so they moved, they pushed the RAAF out of that. Everywhere in the area where you travelled up the roads and into the country, everywhere you went, there was trucks and tanks and everything under the cover of trees. And we wondered what they were there for at the time. But mile after mile of trucks and tanks and army equipment and everything everywhere, everywhere you looked.

07:30 And so that's what was happening, we didn't know of course, no one really knew, were sure what the hell they were doing there. But course D-day was fourth of June which, its anniversary was just a few days ago, about a week or so ago. But they pushed us out of there, that Unit had to relocate to a place called Padgate, which is now in Lancashire. But we were held there for a week or two more then we were posted elsewhere.

So was there any-

08:00 **thing significant that happened at Brighton while you were there?**

No, when, the night when we got, the night before we got there, they'd shot down a couple of German fighter aircraft or some sort of aircraft in the graveyard or something up on the hill behind where we were. It was said that there were German parachutists, pilots hanging from the trees. But Brighton was all right, Brighton was not a bad place.

08:30 Brighton was, like we, the RAAF was in two of the biggest hotels in Brighton, the Metropole and the Grand. And they were enormous old hotels. And that's when Maggie Thatcher, when she was in, they had a bomb there and they bombed the front of one of them, trying to get her, somebody, the IRA [Irish Republican Army] or something. But when we went to Padgate, that wasn't so good, that was quite a nasty place.

So,

09:00 **did you, what sort of training did you undertake at Brighton?**

Well they were just holding units, they were sort of waiting for you to be posted to some proper air Unit, like you had to start, and they had to wait for the different air stations or training units to get rid of current personnel before they could take people from the holding unit. So we went from Brighton to Padgate, then from Padgate for a few weeks,

09:30 we then went next to an Elementary Flying Training School at Fairoaks in Woking which wasn't that far from Windsor Castle. So it was a nice place though.

So just going back to Padgate, you mentioned that that was a pretty nasty place, what was nasty about it?

Oh well it was all the difference between a place being under the control of the RAAF and under the control of the RAF [Royal Air Force]. Now it was an English

10:00 Commandant was in charge of Padgate. And it was also a holding unit for loads and loads of ordinary RAAF airmen you know. Who just might have been aircraftsmen, LACs, leading aircraftsmen and of course higher ranks, corporals and so forth. And they had a very strict sort of discipline on them and I wouldn't say they thrived on it but they really, put the needle

10:30 into you know the lowly ranks. And of course they tried to do that to the Australian NCOs who were there and others. And of course there was officers there too, you know Australian officers. And we used to greet one another like long lost mates, which irritated the English commandant that there should be fraternisation at such a level between NCOs and officers. They didn't like it they tried to stop it. They insisted that NCOs keep saluting their own mates as officers. Which

11:00 we thought was stupid when you've known them for, you know, the whole of your training. And we refused to do it and our mates didn't want it done anyway you know. So they would discipline us and if you never saluted an English officer they would haul you up. And I certainly didn't salute something that had no respect for them, the way they carried on. They'd just about hurl themselves in front of you trying to get you to salute them. And I'm not joking, they did, they wanted to be

11:30 you know, should Johnny come lately sort of fellows. So but anyway they started cancelling our leaves, leave passes into town. And they had all this heavy guards at the gate to stop people getting through there. So what happened was that the, some of the boys started to tear down the cyclone wire fence, which is about twelve, fifteen feet high. They either cut holes in it or they just pulled it out of the ground and then just

12:00 went over the top, you know when it was laying on the ground, they went out. And even though I was a relatively goody gum drops compared with the rest, I went out too. No, local dances, picture shows and things like that. And that infuriated the commandant even more. And he got more infuriated when the Australians complained about the fact there was only hot water on in the showers once a week you know. And

12:30 well we complained that we wanted it on every day. And the poor little English airmen who was only used to shovelling the coke and coal into the boilers once a week, complained that he was expected now to do it seven times, y'know seven whole days a week and he didn't want to do it. So that sort of caused a ruction you know and got us into bad odour with the thing. So they were all the time, all looking for fault,

13:00 whether in uniform dress or whether our general behaviour. Might sound as though we were unruly but we really weren't. There were some bad eggs amongst the ones, you know amongst us, there were some silly fellas who'd get drunk out on the town and they'd move lumps of concrete to places where they shouldn't be. And the chief constable of lancashire would have to come along and see the commandant. And

13:30 the commandant was justified there in sort of wanting something done about it. But that was only done by a small group. And course he should have tried to punish the group that did it not the whole you know hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of air force men who were there and who were quite behaving themselves you know. Apart from that, it wasn't too bad. The food was awful, we'd get kippers, kippers, kippers you know. Made you sick in the end you know, kippers and liver. And we never got

14:00 any decent meat. Cause they didn't have any I suppose so I shouldn't complain.

So what happened after Padgate?

I was, we were moved for three weeks to a Elementary Flying Training School at Fairoaks in Woking. Which was Tiger Moths and the object of that was to give us familiarisation of the English countryside. And I must confess that was a real joy ride there. It was in beautiful country surroundings. It wasn't

14:30 far, it was near the Thames, near Windsor Castle. You know beautiful area with beautiful abbeys and mansions and so forth in the vicinity. So it was really stooge trips as we called them you know to. And you just looked across and looked at maps and you developed your ability to map read according to English towns and villages and rivers and woodlands and so forth you know. So it was three weeks there. And

15:00 the only thing of any consequence, if it was of consequence that happened there, was I made contact with King Peter of Yugoslavia.

So what happened there?

Oh it was an accident really. Most of us had an old bicycle, they weren't new, they were made up by ground staff from bits and pieces that were cannibalised from earlier models. So, and it was their best way of getting around an air field, it was on

15:30 one of these old push bikes you know. I think they usually passed down the line from one owner to another owner, you know, when they left the particular air field. You'd pay someone something for it but you couldn't live without a bicycle in those days. There was nothing, there was no such thing as a car

you know on the squadrons or stations, didn't have em you know. And there was no petrol anyway. But, what was I gonna say. Oh yeah, King Peter. King Peter was the

16:00 newly crowned King of Yugoslavia I think it was, and his father was thrown off the throne and died. And King Peter was the Heir Apparent. And he got over to England to escape from all the uproar, that was going on in his own country. And he lived a real sweet life. He did fly Tiger Moths, and he went to,

16:30 came to Woking, to Fairoaks twice a week in which to get his hours up. And course you can imagine how the CO and the upper echelon of English officers treated him, you know, 'salaam', sort of thing. He arrived in something that looked like a big Cadillac you know, which had a terrific compass about this round on the back seat you know. And he had two huge

17:00 gorillas with him, two huge body guards you know. As soon as the Aussies [Australians] saw this Cadillac they were swarming all over it like a rash you know. And peering through the windows of his Cadillac, which he didn't like very much. But how I made contact with him was after a trip or a little jaunt in the Tiger Moth, I had to get back to the barracks. And I was driving my bicycle which wasn't very good, along a little

17:30 track from the air field to the barracks. And half way along the track this Cadillac, it had stopped straddled across it with the CO doing his salaam's to the King Peter. And of course I just was coming head long down the track and I just burst through the whole middle of the group cause I couldn't stop. And the brakes had failed you know and I just had to keep going. And I got this Royal haughty stare you know with the

18:00 CO promising it wouldn't happen again and all this sort of thing. I didn't get into any trouble with, cause there was, I didn't, why should they be straddling the, you know, the little track you know between the air field and the thing. It wasn't a road or anything, it was a tiny track. Like a little footpath and it wasn't a made one either, it was rough ground, just worn away sort of thing. But that was King Peter, he's a handsome young man he was too,

18:30 handsome young man.

Well lucky you missed him.

Oh I did brush him I'm afraid you know, he got a jolt out of it. Well he didn't exercise the Royal prerogative.

Well there you go, that's a great story, thanks for that one. So you mentioned that you were flying Tiger Moths here?

Yes in, I was a passenger in the Tiger Moths. They had permanent pilots flying them.

19:00 But they, it was for the purpose of those familiarisation visits. We flew them in Temora too you know, but that was for training as a pilot there. But at Fairoaks it was for giving future aircrews on squadrons and especially navigators and bomb aimers, just what England looked like you know for map reading purposes. And there's some interesting places there. There was, not, apart from Windsor

19:30 Castle which was out of bounds, but which we went pretty close to just the same. I think they had a nudist club somewhere around Reading. And once that went around, everybody was just a flurry of Tiger Moths diving down towards Spot X.

Did you ever see the nudist camp?

No I didn't to be honest, no. Some did.

You mentioned that these, the purpose for going out in the Tiger Moths was to familiarise

20:00 **yourself with the countryside. What did you think of the English countryside?**

Oh it was beautiful, whether you were looking down on it or motoring through it. I couldn't believe there was so much countryside in between towns and places you know. I mean you'd think, with England so small and so crowded, back in, even in '43, '44 that there wouldn't be, you know that everything'd be jammed together. But in then, in those days it wasn't. There were huge open

20:30 spaces, fields and so forth and woodlands, you know, patches of woods and so forth between these places. You'd go for miles often and you, you know, and there was hedges and things which sort of most places had to, instead of a fence you know. It was very pretty, really, very pretty. And the villages, everything was so quaint really. There, not every place, but there were things of interest in just about everywhere you went.

21:00 If you went to Chester you'd see the old fashioned types of buildings that were white with looked like black sort of trellis wood over it. But was symbolic of the day when they were built hundreds of years ago. Other places with their thatched roofs you know in smaller villages of course. I don't know what the position is these days but it was very pretty really.

What was your overall impression of war time England?

21:30 Pretty glum really, the places, see most of our training places were in the Midlands. We, from the time we left Wales it was almost a line straight across from Wales to the other coast to the squadron. And there was, we were near some big towns, well places like Litchfield was near Derby I think, that's a fairly big town. And its

22:00 Bottesford was near Nottingham. And in between you had places like Manchester and Birmingham and so forth. Sheffield, they were, that was a pretty industrialised sort of part of England. Once you got out to the squadron it was quite, pretty place. You know that was what they called the [unclear] out there and when we were on the squadron we'd look out our windows and we'd see hillsides covered in daffodils

22:30 and things you know. Looked very pretty in the springtime.

Sounds beautiful. What happened after Fairoaks?

After Fairoaks we mixed probably, we may have gone to a holding unit for a week or two. But we then got posted to what they called an Operational Training Unit on Wellington's. No, no, that's not right we got posted to Wales on a, on Number, I think it was Number

23:00 9AFU, Advance Flying Unit which was Penrhos to start with, P-E-N-H-R-O-S [Penrhos] and it had a satellite station called Llanddarog. So that was on Avro Ansons and two engine training aircraft like at Cootamundra. And we did drop some bombs there but mainly it was to do plot navigation.

23:30 And especially at night, to do flying at night and to take fixes on different you know flashing lights that were on the Cardigan Bay, and so forth which gave us exact positions of where we were. You'd take your sort of distance at an angle from say Fishguard down in Wales and you're able to measure from angles and things, how

24:00 far you were away, so you'd get a fix. But it was mainly plotting navs and some bombing on sort of practice ranges we did it at Penrhos and Llanddarog. And it was very, they were very place, very pleasant places to be. The only place in England we were able to get a swim there at Penrhos in Cardigan Bay. It was good. I don't know if you, someone said that I think that was the

24:30 lady by the name of Pordius said she knew Penrhos and Llanddarog and Caernarfon Castle and so forth. Up there in the North of Wales.

Oh it sounds beautiful. So could you describe the Avro Anson that you were flying, at this point?

Oh they're funny little aircraft, they're not very strong. They didn't use them as far as I know in operations. They were training aircraft, they'd

25:00 two engines and took about a maximum of five people which included the pilot. And they were just made of I think wooden construction with fabric sort of canvassy, water proof canvassy sort of stuff. They were pretty light weight sort of thing. They weren't you know impressive like a, they were very small really.

25:30 All I can say you know is that they, that there was another type of plane called the Oxford and they were very similar. But it seemed to be more dangerous to fly in an Oxford that it was in an Anson. But they looked somewhat similar, except for the shape of their engines I think. But I can't say much more than that if I could only get a picture, it'd be better showing you a picture, really.

So whereabouts was the navigator situated in the

26:00 **Avro Anson?**

Oh behind the pilot in a, most of them were behind the pilot in a little compartment, I think it was on the left hand side. I spent so little time in an Aggie [Avro Anson] you know, as we call them but I rather forget now. But I think they were on the left hand side behind the pilot with just a pull down table you know. Course in those days you spent a lot of time diving between the table and the nose.

26:30 And you use the nose to look through, to get a drift, which way your aircraft was being drifted by the wind you know. And you'd, that helped you sort of do a wind change you know. But they had a bit of a dome on them, some of them where you supposed to take astro fixes but I never took an astro fix from them

27:00 really.

So you mentioned that you were training, doing mainly night training here?

At Penrhos and Llanddarog.

So what…?

Not all, but some yeah.

So what special skills do you need to navigate at night?

Oh well you can't see anything and so at some places that's why we did it at Wales because there were flashing lights on headlands and things you know.

27:30 They'd flicker so much and you knew which place it was by the number of flickers you know whether it was red or white and so on, so that was a very primitive aid for navigation sort of thing. Apart from that you didn't have much to help you you know. If you went over the coast line you might on a moonlit night you might be able to see something, like the, like the shape of the coast but it wasn't

28:00 very good really you know, to do. Sometimes, I'm not sure, I can't remember now the wireless operator was able to get a wireless fix you know, in some way with receiving signals you know. That's how they developed radar in the way, where radar, once you got into the, you know the more advanced squadrons, you picked up radar

28:30 signals, which, if you could work your equipment properly, where two signals transmitted by two different stations crossed and you had maps which showed just millions of lines crossing, where and you could turn up, turn the blips into, this was I'm going ahead now, turning, going to Bottesford and to the squadron. You could get two rows of blips, which when you lined up in a certain way, you could turn

29:00 something and they would transform themselves into a scale and you could read some measurements from the scale which you could then go to a map. Which gave you co-ordinates, which you could, seeing there were two rows of blips and two scales, you could find them and then with your fingers you could trace them across till your fingers met and that was where you were sort of thing. But its awfully unbelievable to, you'd have to see

29:30 it being done. And of course they don't even have that now. But that was the start of getting help for no, for navigation. It was better than the sextant doing astro nav. That was one of two things that they got you know.

So at this point were you, had you been working on G and …?

Well G was later on.

Later on, okay, we'll talk about that later on then.

Yeah.

Yeah. Okay, so around this time

30:00 **in Wales, what were you doing in your down time?**

Cycling, cycling, did a lot of cycling. Had a swim in Cardigan Bay. Which, for a week, which was great. And did cycling, cycled and cycled a lot. Went to, there's a castle called Harley Castle. If you've heard of the, might have heard of the battle hymn, 'Men of Harley wake from sleeping, Saxon

30:30 tyrants now a creeping.' There's, but its not a proper castle any more, its just ruins, but always wanted to see Harley castle. You know its on the seaside, high up on a hill, its just a mass of ruins, so went there. And went down a valley with a New Zealander and our brakes failed. And we, the New Zealander knocked down a child in a

31:00 going across to the picture show in a Welsh mining village. Not, didn't hurt him, he was balling his head off and the New Zealander went back. I was further down the hill, I came back, by the time I got back it was all over. There was a copper [policeman] there taking details down. Must have been the only copper there for miles and miles. He said, "Give him two bob." He said, "He'll be right." So he, the New Zealander pulled out two shillings and the kid was happy. Just bruised him you know but

31:30 it was like that, really was, going down. Didn't, hadn't been there before, we didn't go back. It was mainly cycling, we, there was a couple of land army dances up at a place called Aberystwyth or Abersoch, I forget one of them, they were really interesting. And but you know we were working very hard, we didn't have a lot of free time.

32:00 And we'd often have to wait for the weather to clear and that was the worst part of it. I know we'd wait there for hours and hours overnight waiting for the clearance to come through. And everybody's laying on tops of their parachutes and with all their bag of navigation equipment at their side, nearly asleep, they'd be there for hours sometimes before someone said its on and then you'd have to get up, wake yourself up and then go. This happened night after night after

32:30 night. And it happened everywhere we went, any other training thing it was the worst part of flying, was waiting to get a clearance because the weather was closed in you know. But, that's how it went.

So what other training did you do at, in Wales?

At where, Wales?

In Wales yeah.

As I said it was mainly on, this was the first Advanced Training Unit we went to and it was more or less being adapted to English

33:00 conditions again. And the dropping some bombs, and some practice bombs you know in a practice range. And doing some, sort of navigation. See we didn't do any navigation when we're on Fairoaks, we were just doing you know looking over the side, having a gander. And sort of map reading up to a point, but this at Penrhos it was, you know involved plotting

33:30 and so forth, sort of elementary navigation. Plotting and fixes and change of courses and everything you know. But they weren't very big legs they were just in and around Wales and so on you know. So they were preparing us for longer ones at the next stage at OTU [Operational Training Unit], you know. Litchfield and Church Broughton.

How did you, sorry, what did

34:00 **you arrived in Litchfield after Wales, that's where you went next?**

Yeah we went back to a holding unit and then we were posted to Litchfield and Church Broughton for a total of three months between the two of them. Started at Litchfield where we crewed up and did some ground classes. And then went Litchfield, went to Church Broughton for the flying and ended back at Church Broughton for a few trips. We did, we were mainly at Church Broughton though.

34:30 really but Litchfield was supposed to be the Headquarters and Church Broughton merely a satellite. It was one of the reasons why we were there so long, you know, the weather was atrocious. And we'd all be ready for flying when it'd, and you'd be lounging around waiting for the weather to clear and it didn't. And other times it'd be scrubbed before you even started to lounge around. They'd say, "It's not on tonight chaps, old Hughie is not, you know he's sending it down,"

35:00 sort of thing, so.

So what were you flying here in Litchfield?

Wellingtons. It was, they were aircraft that were oper.. had been operational aircraft, two engines and they'd been taken out of operations, they were really ready for the scrap heap. And they put trainees onto them. And they were of unusual construction. They called it geodetic the framework. They called it geodetic construction

35:30 and it was covered in a sort of fabric you know, wasn't metal like the Lancasters and the Fairey Battles. It was just fabric and you could see em bending as they flew you know. And I suppose you could almost tear a hole in the side with your hand or with a sharp implement you know. But those are what we trained on at Litchfield and Church Broughton. And I'm sure they were the ones we still on

36:00 at one stage when we went over the North Sea and had some problems. I can't quite remember, I've been going through my log book but I can't quite work it out. But an engine failed and we nearly went into the drink you know. (Distracted) I'm not looking at that.

Yes you are.

I am in a way.

I've completely distracted you. You were saying a story about how you had a close call?

Yeah that was later on.

36:30 **That was later on.**

It wasn't at Church Broughton and Litchfield. But that was a fairly intensive sort of navigation at Litchfield and Church Broughton, that's where we crewed up for the first time at Litchfield. This is where we were put into a nissan hut and the chief ground instructor would say crew up chaps you know. And the different groups came in from different doors. And group of pilots, group of navs, group of nav B's, which I was a nav B. Group of

37:00 wireless operators, group of gunners and just pushed them in, sixty, seventy whatever there were. Okay chaps, crew up you know. And after about three quarters of an hour, you're supposed to have picked a crew you know. Or someone was supposed to pick a crew, usually the pilots were supposed to pick the crew cause they were the ones who flew and they were looking for crews. And they approached the other different types and they were looking you up and down and trying to work out, its the most crucial

37:30 decision you could ever make in your life as far as I was concerned. And I didn't want to make a decision to be honest. I didn't much like the look of any of em, the pilots

So what were you doing at this point?

Oh I was walking around trying to dodge people that I didn't, who thought they were coming towards me. Just shuffling around, there was a great hubbub going on you know. But every now and again

38:00 you could see a pilot would team up with someone. And in the end I think we actually formed into, finally we formed into about eleven crews there. That means six in a crew at that stage, on the squadron it was seven in a crew, we added an engineer. So there was sixty, wasn't quite sixty-six, ten crews had crewed up, sixty. Or something like that and there were five of us left. There was myself,

38:30 there was another nav [navigator], there was a mid upper gunner, wireless operator, George Sterns and rear gunner, Arthur Thomas. And the mid upper was Lindsay Reid. And myself. Oh Harry Calnan was a straight nav and myself was the nav B. And we were standing at the back. Not disconsolate, we

39:00 just thought 'Well they run out of pilots, we've got none.' And the chief ground instructor who was a squaddy [Squadron Leader] or whatever came up and said, "Oh don't worry chaps, we'll get a pilot for you," sort of thing. We thought 'Oh God, wonder who he'll pick you know.' So he took my name as being the one to keep in touch with him. He said, "You can start ground classes, and we'll get a pilot for you in the next week or so," you know. So we joined the ground classes in the

39:30 classrooms and stuff. And started doing what we hoed in, I could tell you what we did but we did the class training, it went on for two or three weeks. And about the end of the third week I was called to the chief ground instructor, why they picked me I don't know, but they called me to the chief ground instructors and said, "I've got a pilot for you." And there was this fellow standing up near him. Adult, male, about mid thirties,

40:00 very elder, not elderly but compared with eighteen, nineteen year olds, he was elderly. But you know, good thick arms on him, good sober you know, with-it type and he became our pilot. And he was, he'd been a flying instructor and he had thousands of hours up under his belt. And all the other pilots had just done their initial pilot training, wouldn't have had more than perhaps, fifty, hundred hours you know. So we landed

40:30 on our feet with Steve Burke from Newcastle.

Okay well let's leave it there and we'll come, we'll....

Tape 6

00:30 **Okay so you were talking about the pilot that you crewed up with, can you describe his personality to me?**

Oh he was very mature...

Sorry, what was his name?

Steve Burke.

Steve Burke.

He was a Wool Classer from Newcastle and he was a real grown up person compared with most of us. See only most of us were just around eighteen, nineteen. Except for Harry Calnan who was an indeterminate

01:00 age, but he was obviously in his thirties I'd say. And that had a lot to do with how we fraternised really. You know because he was a drinking man and he liked to go and drink. And maybe Steve Burke did too I don't know. But Steve was an Officer and all the rest of us were NCOs. Steve was a flying officer. And he was, he was very friendly.

01:30 He was very competent. He almost assumed a father figure with us, he looked so old. He, when I say old, he wasn't in an aged thing but he was older. He was more like a very older brother, very older brother or almost a young father you know. So he had a sort of a dominant position with us and we'd, we were so pleased to have him you know. We felt we'd won

02:00 every lottery in the world compared with the one's with. And there was nothing wrong with the other pilots except we weren't anxious to have them as our pilots. For various reasons its very hard to articulate and it would be unfair to make disparaging remarks about them, cause they were good fellas in their way. Except most of us, the five of us had the feeling they weren't for us you know. And so as it turned out

02:30 only three of those crews ended up still as crews and whatever choice we made was the right one I guess. Because it was fairly intensive training at OTU. It was navigation again, I think we were introduced to G there. And well Harry was and I had a rough go through, but at that stage we had to decide what functions we would

03:00 do. Like there were so many navigators, one of them had to become principally a bomb aimer and I did that.

So is that what the B is when you refer to nav B?

The Nav B, yeah, the navigator bomb aimer.

Right.

You're trained as a navigator but also did bombing and did gunnery too.

Can you explain what your role was on this particular crew?

Well at OTU it was slightly behind what I did at the next

03:30 one where I operated some of the radar fixing stuff. But it, as a bomb aimer I could map read where it was required, I'd get down in the nose and do map reading, which was another form of navigation. I would do the practice bombing at the Litchfield and the Church Broughton. And I would operate the front turret as an air gunner. I would do all the sort of practice firings that we had to do.

04:00 So that was principally my role at OTU. I was the bomb aimer and the front turret air gunner. See we had three turrets. Front turret, mid upper turret and the rear turret sort of thing. So, Harry concentrated on the, Harry Calnan, the older chap, concentrated on the plots and so forth. Later on, when they introduced a new form of radar, I

04:30 operated that, called H2S, which was at Bottesford. That was a very unique type of radar and I kept the other duties going, sort of thing.

So you mentioned that you started to work on G here at Litchfield?

Yes.

Can you describe to us what G is for the record?

Well G is a radar thing like in, G would give you a fix as they called it of your position, it would tell you where you were, exactly were. But you had

05:00 to operate the equipment in a proper way as to find exactly where you exactly were. But it capable of pin pointing your position. And they had prepared a whole series of maps that were based on G that covered just about the whole of the Great Britain and the part of Europe that was subject to operations. And these were fixed up on crisscrossing lines which were, in a sense the signals,

05:30 that the radar stations sent out. The radar stations were separate stations and they were located in such a way that the signals they sent out criss-crossed. And it was like a grid that they formed in the air. And the signals that came in on your little lime green radar screen, which was only about as round as that, were blips, there was two rows of blips.

06:00 And there was a way of lining them up, by fiddling around with controls. That when you got the blips in a certain position where they matched, you would, I forget whether you either pressed a switch or pushed a button that fixed them in position. And when it fixed them in position it brought on a scale of measurement which you could read off co-ordinates from. And by reading off the co-ordinates, you got co-ordinates that you could go to a map

06:30 which had the co-ordinates on the various edges of the map, you'd pick one up in one place and you'd pick one up in another, and you'd track them down with your fingers till they crisscrossed, and that's where you were. Of course when you did that, as soon as you fixed the thing on your screen, you would look at your wrist watch and you'd note the time. Cause that was very essential, cause until you do all your fiddling around you've moved even more miles on you know. So you would note, you'd put a little

07:00 triangle on your, when you, you'd note the time actually. And then when you took the reading off the criss-cross lines of maps, you would then do that on a longitude basis on your plotting map, put a dot, put a triangle and then having taken the time of when you made that fix, you'd write the time against that. So you had two

07:30 plots going you see. You had the plot going which was where you should have been. Like you had a fixed from me to you, say, air field to say Berlin in a straight line is what you plotted before you left. And if you went at so many hundred miles an hour, you should get to Berlin at a certain time by keeping a steady course. But you couldn't keep a steady course

08:00 cause you can't control the atmospherics of the wind. When the, its working all the time up there, its blowing you side ways, or its you're into a head wind, or you've got a tail wind and you're not, you might say after the first hour, you're two hundred miles along the line that you thought you should be but you're not. When you take your fix it shows you in a different position altogether. So you know you plot, like

08:30 you put a circle on the one where you should be, according to your map you know if you didn't have any wind. You make a little triangle with a dot in and you put the time. And so you've been blown perhaps at an angle from here to there, which gives you, and you can measure that in, with your dividers with miles. How many miles you've gone say to the port. And you measure the angle and you can put that on a little hand held type of computer thing and

09:00 turn different things. And you can get the direction, well you know the direction of the wind from the way you're being pushed, to the left to the port. And the wind's coming from say, two seventy degrees or something. So that gives you a wind speed and a wind direction, where its coming from. So that you've suddenly then got to give the pilot a change of direction. And you've gotta

09:30 work very fast. You join up the point where you actually have sort of got your fix and you sort of join that up with your target area and you give him a course to put you back on and know, into position which will get you on target. Now that's all in theory, that's all in theory. You know you hope that's what it will be. But the Bomber Command

10:00 bombed at night and the Americans bombed during the day. So we couldn't see where we were going at night, the Americans could see all the land and everything you know beneath them. But at night if you were flying, when you took off from an air field, you would circle around, droning away for perhaps half an hour until you reached a rendezvous point. Which was marked, you know on your map. And you left from the rendezvous point. And

10:30 you were given different levels to be, cause you couldn't all fit the same height above the ground. So you went over in a sort of a box, a rectangular box. There were planes at the bottom of the box and then they were in layers, and they were all in a great sort of a funnel, a rectangular funnel heading towards the target. So you know at night time you weren't just one plane flying one behind the other, you were in a box flying.

11:00 You know perhaps five hundred, six hundred planes. You really didn't know where you were. And you were hoping you know you wouldn't run into someone. But and you only realised you were in a box when you were over target and you dropped your bombs. Course when you dropped your bombs you released a flash, and the flash was a million candle power. And it was so designed to detonate

11:30 it was sort of detonate after last bomb in your load went off and these flashes were going off all the time. And you had a camera that was running all the time, once you pressed the bomb tit as they called it. And the flash went off just when you were supposed to be right on target when the bombs exploded. And it lit up everything, these million candle power was to give you clarity on your photograph. But course with all the flashes going off,

12:00 as you're approaching the target, what you saw in this funnel was bombs coming down all around you, from planes above you, and the side of you. I nearly wet my pants first time I saw this. And they kept raining down all around us, on top of us and everything. And there were many occasions where bombs hit planes within that group that was heading towards the target you know or over the target sort of thing. Bombs everywhere you know, it was a most scary

12:30 sight you ever seen. You can imagine the language when, if you hadn't seen it before.

So there were five hundred to six hundred planes?

Oh well they all, it depended, sometimes like in some of the raids they had eight or nine hundred. But often it might have only been only one or two hundred, a hundred and fifty, it varied according to the target you know. And according to the number of planes that were serviceable.

Massive.

And the number of planes that they had. Because often they got so many, sometimes they lost eighty, ninety, hundred planes on a raid.

13:00 And that, they had sort of built up, you know, they were making them as fast as they could. You know and they couldn't make em overnight you know. So squadrons were often below their strength with planes you know. They had to wait for replacements and things. But it, but they had a lot of different bomber groups you know to, you know to draw from. And they would do that at headquarters of Bomber Command you know. So but that's got away from

13:30 the question you asked me about taking a fix. I ran away with myself.

No but that was a very interesting perspective on it. I'd never actually realised that that is what actually happened. Its quite an...

Well it does and...

extraordinary experience yeah.

And even more than that happened at times because the navigation didn't, wasn't so, and target identification wasn't so good at times. They, that's why they established

14:00 the Pathfinders. This, they had an Australian in charge of it, I think it was Bennett Group Captain or something Bennett. And they used to have special coloured flares. And they used to go out ahead of the mainstream and they used to be the creme de la cream of navigators. They were absolutely perfect, you had to be you know a hundred and fifty out of a hundred to become a Pathfinder. And they would get to the target ahead of the main bomber force. And they would

14:30 light it up with flares so that, all going well, when the main force reached it, the target was already illuminated for, so's that they wouldn't bomb the wrong or sort of miss the target. And they had a controller up there, giving instructions you know over the radio to the planes that were coming on. If something was going wrong they would, it was a very dicey position for them to be in you know.

15:00 But...

So just getting back to Litchfield and what you were doing there and things like that. Now was it around this time that your first pilot got scrubbed?

Yeah he got scrubbed almost at the last period. I mean he took us right through Litchfield and there's something mysterious happened there. I don't know I was talking to Lindsay about it, I said he didn't even say goodbye you know. Steve. I'd heard that he'd had a

15:30 bleeding ulcer and was rushed to hospital you know. But Lindsay thought that maybe had some wife trouble back home. I don't know I thought it was a bleeding ulcer to be quite honest. But I didn't have a chance to say goodbye to him and we were left without a pilot. When we were posted to Bottesford to conversion unit, we went onto Lancs [Lancasters] you know.

So what did that do to the morale of your crew?

Well we

16:00 were depressed because we didn't think we'd ever get another pilot as good as he was you know. He was you know we thought we'd won the lottery when we got him. And we were depressed to be honest. I was depressed because we did, I think in my view have the best pilot out of that particular crewing up. And that was sheer luck, you know, sixth sense sort of result really. But

16:30 we lost him, I've got a picture of him there in the folder. And it wasn't till we were leaving Church Broughton when or Litchfield, we went back to Litchfield before we left Church Broughton, before we went to Bottesford rather. And that's when Harry woke me up one night. He'd been to the Black Swan, Swan, which was nicknamed the Mucky Duck in the local town-

17:00 ship and said, he woke we up about two o'clock in the morning and said "I found a pilot for us," you know. And I said, "My God, at this hour of the morning?" you know two o'clock. He said, "Yeah." I said, "Where'd you find him?" "Down the pub." I said, "I don't want any pilot you find in the pub at two o'clock in the morning," you know. "I want a sober decent one you know." "Oh," he said, "He's good." I said, "How do you know that, you been in a plane with him?" He said, "But he's good," you know. I think he was a bit full himself. Poor old

17:30 Harry. But anyway, Harry was right, Harry was right. He was an English chap, wouldn't have normally been our pilot. And he was an ex flying instructor, well he was a current flying instructor himself. He was breaking his neck to get into the war you know, into a proper aircrew. And it took a bit of persuasion on the part of everybody to get him officially given to us. Because at

18:00 that stage I think we probably had put in to go to 460, if we had to go anywhere. Only because we'd heard by word of mouth that it was a good squadron. And it wasn't under English control, it was under RAAF control. And that's, we wanted to get to an all Australian squadron. Where the RAF, where the RAAF was in charge.

So why did you want to go to an RAAF…?

Well we'd heard they were better than the

18:30 Pommy [British] squadrons. We'd heard that you know that this, that they were mad with the urge in the Pommy squadrons as we called it, you know. Mad for discipline, not that we were undisciplined, we weren't. But just mad, just the way they treated their various ranks you know, they were excessive in everything they did with their kind you know. I mean they if you go back to World War I and everything, they you know they,

19:00 they'd shoot people and do things. They shot 'Breaker' Morant [Australian soldier in Boer War] you know, virtually. They had that sort of discipline taken to an extreme. Sort of thing you know. You weren't a person there you know, you're just a number. And…

So what was the name of your new pilot?

His name was Harry Lakey, L-A-K-E-Y. He was a Bristol lad, he was older than we were, he was probably in his late twenties.

19:30 Big thick ham bones of arms, which was good, could control a control column of the aeroplane. Looked like George Formby, you may probably, I suspect you've never heard of. He was an English comedian of the thirties. Big front buck teeth and sang songs with a ukulele. Spoke with a Bristol accent. And he's a bit on the

20:00 sort of discipline side but we soon broke him down. He liked to conform to, and he was only a Sergeant like us when we got him. And they said we couldn't go to an Australian squadron with him, because they didn't have an English pilot in charge of crews. So we moaned and groaned and whinged and did all the usual things. Said 'there's five of us, its not fair."

20:30 you know, "I mean its only the pilot after all, he's a good pilot, the squadron ought to be glad to get him." Then Headquarters in London agreed that he could become our pilot so long as he was commissioned. Well we had no objection to that and he certainly had none. So we got him and we had him at you know sort of heavy conversion unit at Bottesford. And he was a very, very

21:00 good pilot you know.

And what was his nickname?

Well he didn't have a nickname, we just called him Harry. Harry Lakey.

Cause I just, I'd read in the notes, the research notes that he'd been called Cracker Jack. Was that him or someone else?

No must be someone else.

Right.

I don't know Cracker Jack.

Oh okay. Yeah, oh well.

Don't know where that came from.

Neither do I.

No.

That's a bit of a, I'll double check that.

Cracker Jack.

21:30 No. no.

Oh sorry about that, that must have slipped through the net somewhere.

No, no we, I was one of the few with a nickname in our crew really.

And what was your nickname and how did it you get it?

Oh well they called me De-Gen. And that was because at Cootamundra, well we all got nicknames there. And I was in the habit of calling everybody in the course a lot of degenerated morons. Which, some

22:00 of the legalistic chaps argued with me that there was not such a thing because when you're a moron, you're already degenerated. You know you couldn't become any more degenerated. And I said, "Well you fellas are." So they called me De-Gen after that. Which the odd person does now who I found down in Tassie [Tasmania]. He annoys me when he writes to me and calls me De-Gen. I call him his proper name, Danny.

That's the thing about

22:30 **nicknames,they stick....they're fine for a little while and then they stick but they get annoying after a while.**

Yeah, yeah, they're okay at the time, yeah.

Yeah. Okay so you've described your new pilot, can you describe the other members of the crew?

Yes well remember we're only six in the crew there. And we were seven when we got to the, when we finished at Bottesford or when we got to Bottesford. Harry Calnan was an accountant in

23:00 real life, he was like a little wizened gnome like person actually. He was in his thirties I would say. And he probably felt having such a young lot of other chaps around him was not suitable for him but he put up with us. He was good navigator. He and he

23:30 liked to drink. He really liked to drink. That's how he found our second pilot. And as I say he was a navigator. We had Georgie Sterns, was the wireless operator. He was a short fella with a little wispy moustache, he was only eighteen, nineteen, same as the rest of us. He didn't talk quite properly you know, he'd say 'wiv' or

24:00 things like that. But he was, and he wasn't very much interested in us. He used to keep with the gunners that he'd trained with there on the squadron. So we were, we called ourselves an odd bod crew because we did exactly what we wanted to do, like we had been doing. We were you know used to being on our own, we'd stay on our own. Whereas most crews went along to the pub and got rollicking drunk you know. But we did our own thing in leaves you know, we went our own ways.

24:30 I suppose that's why we got together. No George was okay, he was short and friendly, very friendly. And in fact I'm still in touch with his daughter. She lives up at Tweeds Head, Stephanie. And I only found her in recent years. When I was trying to find him, but found he was dead, died when he was sixty you know. Then there was Lindsay Reid.

25:00 Very tall, about six foot, thin, very, very proper, he was a bank clerk. He became a bank manager when he came back. He was polite, nothing outstanding of any note to describe him as very quiet in his habits you know.

25:30 Don’t know, what does taciturn mean, I think taciturn is probably a word to apply to him, I hope that’s the right word. -

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

29:26 **Well it sounds like your crew was quite an eclectic bunch of people?**

Oh we were

29:30 we were odd fellows. In fact, who was the other one, oh no that was another crew I was in, I was in another crew after that, to go to Japan.

So how, despite your, you know, your obvious differences…

Oh we got along all right.

yeah like I’m wondering how close were you, as a crew?

Oh we didn’t go out together, that’s what I said, we went our own way, we well, went on leave in different things. It was very,

30:00 Harry and Steve and Harry Lakey and Harry Calnan and Steve and George. George drank, the rest of us I don’t think did really. I had my first alcohol in Connecticut with the Derby’s. They served me a Manhattan cocktail, which I nearly choked on really at the time, you know. I spat it out and poor Mrs Derby said, “Oh what’s wrong?” I said, “I’ve never tasted anything at

30:30 all alcoholic before.” And she said, “Oh my Gawd,” you know. But I do drink now. But anyway.

I mean, well despite the differences and despite the fact that you didn’t socialise,

Oh we got along, we were friendly, we were friendly.

well what, I mean could you describe the camaraderie that you had with the crew?

Well we were just friendly, we didn’t want to fly with anybody else. Really, we were quite happy as a working crew. We were comfortable with each other, with each others

31:00 abilities. And there was one occasion where at Church Broughton or at Litchfield a pilot who was looking for, you know to go and convert to heavier aircraft, wanted to borrow a crew to fly and they picked us. And we didn’t want to go up with him. It was almost you know a sort of rebellion went on you know. And we said to Steve, “We don’t want to go with

31:30 anybody but you,” you know. “Bugger him,” sort of thing. “We don’t want to go with that fella, we don’t know him, he could crash,” you know. We had this feeling of impending doom if we went with anybody else you know.

Why was that?

Well its a sixth sense feelings, you know, that you didn’t change things. Once you had trust in one another, everybody worked and did their job well you know. That was probably the main reason.

32:00 We learned to trust one another. And…

Was it about superstition as well perhaps or…?

Oh I suppose there was a bit of superstition attached to it. You don’t go outside what you find safe really. And we didn’t want to fly with anyone else. Not because we didn’t like him, we just didn’t want to break, go with someone else who might, go back to Evans Head with that pilot who took Doug Grimsay up and so forth you know. I mean

32:30 you might get someone like him. You know like that pilot or things like that. I mean we had a trusted pilot and we trusted one another and we just didn’t want to fly with anybody else. I mean might have come a time when we did, I mean there did come a time. I mean we lost Steve and we had to trust ourselves with Harry Lakey and for some God-given reason we ended up with a pilot, different in

33:00 nature to Steve but one who was trained right to the gills the same as Steve had been you know. A man who’d had thou.., not thousands, certainly hundreds and hundreds of flying hours up. And that gave us great confidence, especially once we moved onto Lancasters you know, which were very, excellent plane. I mean the Wellingtons were but the Lancasters were. The Lancasters were superb planes you know. That was the only time I really felt safe in

33:30 a plane.

Well just before we get onto Lancasters, I mean we touched briefly on you know the idea of you know superstition and that sort of thing when flying a plane. Were there any other superstitious practices that you partook before a flight?

Oh no, we all got down and kissed the ground when we came back. There was that old saying which you've probably heard a thousand times, "Good old terra-firma. The more firmer, the less terror ,"

34:00 sort of thing. The old Pope does it so there must be something in it. No we're always glad to get back after there was, and we always said there's any landing you can walk away, however bad it might have been is a good landing. I don't think there's anything, we could hear Arthur singing hymns sometimes, that upset Harry Lakey. He said what the hell's going on down there. And there was Harry, ah,

34:30 there was Arthur in the middle of a hymn singing, so he must have found some inspiration. It was in the night time too, through the intercom and came this raised voice. I carried, it wasn't superstition but I carried a little metal plate in a wallet, round somewhere where I hoped my heart was. Shiny bit of stainless steel that wouldn't have been worth anything probably. But there I, and I took a little

35:00 kit with me in case I had to jump out over Germany, full of compass. Well we had compasses built into our buttons on our jackets you know. Two buttons we'd put together and it'd form a compass. But I took a German English dictionary and a couple of packets of PKs [chewing gum]. Bar, couple of bars of chocolate, stuff like that, I don't know what else, a pair of scissors.

35:30 Things like that but that was just normal precautions you know. Don't know whether the others did anything like that. They'd probably, if they'd known I did it, would think I was nuts probably. And you had to be prepared for some things. So. Not that you could carry much in a thing that fitted in your pocket.

So at what point did you come to join, did you and the crew come to join 460 Squadron?

Well after we went through

36:00 the next station which was Bottesford, heavy conversion unit. We were given a seventh member of the crew then, Tony Moday, who was a Spaniard, who very interesting character.

What was he like?

Yeah he was an interesting character and through my family research I got the skills to track him down in the last few years. Didn't get much help from the Spanish Consul but I tracked him down. And

36:30 he died in the early nineties. He was a very studious type, very Gallic, Gaelic looking, almost horsified you might say. If that means anything, probably doesn't. He'd been educated at one of the Cambridge or Oxford or somewhere. Think he wondered what the hell he'd struck when he joined our crew, young. He was

37:00 intellectually very superior to us. He got his degree or largely got his degree, his father was this, a Spaniard who was the French Consul in Pau, which was near the Spanish-French border. And who lately, I've heard was helping the French Resistance smuggle people across the border into Spain. And who married a French resistance leader and eventually killed themselves

37:30 over in London. Yes the things you hear after the war. He was a member of the Spanish nobility actually. Passed his title onto Tony, Marquis de Guatemala, and I didn't know that at the time, Tony didn't tell anybody. But I tracked that down from the last couple of years. I tried to find a current photo of him, I've got one somewhere but I can't find it. But he's in one of the black and white photos. But he was,

38:00 he was a bit aloof, which you might guess, because of his background. Wondered, and he always carried, he had a motorbike with a side car. And God knows where he got the petrol from, where he choofed off to, every time he could down to a reading room at the local church or the local vicar or somewhere. And he always had a great load of books with him, whether he was still studying as part of his university

38:30 or just reading exotic novels or what, I couldn't say. But if you wanted to talk to him he'd talk to you and we'd have good talks and things. And we got on okay but he had a, and he was very correct, Harry loved him, Harry Cal…, ah Harry Lakey loved him because he'd been educated in English Public Schools and universities. And he kept to the Royal Air Force scheme of things you know. He was dressed

39:00 in the English grey uniform, we had the Australian blue uniforms. And he believed in the correct way of speech, in, on the intercom, you know. "Engineer to pilot," you know. Where we'd say, "Hey Harry," or whatever. And Harry used to get very, Harry Lakey used to get very annoyed about this. "Use the correct, you know, manner of speaking." "All right Harry." But it, and Harry Lakey would say, "Pilot

39:30 to engineer." And engin'd say, "Engineer to pilot, reading you," you know, sort of thing. "Pilot to engineer, what is the reading on dial you know so and so, how much thrust are we getting you know." And this nonsense'd go on but when we spoke, we'd say, "Hey Harry." "Use the correct patter." But he gave it up in the end, he just couldn't change us. But there was a reason for doing that I suppose. But

the English having invented the system,

40:00 did insist on carrying it through to the ‘nth’ degree. And I really don’t think it did any good, we knew each other’s voices you know. I mean just the things we were talking about identified us, whether it was bombing run or when it was gunnery, rear turret you know or whatever. We didn’t need all this stuff you know but...

Okay well we’ll continue that on the next tape.

Okay, don’t tell me, how many, how...?

Tape 7

00:35 **Noel, you referred to the communication system invented by the English. Could you describe what that involved?**

Well its patter really. Its the patter of, to, above the noise of aircraft and perhaps explosions and everything. That pilots believed that they had to give clear instructions to different members of the crew and in return, the members of the crew if you had any problems you’d identify themselves.

01:00 Not by personal names but by whatever their mustering was. So the thing was that before you spoke, you would be, and if it was me it would be, “Bomb aimer to pilot, I’m commencing, you know, sighting on my sort of bombing sighter,” sort of thing. And, except, I didn’t say, you know, from then I’m just giving,

01:30 “Left steady,” or, “Right steady,” or, “Left left steady,” “Right steady,” as the target went past the centre line, I getting back. But if you had problems of you running out of, you had some problems with your oxygen or something. If it was a, if you’re up at a high, height where you needed oxygen and you weren’t getting any, where there was no portable oxygen bottle and you needed one and you couldn’t find one. Or if the

02:00 guns jammed or the turrets had jammed or you’re feeling sick or something, you’d, perhaps, “Rear gunner to pilot. And I’m in trouble” you know. And pilot’s, saying back, “Pilot to rear gunner, what is the trouble?”

So it was really a set formula for this patter?

It was a set formula where you’d identify yourself, who was speaking to whom. Not using Christian names or surnames. I suppose you could use surnames

02:30 if you wanted, but it really identified your particular position in the plane. Rear gunner, mid upper gunner, bomb aimer, navigator and later on the engineer and the pilot himself.

Now you were communicating with each other using headphones and individual microphones?

On an intercom system, it was built into your oxygen mask, which you’d or a mask that you’d put on your face. It was the intercom was

03:00 built in. You’d turn a little switch and you could talk to one another above the roar of the engines and any other noise that might be going on, if they’re, you’re over the target especially, if there was explosions.

Were you wearing the oxygen mask at all times?

Only if you wanted to speak, if you’re low you didn’t need it, unless you wanted to talk to the pilot or something. It

03:30 there was no point in using it if you didn’t need it. If you were down below ten thousand feet, once you got above that, the lack of oxygen made you feel stupid and you could be a danger to yourself and the rest of the plane. I ran out of oxygen on a training flight over, of all places the Scilly Islands, down off the Land’s End or whatever they call it, down past Devon or whatever that

04:00 place is right down at...

Oh John O’Groates?

John O’Groates down there at, oh I know the word...

Oh The Scilly Isles.

Yeah the Scilly Isles, yeah, they’re right down there, heading into the Irish Sea or the Atlantic. And the, we were about twenty-five, thirty thousand feet. And I wasn’t getting any oxygen. And not from the main supply. I was turning the valve and nothing was coming through. And I was trying

04:30 to get back looking for a portable oxygen bottle you know. And I must have been in the front turret area at the time, I think it was. And the pilot said, “What’s wrong with you?” I just wasn’t answering you

know. And so he ordered someone to come up and help me. Probably, it was probably Lin at the time from the mid upper turret go down and see what the, you know, “Pilot to mid upper, go down and see

05:00 what’s wrong with the bomb aimer,” you know, sort of thing you know. So he came down, found I was heady, you know, not thinking properly. And he sort of got me a portable oxygen bottle from somewhere where I couldn’t reach it, hooked it in and I was okay. But you know you didn’t need oxygen under ten thousand feet usually. Sometimes you did but usually you didn’t.

Once the Lancaster had

05:30 **reached its standard flying altitude, what was that altitude?**

Well they changed the altitude all the time, depending on the raid you know. I couldn’t really tell you, you’d have to ask a pilot that. But the altitude wasn’t always the same, you know, depended on topography.

I suppose part of the point of the question is, how often would you be flying above ten thousand feet and therefore need your oxygen?

Not that often

06:00 really Graham [Interviewer]. It, some of the raids were conducted you know at around ten thousand or even under, you know. They tried to get you out of, I think the bombing was more accurate around ten thousand feet. The higher you went up, it wasn’t that accurate I’d say, you know, yeah.

Now could you describe the working relationship between the pilot and the navigator?

What, on a personal basis or...?

On,

06:30 **on, during an operation?**

Well seeing I wasn’t doing the main navigation, it makes it a bit awkward. Seeing I was doing the bomb aiming at the time. But it, the pilot depended on the navigator very heavily. He couldn’t get to target or the destination without it. You know sort of without having a change of course. And if he, fortunately

07:00 in our case, we didn’t have to any sudden mechanical things in the few trips we did, which put us off course. But in other cases the crews were, if they were attacked by fighters, they would have to do what’s called evasive action. Corkscrews and things where they would slip down and go down then come up and go up that way and it was called a corkscrew.

07:30 If you did too many of those, you, you could be off course before you, I mean you might, you just couldn’t do that in any old place, especially if you had some damage to your plane. But it was a great dependency of the pilot on the nav, you know in fact the whole mission really depended on the navigator knowing precisely where he was.

08:00 And often he didn’t know that, if his equipment wasn’t working properly you know. I can’t ever remember Harry taking an astro nav thing on the stars, I don’t think it would have worked. I think that’s was the cause of many troubles in the earlier business, that’s why they developed G and H2S you know.

Now just, returning to the chronology of what happened in what sequence. You were at Litchfield, and

08:30 **after Litchfield, where did you move?**

We moved to heavy conversion unit at Bottesford which was nearer the squadron area. We kept moving to the well to the right.

Are we talking about to the East?

Well I’m trying to think now, I think it is the East, East. No, yes, East, East.

So from where you were at Litchfield?

Its East, heading towards the North Sea.

Right.

Yeah, heading towards the North Sea.

09:00 **Now what was the heavy conversion unit?**

Well that was on sort of Lancs proper you know. We, I think at Bottesford we were still on, at Binbrook we were on Wellingtons and at Bottesford we went onto Lancs. you see.

Oh, so conversion, so what does the term heavy conversion unit actually imply in practical terms?

Well I just think its going from the two engines to four

09:30 engines and a bigger plane, a more operational bomber. Than, see the Wellingtons were training, they had been originally two engine front line bombers, but they were displaced after some time and they were developing larger ones like Halifax's and Manchester's. And then the Lanc. was supposed to be the creme` de la creme

10:00 of bombers. And this is where, why they gave it heavy conversion unit was probably in terms of the number of engines and also the bomb load that they could carry. They carried a hell of a lot of bombs. I think they could carry up to around twenty-odd thousand pounds of bombs.

Now this, was this at a particular aerodrome?

At Bottesford?

Yes at Bottesford.

Well Bottesford was

10:30 the station yeah.

Bottesford was the station.

Yes and it was an aerodrome. And it had hangars and it was a Lancaster conversion, you know, to Lancasters. And Lancasters were very heavy aircraft . You know they were made of metal, they weren't made of fabric etc. you know, they were plated.

And the Lancaster was of course the plane that you were going to fly on operations?

Yes. Oh yes and thank God it was Lancasters and not Halifaxs and Manchesters, they didn't have a very good history of

11:00 and Stirlings.

Why was that, why did they...?

Cause they just had faults with them and operational faults. Engine faults. They just weren't a success, although they did have some very operative Halifax squadrons. I'm glad we didn't go there, we just heard bad things about Halifaxs. And yet I suppose those who were in Halifaxs swore by them.

So could you describe the Lancaster bomber for us?

Well I got pictures of it

11:30 over there. It was a beautiful aircraft. It was a big aircraft. It had four Rolls Merlin engines, you know the top line. I couldn't tell you the power that they developed but they developed plenty of power. But they were, they had a pilot and a co-pilot. That's why we were given an engineer, who happened to be a pilot also.

12:00 That's the Spanish chappy we got at Bottesford. But he mainly did engineering. He might have taken over occasionally you know, to do something, just for a bit of stooging where there was no pressure. There was, in the front, you know below the pilot, more or less under the floor in forward, there was this huge nose. And in the nose, the front turret formed

12:30 part of the nose. You could go down a couple of steps or so from under the engineers seat, he would have to move his seat so the bomb aimer could get down the steps. And once the bomb aimer was down there in the nose he could lay down. And he laid down on the door which opened upwards, normally. You had to make sure that was securely shut. If it opened downwards, you're in trouble.

13:00 But it did, couldn't open downwards, but it could open upwards. And but I did have a frightening experience in a Wellington where it had opened upwards accidentally and I was sitting above it. And if I jumped down to go into the nose I would have gone right through the opening. I couldn't work out how clear everything was, it was night time, I could see water and thought gee, there's no moon tonight, but everything's so clear and I could feel the wind coming up.

13:30 And normally I had to go down there and I thought 'Oh God.' But anyway, this is not the Lancaster. You could lay on a nice padded thing, you had your bomb sight slightly to the right. And it, it was a different bomb sight to what the Yanks, very hard to describe. But it, threw a dagger onto a glass plate and you'd have to set controls on it. So that it threw this sort of

14:00 orange dagger right in the middle of a long, rectangular glass plate with a dagger at the far end. And I think it was the far end, I'm just trying to remember now. But what you had to do is when you're on your bombing run, you would have to give instructions, you took control of the aircraft, when you're the bomb aimer. The pilot was just did what you told him. And you would have to give him instructions as to where to move the aircraft to the port or to the star-

14:30 board. It was done in left steady, left left steady, or right steady, left steady, and you gave that, you know, for quite a while. And what you had to do was, the target was far ahead and you could see it

starting to line up with the line, with the dagger line in the middle of the glass plate. And you had to keep it tracking in that direction. If it moved to one side or the other, you'd have to give a left steady or a right steady. You might sometimes say

15:00 five degrees which just meant a little jerk by the pilot until you got the target coming to the cross piece, the sword handle type thing. And at that stage you'd set all your switches which control the bomb disposal, cause they were all in the bomb bays, weighted, you know. But they all just didn't go from the one part of the plane, they went, they were staggered in their dispatch. And especially

15:30 if you had a cookie in there which was four thousand pound and it looked like a huge water tank you know. And made a bit of a mess. And you pressed the bomb tit as they called it, the button and that released the bombs in sequence sort of thing. And when the cookie went, of course the aircraft lurched upwards cause that, the cookie was tending to hold it down a bit. So that was the, that

16:00 was the bombing compartment. The pilot of course and the engineer, the engineer's seat was a collapsible thing which was, allowed the bomber, oh yes the turret was above the nose or part of the nose and you'd have two three-o-three guns in there, or they were putting point five's in at one stage too. I think they mainly point three-o-three's when I had it. I think when we're going on to, if we'd gone onto Lincoln's they were gonna be point five's and we were gonna

16:30 go to Japan in them. But anyway and that swivelled around as you know, it worked by hydraulic pressure and so forth and they was a couple of drums, rectangular drums each side in which all the guns were on a, all the bullets, shells, were on a belt that was folded. You know, one, this left right, left right till they filled up the drums each side. And didn't have to fire them in anger at any time, thank God, cause I didn't do enough trips to do that. But did drop bombs,

17:00 on two occasions and did three other trips where bombs weren't a part of the load.

What sort of bombs were you carrying, you've mentioned the cookie, what were some of the other types of bombs?

Oh well they were all normal type bombs that you see in picture books. They were thousand pounder's, five hundred pounder's, hundred pounder's. And they were so re-arranged that there was no distortion of the balancing of the aircraft. There'd be, they were

17:30 purposely done on, well as they had to do them on the ground, when they were loaded on they were done in sequence so that they would achieve a proper release balance and there'd be no untoward jerking in any one direction you know, which could, you know make it bad for the other bombs. You know you had to keep as steady as you could before the bombs were released.

On whose, who made the decision as to what bombs were to be dropped?

Oh

18:00 that would be done by intelligence and the, you know the bombing briefing that you got. This would be the probably, it might have been Bomber Command itself. Or it might have been the group in Bomber Command. See Bomber Command was pretty big under Harris. And I think we were in Five Group. And this'd be spoken about at the highest level, what sort of, how many planes were needed, what time,

18:30 roughly would be the time of doing it. It was night time of course, all the time. Except second raid we did was just after dawn when we went to Berchtesgaden . But then they would then pass that down to squadron. You know, squadron would then, cause they had all their bombs like in an underground bunkers you know. And they'd bring them out, trot them out on trolleys. And the ground crew'd put them on.

19:00 I remember the first loading up of the bombs that I ever saw. I think I upset Harry there. Course we were young and stupid I suppose. Abbott and Costello were in lots of pictures in those days. Buck Privates and We're in the navy and things like that. And they went on with a lot of antics and so did we you know at different times. And if something serious was happening, we'd make a joke of it. We wouldn't, you know get mournful or

19:30 anything like that, we'd try to be a bit light hearted about it you know. And when we went down to the bombing area where they were loading the bombs up, and there they were bringing out, the ground crew were bringing out all these huge bombs on trolleys you know. And a whole host of blokes under each thing. And they were putting them in different positions and big cookie coming out. And I grabbed hold of someone and said, "Oh look, they're real Chuck, they're real," you know. And Harry said, "Stop talking like that, stop talking

20:00 like that," you know. But it was only you know, I mean you could have burst out crying or something. But it was very serious I suppose but well it was, I mean they were real, we'd only seen pictures of them before, you know. The first time I'd seen a real bomb. A real real bomb, I'd seen practice bombs you know. But ...

This was just before your first operation?

Yeah, yeah, first one to Kiel. It was a naval base.

Just before we deal with the

20:30 **operations themselves, was there further training on the Lancasters?**

Not after Church Broughton, we were fully fledged when we left Church Broughton. We were held up there, that's the only thing that happened, we were held up there for another three weeks. Which is part of my philosophy that everything was happening to delay us getting to a squadron. We'd, sick in New York, didn't pick a pilot, was given a pilot, lost

21:00 a pilot, was given another pilot you know in between intervals. Then we went to 'Broughton and we had someone in the crew who was a mumps contact, whose mumps broke out and I think it was our wireless operator was a mumps contact. So we were pulled back for two or three weeks there until the isolation per…, we were isolated.

Where were you isolated?

Oh well we weren't allowed to leave the hut. In fact there was a heavy

21:30 snow fall while that was going on, and everybody including a CO was ordered down to the runways to physically clear the runways with shovels and things. And all the station police were going around, rounding up people. And they wanted us to come out the hut and we said, "We're not coming out," you know. And they said, "Oh well, no you've gotta come out, we're telling you to come out." And we said, "We're not, we're not coming out, we're not coming out. We're not coming out." "Everybody's got to come out." And I said, "No," I

22:00 didn't say it, we said, "No we got a mumps chit you know." "You got the mumps?" So that was the last of that. We're the only blokes on the squadron that wasn't clearing snow sort of thing.

That's very convenient.

Very, well we would have gone if we hadn't had a mumps chit, well we were supposed to be in isolation you know. But that held us up again and then finally on the thirtieth of March, 1945 we hit the squadron. And that was, gave us barely six weeks before the war ended

22:30 you know. And we only got two proper trips in and they were nearly a month apart. From the time the first one was early in April and the next one was the very, no was early, very early April. And the next one was Anzac Day, it was the last raid of the war, twenty-fifth of April 1945

23:00 was the last raid of the war. And I've got a photograph of those that didn't go on the raid attended an Anzac Day service on the squadron. I got a photograph of Mick Cowan I think, leading the boys to a church service there, which was sort of interesting you know.

So what were those two raids?

Well first one was Kiel, which was a naval base. On that middle of land that sticks up and becomes Denmark. Just before the border of

23:30 Denmark. It was a night time raid using flares to mark the target. And a surprise there was that when the candle, you know, thousand, or million watt candle power flashes went off, photographs were taken automatically by the aerial cameras. When they were developed and printed, they found a pocket battle ship had been

24:00 you know put on it's side there. It was from memory it was the Admiral Scheer. Now, no one knew that was there at the time, so that was a bit of a plus.

Your aircraft was responsible for…?

No, no, no, no, I wouldn't say, but it was a, it was one of the results of the bombing. I don't know whose it was but, no, no, I wouldn't know whose it was but that was you know quite a, if it hadn't been the la, well it wasn't the last raid

24:30 of the war. Wasn't, no wasn't, Berchtes, that was April twenty-fifth. The last raid of the war was on the seventh of May, that was Berchtesgaden .

And that was your second raid was it?

Yeah that was Berchtesgaden , that was Hitler's hide out in the Tyrol.

And what was the objective with bombing that place?

I just think it was to blow him, go and show him that he wasn't gonna have it if he lived you know. It was also an SS [Schutzstaffel]

25:00 barracks was there . But it was mainly I suppose the SS barracks, it was heavily guarded by ack-ack. And it was just to blow to smithereens really. Some, one of the omnipotent blokes at Bomber Command decided it was worthwhile using some bombs up I suppose, I don't know what the reason.

So what were the consequences of the raid, I mean the place is still standing to this

25:30 **day isn't it?**

Yeah, well there was a lot of bombs. They reckoned it, there was things blown to bits but some of the photography revealed that bombs had overshot the target by a long shot and had gone into refugee camps, actually. And just imagine the hoo-haa that would cause these days. That came up that there were bombs from some planes that overshot

26:00 the target. The target you couldn't see really when we got there, just after dawn. The thing was a pall of smoke like an atom bomb coming from the base and growing into a big black thing of smoke. You could not see the target, clearly.

Oh so it had previously been bombed?

No it was bombed by the earlier ones.

By the earlier aircraft.

Yeah by the first in the flight yeah.

So how many of you were going in to bomb that particular target?

Oh I suppose three of four hundred really. We lost a plane on that...

26:30 **Three or four hundred aircraft?**

Yes. Oh yeah, they put em in.

Three or four hundred aircraft just to hit...?

Oh they get rid of their bombs.

Oh yeah absolutely. But that's a relatively small target. Its not as if you're bombing a city, that's one mountain hideout on top of a peak.

Oh yeah well they had to, they didn't know just what the attrition rate would be. And some targets they lost eighty, ninety, hundred planes you know,

27:00 depending on the ack-ack and fighters. So they were probably erring on the side of you know, I haven't got any records really in my log book. They didn't tell us but there was certainly hundreds, you know, looking around, plane everywhere and the thing was really blown to bits by the time we got there. And we, the only one thing we could do then, to bomb, by the time my, our plane and others got there, we had to bomb the base of the smoke.

27:30 You know the pall of smoke, that was where it was coming from. So we had to use the base of the pall as the target area. We couldn't see any defined target. But and one of our planes was shot down. We were over the Alps and the bloke who was shot down should have got a VC [Victoria Cross]. But he was just lost in...

Why should he have got a VC?

He was so brave.

What did he actually do?

Well, remember we're over the Bavarian Alps,

28:00 over the Tyrol and all that. And he got hit, his four engines were out and he gave the order for them to jump, to parachute. And he saw no other way out, he was hardly, he couldn't hardly control the aircraft. So he thought everybody had jumped while he was trying to hold the thing steady, you know, without any engine power. And he's about to get, unbuckle his parachute and

28:30 from the seat or unbuckle his seat straps to get out and go down into the nose and jump. Cause that's where you went through the door. And he looked back and he saw his rear gunner coming up with all his own parachute pulled out. It had caught up and pulled the rip cord and it was all out. And I think fella by the name of Bennett and the pilot was, oh dear, what was he pilot. I do know his name but its just escaped me for the moment.

29:00 But the pilot had to make a split second decision whether to just jump or to try to do something where he could help the gunner you know. So he decided to strap himself back into the seat. And he didn't know what he was gonna do. Well by this time the petrol tanks which are in the wings had ruptured. The fuselage was swilling with aviation fuel,

29:30 and the fumes were there. He had no control much over the aircraft. He was over the mountainous region and he was desperately trying to control the aircraft so that he could land somewhere. But he didn't know where. And he was sort of in a glide you know. He managed to at least get a glide, he couldn't control it very much. But in the, coming up he saw what looked like a cleared

30:00 meadow. But running across the meadow was huge transmission lines, you know, huge transmission lines. Here was an aircraft swilling with aviation fuel, and an aircraft which he could hardly control. And

some how or other he had to get under the transmission lines with a huge bomber that he couldn't control, and land on a surface that was sloping. He didn't know how he was going to it. By some miracle he did.

30:30 He got under the transmission lines and he did land on that meadow and the thing did not explode. Ninety-nine point nine nine cases out of a thousand, whatever it is, it would have exploded. Its all it would have needed you know. The friction and different things that happen when things like that happen. Your cars explode you know, when they got a ruptured petrol tank. Didn't explode, they were able to get out. Talk about God is my co-pilot sort of thing

31:00 you know. So he and his gunner, he saved his gunner's life and the odds were that both should have died you know. And they were all taken prisoners of war, who did jump out. But they all got released within a few days. Cause the Americans were one side of the mountain. I think some Hitler Youth grabbed some of them and took them, and were had guns ready to shoot them. And the ones who were caught up by the

31:30 Hitler Youth were a bit worried. But on the other side of the mountain or a mountain where some others landed, where my mate down in Hobart, Danny Lynch, was sitting on the edge of a ski lift starting to yodel away, cause the snow's all around and he had nothing better to do. He got caught up with the Luftwaffe at a nearby Luftwaffe air field and they took him to their air field and the mess. Shouted him

32:00 a couple of steins of this, that and the other. But the SS heard about it and grabbed them and took them and put them into some jail somewhere. But eventually the Yanks broke through and released them. I suppose none of them were in prison for more than a couple of weeks, they were back in Brighton before you knew it and being feted as Prisoner of war. And they went to the local dances I remember where Sir Lucky Bennett, who couldn't dance a step was saying to the

32:30 wondrous lass in his arms, "I've been a prisoner of war you know I can't dance very well." And it had nothing to do with it.

What a wonderful excuse.

Yeah.

So what was the name of this pilot?

Gee I do know it, I'm just can't think of it, I might think of it before you go. He, Payne, Lofty Payne. Lofty Payne. P-A-Y-N-E. P-A-Y-N-E. Can't remember his proper Christian name, because he was tall and spindly they called him Lofty. Lofty Payne.

That is, that is just a

33:00 **a really remarkable story.**

He never got anything for it. Never got anything for it.

Why not?

He never joined the 460 Association. He's never marched. He's a, he lives over in West Aussie [Western Australia], I think he's a farmer of some sort. He'd be, I think he recently celebrated his eightieth birthday you know.

That's just a…

He's just glad to be alive you know.

I'll bet he is…

And frankly you know I would be too, I wouldn't worry about anything else. I think its a miracle he's alive.

Why didn't he get an award?

33:30 Because the war was ending, almost immediately the war was ending. And all the brass had other things on their mind. About you know changes that were about to happen. And he was overlooked in the administrative hiatus that was going on. And no one ever thought that that was, thought even to record the fact officially which would have started the processes going you know to do it. But,

34:00 if anything deserved a gong, whether it was a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] or what you know. But I mean he really put his life on the line.

He certainly did yeah. Now just sticking with the two operations you went on, tell me a bit more about the raid on Kiel, that was the docks at Kiel was it?

Well that was a night time raid. Yes that was on a dock, yeah a shipping thing. There was a lot of

34:30 town and everything around it but it was to be on the docks on any ships that, subs etc. that might have been there. Intelligence didn't know that the Admiral Scheer was there. I'm pretty sure it was the Admiral Scheer. There were two pocket battle ships, one was the Tirpitz and one was the Admiral

Scheer. I think the Tirpitz was already sunk really. But the Admiral Scheer they didn't know where that was but it turned out to be at Kiel.

So once you released your bombs at Kiel for instance, were

35:00 **you able to see the after effects, were you…?**

No, it was night time, it was too dark to see anything. The day time you might have seen it if there wasn't palls of smoke in the way. I think that was lit up by Pathfinders that one, earlier on, while the raid was going on. Cause that was one sure way of finding your target you know.

Now what,

35:30 **what is, what view, what opinion do you hold of some of the other raids that attacked civilian targets?**

Well I was asked this by a German girl that I met at a luncheon many years ago. And she had it in for me actually. She said, "What were you feeling when you bombed so and so" And I said, "I was feeling scared actually," you know. And she said, "No I've always wanted to ask someone who was in the bombing, what they felt when

36:00 they did this." Because obviously she must have had a family or something. I said I just wanted to get out of the place really. I said I had a job I was told to do and I did it. But it was nerve wracking from the time we took off till the time we sort of left you know, to get home. And we didn't whether we were getting home or not. But we hoped we would you know. So I all, I forgot to say to her we didn't start the

36:30 war. That London and Coventry and Birmingham and Manchester and all these other places you know, suffered the same sort of thing cause that's the truth

Yes

of the matter you know. But when you didn't have time to think, you're really concentrating on getting there, not getting into danger and getting out of the place. You didn't have any emotional feelings about you're gonna, you're

37:00 just thinking of hitting a target. You didn't think you were hitting, to be honest I never thought really of people at the time. I was thinking of buildings and installations you know. I didn't believe that where we were bombing there would have been people involved. Simply because you know when we went to briefings, you know at the squadron, you used to say, "Well this places makes ball bearings and this place makes, you know, makes

37:30 this, that and the other you know which is for Germany's war effort." But I guess it could be true that they certainly did make things for the war effort. But they, I suppose in most cases they would have had to be made by people who were working you know twenty-four hour shifts, of things you know. But, there was a very harrowing book on the effects of bombers on German cities and it was a book simply called Bomber.

38:00 It was written by Len Deighton, who wrote The Ipcress File and things like that. And for the anatomy of a bombing raid you couldn't wish to read anything more harrowing than that. Cause its told from both sides of the war, from the British side and from the German side you know. And it was told by someone who obviously had done a lot of research, who knew what it was like to be on the ground you know, while all this was going on.

38:30 And certainly you know I wouldn't like to be on the ground in any air raid, whether its last war, whether it was in Korea or you know Vietnam or over in the Gulf you know, over in Iran. Not much you can do about it you know.

So you did the raid over Hitler's Eagles Nest,

39:00 **as its often generically called, as well at Kiel. There are, there were other operations but not necessarily bombing ones you…?**

No they were food dropping operations over Holland, there'd be, at the time the war was ending. They negotiated a truce with the Germans to be able to fly in over Holland. And the Germans didn't want that to happen at the time cause they thought we'd be coming on spying trips you know.

39:30 And they made a bargain in the end that if the Lancasters had all the guns removed from the turrets and only carried food in their bomb bays you know, the Germans would allow it. So that started a whole series of operations called Manna. M-A-N-N-A Operations. And they, there was two of those over Rotterdam, and another one Iepenburg I think it was

40:00 in my log book. And which I think was near Amsterdam. And they were amazing trips in the sense that they were low level trips, just a few hundred feet above the ground. With hundreds of Lancasters you know flying over in mass formation. And you could almost see the Germans in their gun turrets, you know ready to fire at us with their anti aircraft guns. But…

Noel I'd like to pick up a continued description of

40:30 **this on the beginning of the next tape cause we're out of...**

Yeah, okay.

Tape 8

00:35 **Noel we were describing the Manna trips and we got as far as saying, you saying that you could see the Germans in the gun turrets. Could you take the story on from there?**

Yes, the, as I said there was a truce more or less declared in the war, one of the very few truces. And the Germans allowed the Lancasters and other bombers to come over so long as all guns

01:00 were removed. And we did skim across and it was very low level and the lowest I have ever flown. For you know, long distances. And it was like a huge Armada that swept across once we'd got across the North Sea across the dyke areas. And then it just seemed a hundred, two hundred or so feet above the buildings. And you could see the Germans in the tops of buildings, where they had anti aircraft, some batteries,

01:30 and so forth, you could almost touch their hands you know. That, which is an exaggeration of course but they were very, very close. And we were hoping that they were going to observe the truce because we certainly were. But we really didn't know for sure and I don't think those who were in charge of us knew either, but they did. And there was many, many trips like this because Holland was starving at the time. And

02:00 the bomb bays of all the bombers was chock a block full of packaged food in sacks and so forth. But we did notice as I think I might have mentioned, that the food wasn't enough for some of them there. Because on one of the drop areas, someone had spelled out in white stones, the word tobak, which we understood was, they wanted some tobacco. So I don't think

02:30 any of that was sent actually. But food being the main purpose of the sort of mission. And that is commemorated to this day the Manna operations. The 460 Association holds a commemoration day of it and the Dutch Consul General attends you know a wreath laying cemetery. And retires to a luncheon and speeches are made and so forth. So that's an interesting side light of

03:00 that aspect of the war. They were grateful.

Yeah, yeah, that's very good. Now, we talked about your oxygen mask before and the communication system, and that leads me to ask what else were you wearing when you were aboard an operation?

Oh well we were wearing the, our, yeah its strange now you ask me that. But I think only, I don't think

03:30 we used to wear the, we wore protective clothing, which you know big flying boots you know with the big fleecy lining. Four or five different sets of gloves on our hands. You know different things. The helmet. But blow me down I can't remember if we got into an outfit with a zip or whether we just wore our battle dress there.

04:00 But I think we must have had a flying suit but I honestly can't remember now. In some cases we didn't get into a flying suit. But I do have some photos of myself in a flying outfit but that was at early training things. And I should remember I know, but I can't with specificity, you know.

You mentioned you had four or five sets of gloves? Why were there four or five?

04:30 Of for various reasons. The outer pair was leather ones you know with, but there was silk ones, there was chamois ones and all sorts of ones. Don't ask me why but it was just to insulate your skin and so forth. I know when one had to load the guns in the turret, you couldn't do it with all your gloves on, you had to take them off.

05:00 **So in other words you were wearing these gloves simultaneously, they were all on as a series of layers were they?**

Well yes, they were, I can't remember exactly how many pair but you did have several pairs of gloves. And, wished I hadn't raised this now.

Sorry, what was that?

I said I wished I hadn't raised this now because I know there are many different pairs of gloves, and it was just an aside you know at the time. You could, certainly couldn't

05:30 do your navigation with gloves on. You certainly couldn't finely do your bomb, bombing, or do your re-loading of ammunition and you know service your guns. In fact I had my hand, on a number of occasions, my skin stick to the steel of the guns when I, when we were at extreme temperatures. And virtually tore the skin off trying to get my hand off

06:00 the guns, you know, we were so high up. But no I can't re…, in finer detail, the old memory's gotta go in some places and its gone a bit there I'm afraid.

Now that you raised the issue of re-loading ammunition, presumably the armourers were loading the guns first off, before you took off.

Yeah but you had to do a test of the guns that they were loaded and you'd have to

06:30 pull back the thing and release and sort of make sure that it was feeding, it was going to feed properly.

So could you talk us through a bit of a process of what was involved from the test onwards and maybe mention one or two things such as, having to do maintenance on the guns during the flying?

Oh didn't have to do maintenance, it was just making sure that the belt would feed in to the gun proper from the cartridge drums,

07:00 sort of thing, you know. Like you would check with a gun in a rifle, that the bullet was in the breech you know. It was a, it was just a check, the details of which really being sixty years ago, it was done automatically along with a lot of things you had to do. The pilot probably had far more checks to do on his board, but I really, at the moment, I really can't remember precisely, but we didn't have to

07:30 take guns apart like you might have been thinking and to do maintenance on them. I mean you get jams of course in your guns. But I didn't have to use the guns much, you see. Really, I had one sort of test firing I think on one of the trips and that was about all. Which is all I wanted anyway.

Well that sounds very dramatic with the skin peeling

08:00 **off in the extreme…?**

Yeah oh the skin would because it just stuck like in your refrigerator if it's, parts of it are cold and you put your hand inside your skin'll stick. And that's what happened at a high altitude with the skin sticking to the outside surface of the guns, they were so cold. Just stuck, couldn't get your hand away, you know.

It feels agonising just to hear it, yeah.

Yeah. But still, they were minor things I suppose.

Now one thing we haven't covered,

08:30 **are the specifics of the H2S.**

H2S. There's another little thing too later on. About the trip to Italy to bring back Eighth army troops, which might be interesting but….

Well let's cover the H2S first.

Well H2S was a later form of radar which was put into the planes. While we were at Bottesford. And

09:00 they were put in the navigator's department. He had the G on one side of him and the H2S, seeing the compartments were pretty small, and the H2S had a screen which was on the other side of him, nearer to the pilot and I used to sit in there. And Harry told me when we first got it he didn't have any faith in it, really. Because what it was supposed to do was, on a screen, a round, small round screen,

09:30 it was supposed to produce a greenish and blackish image of the ground that you were travelling over. And it was specially effective if you were going over a coastline because it would show up just like a map. There were estuaries and bays and headlands and so forth. River mouths particularly good, it was pretty good at showing up the outlines of cities and towns. Of which the navigator would be supplied

10:00 with maps of Europe with the outline of towns on them. And each had a distinctive pattern and you could pick these up if you didn't take your eyes off the map for too long. It was a case that I found, I had to keep my eyes on the maps and on the screen all the time. Otherwise you could easily lose your position you know. So this was achieved in a rather strange

10:30 way. The screen that the, that I had, that the second navigator had, was supported by perhaps a dozen or so other bits of equipment slung around the fuselage of the plane which did lots of conversion. It was in its early stages and all of this equipment was apparently necessary to transform images and so forth. But underneath the aircraft was a

11:00 sort of a blister and inside the blister was a transmitting device which sent a beam downwards. And perhaps not straight down but maybe it rotated to, to cover a given area. But once it hit the ground it bounced back into another part of the equipment that's in the fuselage of the plane. And it was sort of,

11:30 transmuted or refined or dealt with through these dozen or so bits of equipment until it finally came back into your screen. And when it came back into your screen, you saw various outlines. Which, as I said before, if you were fortunate enough to be near a coastline, you got a precise outline of the coast. If there were towns and you

12:00 were keeping track of where you were going, you could pick out the outline of the town because the suburbs go in different ways and different things, especially if they're near rivers and so forth. And just like maps today where you look at maps out of a map book and you see the outline of towns. Especially you get some of these road Atlases of you know equivalent to Gregory's or of, you know of Great Britain. You get

12:30 special pages which show London and Bristol and Birmingham and all these places. So this is what came up on your screen overall. A picture in this greenish imaging of what you were passing over. And you, if you were quick enough you could identify areas on that map which you could put into co-ordinates for the navigator and he'd have to whip them across onto his

13:00 plotting map, which had latitude and longitude. And he'd have to take the time that, well I used to put the time down that I got a particular fix from the H2S. He would transfer it to his main plot and the time would be there and a little triangle'd go as to so, what time it had been taken sort of next to it. And that's where of course it would be altered from there. That line would be drawn from that point which was

13:30 not on the main line that was assuming there was no wind or anything. That was the main course if there was no wind, the ground course you might say. Whereas the aerial course you were doing was altogether different because of the wind effects on your plane. So you'd put your little triangle and you'd work out about the direction that the wind had pushed you and get your dividers and say that's so many miles. So if you, if it had happened within a certain time frame you'd convert that to miles

14:00 per hour. And you'd then use that on your little computer thing, to see, you know to work out a change of course to your target to put you back on course. You'd feed that back to the pilot and we'd give it, I'd give it to the nav and he'd do the plotting. Ah.

Yes, so this technology must have been especially useful at night

14:30 **on night operations?**

Well even above clouds, wonderful above clouds, it could penetrate through clouds. Cause it did give you a picture in this greenish imaging of everything you we're passing over. And for the time it was good. The plotting navigator as I call Harry wouldn't, didn't think it was any good. But on the special training course we were doing at Bottesford, they cut off G, and they gave it a hell of a big trip all over the British Islands you know. Up as far as Scapa Flow and out to sea and

15:00 elsewhere and...

Could I just clarify that, they stopped using G?

No, no they still had G there but they were putting an extra one in.

Oh I see. I thought you said they cut off G?

Oh they cut off G, they didn't have G working while H2S was being used. They just cut out transmitting. That's what I meant. So G wasn't available to the navigator. He had to go on whatever the H2S operator was giving him, you see. And Harry managed to get through on the plotting and get back to base without

15:30 any troubles at all. And he said to me at the time, I wouldn't have believed this worked, you know. Well I said thank God it did you know.

So from this point on he was sold?

Oh he was sold on it, he was happy, he was very happy with it. But to be frank, you know, no one knew whether things would work. But that was something that was more than just sort of blips on a screen. And where I felt things were a bit weird you know, you weren't

16:00 too sure whether it was there. But you were actually viewing what you were passing over, even though it was in a ghosting, ghost-like form you know.

Can I just clarify something you said a moment ago, so they cut off G during this particular flight...?

To make you use H2S.

So this was a training flight?

Yeah.

And where did that training flight go?

Well it went, it was up and down and all around Britain. It was a very long flight with many legs. But it went up as far as Scapa Flow, which was up the North of Scotland.

16:30 **And this was one individual training flight?**

Yeah there was a lot of planes doing this at the one time you know.

But this, you, as a, in your position were actually given the opportunity of one flight to learn the system?

Oh well we had other ones, like we were learning it gradually. But then they wanted to give the big test you know, we had a lot of theoretical things, we had practices and they were doing it. But to really test us, they took G away from us in a way

17:00 and we had to fly on H2S. Cause there was a feeling that it, by some of the more brilliant navigators that it wouldn't work you know. And they had to rely on what was given to them on this one. I must confess I never took my eye off the screen, except for the quick dash down to the map and back to the screen. And I was recording fixes every minute or two and handing them over at a

17:30 great pace to Harry who had so many fixes, he didn't know what to do with them in the end. He said, kept saying to me, are you sure this is right. I said yes, its right. But if I take my eye off it for too long, I'll miss it. But I know, I can tell you they're right you know.

Now I know that we covered the area where you operated when you were preparing to release bombs. I don't think we've described your work area as a navigator?

Well

18:00 that's, that was up where, oh well the navigation, you can't call it a cabin compartment, you might say it was. That was behind the pilot's seat. It was the next thing in line. And it was just, part of it there was, the first part was just a black curtain you pulled across as far as I can recall. And the other part was I think was a door. And then the wireless operator was in a little compartment next to

18:30 him. And then there was a sort of a door which you had to open to get to the mid upper turret operator. So you were lodged in this little, it was a tiny compartment, wasn't very big. And taking this as the fuselage, the navigator or the two navigators were facing that wall of the plane, the inside wall of the plane. And there were, very small table

19:00 there where you did your plotting on. And there was G was up there, sort of to the left and H2S was over there, when they put H2S on. Harry would be fiddling around with G and he liked G. I didn't like G very much. And when H2S came, well he couldn't operate both, so I operated the H2S. And, and

19:30 was able to operate it you know quite well really. As I say I could pick, but its, they used to try to jam, like it wasn't all roses. It was things that the Germans could jam with their radar, you know, signals.

So what would they jam?

Well they would jam the signals that you were receiving, they would have transmitters of various sorts that would interfere in frequencies, that would interfere

20:00 with the signals you were getting. Now that didn't, that G did go out at times, they were interfering with the transmission from the main G stations. Which were separated by a hundred, you know lots of miles apart. They had to be to get this criss cross, this grid system of signals coming in to G you know. It had to be criss-crossed to, they had to be a long way apart to get signals coming in at angle to you know

20:30 sort of give you a grid pattern. Diagonally I suppose you might say or in some way, they were transmitting signals that did, when they hit, when they crossed over one another. And they had proper maps prepared where these signals were already sort of with co-ordinates super-imposed over a map, like with lines. And they had the co-

21:00 ordinates that you could familiarise with the, when you touched a button and you'd change the blips into a scale on the G screen, that gave to you sort of measurements which became the co-ordinates that you looked up on your maps. You'd have a whole lot of these maps, you had to pick the right one. Don't ask me which one, how you picked it, but you

21:30 Harry knew which one to pick you know. And that, when there was no jamming or anything it was quite, it seemed to work well. But there were occasions not when we were doing it, where the G was jammed and they had problems I know. It was common knowledge that G could be jammed.

And for how long would it be off the air if it was jammed?

Depending on the efficiency of the German jamming you know.

22:00 **Might it be off for half an hour at a time?**

Might be off for the whole trip. Don't ask me how they got through. It was a guess and by God thing if that sort of happened you know. We used to drop things trying to jam their radar too, we'd drop silver stuff. They had a name for it and I can't think what it is now [window]. But it was sort of foil strips. We dropped thousands and thousands of them. Trying to jam it so they couldn't get their anti-aircraft

22:30 bearings on us and so on you know.

And would that be effective?

It could, yes, yes, it could be yeah, yeah.

Now did this jamming affect H2S at all?

Well it didn't jam it on the two trips that I did, shall we say, you know. Because we had the transmitter in our plane underneath and it was sending signals straight down and bouncing back you know. So whereas the others were coming from

23:00 transmission towers or stations, whatever you want to call them, which was separate long distance apart, simply because they had to cover, scan a huge area. And they had to send them so that they would crisscross. And could be related to maps which showed criss cross patterns of things. Which you apply the co-ordinates from your G to the same co-ordinates on a map when you followed one co-ord, see there were two lines on the, two line of blips

23:30 on the G, which gave you two co-ordinates. When you froze them and they changed into a scale, and then you, they gave you a reading which you transmitted to your maps. And that's where you followed it along and if you were lucky, those two lines'd meet and that's where you were and you use that as your fix you know. You just had to have a fix, you couldn't do any navigation really, without a fix.

Well that's a very good, clear description

24:00 **of H2S.**

Well I hope it is.

It certainly is.

Its sixty years ago.

Yeah, no that's excellent, that's made me

Sixty years ago.

you know see and get a good sense of what it is. Tell me, were you've described your absolute preoccupation with the various tasks that you had to do during the trips. Did you ever, at any time, feel a sense of stress during these trips?

Oh I suppose one did really, one was always apprehensive of the unknown.

24:30 There was always a sense of relief to get back. We, the nearest we came to I suppose was over the Kiel raid where we got holes in the bomb bay doors, so that was bits of flack hitting us. Not doing any great damage to us. We weren't ever attacked on those two trips by fighter planes or we weren't directly hit in the sense of an explosive charge from anti aircraft fire.

25:00 So, but I think it was all stressful though. Flying, I found, wasn't, some people love flying you know. I never really could say I love flying. I haven't flown much since the war ended to be honest. I just had this feeling that eight out of eleven crews going in, it wasn't that far off before, I had this fatalistic view that flying was something that'd catch up with you, you know. And I'm not, I'm not

25:30 been convinced of the contrary. Every time I pick up a paper, there's a small, usually a small plane, a single engine or a twin engine, a Cessna or a Beechcraft or something. A something Baron going in, you know that's even happening the last week, planes going in and pilots going unconscious and the planes on auto going up almost to the Gulf of Carpentaria. And I think so easy for things to happen. Yet if you were

26:00 all like me, you wouldn't go in a plane ever would you.

So how did you handle this sense of apprehension during the flight?

Well simply by, well I mean I wasn't paranoid or anything about it. I just accepted, I suppose I handled it because as I said very earlier on, that I never expected to come back. I had an expectancy that one wouldn't come back you see. So that was, it wasn't that I was think-

26:30 ing well I won't come back from this trip, but I knew if the war lasted long enough, I wouldn't, you know. Fortunately it didn't. And if I think if it had lasted another couple of trips, most of those if one looks at the back of the squadron history, a good half or more lost their…, fifty-five per cent or more lost their lives in the first five trips that they made. And I, if they were the odds you know, you just sort of had to be a bit

27:00 philosophical about it. It was a bit hard to, that didn't stop you from being apprehensive, no one wanted to, you know I think it helped to know, you know. I think those who realised, who really believed were coming back were probably more stressed than I would have been, really, I think. Because they might have had some real reason for coming back. When I say I didn't have a real reason, I suppose I did, I wanted to live a full life. But ...

What would have been…?

I was just a bit

27:30 fatalistic that's all.

What would have been your most stressful trip do you think?

I don't suppose that, I think the most stressful trip I had wasn't in operations, I had two real frights and they were, both were in training. One was when we were over the North Sea in a Wellington and it lost one engine. And it was almost a hundred per cent you know cumulus cloud cover. And I think Harry was the pilot, Harry Lakey was

28:00 the pilot then. We went down within fifty feet or so of the North Sea. I was in the front turret firing guns, on a firing exercise. And Harry said, whatever it was, "The port engine or whatever has gone, I can't get it started." And we went down further and further and further until we just you know, you could al…, I wouldn't say you could touch the water, but we weren't far off. You could see the swell, you know the waves. And I you know one didn't feel at all happy about that, we knew things were crook. But

28:30 I think we almost mentally thought this was not going to be a trip we'd come back from you know. And no one would know much about it. But somehow or other with one engine, he managed to, after some period of time, he managed to get enough power in that engine to start very slowly climbing up, bit by bit, by bit, by bit. Until he got up you know, from the

29:00 position we were in, up high enough and he found holes in the cloud cover. And he wandered around picking the, you know, it was very hard. And finally we got above the cloud you know, and it was a, we didn't know whether the engine'd give out or not. It didn't and we got home. But I suppose that in a way was the nearest time we, I think we ever came to really getting into trouble. Or probably you know going,

29:30 going somewhere where we couldn't get back from. And the other time, which wasn't as bad, was in a Wellington when the, I'm sitting next to the pilot. And I mentioned it earlier, when the bomb bay, when the nose door had sprung open for some reason. And I was admiring the clarity of the night in the water and the different sights I could see. And all of a sudden I said to myself, "I shouldn't be seeing that

30:00 at all." That cover's solid wood you know. "My God it's open" you know and I was on this little rickety little thing that you join with bits of pipe, you know, that you just which collapsible and you put into a little latch thing on the right hand side of the fuselage. And that was all there was to the seat you know. And normally I'd just slip off that and go down in to the nose. And I would have gone straight through the open,

30:30 open door there. But I could, if I, you know, I don't know why I note, well I was looking down admiring the view, but normally I probably wouldn't have been doing that. There was some reason or other in my numb brain told me that the thing was open you know. Cause you don't think you know the best sometimes. But when I did that I got backwards off the seat, and I folded up the seat and put it

31:00 in the latch and I went down, I told the pilot and Steve, it was Harry I think. And I said, "Look just hold it steady, I'm going down head first and I'm going to get that door and I'm going to swing it shut," you know. And see what's happened to it you know. It was just a catch, the catch must have vibrated loose. It was just a simple cross catch you know that went into a sort of half circle thing and held it, went over a thing like the side and held it in

31:30 position, but it must have vibrated loose. But that was about the nearest, oh then I had another accident in Italy, I fell off a bridge. But that was nothing to do with the aircraft you know. But that was pitch dark and I was the only sober person leading the crew home. And I was leading them on the edge of an aqueduct that had been blown to bits and I stepped into space. But that was a just,

32:00 that was another story.

How did you survive that?

I don't know really, a miracle.

Where did you land?

I landed about fifty feet down between jagged rocks. It was over a mouth of a river which was tidal. And we didn't know it was an aqueduct, we thought it was a footpath. We'd flown down there from the

32:30 squadron as one of the extra jobs at the end of war, to drive, to bring home Eighth army troops. It was San Petri or something, North of Bari in the heel of Italy. And hundreds of aircraft went down to do this air lift the troops back. And when we got there, we heard there was a town Bari. So we thought we'd walk in to Bari, it was about ten or twelve miles.

33:00 And there was a road which was full of army trucks. It was all right during the day time but we particularly didn't notice. There was a train line on one side with an engine that just seemed to shunt up and down. And on the other side there seemed to be a concrete path. And we must have gone down the concrete, we couldn't have, we must have gone down some other path because we were looking at women in the olive fields or whatever they were in.

33:30 Like these pictures out with their skirts and putting things in, like an ancient picture that used to hang in the primary school of, sort of peasant women you know. And it was like the desert really it was so dry.

And then there was a mound and some miles away with a white washed wall and that must have been the village you know. But we went in there and we traded, we had packets of cigarettes and stuff and we bought jewellery. And stilettos and

34:00 all sorts, watches. And came back with those and I had a stiletto stuck in my belt. And the boys had been onto, they were called Adriatic Wine Shops I think, peach brandies and apricot brandy, cherry brandy. And we had lots of bottles of that to bring back. And it was everywhere, and I was leading back, they were full as balls as the saying goes.

34:30 And I was, didn't drink. I was leading them back, I might as well have picked anybody else. They would have been better picking someone who's drunk. But it was pitch dark and we couldn't go on the road because of the trucks. We couldn't go on the other side because of the train engine. So we looked like a concrete path, three or four feet wide. All of a sudden I stepped into space. And my engineer who used to go to primary school with me, George

35:00 Fyfe, shouted, "Bloody Dwyer's disappeared." And started to laugh. And I just fell and knocked myself out. And woke up a…, they stopped some trucks, American trucks shining lights down. It was, like they took me to First Aid Station where they cleaned me up a bit. I only had scratches and things. I somehow or other missed the rocks. Fell on sand between the

35:30 rocks, and it was about fifty feet down though. But it was part of the aqueduct really, the edge of an aqueduct which was blown away. And there was a pole or a thing with a light on which there was no light on because, even though the war had ended there was still no lights on. Even the trucks still had those vent things on you know, the hooded things on like they used to have in Sydney during the war, you know, for car lights.

Sounds like you're extremely

36:00 **lucky to survive that experience.**

Well I think so. But that happened after the war though you know.

So…

It was more dangerous when the war was, when you weren't at war, when you were training.

It was more dangerous.

Well it was wasn't it, I mean…

Yeah. I just wanted to pick up on something you said a short while ago. And that was that you didn't stress out during trips, because you didn't necessarily

36:30 **feel that you would be coming back. I mean is that, can you just amplify on that?**

Well I had a fatalistic view of life. By the time I left home I didn't believe I'd be coming back. And I used to tell the different American troops in America that and they couldn't believe someone had this philosophy. Sounded too gloomy for them but I told them I was a realist you know. I'd been reading the papers and you know before I left and I knew there was a lot of people getting killed in the Battle of Britain and blah, blah,

37:00 blah. And I didn't know what the figures were but I just believed that the casualty rates were high. But I didn't think they were as high as they were you know. But I didn't think much about it at all I suppose, it was just trying to do it in retrospect of, I think, flying was stressful, I always found flying stressful, I didn't find it easy and everything.

37:30 During the war there was you know easy for mishaps to happen to planes you know. You'd lose an engine you know you'd, something'd fall off somewhere or other. That certainly happened with Wellingtons you know. Wellingtons would, I think we had a couple of planes that fell out of the air either landing or taking off at Church Broughton you know, and Litchfield and the crews were wiped out you know.

Now you've mentioned in passing

38:00 **before, that you had a lot of confidence in the strength of the Lancaster?**

Oh the Lancaster were the best planes, they were beautifully engineered you know. And that was true yeah, yeah, they were safe. Safe planes, safer planes than anything I'd ever been in.

What specifically made them safer?

Just their, the look of them for one thing and their construction was solid. They had the best engines that were going you know and,

38:30 and they just seemed to be designed to be safer you know. They were supplied with, they were strongly built, they were all metal construction you know. And nothing could be safe in a war really if you were hit by anything. But for a plane that you know was just flying and not expecting to be hit, say, it was a safe plane. And they had plenty of speed and they could stand the pressures and

39:00 stress when the pilots did these corkscrews to get away from fighters you know. They called it fighter affiliation. And we did exercises, fortunately we didn't have to do it in the war itself, but these were very violent moves. Which would have shaken other planes to pieces probably, but the Lancs took it like a duck to water you know. And gave one a lot of confidence when they, you know by the way they were easily able to do it. Of course you could, needed

39:30 a good pilot too. With his good, strong, thick arms and wrists and so forth you know. And especially one who had a lot of training hours and flying hours up.

All right we're going to have to change tapes

Okay.

at this point.

Tape 9

00:32 **So Noel you were just talking about the importance of strong hands and wrists in a pilot, why was that?**

Well that's just one of my little criteria for picking a pilot. I must confess that one had only been on light aircraft when until the time I got to OTU, except for the Fairey Battles at Bombing and Gunnery School. But

01:00 there was a lot of the pilots who were crewing up there at Litchfield, were just slender young boys you know, had, were very thin of frame and their hands and arms and wrists were you know like mine. Which are not particularly big. I wanted, I believe arms and wrists and even legs too when doing you know control of your rudder and all that sort of thing, are very important. And

01:30 especially in bigger aircraft where you've got four engines, there's always with engines there's a, what they call a natural torque in engines. They either have a tendency to go to the left or to the right. Even a car is like that, even a shopping trolley can do that on you, you know. And you've gotta fight it to, sort of, to get it on course you know. And if you're involved in evasive, no,

02:00 in, even taking off and landing you've got to really have control of the plane and all its different sort of mechanisms. Like the ailerons and the rudder and the engine you know, which you're pushing under great thrust to take off. Its like, I can compare it to the rockets they send into space. Now you've gotta have the thrust to get you off the ground and you've gotta have the expertise to get you down

02:30 too. To hold the thing and to level off at the right place so as you land fair and square on a runway. And if you in a war situation where you taking evasive action, like the one I explained that we were taught to do at Bottesford where they call it the corkscrew. Where you had to make steep descents to the right and left and then again

03:00 another steep descent in the shape of roughly a diamond you know. You'd go down one side the diamond, down another, then you'd go up and up you know to complete the diamond. They called that the corkscrew. And the plane was put under great pressures and stresses then. And if you didn't have control of the plane and you didn't have good strong arms and wrists, in my view, I reckon that could be a cause for problems, accidents. Now I wasn't to

03:30 know this, it was some sort innate sixth sense told me, get a pilot with good strong, brawny arms and wrists. That can hang on to a control column and can handle it under the worst of conditions. So both my pilots, Steve and Harry, Steve Burke, Harry Lakey, seemed to have, and I didn't pick either of them. They were given

04:00 virtually to us. And I did have a third crew after that. Where we left Binbrook and went to East Kirkby to train to go out to Japan and I got a pilot who probably didn't have big, thick wrists there. And he's a good fella, a Queenslander. And I joined that crew with great reluctance really. It was pier pressure you know eventually made me join it.

04:30 If I'd had my rathers, I would have, I'd rather not, but something said don't do this. But I did it. So I became a member of what was called Tiger Force. Which was to go out to Okanowa to Japan and fly over seven or eight hundred miles of water. And I wasn't looking forward to that prospect with a crew that was different to one I would have normally picked. But

05:00 I happened to school with one of the chaps and I happened to be in New York hospital with another one of them. And I found it very hard to resist their pressure in the end. And I joined that crew. So I've gone off the subject but I do believe in a bomber with a heavy load, with having to subject constantly to heavy movements of a plane, which might be evasive action, which might be in

05:30 some situation where you might lose control of the plane due to engine failure, or engine damage or some damage to the wing or the rudder. You need someone who can keep control of the plane. And I do

believe, that's what saved that Lofty Payne I was telling you about, on the last raid of the war. He had very big arms and wrists and he was able to control that plane in a descent which was really a descent into hell the way he was going. And I think

06:00 really that a lesser pilot with a smaller, slenderer frame wouldn't have been able to do it, really. With hindsight I'm saying that.

Now you've talked, you've just mentioned it again and you've mentioned it throughout the interview, this innate sixth sense that you had, have or had at the time. And I'm wondering if you could explain a bit more, what that is?

Well its just some innate feelings that you get about you do

06:30 something or you don't do it. Something warns you at times that that could be a bad thing to do. Don't go there. In fact I can give you some instances of it even in private life. I've been, when I was with National Parks and Wildlife Service, I was fortunate enough to stay at one of their holiday houses in Royal National Park in which an old boat was

07:00 part of the perks you might say. And the boat was parked at the jetty alongside the house at Port Hacking there, the, one of the, they call it the South West Arm. And having two children and whom I used to take there, I liked to take people with me who could you know enjoy the stay but do some of the work too you know.

07:30 Who, and they loved coming cause its such a beautiful place. And I think it was the then Commissioner of Consumer Affairs whom I knew very well was on one of the boat trips. He had a family of about seven or eight. And there were other school friends of my children and we went out on the South West Arm. And Phil decided he wanted to explore some other bits of the Port Hacking. And

08:00 he had a pipe in his mouth smoking away. And he chugged out into the Port Hacking main arm and then he started to, for some reason, head out through the heads of Port Hacking, out to sea. And there was a huge swell that was you know many, many, many feet high. And we were in this old tub that was on its last legs. And I suddenly realised that he really intended going out. I just thought he was gonna turn around and go back in the quieter waters. And I said,

08:30 "Phil." He said, "What?" I said, "You're not going out there are you?" And he said, "Why not?" I said, "They'll tip us over, those waves, they'll tip us over, we'll all drown," you know. I could see it in my mind's eye, you know, it happening. It was as clear, we had no safety gear on or you know, flotation gear or anything. And oh, you think so do you. I said, "Can't you see it," you know. "Oh," he said, "Oh we'll turn around if you like."

09:00 I thought, "God as soon as we turn you know, the waves which are coming you know, on the turn'll flip us over, you know, we'll all be gone." But it didn't happen and that is a miracle it didn't happen. Because, so many people get drowned you know in this simple way. It wasn't a very strong boat, it was a very old boat. It had an inboard motor that was on its last legs and there was all these kids on board. Must have been twelve or thirteen, fourteen children on board you know.

Well it

09:30 **certainly served you well, your sixth sense.**

Well I think it did. Its happened in other instances too which don't come readily to mind, where something said beware you know. Don't do this, don't go there or something. And…

Do you think that, I mean the fact that you, your crew was one of the three I think to survive…?

Yes.

That your sixth sense

10:00 **had something to do with that?**

Well as it got down, as we heard news of someone going in and you know not returning etc. etc. one did get clammy feeling. But there was only a matter of time. But my belief is, and its spelt out in the statistics that are in the squadron history, that most crews, fifty-five per cent of crews went within the first five trips. I'm sure if

10:30 one had gone for another five or so, one wouldn't have completed much more than that. Just stood to reason really.

Now you mentioned in passing, and I just want you to, if you can just like make a statement about this for the record. The fact that of the eleven crews that were in the squadron, only eight, only, there were eight that were lost. Can you just talk about that

11:00 **as in terms of you know what you feel about that particular statistic?**

They were eight crews out of those that crewed up at Church Broughton and they all didn't go to 460.

Oh, okay.

They all didn't go to 460 but as the news filtered through about those that didn't and those that did on the squadron. There was only three left that I was aware of. And I think that's almost

11:30 what the, that's three out of eleven, that's not many. The statistics for Bomber Command were about sixty-five, sixty-six per cent, was the casualty rate, for Bomber Command. And that's a very high rate, that's two out of every three you know. So when you get it, when you translate that to eleven, you're

12:00 getting you know pretty close if not, its worse, the three remaining out of eleven. I mean its eight out of eleven have gone you know. You put eleven into a hundred it goes nine, nine eight's are seventy-two. So its seventy-two per cent of, that's slightly higher than the average for Bomber Command. And that's a rather scary thing. We knew nothing about that at the time. I

12:30 knew nothing about it till I got the history of called, Strike and Return, written by Peter Firkins, I didn't realise the casualties were that high. Now a lot of people must have realised that in the know but I certainly didn't realise that.

When you read that statistic, that percentage of seventy-two, what went through your head?

I was, well I was horrified to be honest. I knew they were high but I didn't

13:00 think they were that high. And I can't believe that one squadron lost a thousand and nineteen, when twenty-six crews originally made a squadron, or so I'm told, and there were six in each, seven in each crew. That's what, seven twenty's, a hundred and forty, a hundred and eighty-two. So its five or six times the squadron compliment in that was lost. And

13:30 one case I was particularly upset about. I've got a photo somewhere of a chap, there's a chapter devoted to him in Strike and Return. He was, and I felt, when I read that in the last few years, I felt very upset. Because I was approached by the squadron association in Victoria to see if I could find his family in Sydney. And I didn't find his

14:00 family but I found out a lot of the background, which Peter Firkins didn't have who wrote the book. And he was, his name was Clifford Timothy O'Riordan. And if someone should write a book about anyone they should write it about Timothy, rather, Clifford Timothy O'Riordan. He was to my mind, he was, he went when he was about thirty-five. But he's an outstanding person and he was a product of Saint

14:30 Ignatius at Riverview, where he absolutely was the top of everything. Sports-wise, Head of the River wise, scholastically, athletics, everything. He became a barrister, became a lawyer then became a barrister with his wig and so forth. And he volunteered for the air force as a pilot but he was over the age for a pilot at the time. And the only other mustering they offered him was as a gunner, air gunner, and he accepted it.

15:00 He accepted it. It was the worst job in the bomber crew. I suppose air gunners who survived might argue against that, say it was a good job. But you know you had terrible casualty rates, air gunners, especially the rear gunners. And I believe he was a rear gunner. And he, Peter has him down as doing a whole tour of operations. But when we checked we found he did fourteen or fifteen trips. But as a barrister,

15:30 he could have got a nice, soft job during the war, in Intelligence or in lots of things you know. He didn't have to become a gunner. He was probably the only barrister in the whole of the air force who was a gunner, you know. And he was a good looking fellow. He had a brother who won the Military Cross in World War I. The brother had gone to Saint Joey's. And he was just such a good person that

16:00 he didn't really, his life went, you know, in a sense down the drain in one way. He didn't come back and have a marvellous practice like he could have easily had you know. He could have become a QC [Queen's Counsel]. He never married, he missed out on that, he missed out on a family. And that really traumatised me to think that he was one of those thousand and nineteen. And

16:30 he, he's in a grave in Germany. I think he died on a raid, on a thing, on a raid to Hamburg. And the person that discovered his grave was an Englishman in the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. And who wrote, wanted to find out about him. And he took the trouble then to do this little personal memorial to him with his photographs on his

17:00 and little citations about him, have his medals there and air force Insignia. Cause he was so taken up with this Australian who had, who occupies this grave over in this cemetery South of Hamburg you know. And the more I learned about him the more I just felt sad that it could have been you know a lesser person. And probably there were far lesser persons, but he

17:30 was a person who could have evaded doing that sort of thing. And this is why I can't understand now when people say you know, I wouldn't go and do this if there was another war. And I wouldn't do that, you know, you're all mad, you know. He had the option to get out of it I guess in some way you know, when he couldn't become a pilot. He could have become an Intelligence Officer or something, had a sweet cop you know. He could have done a soft job, he would have been quite

18:00 valuable I dare-say. He accepted an air gunner's job, the worst job in the air force. And his life was sort

of cut short, you know. And he's the sort of one I think about. I'd others who were similarly lost, I lost one of my, whom I regard as my best air force friend, John Donald from Nambour in Queensland. He was killed by friendly fire

18:30 over Scapa Flow in a Halifax I think it was. And on a training exercise, pilot named Tanner. His navigator was John Hughes who was the son of one of my bosses at work. And they were just on a training flight. And then as the story goes, and no one has ever sworn on a bible that this was so. But the story

19:00 was that the navy was using, instead of using dummy ammo they were using live ammo. The plane was shot down and they went into the drink and none of them were ever found. And for a couple of years his mother and daughter, ah mother and sister, rather, came down to see me. And they still believed he was alive, wandering around Europe somewhere or England with a loss of memory. And they went over repeatedly to everywhere he'd been you know.

19:30 In the hope of finding someone or finding him actually. Or finding someone who might have been from the crew who could have led them to him you know. There's a photograph of him in one of my albums. But, you know, I mean I trained with him at you know Bombing and Gunnery and at Air Observer School. I suppose when things like that happen, you do get

20:00 a bit fatalistic that the chances of missing out and not being killed are very slight really, you know. I didn't know about O'Riordan but I did know about John Donald and John Hughes. And I knew about Doug, sort of, Grimsay. And I knew about quite a lot of other crews on the squadron who I didn't mix with, because crews usually

20:30 kept to themselves pretty much, usually. And you only knew somebody had gone, when you saw a van pull up outside their quarters and empty it out you know. Get their kit bags and personal possessions and take them away. Or when, after a raid you were waiting to hear the news of whether all the aircraft had come back. And you'd find that one, two or three or more didn't come back you know. And sometimes they were located to near

21:00 where your billet was you know in the, on the squadron. And you knew of them, you know, you saw them around a lot in the sergeant's mess. Or if you're an officer you saw them in the officer's mess. And no, no, you really got, I can't help saying I was fatalistic cause I was you know. I didn't really have an optimistic view of things because

21:30 I suppose I didn't want to fool myself. I pretended to my mother and all that I'd be coming back. I didn't ever say anything to her or to my family. But to myself, I really believed that the odds were against one coming back you know. It didn't make me unhappy or anything you know, I accepted it.

Well the odds were against you.

Well I think they were now after reading that book. And even reading that so many were lost in training too.

22:00 And I have a few bits of knowledge about some who were you know.

Now look, just because we're coming up to the sort of final bit of the tape now and I just want to make sure we fit everything in. So, I want to know where you were when you heard that the war had ended?

war had ended in Europe I think I was in Birmingham on leave. I was visiting young girlfriend I

22:30 had there. And we were in the town there or something. And I remember getting on board a truck, or the tray of a truck full of other people celebrating. Everybody was shouting and cheering and somehow or other I got in possession of a flag which is out somewhere in the garage in a box you know. Which I brought home with me, it was a British ensign sort of thing. But it was lot, it was noisy, but I was in

23:00 Birmingham, yeah I remember that quite well. And when the war ended in no, no, when we reformed I was in Dublin. When the war ended in Japan I think I was at East Kirkby you know. That was the best news of the lot that. Really.

So what happened next after the end of war?

Well we were

23:30 asked did we wanted to go home or did we want to hang around England for a while, we were given a choice. I said I wanted to go home and I was in a batch of people to go home. And we came home on the Aquitania, which was I think the third largest commercial liner in the world at the time. It was on its last voyage cause it had been going for a long time. It was about forty-six thousand tons. It was next to the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth.

24:00 And we came home from round South Hampton, Freetown in Sierra Leone, Cape Town, Fremantle and then called in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. But we had a, it wasn't a very good trip home, we had a commandant of troops who was English and he was, he hated Australians and we had a go in with him. And we, we sort of

24:30 had a rebellion at Cape Town and we all jumped ship. And he was you know screaming out for days that he'd Court Marshall us. Which only made us more determined. There was five and a half thousand on the ship. And four thousand of whom were Australians. And the rest were either English marines going out to the Pacific or there were some AIF [Australian Imperial Force], from, who'd been prisoners of war.

25:00 There were some nurses, there was about two hundred South Africans I think. The commandant didn't like Australians and he wouldn't give us any leave at Cape Town. So only took the start of a few to jump ship and the whole, four thousand Australians jumped ship. They had to lock the commandant, whose name was Lieutenant Colonel Llewellyn in the brig while all this was going on because he was frothing at the mouth.

25:30 We were headlines on the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] and in the Cape Town papers. And we didn't get court-marshalled. And the story of the rebellion or whatever you want to call it was written up in the, in a book by an Australian who was on it, John Brown there. I contributed to that, the last year or two. But

26:00 no he was a nasty man Lieutenant Colonel Llewellyn. He threatened everybody with court-marshals and even his own English troops jumped overboard in the final analysis. But we had a nice twenty-four hours in Cape Town. It was a mutiny, that's what they called it, mutiny, that's right. I was just trying to think of the thing that happened there. It was, as the first lot went off, one of the voices from the decks was shouting out,

26:30 "Cast off Mr Christian, cast off," you know. That was the chaps who'd jumped ship on the first tug that was going back with them you know. And that's from sort of Mutiny on the Bounty of course, "Mr Christian, cast off. Mr Christian." Great laughs going right around the ship on that one. Didn't amuse Lieutenant Colonel Llewellyn though.

So tell me about your home coming.

Oh it was quiet. We landed finally at Woolloomoolo. One of the wharves

27:00 there. There was buses waiting for us, took us up to Bradfield Park 2ED [2 Embarkation Depot]. They called it, started off as being Two Initial Training School but it was Two Embarkation or Two, well it was Two Embarkation Depot. That's right, we embarked from there and was still 2ED when we got back. Everybody was lined up in the quadrangle with huge letters for the names of the people whose names started with A to Z and we'd get there in our groups. Loads of relatives there

27:30 waiting to greet their long lost sons and husbands and what ever, fathers. And my brother was waiting for me. My mother wondered whether she should come, I told her not to, I wouldn't speak to her if she came. Cause she was not very well you know. I didn't want her to be in the hot sun. So my brother was there and he took me home. But we were given a couple of week's leave and then discharged on the sixteen of January

28:00 '46 and back into civvy [civilian] life. Had a couple of months leave after that, disembarkation leave or discharge leave or whatever they called it. But didn't take more than a week or two of it, went back to work and in the same job that I'd left from a few years earlier.

Now what happened to your girlfriend in England?

Well we got engaged actually. And when I brought her out

28:30 on the bride, fiancé ship Asturias in '48 she ran off with a naval officer on board the boat. So everything was off, the marriage was off. So that was a bit of a blow.

Yeah I can imagine.

Well he came knocking at the door some weeks afterwards. I'll tell you the story, its a bit of a joke on me I suppose. But he came knocking at the door some weeks later

29:00 offering to patch everything up. Which I didn't know there had to be anything patched up. But he said, "I can fix it all up between you and so and so," you know. And after that experience I told him I wasn't interested. Having you know done what she'd done and he having done what I assumed he'd done. And told him to go to hell. Oh, he said, "No, no, I want to fix it all up between youse," you know. I said, "No. No thanks." He said, "Oh I can't marry her, she wants me to marry her."

29:30 I said, "Why can't you?" he said, "I'm already married." So there you are. She eventually went back to England you know. And I never heard from her again really. Did my dough. Had to pay her fare out, which was my demob [demobilisation] money you know. It was about a hundred and twenty pound at the time you know to pay her passage. All the Poms were getting ten pound passages at the time you know.

30:00 But I got caught on that one. But that was the least of my worries really at the time. I found solace in going back to work.

And I believe you also, you married someone else?

Oh I did yeah, that was a disaster but I married, had two children, got two sons. One who lives in

Sydney, one who lives at Wollstonecraft. I reared them,

30:30 raised them from the time they were infants until they left home in their twenties, early twenties. Marriage didn't work out. My ex didn't want children anyway and she just left them with me. So I had the job of, that's why I built this house actually to make sure I got them you know. And the older one stayed with me until he was

31:00 twenty-three or twenty-four. And the younger one left earlier cause he got a job where he got moved around to the country you know. He's a…, works as town planner in Councils, you know. And Michael got job as, he went to uni, got two or three degrees, two degrees and a diploma.

How hard was it for you to settle back into civilian

31:30 **life after service?**

Oh I don't think it was that hard really in my case. Work, I did some interesting things. As soon as I came back I got stuck into, especially after '48. The Birmingham lass shot off with the naval man. I got stuck into my examinations I had to do for,

32:00 for progression. And funnily passed them all at the one sitting which normally took others years to pass. So I, normally it wasn't the thing for one to sit for every subject at the one time but I did. Cause I was sort of, what do you call it, there's a word for it, I was sort of enthused

32:30 it that's not the wrong word I was looking for, but I was wanting to do something that was constructive. And did that. And then I did a publicity advertising course. So I did all of that before 1951. And they created a job for me in the health department there as assistant publicity officer. And from that I was seconded pretty smartly

33:00 into helping to organise the Royal visit in 1952. And again, when the King died, when that was put off, into the Royal visit of '54. And I had a very interesting time there. I was seconded from the health to premiers department. And that's where the Royal Visit organisation was. I was made decoration's officer for, to decorate the

33:30 city, for the Royal Visit. And then I was further seconded to the Lord Mayor's office where he had twelve citizens committees that covered the whole of the City of Sydney. And one of my jobs there or the job of the committee was to work up everybody into a fervour, well into a fervour so that they would decorate. I must confess I didn't know anything much about decoration,

34:00 but I learned it as you know time progressed. And had very interesting you know period with them. I got invitations to you know a lot of the main functions that were, and attended a lot of the main functions like the landing at Fleet Steps and the Garden Parties. Went to the Royal Ball at the Town Hall at the time. Had to buy a dinner suit for that,

34:30 which I was one of the very few in a dinner suit, most of them were in tails really, it was one of those affairs. But it was an exciting time you know really. And I was, lots of times, as close as you are, away from the Queen and Philip. I was at the landing, I was an usher for the day and bringing all the hoi polloi from the you know

35:00 onto the red carpet across to the floating pontoon. And Lord Casey, Doc Evatt and Mary Harrison and other, they call them dignitaries. And had a nice bird's eye view of everything.

Well it sounds like you really got stuck into your work.

Well I did and then I went back to the Health and complained about where they were putting me. Because I had passed examinations

35:30 I went up to a mental hospital as secretary. Two of them as fact, one at Stockton, one at Newcastle. And had very interesting times there. And then applied for a job in the snow fields as Secretary of the Kosciusko State Park Trust which I held for many years, creating snow field resorts and things you know. And which was really interesting. And then that translated into a job with the National

36:00 Parks and Wildlife Service which was a fairly big job really. You know politically and ministerial wise and things like that. I did some heavy stuff with that crowd you know. And some was very satisfying you know cause it was dealing with Commonwealth Departments and so on you know, land exchanges. Got a lot of land out of the Commonwealth. Which

36:30 through personal effort which I regarded as you know personal achievement because the land had been written off by others you know in the service as unobtainable you know. But I'd learned you know to be persevering and not to sort of give in, if you're in a negotiation, and be the last man standing when the negotiations were complete. And it worked you know but.

37:00 **Well look we're coming, we've actually, we're coming towards the end of the tape so I just want to finish off a few things. You mentioned that you were allocated to a Pacific squadron. But was that when you were going to be sent to Japan but that didn't happened because…?**

No we wanted to, this was at Litchfield when we were going to an Operation, OTU, Operational Training

37:30 Unit. We had to then start to think about where we wanted to serve when we had finished this operational training advanced business.

Right.

And we started to put in for 460 then. Mainly through word of mouth advice, information that 460 was a good Australian squadron. And it was one you know that most people would like to belong to so our crew put in for that.

38:00 **Right.**

Well we lost our pilot, Steve Burke, through, whatever it was, bleeding ulcers or something. And we got the English pilot at Bottesford, heavy conversion unit and there was some argument there as to whether we should go to 460 because he was English you know.

That's right, yeah and we covered that I think quite well in the interview so. But look just before we do finish the interview, is there anything else that you'd like to say

38:30 **in summary or…?**

Oh about the war or about…

Just if there's anything else that you feel hasn't been said or…?

I just feel, generally speaking, that really I didn't know there was a 460 Squadron Association till the nineties really when I saw, when I was doing family research. And I used to look at a thing in The Herald where it was people

39:00 seeking information. And I saw that 460 Squadron was seeking people to join. And it had been formed for many, many years so that's when I joined. And when I did join it I found that there was no one there when I went along to a meetings that I knew cause they'd all died. And course my life had been so busy with raising two sons on my own from the time I had them, when whey were infants up till the time they'd

39:30 finished uni that, and with a heavy job it really kept me going weekends and night times and so forth. It was a very heavy job. And I really didn't have much time for leisure to be quite honest, I would have liked to have been. But I was trapped in a job that was more than full time you know. And I joined the Association. Had I not been in that type of work I probably

40:00 might have become more able to find some outlet with the air force Association or something but I really was too busy for it. And when I was able to join it I found there was no one left so that was a shame, because I would have liked to have met up and I didn't know where the crew were anyway that had survived of my own crew. And that sent me off on a search and I found that the first navigator Harry Calnan

40:30 was dead when I researched him. I found that George Derns from Tasmania the wireless operator was dead. I tracked down Lindsay Reid in Townsville and he told me Arthur Thomas was dead. And then I only had two to find. They were Harry Lakey in England and the Spanish people. And that took some finding. But I did find their families and still in touch with members of the family. But both of them had already died

41:00 you know. So that's the sad thing that I missed out on further contact with them. And they would have been the only reason to become active in the squadron association would have been to reunited with them you know.

Noel we're actually gonna have to finish there cause…

That's all right.

I'm getting the wrap up sign.

That's fine.

So, but on behalf of Graham and myself we'd really like to thank you for your wonderful stories . Its been

41:30 **an incredible journey you've taken us on today. We've really appreciated that you've done such a remarkable job.**

Well thank you Rebecca and Graham. I, its just sort of reminiscences as I find it. I don't think its particularly interesting really.

No it is, it's very interesting.

Its just an ordinary journey through you know from the time I joined the war till the time afterwards really, you know. But and I've enjoyed talking to you both and you've been most calm and undemanding…

INTERVIEW ENDS