Australians at War Film Archive

Horace Fordyce (Bill) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:35 **If you start Bill with a brief history from when you were a youngster and through the war and a little bit of post war. Just so we get a brief sketch of what we're in for. So if you wouldn't mind I'd like to start by asking you just a little bit about your early childhood. Where you were born and grew up and so forth?**

Well I was born in Melbourne. I was an orphan and I was

01:00 brought up by my late father's sister. And with her had a fantastic time. I was very fortunate. I was educated at Melbourne Boys' High and Uni [University] High and went to, for about 4 years I went to an art school. Should I look at you? I'm…

Yes look at me please. That would be great Archive ID 0101:30:00

Hoping to be an artist but I found that although I'm reasonably competent I wasn't of the quality to be a good artist. I worked as an artist in a couple of printing companies and immediately before the war or a year or so before the war I decided to join the Militia. So I joined a searchlight company.

02:00 Of course in those days there was no hope in getting into the air force. But about I would say what an hour, about a, probably a year before the war started it was fairly obvious there'd be a war so I decided that I should try and transfer to the air force. And

02:30 fortunately for me they formed the Empire Air Scheme [EATS – Empire Air Training Scheme]. So I applied for that but I wasn't allowed out of the searchlight unit and when just before war was declared we were called up and we were training what they called then Universal Trainees, who were people that were should be in the Militia but at that stage weren't. So we trained

03:00 these people. The war began. We were not, still not allowed out. I was called up for the air force in the Empire Air Scheme. But again they wouldn't let us out. And finally we got a new commanding officer in the searchlight unit and he let anyone who was training these Universal Trainees, he let anyone out if they wanted to go to one of the

03:30 war services. So I and a lot of others got out of the searchlights. I finally then joined the air force in about June 1940. I was on one of the first courses in Victoria. Number 5 Course. We learn we went to a, I forget what they call it, Service Flying Training School down at

04:00 Somers. We trained there for a couple of months. Then the decision was made by the air force as to whether we would be trained as pilots, navigators or air gunners. And I was lucky cause I was chosen to be a pilot. Which is amazing cause I was one of the oldest in Empire Air Scheme. I was very much older than anyone else.

Yeah I was

04:30 **thinking that. You would a been 26 or something at that stage?**

I was about, I hate you people who're right all the time. I was 26 when I joined the air force. And then we learnt we came down from we went from Somers to Essendon. We learnt to fly there. We were then sent to Wagga and because of my age there

05:00 was no chance of me being a fighter pilot so I was trained on bombers. Avro Ansons which were a very small air craft so we learned to fly Ansons. We did some very elementary work as bomber pilots. Very elementary. And then at about Christmas 1940 we were sent back to Melbourne and we were put on a

05:30 ship that took us across the Pacific and we landed in Canada. We went right across Canada by train and we were about a month I would say, on the east coast of Canada. I can't say the names cause I can't even remember

06:00 them.

That's all right.

But we were there for about a month and we were then shoved into a very fast merchant ship. Now it's unusual. Most people went in a convoy. We didn't. We went in a very fast merchant ship. We were about I would say, at a guess, six or eight hundred aircrew on this merchant ship and one morning we were sailing in very heavy

06:30 fog and there was an incredible crash. And of course all convoys at that time '40–41 were being attacked by German submarines German Aircraft, German Battleships. We thought we'd been torpedoed. We then found in fact hadn't been because by the time we'd got onto the deck we found we'd hit a very large iceberg. The ship's bow under

07:00 with her stern right out of the water. And we were unable to move and with all the danger of the German, excuse me, of the German submarines and aircraft we sat there for about 4 days with all out lights on. Which frightened us

07:30 to death because we realised the danger of that. After about 4 days a couple of tugs came from Canada and towed us back. Which is the town on the east coast? Halifax is it?

That's the one.

Towed us back to Halifax. We're there for another few weeks and we were put into onto a ship in a very large convoy. There really were hundreds of ships in the convoy. And the

08:00 frightening thing to us was realising that we had sat in the middle of the Atlantic with our lights on, was that every few minutes or every few hours a ship would be sunk near us. We saw many, many ships being sunk and to me, as a man, I don't enjoy the sea, it was a very frightening experience.

08:30 As I said before more frightening than being shot down. To be shot down was very quick and but to hit an iceberg. To sit in the in the, in a ship with the bow under water and the stern out was, to me, a very frightening experience.

It would be quite terrifying.

Absolutely terrifying. We finally got to, it was

09:00 Scotland, we went, we arrived in Scotland. I think it was a place called Gourack. I know that a Scot knocked me down one day cause I said it was in England. He got very upset. But we landed in Scotland. We came by train down to the south of England to a depot in Brighton and we were there for about a month

09:30 I would say whilst they decided where we would be sent. Because, realise that of the seven or eight-hundred aircrew there were pilots, navigators and air gunners so we'd all would be sent to different places. We finally ended up at a place called Morton in the Marsh in Oxfordshire I think. We had a wonderful time there. We

10:00 learnt then to fly Wellington Air Aircraft. We flew Wellington's for about a month and did a lot of other exercises as well. Flying Wellington's they were a marvellous aircraft. They were very safe. They were very

10:30 easy to fly. When we had finished training on Wellingtons we were sent to a Bomber squadron and I emphasise a Bomber squadron because we changed later from Bomber Command to Coastal Command. But we were, went to a Bomber squadron in Yorkshire at a place called. What the devil was it called?

11:00 Can't even remember.

That's all right.

But we were at this it was an Australian Squadron 458. We did very little work from 458 because we had a very big very heavily heavy petrol consumer engine in these aircraft or engines. So that

11:30 whether we could do an op [operation] depended very much on the weather. If there was a very heavy strong wind head wind or tail wind we couldn't do it. So we didn't do very much operational flying from Yorkshire. I've remembered the name. Home on Spalding Moor. At about the time that the Australians realised that the Japanese war

12:00 was on we heard about this and we applied to go to Australia as a squadron. And shortly after that we were moved out of Home on Spalding Moor and we imagined we were going to Australia. We were quite wrong. We were being sent to the Western Desert to reinforce the Desert Air Force. So we

12:30 flew down to Portsmouth in the south of England and finally we flew across France to Malta. We arrived at Malta when Malta was busy winning the George Cross so it was a very hazardous time. None of us were shot down because the Germans were bombing Malta particularly the Bomber Station Luka. They were bombing

13:00 Malta almost 24 hours a day. And we didn't lose our aircraft in the air but we lost them on the ground. So shortly after we'd arrived all our aircraft were destroyed on the ground. And this had happened to many aircrew who had arrived in Malta before us. So we found that there was this thing like a bridge ladder and the people

13:30 that had been there longest took out any serviceable air craft and flew them to the Western Desert. So after a month or two on Malta we were given enough aircraft for the squadron to fly to the Western Desert and when we got there we found to our surprise that we were being sent back to England to get

14:00 more aircraft cause they were desperately short by this time of aircraft. So we were flown as passengers down to Khartoum, Madugri, Lake Chad, El Fasha right across Africa to West Africa to a place called Lagos. And in Lagos we were put onto an aircraft carrier called I think the Archer

14:30 and we then were sent back to England on this aircraft carrier. We were in England for 2 or 3 months but at this stage I suddenly was sent to hospital so although everybody else was trained in torpedo dropping and that sort of thing, I missed all that and when I came out of

15:00 hospital I found that most of my squadron friends had gone to already, gone to the desert. So I was given a scratch crew and I flew from the south of England to Gibraltar. So we were going we went to the desert but by quite a different way. Previously across France. This time across the Bay of Biscay to

15:30 Gibraltar. We stayed there overnight and the next morning we flew down the Mediterranean Sea. Now it's a very long flight in these old aircraft but we flew right down the Med and mainly at night of course, and at first light in the morning. We had been told that the

16:00 German army was at Mersa Matruh. When we got to when we got well past Mersa Matruh we suddenly realised that it was time to turn in and go into the desert. So we turned hard to starboard and crossed the coast. Now in those days to show you were

16:30 as a British Aircraft you had to cross the coast at under 100 feet. So we descended to a about 80 feet. We crossed the coast and we were astonished to find that there was an incredible army of trucks, guns, men underneath us. And of course we'd been told that the Germans were not there. So at first we thought they were British troops.

17:00 But suddenly we realised they weren't. They were German. We turned round and got the hell out of it out to sea. And we were chased by two 109 aircraft. German fighters. The German fighters had I think four cannons and four machine guns each. So that meant with two of them we were up against eight cannons, eight machine guns.

17:30 But a Coastal Command torpedo bomber, cause that's what we were flying, had 2 machine guns in the tail and nothing else. So we lasted about 5 minutes. The tail gunner shot down one of the aircraft which was a wonderful thing. We were down to about 20 feet so the fighters couldn't get under us. The tail gunner was then killed so of course we were completely at their mercy.

18:00 Finally the aircraft caught fire and we crashed. We had most of the port wing was on fire. We crashed in the sea. In those aircraft that were operating over the water you had a dinghy behind the engine cell and when the

18:30 aircraft was under water the dinghy automatically inflated. And came up from wherever the aircraft finished. So we scrambled out or we, of course the aircraft was about 40 feet. We got out of the aircraft and swam to the surface. Everybody had been shot and everybody had been burnt. Now a crew of a

19:00 torpedo aircraft was five men. One was killed so that meant there were four of us. I had been flying the aircraft and I had lots of armour plate round me so I had didn't get very much. I was the least hurt of them all. I was a bit burnt and I was shot but not seriously. We,

19:30 by the time we got to the surface the dinghy was there so we all scrambled into the dinghy, and the one aircraft that we hadn't shot down then came and strafed the dinghy and sank it. So we were now back in the water. At a rough estimate, not because I knew the distance but because of the time it took us to swim in, we were in the water for about I'd say

20:00 6 or 7 hours so we were probably six or seven miles out. We all had Mae West jackets on which was a good they're good for buoyancy make it very hard to swim. One of the men was the navigator, was very badly burnt and so we had to tow him in. But we finally arrived at the

20:30 shore and of course we were met by pushers of screaming bloody Italians who were shooting at us as we swam in. We finally got in without any more getting shot. And we were put into a very small sort of a compound

21:00 which had nothing in it but an aborte. An aborte is a toilet which, so it meant there was a hole in the ground about ten, twelve feet deep with a wooden top with four holes. And that was all there was in the compound. The compound was quite small, it was probably only about 60 feet square. Very high barbed wire fence round it. Now we knew that the, that, oh this was at

21:30 Mersa Matruh. At a place called El Daba. We knew that El Daba was going to be bombed so we asked the German guards for a shovel and we dug a slit trench. Of course there were a lot of other people in the compound too. A lot of other prisoners too and when the, that evening when the air raid did go on, we couldn't get into our slit trench. Everyone else was in it. So we

22:00 got down into the toilet into the aborte which was very safe because it was very deep. It was very filthy but it was very safe. So we were there for a day or two in this compound and finally we were taken in Lance Air trailers so we had to stand up because the trailer being virtually empty except for

22:30 20 or 30 men, it was too rough a ride to sit. So we stood up and we were taken down to Benghazi which took about a week or so. And when we got to Benghazi they separated the commissioned men from the non commissioned officers. Now I was the only officer in the

23:00 crew and so my other men were sergeants. Because I was commissioned I was flown to a prison camp in Italy. Because my crew were sergeants they were sent by ship. And this is one of the tragedies of war. Because they went by ship and they were all killed because the British

23:30 sank the ship. Because I was commissioned I got away with it. which to me is an incredible thing. You're commissioned so you're safe. You were a sergeant so you were killed. So we finally, I was flown with about six other air force officers to a place in the south of Italy

24:00 called Lecce, L-E-C-C-E. We went by train from Lecce to the Abrutsi Mountains to a place called Sulmona. And in the Abrutsi's, this camp had been built in the First World War so it wasn't very new. It wasn't very good it was pretty primitive. But we went

24:30 to Sulmona and we were there virtually until the Italians packed up what 21 months later

I'm going to ask you to stop.

Do you, do I just keep.

Yeah go you can go ahead.

So I go back to we arrived at Sulmona and I'll talk about this business, the urinal.

Yep.

You do want that sort a business?

We certainly do yeah

25:00 Okay. You right?

Yes yes.

When we arrived at Sulmona station we had been handcuffed in fives so that you were handcuffed to the man next to you, so when we got to the station the first thing we wanted to do was go to the urinal. And of course five of us going along to this long urinal the first thing you had to do was to undo your fly. But the bloke next to you would take your hand away.

25:30 Which made a hell of a mess of your aim and of undoing or doing up your fly. So we had a lot of problems like that. We were finally taken to this camp called Sulmona a camp at least in Sulmona Camp Al-Concentro Mento santata otto. Which means Camp 78. Which was right at the

26:00 in the foothills of the Abrutsi Mountains. Which is where you might remember that is where Mussolini was hung upside down at the end of the war. Pity they didn't do it earlier. We arrived at Camp 78 Camp Al-Concentro 78 and we found that there were two separate compounds. One for officers and one for Ors [Other Ranks]. So we

26:30 were in the officer compound. Conditions were pretty horrible. One of the worse things I think was bed bugs. The place was absolutely riddled with them. So you could never get away from it. We used to have a walk about once a week we would probably about 14 men would be taken to

27:00 just for a walk round the district. The best walk was to a place called Fonte d'Amour which means the Fountain of Love. Extraordinary. No fountain. No love. That was where we saw an extraordinary thing happen. One of the as we were walking along, and realise there were about 14 men with 4 guards. A WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK ran through the ranks

27:30 and of course to us a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK would be wonderful to have. So one the men grabbed it and put it inside his battle dress jacket and unfortunately the guard saw this. So this man was sent to Rome and accused of stealing the property of the Stata Majore in the State of Italy and I would think that if the Italian war hadn't ended about that time he'd a been

28:00 shot. So that we had all sorts of extraordinary things like that happening. But we survived it and we got very little food there. Red Cross parcels when they arrived but very, very few. You'd probably have one parcel between about 10 men once a week. And as the parcels were a good

28:30 help if you had one to yourself. One amongst ten was very little food. When the Italian, we heard that the Italians were packing up. They'd declared an armistice. And we got all got ready to go home. Unfortunately we were not allowed out of the camp by the British. I mean by our own people.

29:00 Not any British lot, well all British but a lot of Australian senior officers too. So that when we were ready to go home suddenly the SS [Schutzstaffel] came in with Tommy guns and tanks and we were all shoved into cattle trucks and sent up to Bologna. We were in Bologna for about 3

29:30 or 4 days I s'pose perhaps a little longer and we were put into cattle trucks again and sent right up through the Brenner Pass into Brenner. It, the most extraordinary things happened on the way up because the thing that we found out in prison camps that everybody always thought about the same thing. And we found that

30:00 in every cattle truck and there were 40 men to a cattle truck so you couldn't sit down you were standing packed. But in every cattle truck the men realised that if you could cut your way through the floorboards, and the floorboards were about 4 inches thick you could or some man could get down onto the revolving axle, get onto the step of the cattle truck unlock the lock of the door

30:30 and perhaps people could escape. And they did this in every cattle truck without any communication one to the other. The Germans had a flat car between all the cattle trucks and when you were going round a bend they would fire along the curve of the tray to defer people, to deter from trying to get out. So what we,

31:00 we waited until it was dark and then we had one man had opened the door or unlocked the door. We drew lots amongst the 40 to see how you would, what order we'd try to get out. And finally people were jumping out when it was probably dark. Now realise that going up through the Brenner pass

31:30 there's a railway, a road or a river. So your chances of getting onto anything substantial were very remote. And a lot of men were killed when they jumped. Some were drowned when they jumped. But a lot did get finally into Switzerland. Which was an astonishing thing to us. When the Germans found this was happening they wired

32:00 the loose floorboard to a part of the truck and put a hand grenade between. So that if you lifted the floorboard you pulled the pin out of the hand grenade so you killed everybody. So we didn't, we weren't able to do any more attempts to escape there. We finally got into Brenner the town of Brenner and again this was the first time we'd

32:30 been allowed out. So we, at the intermediate stops because the train would stop at various stations. We were not allowed out. So we used Red Cross boxes which were cardboard boxes about that size. We used those as toilets and everybody in the truck would use that and when we came into a nice little town in

33:00 The, in Germany where Germany butt's on to the top of Italy we would. We couldn't see out because there was one window at each end of the cattle truck with barbed wire across it. But we would listen and you could hear the German guard walking in the gravel of the railway station and we'd, when we heard him very close we'd scream out, "Achtung achtung poston. Chisten binter."

33:30 And throw the box out and judging by the abuse I think we usually hit him. We did very well with that. We went to a couple of different towns. And where there were enormous camps with tens of thousands of prisoners. Army, navy and air force and finally we we're divided up because in

34:00 Italy all the services are together army, navy and air force. In Germany they are separated so that what we, what happened then was we were taken, all the air force were taken out of this camp and we were sent on our way to Stalagluft 3. Which was an air force officer camp. Now Stalagluft 3 was in Poland and

34:30 it was a long long way from Brenner. So that we first went to a most beautiful underground fort in a place called Strasbourg. Which is in it's in France now but then it was in Alsace Loraine. And we were in this underground fort in Strasbourg. We were there for a month

35:00 or so. A few men tried to escape from there but realised that was a very long was from, it was as far as Italy had been from the Channel. So the chances of getting away were, even if you got out, were negligible. We finally got, finally left Strasbourg and we were taken again in cattle trucks to

35:30 a place called Sagan in Poland which was where Stalagluft 3 was and we ended up in this incredible air force camp. It was unbelievable. The whole attitude of everybody, of all prisoners, was quite different in Poland, in a German camp, to what it had

36:00 been in Italy. It was completely different.

In what respect?

In all they thought about all the time was escape. Nothing else. And they thought of escape, they planned escape, they made ways of escaping. For instance before we got there they had had the wooden horse escape.

36:30 I think most people have heard of it. There was a film on that and whilst nobody got away. Because the tunnel was built against the wire, under the wire and it was about to come up outside when a horse fell through the top layer of earth and of course gave it away. There were some wonderful escapes from Stalagluft 3.

37:00 Probably the most to me, the cleverest was the… We had men in the camp who could do anything. For instance I used to help with forging maps and things like thing. Drawing passports. But one group of men said look if we. or bout this time there was no bath house

37:30 in the in Stalagluft 3 so that once a week we'd be marched down in groups of about 12 or 14 to a bath house which was probably about a mile down the road. So that you'd have say 12 or 14 British Servicemen with 2 guards and they'd all march up to the

38:00 gate. The guards would show their, what we call an 'outsvice'. A form to go out of the camp. You'd march up to the gate with that and the guard would read it and then wave us through and we'd march down to the bath house. So we used to wear an overcoat with nothing under it. Shoes and socks of course. We'd have a towel and a bag with razors and soaps and

38:30 things. And we'd march down out of the camp to the bath house. One day someone said look if we were to make four. make two good German uniforms and if we were to march twelve men with their uniforms tucked up under their coats and if we were to forge a couple of very good outsvice we

39:00 would be able to march out of the camp. Fourteen. sixteen men. So they did this. They said right we're ready who wants to go? So sixteen men went up to the gate. Two of them in German. perfect German uniforms. It happens that that battle dress you saw is identical material to the Luftwaffe uniform. So it was easy to convert that

39:30 into a Luftwaffe uniform. So they marched up to the gate. They presented the forged outsvice. The guard waved them through. They marched down the road and disappeared round the corner. And about an hour or so later the escape organisation said quick who else wants to go? We've got extra uniforms. We've got extra outsvice. Realise they also had to make wooden rifles that would pass scrutiny

40:00 from 3 feet away and they were perfect. The hardest thing we found was making a cardboard sling that looked like leather. Cause the rest of it was relatively simple. However the next lot got ready and they marched out too. Now I dunno how many thousands of miles from the Channel Poland is but it's an awfully long way and they were all caught within about a day.

40:30 But the upset it used to cause Germans was unbelievable.

On that note we'll just change the

Tape 2

00:31 **The men got caught but the trouble they caused the Germans was important.**

Yes.

We ready Stella? Yep. Yep.

In the, when we got to the camp we found, and realise that even though I was a prisoner for 3 years, about 21 months of it was it Italy so I wasn't in Germany more than two and a half year, one and a half years. I can't work it out but a short

01:00 time anyway. By the time we got there all the organisation of digging tunnels was well underway and we found that there were three tunnels being dug called Tom, Dick and Harry. One of them was discovered by the Germans. It went through a drain in the middle of a bathroom so that

01:30 goodness knows how they did it, but right in the centre there was a drain where all the water went so they diverted the water somewhere else and you went straight through there and that was one of the tunnels. But that was discovered. The second one was very, very good and nearly complete. It came out in an area where the Germans had decided to build a new compound. So even though the tunnel came out in the woods the Germans suddenly built a

02:00 compound round it. So it was useless for escape and we used it for hiding things. For putting earth in and so on. The final one Harry was the one which took place in the Great Escape. That the Great Escape took place in. The security in the camp was absolutely incredible. We had as you do in an aerodrome. In an aerodrome you have Duty

02:30 pilots and it's their job to see what's happening. To report all aircraft that are coming and going. To give the okay to an aircraft who wants to land. It was a very well organised thing. So in the camp we had Duty pilots. And these Duty pilots, there'd be one man who might just be reading a book somewhere near the entrance to the compound and if a

03:00 German guard came in, if any man like that came into the compound the first duty pilot perhaps was reading a book. He'd shut the book and he'd scratch himself or do something. And that would tell another 10 duty pilots round the camp that there was now a guard in the camp. They would give signs so that all the tailoring that was going on would be stopped and hidden.

03:30 All the forgeries that were going on would be stopped and put away. So that the chances of a German accidentally coming on a man doing anything in the camp was absolutely, it was negligible. A lot of people asked us how we got various things. For instance someone had a Luger revolver. A lot of people had cameras and

04:00 it was terribly hard. It was easy to get the cameras but how do you get the films? So that we decided or it was decided by the Ex-organisation the Escape Organisation that the way to do it was to bribe German guards. Now in my room we had one of the members of the escape organisation and his job had been to or was to

04:30 get certain things from a certain guard. This guard used to walk through the hut exactly at I think 12 o'clock every day so that. We were given by the escape organisation a lot of cocoa, of coffee. Now coffee was very hard to get in the camp. But we were given a big container of it and as soon as we

05:00 knew this guard was going to walk down there we would have coffee brewing and of course the Germans could never get coffee in Germany. We'd have the coffee brewing. We'd have the door open. Blokes'd be swilling coffee as he walked past. And we'd say oh come in come in have coffee. 'Nein nein' they wouldn't do that. But as the winter drew near and it got colder one day we managed to convince this

05:30 guard to come in and have coffee. So for about a week every day he came in and had a good cup of genuine coffee and then one day one of the men who was, had this big container of coffee, dropped it on the floor purposely. And he sort of said oh bugger that, and kicked the coffee about and the guard was absolutely horrified. He got down on his knees and

06:00 was sort of getting every grain up so as not to waste it. So this escape man said to him, "What do you want some coffee? You know we've got plenty. Just say if you want it." So this German guard went away with a reasonable size container of Nescafe. And once he'd done that we got, used to get chocolate in clothing parcels.

06:30 We'd give him chocolate which of course was absolutely, it was worth a lot of money in the camp to us. So to them it must have been incredible the value of it. So we'd ultimately get to the stage where he was going out of our room with coffee and with chocolate and with various other things that we felt he'd want. And then one day the escape organisation man said to him,

07:00 "By the way, we want you to get some film," such and such a size for this camera. And the German was horrified. He said, "I can't do that. I couldn't possibly give you, get you a film for your camera." And this, the Englishman said, "Listen me boy you'd better. It's bloody cold on the Russian front." Because if he'd a been found with anything like that he'd a been sent straight to Russia. Now they had a good

07:30 time in Stalagluft 3 the guards. With you know food and safety but if they went to Russia they'd be dead. So this man then would give us films. We got ammunition. We got not only us but right through the camp.

What was the threat though? Would they, was the threat that you lot would tell?

We'd just, we'd just tell them.

And would you be believed?

My word we would. Well they'd go

08:00 if they didn't believe us they'd go and search his house and if they found anything he's gone. He's a dead man. So that we got an incredible lot of things by straight bribery. Another way in Australia at the beginning of the war everybody had little bakelite suitcases. All the same. In Germany

08:30 strangely enough they had a very similar little suitcase about the same size as ours were but everybody had them. So that if any man was being taken, say he was going from Stalagluft 3 to a hospital in the train with a couple of guards he'd always take..

It's all right. It's the microphone.

I was wondering what it was? He'd always take an empty suitcase and he'd put it in the

09:00 rack of the train and there'd be probably ten others in the train. So when he got out he'd take a new other one any. And the number of excellent things. We got a typewriter once. You know the things you could get by doing that were incredible. So there were all sorts of ways we got extra things we needed. We, it was easy to get money from the German guards just with a bit of bribery. And once you had bribed them

09:30 well and truly for 3 or 4 months they were completely in your hands and there was a lot of bribery went

on. I forget where we are now.

We're building up a stock pile of necessary goods.

Yeah.

You were involved you said in forging maps and documents and so forth?

But very little of that because even though

10:00 as an ex-artist I would've been very beneficial to them they were all organised when we got there. You see the great escape was in well it was 2 days before my birthday. The end of March 1944 and we'd only been there for less than a year. So that they

10:30 were all organised. They didn't need us. So that I just did a little bit occasionally. Not very much.

Was that with, was Des Plunkett the fellow in charge of maps and so forth? Was that his name?

I don't know what he was in charge of but yes he was one of the drawers. Security was so good in the camp that for instance in the Great Escape my number was 86 and I have no idea I. At the

11:00 time I had no idea who else was going out. Cause nobody told you. Nobody talked.

Incredible discipline it seems and coordination?

It was incredible discipline but in the air force discipline was pretty good. You hear a lot of funny things about airmen being drunk every night and so on. But discipline in the services was pretty good in England.

11:30 It wasn't as good in the desert but it was very good in England. We, it was decided that when the tunnel was completely dug. And realise that the tunnel was 30-feet deep and 360 feet long and the entire length of it had to be shored up with bed

12:00 boards so it meant that everyday they'd go round the camp and take a one board from your bed. Now when we first got there the bed which was about two foot six wide had planks right across it. So that when they took,

12:30 when they took one or two planks it didn't matter. But by the time they'd taken six or so you were sleeping like this and of course if you turned in bed it would collapse onto the bunk below. There were three bunks. So that you had to be awfully careful because it could be a disaster. But the tunnel was shored up for it's entire length with bed boards. The earth underneath the camp was pure sand. So that

13:00 as soon as a very broad man got into the tunnel and dislodged a bed board the tunnel would collapse. Sand would come in and the diggers would have to go in and dig him out. Which happened quite a lot.

Did the Germans not notice the bed boards going missing? What was the

They didn't seem to strangely enough. Or I think that I can remember one occasion when one man said you

13:30 know cause the mattress is off the bed. And he said, "Where are the bed boards?" And this lad said, "Oh we use them, fuel," because we had a stove in the room. There was very little fuel and they would make perfect fuel and he was satisfied with this. There was about 4 feet of snow on the ground towards the end of March. My birthday was the 30th

14:00 of March. I think that I can't even remember the escape I think it was about the 28th. As soon as, just before the tunnel was completed they called for anyone who wanted to be in the escape. Now the Royal Air Force and we were in touch with them constantly. All the time virtually.

How?

With radio. We had lots of hidden

14:30 radios. And they, we would broadcast to them and they to us. But so bloody senile I can't remember what I was gonna say.

Sorry. No that's all right you said was it you'd spoken to the air force just before the.

Yeah and it was. Oh they had told us that 40 men that we called the VIPs [Very Important Persons] they had to

15:00 go. They were the first to go. Then there was some men who had helped with the tunnel. They were to go next. And then anyone in the camp who wanted to volunteer could put their name down. Now I hadn't done much towards the tunnel so I just put my name in with the mob and I was lucky because there were probably 60 men who were what we called VIPs and tunnel helpers

15:30 so that the fact I drew number 86 was very good. It was near the front of the mob. On the night that the

tunnel was to break there was about 4 feet of snow on the ground and we had planned the tunnel to break in the woods which would be about 50 or 60

16:00 yards beyond the perimeter fence of the camp. But unfortunately when they finally broke the tunnel at about, soon as it got dark and realise this was mid-winter. As soon as they broke it the realised they'd missed the woods by about 20 feet. So that anyone getting out would have to risk the searchlight shining on them as they got out. So the business

16:30 of getting from the exit to the woods was going to be very very difficult. So they relayed back to us in the camp that there was no a rope in the snow from the tunnel exit into the woods onto a certain tree. That there would be one man in charge of every group of eight that came out of the tunnel. And that as you came up he would tell you

17:00 where the light was going to flash and he'd say now and you'd follow the rope into the woods and wait there for the rest of the eight to come along. Unfortunately everything happened for the worst. We had, the tunnel was electrically lit from the power supply of the town. And there was an air raid on Sagan, on the town of

17:30 Sagan that night. We'd never seen one before but that particular night the air force raided Sagan. So that firstly we lost all the electric lights so we had to use those things we called fat lamps. Tiny little things with German margarine and a little bit of a wick in them. And of course the tunnel was air conditioned so that the flow of air through it would blow the lights out.

18:00 All sorts of problems like that. Quite a few men. You had to lie on the trolley with your arms out, cause if you were any other way you were too wide. Quite a lot of them were broad men. You know a man like you would've, you couldn't have got through. You'd got caught in the bed boards and the tunnel would of collapsed. This happened quite a lot. Several times. So that instead of getting out as I was to go at about 10 at night I got out at about

18:30 five or six in the morning. It was broad daylight and it was so light that when I went down the shaft into the tunnel entrance. And the tunnel entrance was about 3 or 4 feet from the bottom of the shaft. Because the people in the shaft would lift the prisoner onto the trolley and he would jerk the rope. Not as it said in the film hit it with a,

19:00 that was ridiculous. You'd never make a noise like that. But he would just jerk the rope. The man in the half way house would tow him along. You'd get to the half way house. You'd slide over the top of the man who was in the half way house. Whilst you were lying on him you'd pull the next trolley up to you. He'd help you onto that trolley. You'd jerk the rope and you'd go on to the second half way house. That way you got to the end.

19:30 It was so light that when I got, when I got into the entrance of the tunnel they decided that no one else could go through. So immediately I got into it they closed the tunnel down. No one went in after me. And of course by the time I got to the exit the Germans had found the tunnel. People were screaming down the shaft to me

20:00 get back the Goons are here. Then the German came up and started to shoot with his machine gun down the 30 foot shaft. So the only thing I could do was turn round and go back. And of course by this time the system had broken down. There was no one to pull me along the half way house, men had gone back into the camp. So I just had to scramble and of course the tunnel was shorter

20:30 than the distance from your hip to your knee.

The tunnel height was shorter than the length of your thigh?

Yeah so it was, you couldn't crawl properly you had to sort of drag yourself along like this which meant a risk of pulling in the bed boards. So I got back into the camp panicking like mad and, the Germans still didn't know where the tunnel commenced. Because

21:00 by the time I got up into the back into the room they had the tunnel. The beginning of the tunnel went from under a stove. Well they'd closed the tunnel down. They used to put about 20 sandbags into the tunnel to so that it would sound dead if any German were to hit the beginnings

21:30 which were brick. So that there were about 20 sand bags put into the tunnel after I got out and the whole thing closed down. Of course the Germans now knew that there was a tunnel and a lot of men had escaped and there was an incredible panic in the camp. The Germans are going absolutely berserk and firing guns everywhere. They made us strip off in the snow and we stood there with nothing

22:00 on for a quite a time. Some men were sent to the cooler. I wasn't I dunno know. But so it was it was a very a strange time because we knew that a lot of men had got out. The Germans didn't know. So we were delighted. Thought just imagine the upset we're causing and of course it wasn't for 3 or

22:30 4 days that the Germans told us that they'd caught. They said they'd caught everybody and they said that 30 men had been shot whilst trying to escape. The senior British officer said how many were wounded. Because you know you don't kill everybody when you're trying to stop them. And the German officer said none were

23:00 wounded 30 were killed. So we immediately knew they'd been just killing them when the caught them. About 2 days later they said that a further 20 had been killed. And we got to the stage where we really didn't know for sure what had happened. A few men were sent back to the camp. Realise that

23:30 although I was 86 that 76 men had got right away. So there were 10 including me round about the top were caught and they of course were put in the cooler. They weren't shot. There was no one, no fear that I would be shot. And of course they the Germans didn't know that I'd got out and got back in because there'd be no way of

24:00 picking me out from the mob. A few, there were probably three or four. It was probably up to a week later that they said that 50 men had been killed whist trying to escape. And if you've ever read the books, the authentic books. There's one wonderful book called 'Exemplary Justice'

24:30 and it tells how a lot of the men were killed. For instance you recall that one of the men killed in the escape was the son of the Cattanach family. You knew there was a Jeweller in Bourke Street called Cattanachs. Cattanachs some people call it. Their son Jimmy Cattanach was a squadron leader DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] aged 21. Well he was one, the one's killed and

25:00 this book Exemplary Justice tells how he was shot and it's a bloody disgrace. You know they told them they could get out and behind a bush to have a leak and as they walked away whilst hand cuffed they shot em through the back a the neck or the back a the head. And the story of one man says he it didn't kill him he collapsed on

25:30 the ground and as he lay there moaning the German guard said, "So I went up and knelt beside him and shot him through the back of the head." He makes no bones about it. So. There were a lot of people were sent to the cooler. To the local

26:00 prison in the camp. Sort of a local jail in the camp and a lot of the men that were caught and brought back were sent there. Three or four of the men who were captured were sent to Concentration Camps including the senior British officer. And of course Roger Bushel who was the man who we call Big-X he was executed. He was killed.

26:30 About a day or so after the tunnel broke the Germans came to us and said look one of our German officers has crawled along the tunnel to try and see where it began from. But of course he couldn't get up because of the sandbags.

27:00 So they asked us would we open the tunnel. Cause he was, he'd crawled along it and didn't have the courage to go back and so for about 2 days he'd been at the bottom of the shaft. It must have been, I dunno how he survived. Must have been very claustrophobic. So we opened the tunnel and let him out so the Germans now knew where the tunnel went from.

27:30 We got a list sometime later as to the men who'd been shot whilst trying to escape. Some we couldn't account for. They were the one's that were in Concentration Camps. But we didn't know that they were there. And of course this was about a year before the

28:00 end of the war. So that this was what in March '44. So life just went along the same old way in the camp. In about the end of January 1945 there was an incredible bombardment near by. We could hear this and it was, and the German's came into the

28:30 camp and told us it was the Russians bout 10 miles up the road and they were advancing on the camp so we all had to get out. So we grabbed what little food we had what anything we considered precious. And that's when I grabbed that log book of book of drawings of mine. These drawings here had gone out. A man who was being repatriated

29:00 had it, was taking a suitcase and he hid those in the hollow bottom of a suitcase. So they went out probably a year before the end of the war. But we grabbed what we could and at about 9 o'clock at night again in very heavy snow 4 feet at least we started to walk across Germany. We walked about 30 kilometres,

29:30 30 miles a day for about the first 3 days and we did a lot of extraordinary things. For instance there was a wonderful place in a town called Muscow. Not Moscow, Muscow where the Germans made optical glass for their binoculars telescopes things like this. And the stupid people

30:00 quartered us in the glass retort. So we heated up our bully beef tins by putting the tins in the glass so it would be no good ever again for optical glass. Things like that they did stupid things. But we finally, after about 3 days 90 to 100 miles we had walked. And we weren't fed of course it was only what we had with us. We

30:30 finally were put into cattle trucks and we went right across Germany in cattle trucks. And again at the time we didn't' realise how fortunate we were because everything that moved in Germany was being strafed by the British or the Americans. But we got right across Germany. We were taken to a place called. I can never remember if it was there were two of them

31:00 Trenthaust or Tarmstethost. It was one of those places. We were there for probably 5 or 6 weeks and so. Suddenly again we heard a lot of bombardment and we were told it was the British coming up from the

south. So again we were moved out of this camp and again we had to walk

31:30 and it was so stupid of them because with three or four thousand men wandering round the roads, they couldn't possibly get their troops back on the roads. So they were really doing themselves a lot of harm. However we finally walked with German guards up to Lubeck and we were there for a week or two. We stole food from German houses as

32:00 we went. You know two or three men would go to the front door and make a fuss and half a dozen would go around the back and burgle the house. It was, we did it very successfully.

Were there not enough guards to keep an eye on you doing that or?

Well there were very few guards and the guards were all what they called the Fauksterm. The Old Men's Army and we'd got to the stage where we were carrying their rifles for them.

32:30 Because we knew there was no point in using it. We were initially in Poland we were getting closer to the Channel all the time so we may as well wait til we got really close. When we got well and truly into Lubeck the British dropped pamphlets and I can show you one later which said that if any

33:00 German officers moved Allied Prisoners the Germans would be shot without a court saying they should be. So the Germans moved us very quickly out of Lubeck back south again and to I think this one was Trent, was Tarmstethost. We moved down and we were about probably another 2 or 3 weeks

33:30 when again we heard an incredible bombardment which turned out to be the Lunaberg Bridgehead I think it was. Anyway this incredible bombardment and about a day later a little man arrived in the camp

34:00 in the tank and he flung open the lid and he said you're free and the war was over. We thought we were so important that the air force would come and get us straight away. But nothing happened and we waited for four or five days and at last we decided the only thing to do was to try and get back to the Channel by ourselves. So we

34:30 we stole Lugers and Leicas and motor cars. The Mercedes Benz. The problem was you couldn't get petrol. So if you did steal a car you could only get as far as the petrol in that car. And then we would walk. And course as soon as the British troops saw us it was very obvious we'd been POWs [Prisoners of War] and they said, "Well you were prisoners of war. You must have

35:00 lice. We have to delouse you." So they would had a thing like a big bicycle pump they'd shove it up your shirt and down your neck and up your trousers and so on and pump DDT [insecticide] powder through. And when they'd finished they'd paint a big purple spot on the back of your neck to show you'd been deloused. So we then marched,

35:30 walked on in our groups of four or five towards the Channel and as soon as we saw another lot of British soldiers we'd get out our tinned powered milk and dust ourselves over with this so it looked as if it was DDT powder. And then I'd get out my tin of paints and paint everybody purple on the back a the neck and we'd say we'd been down and they'd just wave us through. So we

36:00 finally walked right through to Brussels and then there was the most incredible air lift. There were there were thousands of Lancaster's coming into this aerodrome nose to tail. All round the perimeter there were tens of thousands maybe hundreds of thousands of prisoners in rows of 16. Cause

36:30 that was the number a Lancaster could take. The Lancaster's were coming in nose to tail. They were, there were, the traffic was so intense the flying traffic that one airman told me after the war that if you missed the circuit you had to go back to England to

37:00 to get into the circuit. It was incredible. A Lancaster would come up taxiing very slowly. They'd drop a ladder 16 men would come and climb into the bomb bay. I can't talk about this. And the Lancaster would then turn take off and go back to

37:30 and go to England. The one I was in took us to a place called Dunsford in the south of England and look. I'm sorry I'll have to stop just a minute.

Sure.

Tape 3

00:30 **Okay.**

We went back to a place in the south of England called Dunsford and as we the aircraft pulled up and we got off the aircraft each man was met by a by a WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] officer. And I grabbed this girl by the arm. I hadn't seen a woman for over three years and I was terribly impressed.

01:00 And I thought to myself, "I'm going to take this bird out tonight." You know I had that filthy uniform that I'd swum the Mediterranean in. That I'd been wearing for the last 3 or 4 years and the chances of going

out with no money were absolutely nil but I thought and everybody did, we're going to take this woman out tonight. She led me across towards the hangar. She said, "There's a wonder

01:30 meal for you. Set up in the hangar," and I thought, "To hell with the meal. Concentrate on the girl." I finally, half way across towards the hangar there was a little hut with a Red Cross on the roof and she led me across to this and she said, "Oh look just go in there." And I said, "What's in there?" And she said, "Don't worry everybody has to go in there." And when I

02:00 got in I found it was a man with one of these big bicycle pumps prepared to cover me with DDT powder. And I saw this and I said, "Oh I've been done." And he said, "You're going to be done again." So he covered me with this powder and I went out the exit and feeling very stupid dusting myself down. And the girl said, "Look don't worry about it. They're doing it to everybody." And we went across

02:30 and sat down at this table where this immense meal was laid out. Which we couldn't possibly have eaten. There's one thing I didn't tell you. Years before the Germans found that when we were issued with uniforms in England we all were given what was called a fly button compass. This of course was before the days of

03:00 zips. So that the top button you took off and it had a pivot. The second button sat on top of it was a perfect compass. When the Germans found this out they cut all the buttons off everybody's flies so that you could always tell the air force. They were going round holding up their trousers. So that when I arrived sitting next to this WAAF officer in the hangar at the food table I had no buttons

03:30 on my fly. And the man had just filled me up with DDT powder so I sat down to do a line with this girl and I crossed my legs and out of my gaping fly came a great puff of white powder. And I thought this is a horror of war. First woman and I can't even do

04:00 more than a puff of white powder. After we'd been in Dunsford cause we didn't get uniforms and we didn't get money for 3 or 4 days and finally we were given new uniforms. And of course we'd been wearing English uniforms because we hadn't seen to that date any battle dresses in Australian blue.

04:30 But after about 4 days we were given new uniforms and we were allowed to go up to London. I was very fortunate. I'd been writing to a man from the prison camp. A man I had never known. But he just had decided to write to a POW and I was the man and he got in touch with me when I got back to England,

05:00 and he said he had a spare car he wanted to lend me. I found later it wasn't his it was a hire car. But he hired this car and he gave it to two of us and we toured England and Scotland. And of course the petrol rationing was intense at that time. So this man put a 44 gallon drum in the back seat of the

05:30 car and every time we went to a garage we got them to give us to give us without ration tickets, to give us some petrol. We told a sad story. We'd been POWs for 3 or 4 years and so everybody gave us petrol. So we put whatever they were going to give us, we put half in the tank and half in the tin so that we would have enough to come

06:00 home with. We ended up touring England and Scotland. We had a marvellous time with that. There were a lot of tragedies. We stayed at a big hotel in Brighton and a couple of the men couldn't stand it and committed suicide. Jumped down stairwells and things like this. But most of us coped with it.

What do you think

06:30 **in particular about coming home drove them to kill themselves?**

I don't know. I think that one of the problems was, and it wasn't done in England and it should've been. And it certainly wasn't done in Australia but I think we should've all been counselled. I think that, I believe. My marriage lasted

07:00 about 25 years and I think the reason it failed was that my attitude towards everything as an ex-POW was extraordinary. And I've realised that now and of course my marriage finished 25 years ago but I realise now that I must a been very difficult. And, but we weren't given

07:30 any counselling or anything like that.

I think that's one of the most remarkable, in a tragic way, aspects of war. That men are sent away to war to this completely bizarre world where nothing is as it is at home and then they're taken back home and asked to sit on the couch and have a cuppa tea.

Well yesterday I got a [Department of] Veterans' Affairs paper and it

08:00 talks about the help these men that have just come back, the help they're getting. Now they were away for 4 weeks. We were away for 5 years and Veterans' Affairs can't even send someone once a week to clean my house. They can only do it once a fortnight extraordinary.

It is extraordinary.

We stayed in England surprisingly long time. Cause the war finished

08:30 early May and we didn't leave England to come back to Australia until I think it was September. On the ship coming back and realise again how very vulnerable we were to anything. But on the ship coming back there were 24 girls from what they called the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry. These were code and cipher experts and

09:00 maybe you've heard of Odette. That's a wonderful book on and Odette was in this organisation which they called the FANY's F-A-N-Y [First Aid Nursing Yeomanry]. These girls were with Odette to do the invasion, the Continent ,and then when the war finished they came out here to do the invasion of Japan. Which didn't come off. I met one of these girls

09:30 and she went back to England but I brought her back and we got married and it must have been a terrible 25 years for her because we got just got no help at all. No help at all. However you want me to keep on don't you about..

I'd like to talk a little bit about how you felt actually at the end of the war. Were you in what way

10:00 **had it changed you? You said it changed you quite remarkably?**

Yes. It well, I became I became rudely aggressive I think. I became very, very intolerant.

10:30 My ex-wife has been out here. She went back to England last Sunday. She's been out here to visit my daughter. I just I think that any pleasantness of nature that I had I think the prison camp helped it go away. Yeah.

It's awful.

11:00 But the Government could've done so much for us. They really could've. But they didn't do much.

If we, if, we might just talk a little bit about when you when you returned to Australia.

Right. When I came back to Australia I as I said before I had been trained as an artist. There's nothing

11:30 better for ruining any artist ability than 3 years in a prison camp so it was useless for me to try and go being an artist for a living.

Why. Excuse me if I might interrupt. How had that?

I beg your pardon?

How had that ruined your? Did you have a shaky hand or?

Yes definitely and now my writing is almost

12:00 unreadable. But it just, it took all sense of all artistic sense away from me anyway. So I decided the only other thing I knew anything about was flying. So I, at this stage Australian National Airways was looking for pilots and the

12:30 only source of course was people who'd been to the war. So I went up to Essendon it was then, and there were, they must have had thousands of applicants and I was just one of them. And I had, I'd been to a lot of places during the war but I hadn't done anything heroic at all. So I was one of many

13:00 many men applying for a job. But being a dirty old man I'd done a quite line with a girl at the aerodrome who was the Secretary of the senior route captain and. I'd had a few interviews as we, as the dozens, the hundreds of us had, and one day I got a phone call from her and she

13:30 said look I've just been given a letter to write to you to. Or I am typing a letter to you telling you you're not getting the job. So before you get the letter why don't you come out here and talk yourself into the job? So I leapt into my car and rushed out to Essendon and insisted on an interview with the senior route captain

14:00 and he, I knew I'd lost the job so I couldn't do any harm and I talked myself into it. So I then flew as an Airline captain for 7 or 8 ten years or something. And then when Australian National Airways sold out to Ansett they didn't want so many pilots and I thought this is stupid to keep on with this. So I chucked it

14:30 and convinced the firm Containers Limited that I was a brilliant marketing man. Because I could draw and in the in the Prison Camp I'd become a, I got an English, it wasn't a degree exactly it was a, I'd joined an Institute of Sales and Marketing Executives. So I told them I belonged to this

15:00 and that I would be a very good marketing man. And I could draw well and they gave me the job. So I became the Marketing Manager of one of Containers Group called Charles Steele and Company. And I stayed in that for many many years. And at one of the customers, which was Arnott's Brockhoff Guest then I used to get out there, they were out here in Burwood. I used to

15:30 get out there every morning at about 8 o'clock and get my orders for the week for my company. And the same time a bloke named Dick Pratt used to arrive there to get his orders for Visy Board. And one day Dick Pratt offered me a job with Visy Board. So stupidly I left

16:00 Charles Steele and company and I was about 2 or 3 from the top in Steele's. I should've stayed there. I didn't enjoy Visy Board. There was nothing wrong with them. They were a wonderful company but I just didn't enjoy it. So I only stayed there about a year and from then on I got various marketing jobs with various companies. And in, at a time when I should've been retiring

16:30 I became the Executive Director of the Lord Mayors Fund. So I was in fund raising then for oh the next 12 or 14 years. I didn't retire until I was, I think it was '78 or something like this. But the extraordinary thing about Veterans' Affairs. You'll have to cut this out.

Do you want me to cut the tape? Do you want to say it or will I cut the tape?

I'll say it I'm going to say it.

17:00 The extraordinary thing was that if you knew the rules and you applied for a what they call a TPI [Totally Permanently Incapacitated] pension you had to apply before you were you're 65. But nobody knew this. So I applied for it when I was about 75 and was told oh no you can't get that now. So I the pension I got was an EDA [Extreme Disablement Adjustment] which is

17:30 about half the TPI pension and you see again if they had of told us then. Because I just had to keep working. Whereas if I could've got the TPI I wouldn't have need to. And that's the thing again that I feel that we've been let down badly. We didn't, weren't told anything. You had to find out for yourself. I don't know what else to talk about so you'd better

18:00 cut me off.

Okay. We'll just stop there for a moment.

Yes I hope this is this is the sort of thing you wanted because…

Well it is.

Is it?

Yes, definitely.

Oh that's good. That's good.

I'd like to take you back to just prior to the war.

18:30 **You're obviously as you said when you joined the RAAF you were considerably older than most of the other men.**

Oh yes very much.

Well I'm wondering then if through the '30s you were following the rise of Hitler and Mussolini in Europe and were aware of the events that were going on there?

Oh yes most definitely. Most definitely.

Well what sort of news would we be hearing back here in Australia about that?

Well we heard it

19:00 in all it's nastiness. But it didn't seem to register as much as it did when we got to Germany and found out just what they were really were like. You know to, for instance, to when the Hitler first heard of the Great Escape he said every man you catch has got to be shot and the Goering in charge of the Luftwaffe said

19:30 look you can't do that. You can't do that. So Hitler said well shoot 50. And that's what they did. Now when we first were shot down it was it was pretty tough but it was almost a joke you know. And we were told we were warned by the British after the Great Escape that no matter what happened we weren't to try and escape again. Because the chances were we'd be

20:00 shot. But before the war we didn't hear how frightful it was in when did the. The Nazi regime started in about '33 it was getting very bad. We didn't hear we didn't hear about it in all it's nastiness then.

20:30 And it probably wasn't until about a year or 2 before the war. In the firm that I was working for as an artist just before the war we had a Colonel who was absolutely horrified that none of us were in the Services. There were, I was the artist and there were about 6 salesmen. We used to have a meeting with this man Colonel Rankin his name was.

21:00 We used to have a meeting with him once a week and every time he used to say we should be ashamed of ourselves. None of us are in the services and as I say this was a good year before the war.

Did you feel any kind of shame or ignominy that you weren't in the services?

I'm not sure what it was but we all decided without him knowing we'd all join the Militia. And that's why I was in the Militia.

21:30 Because he had said you know I'm ashamed of you all. So we all joined various branches of the Militia. You couldn't get into the army or the navy so we were all in various Units and as I said I was in a searchlight unit. And then to our surprise bout a month or so before the war we heard of the Empire Air Scheme so I applied for that. But

22:00 the, we were called up compulsorily to train people in search light drill and there was no way that we could get into the air force. Even when I was chosen for it.

Did you have a yearning to fly or did the air force seem the most glamorous?

No I'd always liked wanted to fly and. See this was very early in flying days and down at,

22:30 I lived for quite a bit of my life in… When my parents were alive I lived in Sandringham and we always were at the beach all the time. When my parents died I went further out and was in Cheltenham. But we used to go down to the beach every single Sunday. Sunny day. Saturday's and Sunday's and

23:00 Yes. We, there was a man living near there called Major Shaw. Major Shaw lived at, down near Balmoral somewhere and he had the first aircraft I ever saw. Called a Farman Shorthorn. A very, very antique aircraft. It was so old that it had the two wheels and the skids sticking out the front and a bicycle

23:30 lashed onto that, in case he force landed somewhere and needed to go and get help or something like this. I was very interested in flying and I went to Essendon several times before the war and paid for a flight. One of them with him in the Farman Shorthorn. Which was extraordinary because the cockpit came to about there. You

24:00 were just sitting out in the air.

Wow.

But it was very slow. I don't think we even wore goggles but it was probably going along at 50 or 60 miles an hour no more. But I was very interesting in flying yeah.

Well when you did finally managed to transfer to the RAAF and you were in the Empire Air Training Scheme did it seem to be a good training? Do you think it was

24:30 **up to standard?**

Well we wouldn't have been in a position to know if it was good or not. I learnt to fly in about the normal. I think I flew solo in 7 hours. Whereas the average was about 8 but I was no better than most of them. We learnt to fly Moths in a fairly secure way. We, when we went to

25:00 Wagga we learnt to fly Ansons. Avro Ansons. We did silly things all the time. Things that later as a trained pilot you know that if you wanted to kill yourself that's what you did.

What such as?

Silly things like you thought you could fly at about 10 feet in safety. And if I if I now were going

25:30 on a, if I was chartering an aircraft to fly me somewhere I would say to the man how many hours have you got? And if he didn't have 2 or 3,000 hours I wouldn't go with him. Because you are stupid when you've just got a few hours. You're so sublimely confident. You're quite sure that nothing can shoot you down. Nothing can kill you. That you can fly at 2 feet off the ground because

26:00 if the fence comes up you'll see it. But it's not like that at all. I s'pose I learnt that at when I learnt to fly and a lot of men now don't learn it.

But did, I was speaking to one gentleman who was in the RAAF he trained prior to the Empire Air Training Scheme and then went to Britain and when he got to Britain they didn't recognise his wings. Did they recognise yours as you'd been through the training scheme?

26:30 Oh our, we had Royal Australian Air Force wings before when we left Wagga. We were we were given our wings. That was what the whole thing was. The training was to get your wings. And so when we got them we had them very proudly too.

You I guess you knew if you were part of the training Scheme that you would be going to Britain didn't you?

We were absolutely certain we would because even the people that subsequently

27:00 went to the desert even if they. See some people went to England were there for 2 weeks and then went out to the desert and flew there. We were lucky because. Well I've got an awful lot of medals and none of them mean anything. They're not what I've done but where I was. Because you know there's a we flew over the Continent so we've got an

27:30 Aircrew Europe medal. We went to the desert so we've got an Africa Star. We went to Malta so we've got a Malta medal and it doesn't show that you did much work it just shows you went to a lot of places.

It's like a travel diary.

Yeah.

Did you did you feel then that you were Australian going to the aid of the British or British subjects defending the homeland?

Oh we thought. People have often asked that lately

28:00 more lately. Why on earth did you do it? If anyone didn't go to the war we absolutely despised them. We really did. We thought that it was it all we wanted to do was go and help the British Empire. And I, it's, I'm still this way cause I'm a Monarchist. I'm the Vice President of the Monarchists' League for Victoria. Or the Vice Chairman and

28:30 to me even now the British Empire means a hell of a lot to me it really does.

So in those days did you consider yourselves British subjects ahead of being Australians?

Oh yes we were definitely British subjects. We, that was our nationality. We were British.

Just out of interest and I don't think I've asked anyone this question. Were you listed on passports and such as British subjects or Australians in those days?

Well we had our passports until I'm not sure of the year but our passports

29:00 were British passports and suddenly when I renewed mine. You see in those days we used to do a lot of flying overseas with ANA [Australian National Airlines] and every time you landed at a foreign port at Salon at all the places you flew into, going to England you had to present your British passport.

29:30 You had to get authority to go there. So that our passports were filled up very quickly and when I went to renew mine it wasn't renewed as a British passport. It was renewed as an Australian passport.

And was that a funny moment for you?

Pardon?

Was that a strange moment for you?

It was an. I was annoyed because every time we went into a port they'd say what's your nationality? And I said my nationality is British.

30:00 And they'd say it say's you're an Australian? I said yes I'm an Australian but my nationality is British. And they cross it out and put cross out what I'd put and put Australian. Because you see I still feel that I'm British.

Do you think then in that respect that the British Government has done enough for men like yourself after the war?

I think that when you realise

30:30 that there were, I dunno how many times, more Brits from England. England, Scotland and Ireland. More of those in England after the war than there ever were Australians. We do, Australians do much more for ex-Servicemen than the English do. Much more. Now my wife who

31:00 as I said was in this FANYs unit. She didn't even get a medal ribbon and yet she was she must have been in this service for about I'd say she was in it for 4 years. So.

I'd like to talk if you would about what sounded like an absolutely

31:30 **remarkable yet terrifying incident. And that was the ship across the North Atlantic where you struck an iceberg. As you said you're not particularly happy on the ocean at the best of times?**

I hate the sea I really do.

Oh right. You hate the sea.

I hate it. There's no question about it.

Do you get seasick?

No I don't. But I just don't like the sea.

What do you fear what to you fear out there at sea?

I don't know if it's fear I just don't

32:00 like the sea. It perhaps is fear. I'm quite sure if I fell off a ship in the middle of Port Phillip Bay I'd drown. I can swim quite well but I'm quite sure if I fell off a ship I'd drown. And these ships we were on, maybe this has accentuated my dislike for it, but these ships

32:30 didn't have any lifeboats. They had a thing called a Carley Float. And so when the, when we all panicked and screamed up to try and see what had happened up to two or three decks, and then we got up there and found that if we did have to get into anything

33:00 it would be into a float not into a ship which was again not the best. In that I think we were luckier than at any other time in the war. Because we realised how fortunate we were weeks later going in the convoy and seeing I dunno how many ships were sunk but it'd be 20 or 30 of the entire convoy was sunk by enemy action as

33:30 we went across the Atlantic.

Incredible losses in the Atlantic due to U-Boats [Unterseeboots – German submarines] and German bombers.

Absolutely. And when I think of these merchant navy men and Royal Navy men and the Merchant Navy men weren't even very well protected and they must have had an incredibly hideous time.

Did you notice as you boarded this boat from Halifax that there were no lifeboats?

We probably did but you know this nothing's gonna happen to me.

That's right.

It's its.

34:00 **I think without that attitude none of us would ever do anything.**

I think you're probably right and what was it? There's something that called to mind a thing I used to say in give. I give, used to give a lot of talks on this on the Great Escape. I haven't in the last year or two. But there was something that came to mind just then. We

34:30 never thought it could happen to us. I knew I would never be shot down. And perhaps this is why it was such a terrible blow the physical problem of it. Even the fact that I survived and my entire crew didn't. But the fact that nobody can shoot me down.

Yes it's quite a

35:00 **what's the word? It's quite a well quite a quite a bringing back to earth when that bubble is burst isn't it?**

Absolutely.

You realise you're as mortal as anyone?

Absolutely.

When the ship struck the iceberg then that must have been pretty close to bursting that bubble for you?

It was probably more terrible than. Cause we thought it was a torpedo. We expected

35:30 to, I don't s'pose we expected to have trouble but if any trouble had occurred it would've been enemy action. And so to finally get up on deck and find that the ship was half under water and that or at least the bow was under, the stern was out and all that we had done was hit an iceberg. And to sit there with our lights on. You see we hadn't even been allowed. I never smoked. I never have. But people weren't even

36:00 allowed to smoke on deck going across the Atlantic and to suddenly just sit there with all the lights on I dunno whether they just hoped. Perhaps it was to let the rescue tugs find us but it was an extraordinary thing to me that we just sat there.

That would be a quite terrifying 4 days?

Yeah.

Do you. When you're in a situation like that, when you realise well we're a

36:30 **very large target. We're well lit are you terrified all the time or do you forget about that for a moment and then you?**

Well for a lot of the time there was a heavy fog and after that we used to beg them to put the lights out and because… It was terrifying yes. And as I said before it was far more frightening to hit the ice, excuse me, it was far more frightening

37:00 to hit the iceberg than to be shot down. Cause that lasted four days but being shot down it's like this.

And then of course you were towed back to Halifax?

Yeah.

Were you a bit windy about gettin' on another ship to go across?

Probably. I can't remember that. I really can't remember that. But I would think that probably we saw the

37:30 wonderful number of escorts we had and destroyers and battleships and things. We probably thought we were unlikely to have any problems at all.

And you saw you saw ships being sunk on the way across?

Oh on the way across it was terrifying because everything was being sunk all around us and the thing was you never stopped to pick people up. That was one of the most terrifying things to

38:00 me.

Yes. That I think would be awful. A) to either be sunk or B) to know that you were just leaving men

Yeah.

to their death?

Yes because if you had stopped the ship you were on would be sunk too.

Well I think there we might change.

Tape 4

00:30 **this tape by asking a little bit about art school and how you ended up there and whether you considered the training there to be very good?**

I was going to be an architect, which my son is now, but I wasn't good enough to pass Matric [Matriculation] so I couldn't get into the university. I was so stupid I didn't know that you could do architecture at RMIT [Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology] so I went there and did art

01:00 instead. In those days I don't think one could've made much money at art. There was none of the illustration and… You see today people who have no pretensions to be able to draw are doing wonderful work because of this computer stuff.

It's totally revolutionised things to say the very least?

Yeah absolutely. I'd probably be a good architect, an artist, if I knew how to work a computer.

Oh it's never too late.

01:30 **I'm curious about your aunt and the two of your survived through the Depression. Was did that affect you very much?**

My aunt?

Who raised you yeah?

Well she was a school teacher and a very successful one. She ended up as principal of quite a, at one of the best state schools here over towards Balwyn. We had a tough time. I know that for many years I wanted a bicycle

02:00 and a new bicycle costs I think it was 4 pounds 10. But we survived and she was absolutely marvellous to me. Absolutely marvellous. She, and finally she lived with me until the end of her life.

Did she have other children?

No she wasn't married. Her fiancé had been killed in the First War.

That's an interesting coming together of the two of you I suppose.

02:30 Yes no she was she was incredible. A wonderful woman.

Well can you tell me a little bit about RMIT and what they actually taught whether they taught a traditional method or not?

I think the training there was excellent. Perhaps they didn't, we didn't do enough life drawing. Although we did quite a lot and mine must have been good cause it was all stolen out of my locker.

03:00 **Perhaps the girl was attractive?**

Don't be rude. I was brilliant. No I think that they, I think they taught very well. Although Bill Dargie whom I was telling you about he said that. And he was the, in charge of the National Gallery. That was

one of his main jobs and he said that if I had gone to the National Gallery

03:30 Art School I would have been a brilliant artist. And that this showed just not quite enough teaching.

Well I wanted to ask about the National Gallery Art School. It's still probably the premium art school in Melbourne. Was there competition or was it possible for you to go there and you just didn't know you could?

I probably could've. But I don't even know if it was costly. I just really don't know anything about it. Because I think that,

04:00 I think that I probably heard about the RMIT Art School and just went there. It's amazing that my Aunt. Perhaps as it was virtually a State School perhaps she just thought that'll be the best because she was a teacher.

Perhaps. Wondering did that put you in touch then with a slightly more avant garde or less conservative sector of Melbourne social

04:30 **scene?**

Social scene? No. There were some very social people there but we didn't seem to get to know socially the other pupils. Course we were all pretty young then. I went through it when I was about what

05:00 seventeen eighteen. Well I was there for more I was there for 4 years including nights. But I think the training was pretty good but apparently it just lacked. You see I believe that today if you went to something like the Slade School in London you wouldn't be taught life drawing at all and yet I believe that that is the secret. I think that if I were to grab

05:30 my grand daughter for instance and just make her draw, do life drawing, life drawing she'd be very good.

I'm curious about the life models at a time when social mores were a little different than they are now. What was the appreciation of young women who did strip off for life drawing classes? How were they treated and how was it respected?

They were treated exceptionally well and the sort of

06:00 thing that I find amazing. For instance we had one very attractive young woman who was a model and we drew her completely nude. It happened to be a night class but night after night we were drawing this girl and one, and she dressed and left and we then went

06:30 and we were walking from RMIT down to the Flinders Street Station and as she walked past the shops which were lit, you could see through her dress. And we were sort of 'look at that'. And this is the girl we'd been drawing nude. It meant nothing to you. At first I remember when I first was going to front up to a life class, I thought oh god I won't be able to cope with this. But once you got there it meant

07:00 nothing to you.

Well it's interesting cause for a lot of fellows it'd be the first time you would seen a naked woman?

It was yes. It was.

Well

And if even if it wasn't I wouldn't bloody well tell you.

How were you on the romance front?

Pretty useless. Pretty useless. We were very, considering what life's like today, we were very moral.

07:30 Extremely so. Extremely so.

So at the time did you have ambitions then of being say a garret artist, working by day and drinking wine by night?

No. I think it was part of my upbringing. I even now, I can, I would never drink beer at all. And if I have two drinks

08:00 a week it's a lot. I just don't drink and I've never smoked. And I see other people drinking and I think oh god you bloody fool. So I'm just not interested in grog and there might be reasons for it I don't know but I'm just not interested in it.

Where did you want the art to take you then? Were you hoping to go to Paris or France?

No I was

08:30 really more interested in commercial art. And I think that it's reflection on me that I didn't look ahead a long way and think this is what I want. Because in those days you'd have never made money at

commercial art. Never.

What existed at the time for commercial artist?

Well the first job I got was with a firm called Ramsey Publishing Company. And

09:00 I had a little studio in the in part of the printing works. And we used to do a lot of small lettering then by hand. Whereas today it's done by computer and we'd just, someone, one of the salesmen would come in and say I want a design for a carton for Colinos toothpaste or something and you'd just sit down and do a lot of what

09:30 we call visual roughs. And of course this is the ability to do, that is what gave me the job as the Marketing Manager of Charles Steele because I said I can design anything and give the designs to the salesmen to for them to sell. And in Charles Steele we were a very expensive company and we always used to

10:00 get… I would do a design and the salesmen would take it out to sell it. We'd always get the first order because it was our design. But we'd never get the next because we were so expensive. So that the ability to design was a huge success with Charles Steele.

Was art supplies expensive then as it is

10:30 **now? I should've said were art supplies as expensive as they are now?**

Yes. It's very hard for me to tell because we never paid full price. We always got what was then called an art student's discount so we got things inexpensively. And I haven't bought much arts material for many years.

And when you worked at Ramsey's would they give you a subsidy

11:00 **or would they pay for all of your equipment?**

Oh they'd pay for everything. You just tell them I now need so and so and they'd… Well as a matter of fact staff from the various art suppliers would come round and you'd just give em an order.

Can you recall the any sort of equipment or materials that you were using then that are just

11:30 **are not used any more now that you wouldn't even see any more now?**

Well I think that the, a lot of the… For instance we did an incredible amount of very fine lettering because you couldn't buy, you couldn't do it on a computer and a lot of the stuff you wanted you couldn't set in type so that we used to buy

12:00 dozens of very very fine brushes to do very fine lettering. And this of course is why, when I came back from the war thinking that's what was required I couldn't possibly do that sort of fine lettering any more.

I guess things have changed. Did they use stencils of any kind for lettering?

No never.

So everything was with a fine hand?

Everything was actually hand painted yes. The visual roughs

12:30 were hand painted and the finished drawings which you did for a third reduction. You always did them bigger and reduced them photographically. They were always hand done. Always. Everything in it was hand done.

And were acrylics in use then? Acrylic paints?

Yes they were. Yeah. Tempura

13:00 we called it.

Tempura.

Yeah.

And the photographic equipment I guess photography was making leaps and bounds at that time.

Yeah but we didn't do that.

So you would just pass it on it would be reduced?

We'd pass it on to. We'd for instance if there was a, if you designed a pack with a lot of instructions which was going to be in bout you know 8 point type. You'd have the type set and then you'd have it reduced the size you want it. Glue it on.

And was it just a job like an

13:30 **accountants job that you were doing or did it feel like you were pursing something a little bit more vocational?**

Well we thought we were vastly superior so I suppose it was a little different. I know that towards the end of my, just before the war… I, because I could do a design and then talk about the design to a customer I used to

14:00 almost go and sell my designs. So I became almost a salesman. And I know I felt that don't tell anyone that it was terribly in for a dig to be a salesman. So we had bloody snobs even then.

And I guess what I'm digging around at is was there some kind of intelligentsia or I think I they don't know who called it the cognisenti but you know a sort of a

14:30 **a sub group of society that placed themselves a bit separate to the working class?**

If there was I didn't know of it because. I was going to say we had no money. We were we were very very poor. That's ridiculous we never went without anything but. And I had a brand new Austin 7 sports car. But

15:00 that was because when my mother died she left me about 6 pence which was worth a couple a hundred thousand today. But no I don't, I can't think that there was any, there was nothing like that.

Okay. You mentioned before part some of the reasons why you wanted to join the air force and your early interest in planes and so on. I'm wondering and I'm, I hope you don't mind me asking this

15:30 **but I'm wondering what it's like to join up when you don't actually have any parents to sort of worry about leaving at home?**

Well I had a guardian who was to me as important as any parent.

Was she like your mother?

Oh definitely was definitely was. And my father. She was like my Father too because she was the only thing I had. Oh no I was absolutely besotted with my

16:00 guardian, my aunt, I really was. She was fantastic. And I had two sisters who had different guardians and they weren't a thousandth as well treated as I was. I do, did so much better than they did.

Did you stay in contact all the way through growing up? You and your sisters?

All the way through?

While you were growing up were you still able to stay in contact?

Not as much as I would've liked, as I should've but

16:30 my sister, the younger one was a Nursing Sister and Nursed ex-POW's from the Islands and caught some hideous complaint called Perpura Haemoragica which I don't know what it is but,

Sounds like something

And she died many years ago. My

17:00 elder sister who was very competent but had no confidence. Mainly because we didn't have a have parents I think. And she only died 2-years ago.

I've jumped back a little big again but I wanted to ask a bit about the searchlight training at Werribee and whether that was kind of sounds like fun to me to

17:30 **do that sort of work.**

Yes it was it was good. I always say when I'm giving a talk on this that one day an aircraft flew down the beam of the search light at me at Werribee and it made me realise how dangerous it was and so I got into the air force. But I decided on the air force long before I was even was properly in the searchlights.

18:00 Yes it was good fun in the searchlights it was and. But strangely enough we were we were shattered that we couldn't join get into the air force and go overseas. Perhaps we were stupid and didn't realise the potential dangers in the air force. Because you know I don't think many people realise. For instance on my squadron Association

18:30 there is only one pilot there that was there when I was in the in the service. In other words they've all been killed.

I believe the statistics was almost one in two and that?

I would've thought it might've been even more than that because you see if you if you stayed alive if you… Nobody rings me.

You're right. We're rolling.

What were we talking about?

19:00 **Unfortunately we were talking about the shocking ratio of life and death in the air force?**

If you stayed alive on a squadron if you were very lucky and did a second tour your chances were so remote. On my squadron we'd have say 24 Aircraft go out and we'd have about 8 or 9

19:30 not come back. Now some of them were POWs but usually they were killed. My navigator. I had a wonderful North Country navigator and one night when we were not flying another crew had a sick navigator, so they asked my navigator would he go with em and he said he'd be delighted to and he never came

20:00 back. And it was a bit like that. Can I divert and tell you about Frank?

Please. Please.

He was marvellous. He was he was a North Country lad and as a matter of fact I think the first time I met him he knocked me down because I said he was a Yorkshire man and he was a Lancastrian. Got very upset. But we were coming back from Germany one night and he was the navigator and

20:30 over the intercom he said, "Alter course dooble one zero." And I said, "What's that Frank?" And he said, "Alter course dooble one." And I said, "Look I dunno what you're saying. Write it on a piece of paper and bring it up the front." And he said, "Oh stick clog in mouth up second laceoh." Which I thought was bloody lovely. No he was a wonderful man.

21:00 **This business of you know he said he'd love to go and fly the other craft for the night's operation. Were you quite autonomous in your decisions in the air force? Were you able to move around?**

Well he would've. As he was my crew he'd have said do you mind if I go? And I said it's up to you.

Now knowing the risks did that not bother you that you might lose one of your crew? Given that it's such a tight knit

No because

21:30 you were, you knew everyone else'd get shot down but not, I wouldn't and my crew wouldn't. See the tail gunner that was killed when we were shot down killed in the air. He was a very close friend of mine and I'm sure he didn't think he'd he knew all other tail gunners cause they were the one's that really got… You lost more

22:00 tail gunners on a squadron than anyone else. But he would've known perfectly well that he wouldn't be shot down. He'd never be killed. Yeah.

Does a little part of you go each time you loose one of your friends in that situation?

Well this was so quick. See we were fighting we were trying to get away from two 109's and

22:30 he was directing me as to which way to turn to try and not be in their line of fire. Then suddenly he stopped and he was killed. So that and then we were in the water for a long time and had been on fire so that really we weren't thinking about that. Probably didn't think about it until many days later.

23:00 And then to realise that the rest of the crew were killed when the British sank the ship. So even if he'd a got away with that he'd of got been drowned anyway later on. And that's why it's so extraordinary that you're commissioned so you stay alive. You're a sergeant so you die. Purely because they sent you in a ship.

Did you know that when you got your Commission that it would improve your chances of living?

No definitely not.

23:30 And see in the army and certainly in the navy you, if you were sub lieutenant you did all sorts of. Well if you were a sergeant you didn't get into the commissioned in the navy that way but in the army if you were a private the things you would have to do to get a commission were incredible. You'd do all sorts of exams.

24:00 You'd study. In the air force it was nothing like that. One day here was I, a sergeant pilot and one day I got a notice saying I was now commissioned like that. And it was just I think they needed more pilot officers.

I guess it was perhaps a combination of timing but also merit is it not? I mean if you'd been a lousy pilot that wouldn't have happened?

Oh they wouldn't see if you were a lousy pilot. Cause you'd be a lousy pilot somewhere where they couldn't

24:30 see you. No I, I'd like to think that it was my excellence but I think probably they were losing so many pilots that the one's at the bottom had to get commissioned. Maybe by the time you were. Now Jimmy Catten at 21 is a squadron leader. He obviously was very competent. Another friend I had who

25:00 who worked who was the man who started a charity that I used to work for named Cheshire. Leonard Cheshire. Now Cheshire, and you see this is where luck came into flying. About the first trip Cheshire did he had the side of his aircraft blown out but he managed to get it back home and I don't think he was ever hit again and he did about 300 ops and got a VC [Victoria Cross].

25:30 You imagine if there're a thousand air craft flying above Berlin everything in the world coming up it's a matter of luck if you're hit not skill. I wasn't in that situation. I was just bloody useless anyway.

What were you like at landing?

Oh that's easy. Just that's very simple. Yeah.

I don't think Bluey Truscott found it particularly simple unfortunately? I've heard

26:00 **a lot of pilots were very good pilots but they weren't much at landing.**

Well Truscott was one. When I was at Wagga I was 5 course and I think Truscott was on 4 and he was at Wagga and he was a bloody nuisance of a man. He really was. If anyone had said to me without this conversation coming up who was the worst person to know in the air force? I'd have said Truscott, Bluey Truscott.

26:30 He was a bloody nuisance.

In what way was he a nuisance?

The huts that we lived in at Wagga had fibro cement walls and ceilings and one day Truscott got through a man hole at the end, crawled along in the ceiling and dropped through the fibro cement onto some poor devil in one a the rooms next to me. Oh he did

27:00 stupid things. Not, it's not necessary to do that.

A prankster?

Not a prankster, bloody idiot.

Can we talk about Wellington's for a moment and

Yes.

And were which were your favourite planes to fly in your career?

Well I flew a lot of aircraft after the war but I think a Wellington was. It was, it gave you a wonderful sense of security.

27:30 We had I'd say about 7 or 8 feet of one wing burnt off and it still, it was heavy on the on control but it was a marvellous aircraft to fly. And it wasn't till we lost the engine on that wing that it, that we pranged but… And you see even in the crash we well, we all got away from the crash

28:00 and we must have been doing about 150-160 knots or miles an hour. They were, they were marvellous. Marvellous.

Did you tend to fly the same Wellington a lot or were you just moved around from plane to plane?

No we had we had our own aircraft.

So you, so and did you have a familiarity with it? Did it have its own sort of energy or spirit or smell or something that you knew was your Wellington?

No.

28:30 **Did it have any characteristics?**

Well we didn't compare it with other aircraft to know that. To my knowledge we it was just a very pleasant aircraft. And we, and yet that's not the one I was on the squadron, isn't the one I was shot down on. It was quite a different aircraft.

You know how soldiers will say they you know they don't hear the bullet that hits then and so on did you have a sixth

29:00 **sense the day that you that you were shot down that you would be? You said earlier you never thought you would but was there anything about that day that made you wonder?**

Nothing at all. I think that the main thing is that that we were told that the Germans were down here. So we flew past where we were told they were. Then we turned in and made a land fall but they were

back there. It was,

29:30 I hesitate to say it was a navigational error. I think that we were given the wrong information. Mind you the information we were given was 10 hours earlier when we left Gibraltar so that it could've well be quite wrong information. Well it was wrong.

How did you receive the information?

Well we, before any air, before any flight,

30:00 before any Operational flight you went to briefing. And you were told everything that you they thought you needed to know.

Thank you. I want to cut back again a little bit to just arriving in England having come across the Atlantic and the berg and so on. When you got to England as an Australian/British pilot did the English respect your Empire training?

Oh Lord yes.

30:30 Oh Lord yes. Well you see everybody was getting Empire Air Training it just some were getting it. We got it all in Australia. The few courses after us got it all in Canada. Canadians were getting it in Canada. Some Americans were going too. There were very few Americans at that stage some of them were going to Canada and learning to fly. Some of them were going to South Africa

31:00 so that it didn't matter. You didn't say, oh he's better than he is because he learnt at Wagga or at somewhere in England.

So there was no suggestion that you needed any extra training and? And you said that you were too old to be a fighter. Was that your decision or was that their decision?

It was nothing to do. No decisions were ours. We, as I said I was 26 when I joined,

31:30 and see fighter pilots were 18 and 19 and 20. So they were, they were like young men driving cars today. They're bloody idiots and the more stupid they were the better Fighter pilots they were. Because they didn't realise the risks and they flew in a fantastic way because they were young.

And immortal

32:00 **to themselves I'm sure?**

Well exactly yeah. Exactly.

Air force fellows you said they had this reputation sometimes of being great drinkers or being drunk but they had remarkable discipline.

Yeah

I'm curious about the fact that you could go out and do an Operation and come home before morning and get some sleep and get up and spend the rest of the day in your own time unless you had other training to do? How did you spend your

32:30 **evenings or your time off there?**

I used to go to the pub with them. But I just never drank. I don't think I ever had a drink until after the war when I joined Charles Steele. I found that as a Marketing Manager you had to entertain clients and I'd take them out to dinner and I'd say what'll you drink? And then I wouldn't drink any. They'd say, oh c'mon, and they wouldn't

33:00 unless I did. So I started then. But I don't like alcohol. Doesn't appeal to me at all.

So in the pubs with the other fellas was there any of that sort of suspicion that if you didn't drink there was something a bit wrong with you?

None at all

They didn't care?

None at all.

And I also believe that men didn't really talk about what they were doing so they'd talk about other things? What did you talk about with your friends there?

Gosh I wouldn't have a clue. I wouldn't have a clue. Really. I know

33:30 that I formed some strange friendships. In Morton in the Marsh there was a shop called Granny's Antique Shop. Granny was quite an old lady. She was about 28 and I was buying some things in the antique shop and she said to me would you like to come home to dinner to my house? I said yeah I'd love to.

34:00 Where do you live? And she said I think it was Borton on the Water. I said, "How would I get there?"

And she said, “I’ll pick you up in the car and drive you there.” Now very few people had cars. So I said, “That’s beaut but how will I get home?” She said, “I’ll lend you my bicycle.” So used to go there about once a week and have dinner. She’d pick me up and I’d ride the bike back and the next day I’d take the bike to the shop and

34:30 leave it. And after the war it must have been 20 years after I went to, I was with my son and daughter we went to Morton in the Marsh, and Chris and I were looking out the window of the of the White Heart and I said that used to be Granny’s Antique shop and it was now a grocers. So we went looking for Granny. And this man said oh I don’t know but

35:00 Mrs so and so will know. So we went and asked this woman and she said, “Yes Mrs Harmer Brown her name is. She lives half way up the hill at Boughton on the Hill.” So we drove in the hire car to Boughton on the Hill and I knocked on the door with Chris and Jan there with me and I said, when the lady came I said, “Mrs Harmer Brown? You won’t remember me. My name is Bill Fordyce,” and

35:30 she said, “Yes and you never brought my bicycle back.” Because I was posted and someone else took it back for me but she obviously thought that she wasn’t going to get it back. No, people were marvellous to us. And you see we lived, Morton on the Marsh was near the famous Broadway which is a wonderful place. All round there was. Stow in the Wold was incredible.

How far from London were you?

Wouldn’t have a clue.

36:00 **You never went there?**

Yeah but we went by train and we didn’t, I didn’t know how far. It was in the corner of our aerodrome at Morton in the Marsh. Morton in Marsh. There was a thing called the five. The five shire stone and it was a stone with five sides on it and it was Oxfordshire. Gloucestershire. I forget what the others were but that was

36:30 where five shires came together. So that’s how I say we were we were quite away from London.

Did you ever see the effects of the Blitz?

Oh lord yes. Oh lord yes. Cause we used to go to London quite often and. This is what always astonishes me. In Australia we make such a fuss about the bombing of Darwin.

37:00 Extraordinary. You know even if they bombed it for 10 weeks it was nothing compared with what England had. And England had it for years and years and years and so much worse than Australia had. But of course, you see to people who saw the war in Europe on the Continent and

37:30 on in the Desert, the war out here really didn’t mean very much to us. But of course when I give a talk on the Great Escape I always start by saying please don’t think that our time as a prisoner was one hundredth as bad as the Jap prisoners. Because it wasn’t. Ours was a holiday camp compared with the way they were

38:00 treated in Japan.

So in London when you saw the bombing had had you already been on Bomber Command yourself by this stage?

Yes yeah.

Did it did it ever occur to you that what you were doing this is what it looked like at the other end? Did that ever bother you?

No I don’t think so. I don’t think so.

I’m not trying to be a smart arse or anything. I’m just

No I know you’re not. I don’t, I’m not taking it that

38:30 **way.**

I’m just wondering because you’re in a plane you drop something you take a photograph of it and you’re gone?

Yeah. No I don’t think that. We had a great hatred of the Germans and with me, and apparently not with many, with me it’s lasted a long time. I cannot tolerate Germans Italians or Japs.

39:00 And I’m very, very prejudiced against them and if I, if I see on television some extraordinary thing or man I say oh he looks as though he’s a bloody Eye-tie [Italian]. You know I’m prejudiced against them. And this is why I believe that we should’ve been counselled when we came back. One of my big fears is that my 15-year old

39:30 granddaughter will end up marrying some bloody foreigner. It really is and I really worry about that.

Okay. We have to swap tapes.

Tape 5

00:30 The pay office was on this used car place Little Collins Street and I remember that when we came to be discharged we went in and he called out, “Fordyce,” and I marched up and he said, “Is your number 400396?” And I said, “Yes.” And he said,

01:00 “Sign this,” and I signed it. And he said, you’re deferred payment is so much and he gave me a little chit with it on the amount on it. And that was it. I was now out of the air force and nobody sort of clapped me on the back or gave me a handful of medals or... Course we didn’t even get medals for about a year later and they don’t mean a bloody thing anyway.

Back to

01:30 **Bomber Command did you by the time you arrived in England was that already well established and up and running? Butch Harris’s Bomber Command?**

Oh Bomber Command? Yes it was very well established. Very well. Well you see we didn’t get there until about mid early. We got there early ’41.

OK. Can you sort of take me through what it was like then going out on your first Operation?

02:00 Yes I was scared stiff because I could see the exhaust pipes of the twin row wasp engines were vivid red and I was saying to… Cause I was the first, on my first trip I was the second pilot not the captain. I remember saying to the captain, “God look they can, they’ll be able to see us miles away with that.” You know

02:30 it was par for the cause. Exhaust pipes got red hot. They were visible. No, I was, but the first trip I did was a bombing raid on Brest Harbour. And you see it was a good place to go because you were flying over the Channel. You didn’t, you weren’t flying over hundreds of miles of towns that could shoot at you.

03:00 So it was comparatively nice and safe until you got to Brest.

And I believe that the Wellingtons were magnificent but they were a bit limited in their range. They couldn’t go too far?

Well I think I said before that we had these twin row wasps and they were had a very heavy fuel consumption so we couldn’t go far. So that my squadron really did very little operation.

Can you tell me about the formation of your squadron?

03:30 **Were they men that you’d come over through Canada with or?**

No. Firstly there were all sorts of nationalities even though it was an Australian squadron.

Oh is that right? So 458 had lots of fellas from everywhere?

Well it had fellows from everywhere. Not lots but there were a couple of Canadians and there were a couple of New Zealanders and quite a lot of Australians.

04:00 Later the proportion of Australians on the squadron was far greater. When we got to the desert the second time most of the ground crew were Australian. There would be a few that were English but not very many. But even now on the squadron Association

04:30 almost all the members are ground crew. They’re very, well I don’t know of any, I know of one other aircrew on the squadron association. So that mainly towards the end we were all Australians or were mainly Australians. But initially, see my crew, I had an Australian navigator.

05:00 An Australian radio operator. No, I mean a sorry, an English navigator and English radio operator. And the other three the front and tail gunner and the mid-upper gunner were Australians. So that of the six there were only four Australians. And that was about the

05:30 percentage people.

About how many operations did you complete before you

We didn’t count it as how many operations. Because we did a lot of ferrying and so your operations would be counted in hours. So I did about probably about 340 hours ops and as the average

06:00 op would be 8 or 9 hours divide that into 300 and that would be about... I can’t divide that. It would be about 30 ops. It would be about a tour. But you see so much of it was, well for instance to fly from England to Gibraltar and down the Med

06:30 would be about 20 hours flying. Or a bit more than that so that there would be two, almost three ops if

you were doing a raid to Germany or something like that.

And

Whereas to Brest it was only I think it was a 6 or 7 hour flight. There and back.

And did you have, did you have a sense after flying for so long did you have a sense that that Britain was getting ahead? That they were going to be able to achieve

07:00 **victory?**

We were very confident when we were operating out of Home on Spalding Moor and then. See we didn't do anything to get confidence cause we flew to Malta then to the desert. We saw what the Germans were doing and had done to Malta cause they'd absolutely wrecked Malta.

07:30 And then we went back to England and then I, the next double trip I was shot down. So that I couldn't get much confidence the last 6 months of my flying, my operational flying. And then of course to get to Germany and to see what was happening there. When we went through parts of Germany by train,

08:00 by cattle truck we saw the incredible damage that was being done which gave us a bit of confidence. But to then be a couple of years in Germany as a prisoner you wouldn't have much confidence left.

So when you heard that Japan had entered the war I'm curious to find out sort of where your heartstrings were pulled. You were a British subject and you were over there flying for the British for very good reason and then suddenly there's this other

08:30 **business happening at home.**

Well we thought. We had applied as a squadron to go back to Australia. So that soon as we were told, right you'll now fly to the desert, we thought that was the first bit of a trip to Australia. And then to we found out it was nothing to do with that. We were strengthening the Desert Air Force, and then when we lost our aircraft which was the whole purpose of going there

09:00 we went back to England to get more aircraft and then came out again.

So all of that sounds to me like a bit of a balls-up. Did you start to get very frustrated?

Well no it wasn't a balls-up at all because if you, just because you lose your aircraft you've got to change what you're doing it's it was, if it was a balls-up then they should've anticipated you were going to lose your aircraft.

Well that's what

09:30 **I wonder? I mean**

Well they couldn't possibly do that.

Didn't you say they'd been bombing Malta for 24 hours continuously I'm wondering how it was how it come about that you were to leave your craft there?

Well because the, you couldn't, there wasn't enough. The range of the aircraft wouldn't let you fly direct to the desert. Therefore if, to go quickly you had to go by way of Malta. Therefore there was no other thing to do than go to

10:00 Malta and hope you could land the aircraft, refuel it and someone else take it off. So that all you had to do is that have half a dozen, six hours to refuel and get one crew off and another crew on, and it probably wouldn't take 6 hours but we lost all our aircraft in less time than that.

I understand. Where were you when they were bombing the airport at Malta?

Down a big hole.

10:30 Yeah we used to live in air raid shelters. We lived in what was called the poor house and leper colony. Where, and there were a lot of lepers on Malta then and so everybody that we came into contact with at that time was. He's pinching my lemons. So everyone we

11:00 came in contact with wore masks or they had leprosy in some bad way. And of course they were living, they were the lepers living in the leper colony.

God it gets surreal doesn't it?

Didn't seem to worry us strangely enough. But the bombing on Malta was incredible because Malta seems to be crisscrossed with stone walls about that high. And

11:30 you'd be walking along and there'd be, an air raid would suddenly come. You'd hear the sirens. So everybody would crouch down beside the stone wall and then you'd hear the bombs falling and as they whistled everybody would change sides because you thought that bomb you could hear, it was coming on your side. And you'd sort of pass the other man coming the other side so that we

12:00 were quite, it was frightening. Malta was, the bombing of Malta was frightening. It really was.

I'll bet it was. When you came out of your holes trenches and saw such damage was it a case of just getting on with it again or was there you know did you begin to wonder whether it wasn't gonna be able to be put back together again?

No we never seemed to, we never seemed to think that way strangely enough.

12:30 **Wow. Now you had this sort of circuitous route back to the UK and then you said that you were in hospital for a while. What happened?**

Oh I had, I just had appendicitis.

Oh OK.

Yeah I saw you stealing my lemons.

I put it on the kitchen bench for you.

I bet he ate them.

So when you got out of hospital did you feel a bit sort of disoriented that your crew had gone off

13:00 **with the Coastal Command?**

No it didn't, it didn't worry me. It was, I was concerned that I hadn't learnt, that I hadn't attended the torpedo dropping courses but. I think that with all operational flying the worst thing you could do was to sit round and do nothing

13:30 and we just desperately wanted to get on with whatever was happening.

Did you have any particular ambition within what you were doing? Was there something you had your eye on?

No. I think that initially when I was a sergeant I was desperately keen to become to get a commission and. They sent us to a place I think it was called Luftborough and we were interviewed

14:00 by very high air force officers. And strangely enough I heard that I'd been commissioned when I was at Malta. So that I'd probably been to Luftborough 10 weeks beforehand but my commission came through and I was advised of it at Malta. So I sort of

14:30 pretended I was a pilot officer on Malta. But I can remember when I got back to England and that was after a trip to Cairo. To Midori. Lake Chad. Right across West Africa. Then a trip up in the boat. I can remember that, thinking now I'm a pilot officer and so I picked my stripes off my jacket. And the Service Priest grabbed

15:00 me because why have you got, you've had stripes there. You haven't got officer things on your shoulder's. What's it all about? They got very cross with me.

What would've been the chances? Would, was there a chance that you were an enemy agent?

Oh no. Just that I was some donkey pretending I was not a sergeant when I really was. That was all.

I see. Not so much impersonating an officer as just

Oh I was too stupid to have been an enemy

15:30 agent believe me.

So when you had a scratch crew and began Coastal Command was markedly different to what you were already doing in Bomber Command?

Well you see I don't know because we really only did ferrying. But the crew were very good. And as I said my very great friend George Crompton was the tail gunner that was killed in the air.

Well I want to talk

16:00 **about that in some detail if that's possible. I'm wondering if you could. I've got a number of questions including you know how hot it gets inside the cockpit when you've been fired on and the and the planes burning. Can you really feel it burning up quickly?**

Well the fire wasn't in the cockpit. The fire was in one engine and in one wing so we wouldn't have felt heat in the air

16:30 craft. What you initially felt was lack of aileron control because the first thing that was burning was the aileron at the end of one of the wings. And you wouldn't and then once the engine was burning and you see it would be incendiary bullets from the fighter that set

17:00 the wing on fire. And then once the engine was burning you just lost power. So you had to and we were so low. We were flying at about probably 20 feet so the minute you lose power with one engine you crash. It was as quick as that.

When you looked down and saw. You okay?

Yeah.

When you looked down and

17:30 **saw the troops and you weren't entirely sure whether they were the enemy or your own what kind of communication occurs between the crew?**

Well I was up the front so I could see out and I was amazed that as I flew along this body of men they, the transports were driving off the road and of course

18:00 in that part of the world the road is solid tarmac and if you go off it, dead. It's like a beach sand. So vehicles were going off into the sand and stalling or tipping up and we realised then or I realised then, and probably swore foully and said, you know, "Geez we've got to get to hell out of here." And I immediately turned round went out to sea and flew very, very low and

18:30 so that the fighters can't get underneath you and they've got to come down on you and they risk flying into the sea.

When you fly so low to the sea are you working off instruments then or visual?

Oh no certainly not on instruments. No it's visual. Certainly visual.

Is there any optical skewing going on in terms of the horizon and so on? It's I imagine it's quite dangerous flying that low to the sea?

19:00 Well it's ridiculous flying that low. But, and the only reason to do it was so's the fighters couldn't get underneath you. Because if they can do that it's much better for them than if they can do that cause if you're low enough they can't pull out. No it's just the natural thing to do.

So when the two the ME 109s are they Messerschmitts ?

19:30 Yeah.

When they, when they first appear I'm sure you're just getting on with business of flying and leaving it to the others to tell you where to go and what to do but are there is there any time for anything personal said between the men on board?

Oh probably we all swore and the Tail gunner would be telling which way to bank. Because if an aircraft's coming in like this at him he would tell you to go to hell over here, and because

20:00 then maybe it would overshoot. But that's about the only communication there'd be.

Now getting shot while your flying. You said you weren't shot that badly but I'm sure any bullet is pretty bad to take?

No you, I don't think that anyone noticed. Now it just shows you what it's like. In Coastal Command because you always flew very low to torp, to drop torpedoes on ships we always sat

20:30 on our tin hats. And one 109 went past and I lifted my right buttock to see where the other was and he put an explosive cannon shell in the geodetics in the side of the aircraft which I got in the tail. Now it, I wasn't even aware of it and about 10 days later when we got into Benghazi and I undressed and had a

21:00 shower for the first time I found I was covered in blood and so I went to the doc and he picked out little tiny bits of flack out of my tail. Which were very minor. Very minor.

So at the point that you're hit and you know you're going down does it does it happen in a flash and there's sort of no time for thinking?

Yes it does really. It does and

21:30 in a flash really because this thing that used to be airworthy is now not. It's not a flying thing. And it just, you've got no control over it at all.

Is there a bracing position you go into when you're gonna hit the water?

I dunno. I didn't have time to think. Well you're very solidly strapped in so that. And the very fact that

22:00 I received no injuries from the crash, shows how solidly I was strapped in. The others were all strapped in very securely too. That's probably why, see nobody was hurt in the crash. And you think we probably were doing about 160 knots 160 miles an hour when we hit. That's awful hard to hit the water at that speed.

22:30 But nobody was hurt in the crash.

When you hit the water how do you work out how to get out of the cockpit and so on? I mean does it go down really quickly?

Very quickly and the, you can, it's surprisingly dark and in a Wellington there's two great perspex panels above your head and if you

23:00 pull a certain lever they open like that. Now our aircraft would be full of air under pressure so that they wouldn't do it like that but they'd open and I think that all the crew got out in the aperture about the pilots head.

You said you had your Mae West jackets on.

Yeah.

Do you also have parachutes strapped to you or is that all part of it?

23:30 Parachutes in a bomber, generally they're separate and so you pick up the parachute and hook it on the front here. It's some tail gunners and gunners might have had seat parachutes. Can't remember. But certainly the pilots and the navigator and the radio operator would have one's you'd hook on the

24:00 front.

So you're in the water you've got these suits on. You said they made you buoyant but a bit harder to swim. I feel I'm bound to ask this is there apart from the fact there's enemy around is anyone scared of things like sharks?

I don't think that you, I don't think we ever thought of sharks.

It's not really the area for it but they're still,

No I think that

24:30 someone said to us later, oh don't worry there were no sharks in the Med. You'd only see, I think turtles.

I'm sure they weren't gonna snap too badly?

Snapping turtles yeah.

Can you see the coastline as soon as you're in the water?

Oh lord no. Oh lord no.

How did you know which way to go?

We were flying.

25:00 There was the coast. We were flying along there and crashed like that, that way. And from that from 100 feet you could see the coast so we just went that way. Perhaps we were just lucky.

Was it possible to stay together as a group while you're swimming back to shore?

Well we had to. We were towing the navigator who was much worse shot and burnt than.

25:30 You see by this time we started with five. George was killed, that's four. So that there were two or three of us towing one and yeah. We just we did stay all stayed together anyway yeah.

I'm sorry if it's a bit upsetting talking about it?

No, no, no don't worry.

26:00 **It on top of, on top of the whole extraordinary ability to survive even that then you swim back and you're fired on from the beach. Did anyone get hit at that point?**

No. It's very hard to, I say this advisedly because I've never tried it but I would imagine to hit someone swimming in moderately rough water

26:30 from the beach would be very difficult.

Oh and before that I just remembered you said you all managed to get onto the little dinghy. Was that part of the plane's equipment that would expand on crash?

This is the thing that every aircraft that flies over the sea has a dinghy behind one of the engine cells and when you get into the water the dinghy automatically

27:00 inflates. And comes to the surface.

It's pretty clever. But then they came back and shot that down too?

Well yeah. This bloke came and strafed us in the dinghy.

So when you get to the beach and you're picked up by I'm assuming they're Italian soldiers. Did they, did they explain to you straight away what was going to happen or was there fair?

They cut me wings off.

Did they?

Well that's why I've got those ones on

27:30 because they cut, they wanted the souvenir so they just cut em off with their bayonet.

Did they treat you badly at that point?

What's bad? You know.

Did they beat you around the head did they?

Oh no no. Nothing like that.

Did they treat you in terms of the Geneva Convention code?

I suppose they did yes. I suppose they did. They didn't feed us and we had nothing to eat or drink.

28:00 Because I can remember we'd go through little villages in this Lance Air trailer and we'd be bleating out, "Acqua," because we wanted to drink water. Some people gave us some but I don't think we had much to eat for about a week.

Good lord. At what point were you separated from the sergeants after you got back?

I'm sorry. Say again.

At what point were you separated from your sergeants?

Well as soon as we got to Benghazi

28:30 they had a an officer compound and a sergeants' compound. So as soon as we got there I went there and they went there.

And that was that. Any chance of farewells or,

Oh well probably said, you know, see you later or something like this. But..

Dear oh dear. Can you tell me a little bit about you were in Campo 78 at first what that was like rolling up there? That'd been sort of

29:00 **well established I'm assuming?**

Yeah it had been a camp from the First World War. I can't remember much about the first arrival there except that we arrived handcuffed, as I said before. And of course it was probably a relief to get there because we'd been separated from our crew. We'd

29:30 flown over the Med which was in one, in an Italian aircraft which in itself was fairly dangerous. We'd then got, been put on a train and the Allies were bombing everywhere in those days. So that we were very fortunate that we had no problems and from this place called Lecce until we got to Sulmona.

In all of that

30:00 **time and despite the situation you were in did you get a chance to appreciate you know the glory of all of that area of Europe and how beautiful it is? Did that you know could it enter your head that you?**

No it didn't. Nothing like that did. In the in the camp at Sulmona, in the, it's the Abrutsis they are very steep like that and above our camp there was a

30:30 winding track and half way up the hill, and it's more than a hill, half way up the mountain there was a monastery. And about 2 or 3 times a year on certain Italian Fete days the entire village would be walking up to that monastery. And it just, all we thought was you know it's a long way to walk and why do they do this.

I appreciate that you

31:00 **have no love for the Italians but what about the locals there the especially those that were against the war?**

We never saw them. We never cause we were in, we were in a camp and we couldn't even see out. So if the, if all the villagers had been outside the camp. We saw them as we went on our walk about once a week but that was all.

31:30 **Did any of them try and give you food or help?**

No.

And I've also read that

I think that they, you see this was in the middle of '42. I think that they changed to be pro-Allies much later than that. Because you see they, the Italians surrendered in what September '43. Yeah.

Oh yeah I guess they had another year to

32:00 **go. I think the ground swell of anti-Mussolini was certainly on the rise? I believe the Italians curiously fed their prisoners reasonably well? Was that true for you?**

I don't know how well they ate so I can't compare what we had with them. But if we hadn't had Red Cross parcels we'd have been very, very starved.

So that's not that wasn't the case

32:30 **for Camp 78 then?**

Well maybe they did because maybe they were eating even worse than we were. I don't know.

It's possible. Was what was the state or morale in camp when you arrived there?

I think that in any prison camp I've been in morale was high always. They never gave up. And you know someone said to me some weeks ago

33:00 why didn't you learn German? How did you speak to the Germans? It was the attitude of prisoners if you're going to speak to these bastards you'd, all you did was you got up close to them and you shouted in English. And if they didn't understand that was bad luck. But some men learnt English. Some men learnt Italian. Some already knew it. But most of us had no desire to

33:30 communicate unless it was absolutely necessary with them.

You believe that you would never be shot down?

We, one had sublime confidence in one's future.

As I'm sure you would need to survive even a day. Did was there a point when it sunk in that you had been shot down?

No it's well it must have I suppose.

34:00 But you didn't sort of say my god I've been shot down and I didn't think I was going to be.

I know, I know but I'm wondering,

No

You get a lot of time to think in a POW camp.

Yeah well of course, the time you'd have thought of that was in the water swimming to shore.

I guess I'm kind of asking more about did you begin to wonder what would become of you at that point as opposed to assuming that you would've kept going?

No and I think that there's a sketch in the front of that log book of mine

34:30 and it's more easily understood if you look at it than I say it. But the first there are about nine drawings of an air force officer's head. The first one he's got a big smile and it's the date on it is 1942 July. Which is when I was shot

35:00 down. And the caption under it is 'Never mind. We'll be home for Christmas'. And then Christmas '42, "Well never mind. It can't last more than three months." And then June or July '43, "Well anyway you know it's home for Christmas." And it went on like that with the smile getting less and less and when the, when the Italian armistice

35:30 came the caption says 'We'll be home for Christmas any day now'. And then, "Well they can't take us to Germany. They haven't got the transport." And then they did and then at the very end of the war, "Well they can't move us. They haven't got the transport." And then they made us walk. So you know it says I give up. They can do any damn thing. And I think that is a very good indication

36:00 of the way we felt sort of every six months for the for the 3 years I was in prison camp.

So when you got to Italy I wouldn't mind betting you had like nothing with you. Like no possessions of any kind. Were you able to scrounge anything in the Italian camps?

Well I we were flying in flying boots and I'd taken my flying boots off when I was swimming in so I had no shoes. And in the

36:30 in the pen at Mersa, at El Daba the Italians gave a couple of men cigarettes. Now I didn't smoke and there was a coloured bloke I think from, I dunno what army he was with but he was a prisoner there

and he so desperately wanted a cigarette that he said if I would

37:00 give him that cigarette he would give me his shoes. So I did that. They were too tight and they hurt but I wore those for probably the next 6 months. And then I got a pair of wooden clogs which we call clompen. And there's a picture of me there in the clogs. So that

37:30 shoes were what we desperately needed. Especially if we'd been shot down in the sea. The men from the desert all were very well shod. Because they, you know they had desert boots on and they wouldn't need that sort a thing.

This tape's going to close in a minute but I just wanted to ask before it does. When the Italians did surrender and there was a chance that you'd be able to get out of the camps and that message came

38:00 **through from the British saying stay where you are when in hindsight that was a?**

No, the message the instructions no to get out was from our commandant in our camp.

Oh I understand. Oh I've read a little bit of history that that indicated that British Intelligence suggested to British officers to stay where they were as opposed to trying to escape?

Well maybe our senior officers got that message. But we were just told by the two

38:30 men Spike and Darby. Darby Monroe and Spike, a man called Colonel Marlin hence Spike Marlin. We were just told don't try and get out. You're to stay here. So. So we did.

Did that kind of burn you up a bit later on then when you were moved to Germany?

No because

39:00 at this stage we'd have had to go a long way to get to any Allies. Some men did but we always felt that the best thing would be, to try and escape out of the cattle trucks and get into Switzerland. Go that way instead of that way. Yeah.

Sure, okay.

Tape 6

00:30 **Let's begin. Rolling. Bill I'd like to start off by asking a little bit about daily life in Stalagluft 3. Can you remember or can you tell us about your initial impressions of the camp when you arrived?**

How much, how different it was from Italy. How much bigger it was than Italy.

01:00 **How many men?**

Well there were 4 compounds and in our compound there were about 2,000 so there were about 8 to 10,000 in the whole camp but we never saw the other people. But we were in the north compound which is where the Great Escape took place from. It was, it was quite a good impression compared with the Italian place.

01:30 **In what respect? Can you compare the two?**

Bigger rooms. Separate rooms. When I say separate there were 8 or 9 men to a room. Where as in Italy there would be one big room with probably 30 men in it. So there was a little bit more privacy. The food of course was just

02:00 as limited. Because the, there was very little food in Italy and very little in Poland too. I think that the people were friendlier. It was rather interesting to have only air force people. Course we knew air force people whereas previously we'd been in with army and navy who strangely thought differently from us.

02:30 **There is a sort of natural friction between the different services isn't there?**

Not in a prison camp. Of course in life in England we knew we were superior to the army and navy so we let them know.

In no uncertain terms I'm sure?

Exactly.

When one is taken to a new prison camp do you go straight before the CO? Like did you go straight to Massey and introduce yourself?

Well normally we would've but

03:00 you see in this case. You see had we just been shot down we'd have gone to that place called Dulag Luft

we'd have gone there. But as we'd been in a prison camp for a couple of years by this time obviously there was no reason for them to check us or query us or do anything to us except shove us in the new section.

And I guess then if you're not meeting the

03:30 **SBO the senior British officer you're not really gonna meet the commandant either are you?**

Of the commandant of the British commandant?

Of the German? The German commandant?

The Germandant, the German commandant? No no. We probably saw him he… I think we all fell in on what we called a pell and the camp commandant was there and we were counted and so on but that's all. It was quite different from if we'd

04:00 of arrived there straight from flying. Cause they'd have tried to find out our squadrons and what aircraft we were on and so on so we just didn't tell em. There was no need in Germany to tell em anything like that.

And so in terms of the British officers there in the in the compound, who oversaw your allocation of say bunk and duties and so on and so forth?

Oh I can't even remember but. I'm not even sure how many of us

04:30 there were. There were probably about 100 and we were just divided round to places where there was a bit of space. See initially there were 6 to a little room. Room about this big and then it was they put extra bunks or they put triple-decker bunks instead of double so there were 9 to a room. So that was all.

05:00 I can't remember much about the detail of that sort of thing.

That's okay. And so you're in this room with 6 other men perhaps maybe more. Do they try and sound you out in terms of what kind of fellow you are for escape purposes?

Yeah but you see realise that there were an awful lot of people from the same squadron so you'd know people. And you we would try and get in with someone we knew. I think that

05:30 in some cases a group of 6 or 8 men from Italy would've been in a room together. There were quite a few new huts going up around Stalagluft 3 and in some cases people were all shoved in together into the, from Italy were put just in say in one room full of men or perhaps even a hut full. It didn't happen in my

06:00 case. I went in with some other blokes whom I knew quite well. Yeah.

Were you were you informed about the previous escapes which had been attempted from the camp? Were people proud of that and told you about their stories?

Oh the prisoners did. The Germans never. Oh yeah we heard all about their escapes almost immediately. And we heard that

06:30 there was a big escape organisation headed by Roger Bushel. And that the need for security... See the security in Stalagluft 3 was completely different from Italy because there was not the need for it in Italy. Whereas there was in Germany.

Because you were planning such a big operation?

Well we didn't know

07:00 at first they were planning a big operation but. There seemed to be a greater will to try and escape from the air force men than they ever had been in Italy from the mixed services.

It does seem to have been that way historically doesn't it. The big escapes were mainly air force escapes?

Yeah, yeah.

So in that case I'm just wondering how do you become aware I know you said there's a big op underway and that's as much as you

07:30 **were told but who approached you about perhaps contributing in some way?**

Well when it was apparent that I was trained as an artist and I sort of asked around. We had this escape organisation man in the room and I just said you know do you want any map forgers or. See the maps were printed by an off-set process.

08:00 We made a metal try about a foolscap size. We filled it with the gelatine from Healthy Life lemon crystals which was in the Red Cross parcels. We washed the flavouring out of it so that it was just gelatine. And from that we could do one draw, one map in indelible ink and then and of course we had to do it in reverse

08:30 and then print off that eight or nine on the jelly mould. So that I knew that was happening and I just asked did they want any help. But they were very well organised by the time we got there. You see we would've got there in about September, October and the Great Escape, that was what

09:00 would it be? Forty forty-two forty-three and the Great Escape you see was in March '44. So there was only about 6 or 7 months so they were very well organised before we even got there.

And say there were 2,000 men in your compound.

Yeah.

How many out of those 2,000 do you think were involved to a greater or lesser degree in the actual escape in one form or another?

Well I was just reading an article.

09:30 People in England send me any articles they see on the Great Escape and I got one in the post yesterday which was absolute garbage and it said there were about 600 involved in it. Because you see there were people. For instance there were an awful lot of men getting rid of sand. You've heard the story with their trouser legs full of with sort of pouches down their

10:00 trouser leg a string in their pocket. So they'd just pull the string and the bottom came out and they could distribute the dirt, the sand all round the compound. Now there would be many, I was going to say hundreds. Probably hundreds of men involved in that. Three tunnels and you dig a hole this big and see the amount of earth that comes out. Now this was 360 feet long.

Well when

10:30 **you dig earth out too it increases in size quite dramatically doesn't it?**

Exactly. Yeah. Yeah.

With these fellows. They were called the Penguins because of the way they shuffled with the sand?

Yeah. Yes exactly.

What would they make those long sleeves out of that they filled with the sand?

I can't even remember what they were made of. But..

Cause that's a lot of material to get your hands on isn't it?

It was a lot of material and I was reading this article that I got yesterday and it said that that we had a wonderful theatre. Which we did have. And it said that we used to

11:00 hire costumes from for the theatre from Berlin. And that was absolute crap. We never hired anything from anyone. We made them. And we'd, for instance if there was if someone got a sheet in a Red Cross parcel. You could do an awful lot with one full sheet.

What could you do with a sheet?

Well you could make the legs that went down trousers. You could do things like that.

11:30 You could, the tailors in the camp could make a very good civilian shirt out of it. That's, there was always something you could do with it. And occasionally when we didn't have material we'd get one of the Goons to buy some and we'd use that. See we used to make very good suits out of German blankets that were dyed in a with ink or something like that. In fact

12:00 we had one occasion when a man dyed it in ink and it ran when he'd gone about 50 feet and so he came out bright blue that sort of thing.

Would you be able to because blankets they would make a you know good woollen suit look. Would you have to scrape the,

Yeah they were a bit. Mind you in those days they weren't such beautiful wool. You see today a blanket pills. It never would then because they were thin and

12:30 pretty meagre sort of woollen material.

So when you approached this fellow and said look I'm an artist do you need anyone to help did they do a bit of a character check on you do you think or?

As to whether I was an artist? Well they didn't need to do a character check because they knew I was a I'd been a POW. They knew my squadron and so on.

But would they ask around among your fellow men and say?

No they wouldn't have to because we'd been in a prison camp

13:00 for so long that they would be perfectly happy with our credentials as it were. Not our, my credentials as an artist but my credentials as a genuine POW. Well we had some very severe checks. For instance there was one man came into the camp and, anyone that came in was checked because

13:30 there was a certain number of squadron's in England and a prisoner probably came from one of them. So other people would know them and they'd verify that they were genuine. Occasionally a man would come in and nobody knew him and one day we got a bloke who came in he spoke with an impeccable, frightfully Oxford accent. He was very English and, but we

14:00 never trusted people that we didn't know. So they put this man in a room with about 6 or 7 others and made sure he heard nothing until they were confident that he was who he said he was. And so after about 3 or 4 weeks they sent him, I forget where he went, but to another room and he was verified as being genuine. And he'd been in the new room for

14:30 20 minutes and he said... The people in the room laughed and said, "They thought that you were German spy or something like that." And he laughed and said, "Yes. I can't understand why because it's so obvious that I'm an Englander."

That's fair dinkum.

That's actually happened. So of course that man was obviously a German because no Englishman would ever say

15:00 I am an Englander. That is what a German would say.

That's quite incredible.

Yeah extraordinary. That a man could go for so long saying the right things to be considered genuine and then in one sentence could muck it up by saying they should be able to see I'm an Englander.

Wow. Were there were there little tricks you would play. Like I read about when

15:30 **the Australian officers were calling from Ambon when the war was over. They got hold of the radio from the Japanese and were calling further up the line and they said where's Chloe? And they said at Young and Jackson's and that's how they knew they were an Aussie?**

Yeah.

Were there little nicks and tricks like that they would do?

Yes but they'd do it individually and not in front of us so that they might have done it, been doing it everyday to certain people. And that would probably originally been done in Dulag Luft

16:00 because that was where the interrogation initially went on and by the Germans. And you might have a crew shot down. They'd all be in Dulag Luft so they'd all be able to verify one another. If one man came in by himself there may, there might be a bit of suspicion about his origins. But otherwise no.

So this fellow that that was a German spy what would've happened then

16:30 **did he?**

He disappeared. Now whether he, whether he ended up two feet under the filth in the in the aborte or whether he was whipped smartly away by the Germans I don't know.

Because a spy is allowed to be shot?

Yeah but a German isn't going to shoot a German spy.

No but I mean you could execute him really couldn't you as a spy?

Well we would, officially didn't have anything to execute him with.

17:00 We certainly did have but we wouldn't have done that no.

Speaking of unofficially having weapons with which to execute somebody you must have quite a catalogue of sins on a mans card to get him to bring you a gun I'd imagine. Cause that's really?

You wouldn't need many because you see the Germans were the sort of people that if they knew that one German was accepting bribes of coffee

17:30 from an Englishman or from an Allied Airman that was enough to get rid of him. And they knew that the Russian front was so horrible that they wouldn't survive there.

Well let's talk about the maps and so forth. I've seen in that exhibition which is travelling around the country at the moment maps drawn in Europe by Prisoners of War and they're incredibly detailed?

Yeah.

They look like

18:00 **they could be off any roadmap you might buy in a shop.**

You're quite right and in, on the wall in the German commandant's there was a picture of Hitler just in his usual uniform, usually you know head and shoulders only, and down the bottom was the

18:30 Shell insignia. And we knew that in Australia if there was a picture of something Shell tanker or something like that that was Shell it would have a map on the other side of it. So when the senior British officer went into the German commandant's office and saw this he said look we've been. And of course realise that some men had been in that camp for 5-years.

19:00 So he said, "Look we've been in here for X years, for many years. We would very much like, we admire Hitler very much for all he's doing. We think he's doing an incredible job. We see that wonderful picture you've got on your wall. Could we have a few of them?" And the German commandant gave the senior British officer about half a dozen maps which were detailed maps of Germany.

That's quite

19:30 **in retrospect that must have been so gullible. It just seems like that doesn't it?**

It means that, well I s'pose it's gullibility. They obviously didn't think now why would. See if a German did this to me I'd say now why does that bastard want that map? What is there about a picture of Hitler? And I'd examine it turn it over and say oh he obviously wants the map.

So the map would be on the back of the picture

Yeah.

20:00 **But the back of the frame would cover the map?**

Well you think you think you've probably got a map, Shell map somewhere at home now, out here we wouldn't have a picture of the Prime Minister or something like this but it would have some illustration on one side of it and to advertise Shell and or whatever the company was, and on the other side it would have a map.

But the picture would be in the frame and the back of the frame would cover the map wouldn't it? So the commandant wouldn't necessarily know there was a map there?

Well he'd have to

20:30 turn the, take it off the wall turn it over. Because Hitler was on the one side and this thing I got yesterday said that the, was mentioning this but it said that the Germans had already given about 10 prisoners maps. Which is rubbish. They didn't do that. The commandant had to ask for them so it's even stupider

21:00 by the German giving it to him.

That's quite remarkable.

Isn't it? Yeah

So then they obtained these maps? What's the next step?

Well the next step is. See there were about 200 men prepared to go out in the Great Escape. So they had to produce 200 maps of the entire route that that man wanted to take. And then divide it up to about four sections with detailed maps

21:30 of each little section. So that if there were 200 going out you'd have to print 1,000 maps. Four detail and one over all one. Mind you half of them might be exactly the same. But they would have to print 4 or 5 maps for every man that was going out. Now some were going by train and they wouldn't want them. See quite a lot went by train as a matter of fact.

And would you

22:00 **having seen movies and they may or may not be accurate about escape attempts from various Stalag's across the war. There's always as you said a network of cockatoos you know so that by the time the German gets anywhere near where you're working it's all covered up and hidden. But where would you be working to do the map copying?**

Well for instance some of them would working down at the bottom of the shaft 30 feet down but the top would be open so that on

22:30 the you called him a cockatoo what did I say he was?

Duty pilot?

Yeah so that when the duty pilot gave the signal they would make sure the tunnel entrance was closed. One thing they did which I thought was very clever at one stage one of the men picked the pocket of the

commandant when he came into the camp. They said

23:00 they were going to do this so about 50 men crowded round him as he came in and one of them picked his pocket and pinched his as it I called it an outsvice. His card to give him let him exit the camp or come into the camp. So that the commandant now didn't have an authority to go in and out of the camp and their security was so great that even though they knew

23:30 him they knew that he was the commandant they wouldn't let him out of the camp.

And how how when did he discover that he'd been picked?

Well when he tried to go. He came in, he did, he counted the men on what we called a pell. He counted the men he went to go out and he found he didn't have his, he'd lost his outsvice. He knew it had been pinched. So then now I had a long garbled story to tell you but I

24:00 can't remember it.

About pick pocketing from the commandant?

Yeah then when he about, oh they made numerous copies of this because this was dead accurate and it was signed by all the right authorities so they just got men to forge the signatures. And when they had about half a dozen copies of it they shoved this, his outsvice or a copy. I don't think he ever got his own back. Onto the notice board and when he came in for a

24:30 pell a week later and he had to stay in the camp so we had to give him a room to sleep in. When he came out to count the men suddenly someone said oh there's Herr Peeber's outsvice pinned on the notice board. So he got it and he could then go home. Now the extraordinary thing was that a room, as I said, was about 16 feet square and these rooms were

25:00 made of moveable panels. So what they did in this hut was they shortened every room by the width of a panel. So they were now probably about 12 feet by 16-feet and they put him in one of those short rooms but it meant they had an extra room up at the other end which they could use for drawing maps and things like this. Because the access to it would

25:30 not be obvious to it at all.

Wow. It's it really is a case of two worlds operating in the same space isn't it?

Well I think the thing you've got to realise is that if you give some. If you give competent men nothing to do all the time firstly they'll all think of something similar, and secondly the things they think of will be fantastic. Now this article also mentioned

26:00 that we used to bribe the Germans to give us yeast and with this and raisins we would make an alcoholic drink. And that was quite wrong. We found that when I first got into Germany that… See we used to get raisins in a Red Cross parcel and little wee tins of sugar. We found that if we soaked the raisins with sugar in a big German bath and probably 30 men would

26:30 contribute to the raisins. So you'd have a lot of raisins fermenting in a big wooden German bath and after some months it would turn into alcohol. And that's a natural process you don't need yeast. So that when we would then strain it and drink it as a very rough red wine. That's perhaps why I don't like grog. We would then, oh and then and Englishman came

27:00 into the camp and he saw this and he said that's ridiculous. You're wasting that. And he found that a German jam tin, they were very big tins about that round that high. He found that was pressed, fit onto the bugle of a trombone. So what he used, he then said this is what you should do. So he got this mixture of raisins and sugar which had been fermenting for a month or more he put it in this

27:30 jam tin, clipped the trombone on top, boiled it up in here wrapped wet socks around the coil of the trombone and out of the mouthpiece you got 98% proof alcohol. You know what's this pinching borrowing yeast. You didn't have to do that. You just distilled it. It was so simple and there were always people who could do brilliant things like that. And realise that amongst the,

28:00 every profession you ever thought of would be in that prison camp. So there'd be always someone. For instance we had a surprising lot of tailors and out of a couple of German uniforms they could make fantastic Luftwaffe uniforms. These wooden rifles were unbelievable they were so accurate.

How would they get the

28:30 **gun metal colour?**

Well boot polish. For instance if you polished up, if you made the barrel and polished that with black boot polish enough it would look like metal. And you could then polish the wooden, what do you call it?

The stock?

The stock with brown boot polish and it would look pretty good. I think I said before that the only problem we really had a difficulty with was to get a

29:00 leather strap that wide and we had to make it out of cardboard and colour it up properly and then polish it to look like leather.

You know this could be an entirely wrong thought track on my behalf and I'm sure it is entirely wrong but it seems like a fairly exciting place to be? And I'm sure it's you're very much under severe privations ? You're missing your

29:30 **home? You don't know if you're going to be shot one day perhaps? But there's such a hive of activity and mental?**

Look it was it was incredible. Now probably one of the cleverest things was the, and you should look at it before you go. There's a thing in there about the theatre, and as I said before in that article it says we hired costumes from Berlin. That was garbage. We made everything.

30:00 We would make an armchair. We'd pad it with blankets and using a coloured sheet we'd laboriously go round and paint a very detailed pattern on every bit of the armchair. Things like that. You think, we had plenty of time and so there was no problem in getting people to do that. It was, it saved you from a lot of boredom really.

The Germans didn't use you in work parties or anything? Could they not use

30:30 **officers?**

Oh no we couldn't, we weren't allowed to go out of the camp on work parties no. You definitely were not allowed.

Is that not allowed by the Germans or by the Geneva Convention?

No by the Geneva Convention. Yeah

It's seems rather odd doesn't it to put let's lets for arguments sake call officers the cream of the crop cause in a lot of cases they'd probably be the more intelligent or motivated gentlemen altogether and give them nothing to do? These idle hands meant the devils work?

Yes. Silly isn't it.

31:00 Yeah.

Especially if they're being guarded by a lot of conscripts who are not really interested in it?

Well of course this is why the average British, and I say British, Allied POW could put it over the Germans because they were usually a little more thoughtful and the Germans they were bloody stupid. There's nothing worse than a really pleb Luftwaffe private. Believe me.

31:30 They really were and mind you you could get that from our population too. You could get the very bright ones and the not bright ones easily.

So you said they moved the panels to create shorter rooms and therefore give them a space to draw maps?

Yeah.

Would the maps just be on tables in that room or when you finished for the day did you pack them away?

Well in a room in a special room like that yes. Because there was

32:00 apparently no entrance or exit and unless the Germans suddenly said this room's too small why? Then there would be no way of knowing that something might be going on behind the wall.

How would you get into that room then?

Well they probably would shift a whole panel to get in.

And then if the Germans came in you'd have stay in that room and be dead silent?

Yeah, exactly yeah.

Did they were they often coming though on

32:30 **on spot inspections upending everything?**

Yes very often. Usually that would be about one in the morning but again we'd get plenty of notice. Some German would have told one of the men. And we'd all be in bed knowing full well that in one hour's time we were all going to be dragged out. They used to, they had a bad habit of coming into a hut kicking everybody like that out into the

33:00 snow and you'd stand there for 2 or 3 hours whilst they really searched that hut. And that was, it was probably the best ways of trying to find something. But our security was so great that there'd be very few men in the camp that knew where the tunnel for the Great Escape was going except the men

involved in digging it. Or in the Penguins moving the earth.

33:30 Otherwise nobody knew. We never talked about it. I hadn't a clue where the tunnel was until a few days before the Great Escape.

Was the organisation divided into cells? So you'd only know the people involved with what you were doing you wouldn't know who else? Is that how it was organised?

It was almost like that. Roger Bushel planned and organised everything and he had a few people, this man would be

34:00 in charge of forgery, this man of map making, someone else of doing the outsvice. Someone else might be a dab at forging signatures and all he would do would be sign these outsvice. I had a, pity I didn't keep it. I had a wonderful letter to Krupps Works telling me that I was a foreign worker. I couldn't speak German and that I'd been

34:30 working in so and so and was now on holidays. So that if I was caught anywhere round Germany I'd have an excuse. But there were one man who spoke extremely good Welsh he just, everything the Germans said to him he answered in Welsh. Because they hadn't a clue what what he was talking about and he knew

35:00 perfectly well that there was about one chance in a million, because even Welshmen don't speak Welsh. Most of them speak English and this man found that by just speaking Welsh and saying to them in Welsh, "I dunno what the hell you're talking about," he got away with it extremely well.

There's just so much. Thank you. That I want to ask but there's only five minutes left on this tape so I've got to think of a small question.

35:30 **In terms of Roger Bushel then the master mind he had a reputation as being an escaper he wasn't some greenhorn?**

He'd escaped a lot and he knew and everybody in the camp knew that if ever he escaped again and was caught he'd be killed. He knew that and he went out with that risk hanging over his head and of that's exactly what happened of course.

Well as he was known as an escaper

36:00 **would he often be hauled in by the Goons for questioning or would they try and lean on him some way?**

I don't think so because I think that they knew perfectly well that they were wasting their time with him.

Would they keep him under surveillance often though? Would there be guards?

I don't think more than anyone else. You see their feeling about the camp was that everything is secure. We've got a Goon guard going in every half hour or whatever it was every hour.

36:30 If anything's happening he'll find it. but of course by then the duty pilot had closed down everything so that they never found anything.

So you're saying they had a guard going in every half hour?

Oh well I don't know how often but there'd be perhaps more than one. There might be, half a dozen would suddenly go in and just wander round the camp looking for things.

Even so 6 men amongst 2,000 they're not really givin' themselves good odds are they?

They're not

37:00 at all. They're not at all.

I always assumed there would be you know dozens and dozens of guards in the camp all day?

No there were, there weren't guards in the camp all day at all. But there would be groups of guards coming in at and specified times. For instance, the ones I said before who came in at night and even that we had been given warning. A tame goon would tell

37:30 someone that, "Did you know that we're going to do a spot check tonight on hut 109?" He would, this tame Goon would tell one of the Brits and so that night we'd all know perfectly well. Thing they used to do. There'd be something that was terribly obvious. You know they hadn't hidden the typewriter. But

38:00 the typewriter was in that room in that hut every day but we know there's going to be a spot check on that so we'll move that and just put it over in that hut. It would just be over there but it'd be quite all right. Because that's the hut they were searching. It was, it was that sort of strange going back on it, a lot of it was stupidity on the part of the Germans.

Well I've heard other

38:30 **POWs say that they would come in looking for lets say knives and they'd see other things and ignore them?**

Exactly. You're quite right. I don't know if they'd ignored a revolver but you're right. They would be looking for one thing and they would. Money. They'd be looking for money and they'd happen to see a map. They wouldn't bother about that because we're not looking for maps we're looking for money.

39:00 Extraordinary people.

Very.

Tape 7

00:32 **On the subject something you mentioned earlier on today which was quite fascinating the subject of the bakelite suitcases.**

Yeah

Can we go into that into a little more detail. You said everybody had these suitcases? Why and how and what for and so forth?

Well in Australia when the war started you couldn't buy a normal suitcase. You could buy a

01:00 suitcase about that big. It was the only one you could easily get. Made of this stuff which we called bakelite. Now in Germany they had a similar thing so that almost everybody if they were travelling by train took with them a little suitcase about that size which they shoved in the rack. Now some might have clothing some one as I told you had a typewriter. So that by taking an empty case

01:30 and if we didn't have one and we were going somewhere we'd just have to say to the German can I have a suitcase to put my belongings in? When we're going to the hospital or wherever it was. We would then make sure we put it in the rack where there were a lot of other suitcases and in every train there would be, sure to be 6 or 7 in the racks because there was nowhere else to put em,

02:00 and everybody had one. So that when you got out you just took a different one. Some of them, occasionally we got incredible things. I told you we got a, two we got a typewriter once, which was marvellous.

What about on these trips out of the camp you said there were to be to hospital and so forth?

Well normally the officers were never out of the camp. Never. They were in Italy but we never went for walks in Germany. So that

02:30 once I got into Stalagluft 3 I was never again out of the camp until the day we left. But there'd be reasons why some men as I say they might of just had to go to a hospital or something like that. They would then go by train and make sure they took an empty suitcase.

Did, they must have pilfered

03:00 **other things on the way? Would they lift whatever they could from anywhere?**

Yeah they'd just, and if, say on the way to the hospital you got a suitcase that you didn't want the things much you'd swap it again on the way back for another one. So that, the chances were great of getting things.

Before you arrived there was the wooden horse escape attempt which failed. Were was there evidence of that tunnel still in the camp? Was there a subsidence where it was?

03:30 I don't know frankly. I just don't know. But I know it was a very successful tunnel and if they'd of, if they'd of made the exit. See you couldn't see past the wires there were so many. And if there was if the exit had been 3 feet further away the horse wouldn't have fallen through it. You had to see the wire to appreciate

04:00 what it was like and you'll see a picture of it in that. There's, the trip wire was about that high. And it was just a very little a very low wire. It was about I suppose 30 feet from the main wire fence. And the main wire fence would be about 17 or 18 feet high so that it would go up and in towards the camp like that. And then from every post

04:30 wires would go down towards the trip wire. Co that to get out you'd have to first go over the trip wire and if you did you'd be shot at. Cause you could see that. The German guards could see the trip wire.

That was the rule you're inside that wire you're shot?

Pardon?

Was that the rule that if you were inside that wire you'd be shot?

Absolutely. And there was a white box with a red cross painted on it about every 100 yards and if you...

05:00 Say the footy went into that area you screamed out to the guard for his attention. You took the cloak with the red cross out of the box. You put it on and this was giving a parole. You were saying I will not try to escape. You drew his, the guards attention and he waved yes and you went in. You got the footy. You went back beyond the trip wire and you put the cloak back but, so

05:30 The, there was the trip wire here. Then there was an apron. Flat like that going to every post, say that this post might have five. That post had five and so on. Then there was the straight up fence bent over at the top. Then the whole thing was repeated on the other side. And the space between the two upright wires was probably about 5 feet,

06:00 and in that there was just a loose coil of barbed wire so that. It was the sort of thing that if you cut it it would just spring away because there was just so much of it there. So that the only man I ever saw getting through was a man from Queensland, a friend of mine called Ken Carson. And Ken got very tight one day on this Kriegy hooch and

06:30 for some somehow he cut his way through the wire. Goodness knows how. I think it was round about Christmas and perhaps the guards weren't watching properly. But he got into the next compound and the Americans in the next compound couldn't give him enough food so he just had to give himself up and come back into his own compound. But he wasn't trying to escape. He just made a stupid mistake when he was tight.

And was he then

07:00 **put in the cooler?**

He probably was but you know he was in the wrong compound so there wouldn't a been… He wasn't escaping really. There wouldn't a been much problem.

What was the legendary cooler like? What

Well that was one of the few things that were too, were pretty good in the film The Great Escape. It was just a very small, very small room and the, it had a very little window and it had a door onto a corridor. And

07:30 it didn't even have anywhere to sit or sleep. Just a very small barren room.

Did you ever have cause to be put in there?

No I was never in there. I was one of the lucky one's because having coming out, having come out of the tunnel I maybe should've been but they didn't know I'd been in the tunnel because I came out before they closed it off. Or well it was well after

08:00 they'd closed it off. But they opened it up for me to get out and then put the sandbags in to secure the thing.

In reading about the Great Escape one reads about goons and ferrets, ferrets obviously being the goons which are searching?

The ferrets were the men that… The Germans built the huts about that high off the ground and the only places the huts had contact with

08:30 the ground was under, every room had a stove in it and every stove was on a brick pillar. So that the only exit to the earth was under a stove through a brick pillar. Now you'd have, it was so obvious you'd a thought the Germans would've, if it'd been me I'd have drilled hundreds of holes through the bricks to make sure there was nothing going on inside. But that

09:00 was the only access to the earth from a hut was through the brick pillar under a stove.

And to get through that I imagine that's how many feet? Six or seven feet of brick and concrete?

Yeah and as you say, concrete, and this again is an extraordinary thing. The escape organisation decided that one of the best things for digging through the concrete

09:30 was, you know the way an ice skate has got a curved end and it's serrated? They decided that that would be one of the best ways of chopping through the concrete of a brick pillar. Cause the inside was concrete. So they asked the Germans could we have, could we write to Canada to the Red Cross and get them to send us 40 or 50 pairs of ice skates. So the Germans

10:00 did this, let us do this. We got,

On what pretence because?

Well we were going to skate and every winter we used… We had things we called, what were they called? We had big zinc jugs this big with a notice on it. 'Kina trink fassa'. Which means not for drinking

water cause it was made of zinc and we called them a ‘kina trink fassa’. So that as soon as it looked like

10:30 winter coming on every man in the camp would fill a jug and we would form a queue and we’d fill it from the, what we call the saoug stella, which is a fire water pool. We’d fill the jug from that and pour it on the area we were going to make an ice skating rink. So that by the time eight or eight or nine hundred men had

11:00 spilt a couple of dozen jugs each you had an ice skating rink. So then the digging through the pillar obviously blunted the skate. So we then asked the Germans could we have a skate sharpening machine cause our skates were so blunt. So they gave us this. So that we’d blunt the skates digging through the concrete and they’d produce a machine to sharpen them which was good.

11:30 **Was there anything they ever turned you down for in terms of request?**

No that I know of. But of course they should put old POWs old Kreigies we call em.

Why Kreigy?

Kreig’s. A Kreigy is, it’s short for Kreigscaffengannan which means a war prisoner. If I were in charge of a jail

12:00 in anywhere, in Victoria say, I would have a POW on the staff for security person reasons. Because I’m bloody sure that that a POW on a jail after the war no prisoner would have ever got out. Never.

I’m sure. So this digging. As you say nobody knew apart from the diggers and the penguins where the tunnel entrance was?

12:30 Yeah

How would they keep the men out of that part of the hut all day then so they couldn’t come in and have a look?

Well mind you, once the shaft was built they could close it up and there could be men working. And one interesting thing they did was that one day we thought security was fairly lax so they put on a fake escape. And four men got down the tunnel

13:00 and hid and then the Germans came and counted and there were four men missing. Most, every now and then a man came in with face wounds and he’d be, his identity card because we all were given those, would show a bandaged head with just eye holes. So that a man with an identity like that could go down the

13:30 tunnel and hide and the Germans wouldn’t know which man it was. So that very often if there was a count there’d be four men all the time down the tunnel. So they could be digging or making the pump to pump air through. They could be doing anything like that.

So you effectively had four extra bods all the time?

We did all the time in the camp. Yeah

How was this fake escape staged? Do

14:00 **you know that?**

Well I think that it was as simple as, all you had to was to say to the four men don’t come up out of the tunnel today. And when the, a pell, when the count was on the Germans would count and suddenly find there were four missing. They’d then go berserk and do another count and then they’d start checking up on photographs. And if you’ve got a thousand men it’s awfully easy to fiddle with photographs.

14:30 So that wasn’t a difficult thing at all.

Would you all be punished on a day like that? Would they say no you know Red Cross parcels for a month or something like that?

They did that often that sort of thing. And so we were a little more hungry than usual sometimes.

What would come in these Red Cross parcels?

Milk called Klim which is a powdered milk and that’s a reverse of the word milk of course. Peak Frean biscuits which were very highly valued. Very small tins about that round and that deep of tea and also of sugar. A tin of what we called connie-connie of condensed milk. Nothing,

15:30 no chocolate or anything like that. But we were allowed to have, to get chocolate in Red Cross parcels, in clothing parcels. So say my guardian sent me a parcel with singlets or shirts or something in it she would include half a dozen bars of chocolate in it too. But there was never anything glamorous like

16:00 you know, baked beans or boiled pineapple or anything like this. But things that we really needed. They were well thought out. Very well thought out.

In terms of communication with home

Yeah.

obviously Red Cross parcels are an essential communication to let you know that people are still thinkin' about you

Yeah.

Apart from the fact that they're keeping you alive? Your guardian could send you things

16:30 **and you said that a man wrote to you as a pen pal. So you had reasonably good communication with England?**

He only, he would only write. The only person that could send you a parcel would be your family. And the Germans were meticulous that a parcel would have to... It was called a clothing parcel. You could get one every 3 months and in a clothing parcel it could be all clothing except that there

17:00 could be chocolate in it as well. And of course with a bar of chocolate we used to sell it by what we called the nub and you could get almost anything. If someone gave you a bar of chocolate you could just about buy the camp with it. Because it was so valuable to bribe with but so valuable in the camp. We had a man who strangely enough was on

17:30 my squadron on 458. He was a Dutchman. He said his name was John Douglas which is hardly a Dutch name. He pretended he was a Scot and he had such a broad Dutch accent you could hardly understand him. But he set up a company called Food-Acco. Which was Food and Tobacco. Strangely enough in so many cases in the

18:00 war the big shortage was cigarettes. In Stalagluft 3 we had millions of cigarettes. We had so many that when we were vacating the camp we chucked all the surplus cigarettes into the, I told you before they called a saoug stella that's a firewater pool. They were pools about four times as big as this, ten feet deep so that

18:30 if there was a fire they could suck the water out of it. saoug stella it is. It means suck place. And we had, I can't remember what I was saying about the saoug stella?

Throwing cigarettes into it.

We packed the cigarettes in so they were a sodden mass. You could walk across it. But of course they were then no good to anyone, which is was what we did it for. Yeah.

So how did you end up with so many cigarettes?

19:00 Everybody used to sell, send cigarettes from home. Extraordinary.

This pen pal you had the fellow who wrote to you? Did a letter just arrive for you one day from him quite out of the blue?

Yes and he said something like, "I am the manager of..." and I can't even remember the company. "I am the Manager of such and such a company. Because of my position I cannot go to the war. I want to

19:30 bring a little enjoyment to a prisoner and," he said, "I don't know your name yet because I don't know whose getting the letter. Please write back to me." So strangely enough the letters were numbered and there were about, the one, the first one I got was number about 10. So I hadn't got the others but I then started to write and he was fantastic. He only sent letters when I was a prisoner. But

20:00 when I got out he supplied that car which he had hired and we drove all round England and Scotland for 3 or 4 weeks. Wonderful.

It's a wonderful gesture?

Yes marvellous.

What would he write to you? What could he tell you?

Mainly personal family things. Telling us who he was and what he was about. Strangely enough I can't even remember what. He was in a reserved occupation

20:30 and obviously felt badly about it but he really justified his existence by what he did for the two of us. The other man was a fellow from up near Orange. A New South Welshman called Geoff Patterson. And Geoff was a very close friend of mine and he was the man that when we when we finally were told that the war

21:00 was over in Tarmstethost he was the man that I walked right across to the Channel. He's the man that we used to be grabbed to have the DDT powder shoved down us. He was the man with me all the time. He unfortunately died about 5 or 6 years ago. Strangely enough I,

21:30 he's didn't draw. There's a picture of him in that book but it's not a finished picture. These people are

interesting because the end one, I won't say his name because his son whose, who wrote to me some years ago and said I hear you were a prisoner of war. My father was a prisoner of war did you know him?

22:00 And he's become quite a good friend. This is the son of that man. That man got married within a week of getting back to Australia and had such a terrible time I don't know why, that he committed suicide about a year later when his son was 6 months old. The next one is his name's,

Sorry to interrupt Bill but if you could look at me,

Oh yeah.

as opposed to the pictures.

22:30 **The camera won't be able to see your face I'm sorry. It's,**

OK. The next one is a man named Thwaites, Eastern Thwaites. He's still alive he lives in South Yarra. I talk to him about one a week. The next one was a Greek and he told the Germans his name was Alexandra. They got very cross and said it's not. It's Alexandratos. So he was a Greek. Very nice bloke. Died 5

23:00 years ago. The next one I think is still alive he was a... He grows Charolais cattle up in Queensland. The next one I haven't seen. The second last one is the nephew of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith. His name was Kingsford Smith. And the final one, oh I forget his name but... And then there are one or two round the corner. But you'll notice at the end there

23:30 there's a cutting out of the Australian magazine which features all of those. And as I said before they came back from the prison camp in the hollow bottom of a suitcase with a man who was being repatriated. So when I got back to Australia they'd all been published in the Australian Australasian. And then they arrived back here about I'd say 30 years ago which means

24:00 20 or 30 years after the war they just suddenly arrived here. So I had em framed and that's why they're there now. Extraordinary.

They're they, was it a touching or was it a moving moment when you finally received them again? Was it

It was yeah it was very interesting yes. It was good. It was good. Yeah.

I was just thinking about we were talking about

24:30 **what were we talking about in the camp there? Red Cross parcels. Red Cross that's it writing. What could you write to this gentleman in England? What could you tell him that the Germans would allow you to write?**

It's an interesting thing. In that book there are about, right in the centre somewhere, there are about five cuttings of letter that I wrote to my guardian. You had to write in pencil. And there was so little to tell them. So I used to always do a drawing of some sort,

25:00 a coloured water colour and there are half a dozen in that book. So we just would say you'd be surprised but the weather here's perfect. You know we feel so well. We've just had the biggest bash you could imagine. We've, we're eaten till we, which we just write absolute garbage because they knew perfectly well it wasn't true.

In the same way sorry if I'm

25:30 **jumping around here but I'm just I want to cover every thought as it comes up.**

That's all right.

In the same way as you managed you all managed to bribe Germans to give you the you know the good oil and get what you wanted did they try and bribe any of you?

Oh no. Well they had nothing, we'd, I say they had nothing we'd want. They had everything we'd want but you know you can't imagine a German coming up and saying I'll give you a Luger revolver

26:00 if you give me a tin of coffee. It didn't work that way. They, on the face of it were decent honest people until we got at them. Yeah.

And you mentioned that there were many or several radios in and around the camp

Yeah there were quite a lot of hidden radios. Yeah.

And you were in contact with England quite a lot?

With Air, with the with Air Ministry.

So you would know pretty much

26:30 **how the war was progressing?**

Oh we knew exactly how, and the Germans used to come and ask us.

Really?

Oh most definitely and we'd tell em because you couldn't believe their, there were 3 or 4 papers. There was a Forkshire Beerbuckter. The Frankfurter Zeitung. We used to get those two and the, it would have a story about the war which we knew was absolute garbage. It certainly wasn't what was happening at all. And it was very good to know that, although they said

27:00 this and if you just read that you'd think oh god the Germans are winning but if you knew what we heard from England you'd know perfectly well that the Germans were being beaten. And they were being beaten I would say from towards the end of '43 onward. I don't think they had anything happy to say after about the end of 1943.

And when you say the Germans knew you had them and they would ask you what was going on are we talking about low ranking

27:30 **Germans here or would the,**

Oh well the only Germans we had a bit of contact with the officers but generally it was just the guards who were just Wehrmacht, no just Luftwaffe ORs, other ranks.

And how would this news be disseminated amongst the Allied soldiers from whoever was running the radio? Was it just word of mouth?

Well we had, and there's one in there too, we had a magazine called

28:00 Scangriff. Now in the air force you scan a map. You get the good 'griff' that's the good information. So we called the magazine Scangriff. And of course scangruf is a German word meaning struggle. So it was a very good name and the magazine was called Scangriff and if you read it in there you'll see that it had all sorts of things. Some of which were true some

28:30 were just funny but there was always enough truth and we pinned these on the notice board. One man would type them and I would do the headings in coloured paint and perhaps do a little sketch and we would pin them on the notice board.

What were we talking about? Train of thought.

29:00 **So the we were talking about the magazine that you would produce**

That's right. Scangriff we were yes.

And was that a handwritten or print?

No it was typed because as I said we had several typewriters. One was what, I forget what you call it. But one we could use but we'd sworn that we'd never use it for escape purposes so we

29:30 would never use that typewriter for typing escape organisation outsvice anything like that. But the one we found on the train of course we could use for anything so that one of them was not usable the other was. So Scangriff was typed, and as I said I painted the headings and little sketches on them and so on.

And the Germans knew you had that magazine?

Oh yes there was no

30:00 doubt about that and they used to clamber to read it too. But of course we always used to put a lot of garbage in it so they never quite knew what was true. Although we had tame Goons that would come up to us and ask how's the war going? And we were able to tell them.

What does Goon stand for?

I beg your pardon?

What does Goon stand for?

Goon?

Is it a contraction?

No it's just a derogatory term for a German

30:30 Guard.

Like a clown or a fool?

Yes exactly. Exactly. In fact that 's a good expression because a Goon. You know the Goon Show that was clowns.

Did you have any entertainers any of note in Stalagluft 3?

Well we had and again one of those books is entirely about the theatre. We had a wonderful theatre. We really did. Excellent theatre. And when I was shot down I had in my pocket tickets for

31:00 a film for a theatre show in London called 'Arsenic and Old Lace'. And when I arrived in Stalagluft 3 which was almost 2 years after I'd left England 'Arsenic and Old Lace' was on in the theatre at Stalagluft 3 and really they did them well. I was very much involved in the theatre.

31:30 I did the sets. I used to help with the sets. I used to help with make up. You'd have been intrigued. We use to, for instance in those days women's, do they have a seam on stockings nowadays? We used to put, we made up makeup out of German margarine and distemper paint. And it was so potent that if a man left it on for too long it would burn

32:00 his legs or his face wherever you put it. But we we'd cover their legs with this make up we made and then we would draw a line right up the back of the leg for the seam of the stocking. Extraordinary.

This is obviously for the fellas who are playing females parts?

Yes, yes.

Not as a general daily operation?

They, we had a couple of men who really played woman's part very well. Very well indeed. Again there's a photo of a

32:30 couple of them in there. Very, very well done. Some of them of course looked absolutely gawkish. Because but I s'pose when you're in there. We hadn't seen a woman for so many years. We hardly knew what they looked like.

Well what would if you hadn't seen a woman for so many years and these men look and are acting very much like women was anybody ever tempted?

Was any?

Anybody every tempted to?

Never. Again in this article that I was sent from England that got here yesterday

33:00 it says in it in one of the headings that homosexuality was rife in prison camps. That's absolute garbage. I was there for 3 years and I never, never, never saw the slightest suspicion of homosexuality. And I would be prepared to say that in the camps that I was in I would bet you any money that it never occurred. Maybe it did say in some of them but. It says extraordinary things

33:30 like people bribing the Germans to let them have intercourse with people and so on which is rubbish. Oh I've done it again. But no I think that, well imagine anyway in a room this big with 8 or 9 men in it you know you'd be pretty clever to be having sex with anyone in it. Extraordinary.

Yes

34:00 **I'm sure you you'd have to be**

Absolute garbage.

Very clever indeed.

Yeah.

What about in the in the camp I noticed in your log book some Christmas Day menus. Were they what you would like to have had on Christmas Day?

No every Christmas and most of those I painted. There was one painted by Earl Haig. But every Christmas we would have a special Christmas feast. Now

34:30 the only food we had was food we'd saved up from our Red Cross parcels and some of the things that we ate which are written there. For instance one is sausies fancu. The translation of that is arse end sausage.

That's right.

It was called that because we had a sausage that long and we had to cut it into seven pieces. You know eight

35:00 Pieces, six pieces yeah but not seven. So that the we would take it in turns and the mess was the number of men in your room and we would just... Today that man would have first choice and, but it would be cut up by the last man to choose. So he made sure the pieces were very accurate and tomorrow that man would be first and so on

35:30 round the room so that you got a good share of the, of the any luxuries there were.

Was Christmas a time when would it would you all be celebrating at that stage or was it a dark

reminder?

Yeah because we had saved up a lot of food and we even the Christmas bash that we had was better than our normal meal. And you

36:00 know some people would've one man in the room might have got 2 quarter pound blocks of chocolate a week before in a clothing parcel. So he would be sharing it with us and we did very well with that sort a thing. Very good.

Just one last question before this tape finishes. The Goons on the whole were Goons and the Ferrets were not much better apparently?

Well the ferrets were Goons. All the Germans were Goons.

Were there any of the Ferrets though or Goons

36:30 **whichever who were particularly good at their job that you had to really keep an eye on?**

Yes there was a man called Rubber-neck and he was particularly good and strangely enough he was very highly regarded by a lot of the Prisoners. Because at the end of the war or about a year after the war he came to England and joined the Royal Air Force. Which to me was extraordinary that they let him. But he was very well regarded

37:00 by most of the prisoners. I never regarded any German well but he was very well thought of.

In what context? In the way you respect a strong enemy?

And he was he was very sensible. You see a man could do his job as a German perfectly but do it so justly that that the all the Brit prisoners admired him for what he did and the way he did it. It was

37:30 just appreciation of him doing his job in a very good way.

And I suppose you had no respect for the men you'd bribed either they were just?

None at all. None at all.

Just fools?

And we were prepared to report them if they didn't do what we wanted.

Was there any cases where you had to report men?

Not that I know of. None of the one's that I was in contact with ever failed to do what we wanted.

And were there

38:00 **any guards who were what's the word? Who were sadistic. Who would who would treat you particularly badly?**

No I think that the treatment they'd have got was so bad that they wouldn't have risked that.

The treatment from the,

From the prisoners. Because you know you have, you see the Jap prisoners couldn't have done what we did because they were starved and weak

38:30 and in a very bad unfortunate position. But we were not like that and I think if any German had tried anything on the prisoners he'd have had a very rough time.

Do you think are you suggesting they like they might've killed him or what would they have done?

I don't know . I think that probably that went on but we wouldn't know about it.

39:00 Yeah

You really think that might have gone on?

I do think it might of yeah. This I think that if it did happen they would end up in the aborte and the aborte was the toilet and it was this deep in filth. Which the poor Russians used to come out and pump out 'bout once a fortnight. And

39:30 I would think that if anybody did anything they shouldn't have they'd of ended up in under that. They wouldn't have lasted 2 seconds in there.

Oh you said earlier you think that's where that German spy might have ended up?

Yes I think it he might have ended up there. Yes

Just finally for this tape. Or actually that that'll do. That's fine thanks.

Tape 8

00:31 **I wanted to ask you. We're rolling now. All right. Based on the content of that joke you said there was no homosexuality but the men weren't so starved as to not have had a libido like they were in the Japanese prisoner of war camp. So what did they do?**

I have no idea. But you never saw any sign of sex. You never saw anything. You never heard anything. People didn't tell dirty jokes all the time.

They never told dirty jokes?

01:00 No.

Ever?

Well we never knew heard of any to tell. This again this thing that arrived yesterday. It's got this extraordinary thing about see that that homosexuality was rife in the camp. But it's garbage. It couldn't have been.

What about solo relief shall we call it?

01:30 Not that I knew of you know. Maybe. But I always thought that it was hunger that you never worried about that. Truly.

Well I'm prepared to belief that. That if you're that hungry then that's where you preoccupations lie but?

I say again. I beg your pardon?

I'm prepared to believe that you know if you're that hungry that's where your preoccupations?

And what about the Jap prisoners? Surely they were too hungry to worry about anything like that.

We, we've heard both. We've heard accounts that there was nothing of that kind. That they were too weak and too deprived to manage

02:00 **that. But we've also heard and had eye witness say that they saw that and that they were accosted by. So you know maybe that was early on in the piece**

Well

before they were really hungry?

Maybe I was blind or something but.

What was and there was bromide I think put in people's diets too to reduce their libido's on ships and so on so. It's an interesting subject if you really want to get into it I suppose. And what about women then I'm sure you didn't lay eyes on any but

02:30 **were did men ever talk about their girlfriends or their wives to each other?**

Well again in this thing that came yesterday it mentions a thing that I never saw. It says that in Stalagluft 3 there was a, I forget what it calls it. But a list on the wall of men and photographs of their wives or fiancée's or girlfriends who had written to them and said,

03:00 "I've got someone else." And it says there was a list and once you heard that you put your partners name up and sympathised with all the other people whose names were up. But I've never seen that list. I've never heard of that.

I don't even know why you would do that. Just to add your list to you know to heartbreak wall or something. That seems odd.

Nor do I. But it definitely says that and

03:30 I think that's one of the things I think is garbage too. Cause this article, I was talking to my English friend last night and he had sent this and it just happened I got it yesterday and we were discussing it and he said well I very much… He like me, I'm just going to number various things in the article. It's a very big 2 page article,

04:00 I'm going to number them and write comments on them because it's to me terribly important that we don't let absolute garbage go out.

Have you, have you bumped into anybody who have been you know making the most of you know telling stories that really didn't happen to them? Had you met any vicarious?

No. Frankly this sounds egotistical. I haven't heard many people

04:30 talk on a prison camp except me.

Okay.

I really and truly don't know of anyone. For instance my friend Thwaite's who lives in South Yarra I'm sure has never talked about it. Even the POWs that were at this reunion in Sydney just before the Olympic Games none of them ever talked about it. And really it, unless you're in the

05:00 Great Escape there was nothing much to talk about.

I guess not. I wanted to ask you where you first where you picked up that log book?

The, unfortunately that book has had a new cover put on it. A leather cover. But it was sent to. Every prisoner of war got a blank book like that sent by the Canadian YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] and you'll see in the front it says

05:30 give to the Canadian YMCA so everybody was sent one. And so when I got it I started doing drawings and paintings. People would come up to me and say do me a drawing in my log book. I'd say what do you want? Because you know there was nothing much to write. Usually they wanted to me to do a picture of how they were shot down and then as there was no one to do it in my book I would copy what I'd done in theirs. So most of these

06:00 are copies of what I've done in someone else's book. Sadly not many people. See we walked from, for a long time from the Polish camp and we were, I weighed 11 stone. You didn't want to go carrying heavy things like that.

No.

So not many of the blokes brought their books with them. I did.

How did you get your hands on the paints?

06:30 When I'd been in the in Germany for not very long, a few months, a Red Cross delegate came into the camp and someone told him that I did drawings and sketches so he got me that paper. That's why there are only about 12 of those because I had no more paper. And he gave me a,

07:00 probably the best set of water colours I've ever owned. They were very, very good water colours.

They were pretty good quality by the looks of them.

They were. Well you notice they haven't even faded in the book and it's 60 years old.

Pretty good.

They were marvellous and then shortly after every bloke was given a blank book. Now that book originally had a very interesting linen cover with a Canadian oak leaf

07:30 printed on the front and written under it a wartime log. Unfortunately my book was handled so much in the last 60 years the cover just faded away. So had it rebound in that many years ago.

And when all of these chaps wanted their portraits done did they first of all did was there any payment or trading done?

No

It was a gift from you to them?

No I just, they were

08:00 mainly fairly close friends of mine and I just decided perhaps it was easier to do that man maybe. See some of them were in my room some of them were very great friends. Some of them were right bastards that I often wonder why I did them.

Did they sit for them or do you just?

Oh no they sat for them. Yeah they sat for them

So when they sat for them did you have a bit of a chat about things

08:30 **and the way things were going? Like would you converse?**

Well yeah but there was not much point in doing that. You see the first portrait I ever painted was that the third man along. The one side on smoking a cigarette. That's, I'd never tried to do that. Not even at the art school. I'd done nudes but never portraits. And from then on I thought, "Oh, that's easy." So I started doing all the rest. They are surprisingly like

09:00 the ones that are still alive, it still looks very like them. That man Thwaites the second one, it's very like him still.

Well one of them looks like Paul Newman but it's not?

No it certainly isn't.

Were there ever any female guards?

No definitely not.

So no German females what so ever?

The, we were in the middle of a pine forest and they'd cut out all the pine trees so

09:30 every now and then there'd be a pine stump which we would then cut out and use for fuel. So through the wire and through the pine forest there was not a camp but a place where the female workers of the camp worked. And we used to say, "Oh God, I saw a woman through there." You know, we'd make a big thing of it.

10:00 We saw a woman through the pine trees today. And really you think from, I suppose when we were travelling, and from Sulmona we probably saw one or two on the railway station. But once inside a camp never, never, never saw a woman.

I read also that some unfortunate Airman ended up in concentration camps and I'm wondering any ever turned up from Buchenwald?

10:30 Two or three of them were in I can't pronounce it. Sachsenhausen. Because one particular man escaped from Sachsenhausen which is never done before and he was recaptured and they told him if he just even got his nose outside he'd be shot. Then they used him as a he was fairly senior and they used

11:00 him as a… They hoped that they would be able to bribe the British with these very senior British officers. And this man he was an incredible man. I had a bit to do with him in England 9 years ago at the 50th memorial service. And he wore a monocle which is to me big stuff. It tickles me pink.

11:30 **Cause you think that's great or cause you think he's a jerk?**

Oh no. Oh he was no jerk believe me. And usually the Englishmen that wear a monocle they are not a jerk. We had one out here a great friend of mine who was he died a year or so ago. Who was not a POW but he was a wing commander in the Royal Air Force who married an Australian nurse from the desert and his name was Franklin Jones,

12:00 and he always wore a monocle and he did it with aplomb too.

I might give it a go some day if I need.

He did it very well.

While they were getting ready to escape it was it was a long time that they were preparing this. Where you there when they discovered that the tunnel it think it was Dick they discovered the Germans discovered it?

No it was before we got there.

Oh okay.

We were there

12:30 when they suddenly realised that they the Germans were building a new compound round one of the tunnels. I forget what the name of that was.

Okey dokes. All right then I wouldn't mind talking about the selection process. The you know what ever straw poll you did you get your number 86. How did they operate that and how did they keep it quiet at the same time?

Well the

13:00 VIPs had to go out. There was no, the senior British officers got a list of who had to go out and it consisted of most of the of Big-X. Most of the men who were in charge of the escapes organisation. Quite a few of the men who'd been in for almost 5 years. The all the senior British officers. A couple of group captains and a

13:30 couple of wing commanders. They we were told they had to go out, and at a guess and I'm not sure of this but at a guess I'd say they number about 46 to 55. We were then told that there would now be a draw and anyone who wanted to escape could submit their name and how they were going to escape. I was what they called a

14:00 hard-arser. I was going to walk across. I wasn't going to mind you I'd have never got there. Nor of course did most of them but. So I put my name in. I told them that I was going to walk and that I was going to wear a uniform. Because a lot of people chose to go out in civvies. So one day they published a list and my number was 86.

14:30 Although this thing says that the tunnel was closed at 87. This article which is again garbage.

I read another that said it was about 76 that closed and?

No 76 got away. That meant that there were 9 around the top of the tunnel and I was the tenth. But these people the Germans caught

15:00 10 around the tunnel including me.

I'm interrupting just for a moment but it just made me think of something. In your log book there's a letter of promotion in about

Yeah that was extraordinary. Nobody ever got those. I've never heard of anyone getting that.

It struck me as very odd that

Pardon?

It struck me as odd?

Yeah to me too that. Firstly that the Brits wrote, bothered to send it to Germany and

15:30 secondly that the Germans gave it to me.

So did that mean that your pay your deferred pay that you obviously weren't receiving in prison did that mean that it would've suddenly gone up?

Well I was a PO [Pilot Officer] when I was shot down and but automatically a pilot officer after 6 months is automatically a Flying officer. My pay automatically went up after 6 months. Well after one month because I'd been a POW

16:00 for 4 or 5 months been a PO, I mean. And then when I'd been a flying officer for I think it was I forget 18 months, 2 years or something, one automatically became a flight lieutenant and that's what happened to me.

Well getting back to the selection after the

16:30 **200 or so were chosen was there any sense among the men that they ought to be going and that they weren't chosen? Was there any animosity or?**

I didn't hear anything like that. But mind you I said there was a, I said there was a list, I don't mean there was a list on the wall. Someone apparently, I can't even remember how but someone must have come and said you're number 86. Because I had no clue

17:00 as to who else was in the Great Escape. I really didn't. The man in the next bunk might have been going for all I knew.

When did you receive word of the date?

Of the?

The date of escape?

I think either late the night before or early that morning.

So was there a few weeks where you were contemplating you know the possibility of going out within 24 hours?

Not really. We,

17:30 one secretly thought the tunnel must be just about to break now. The weather is such that it would be a good time to go now. But you see you never discussed it with anyone. The first time anyone would have known that I was going was when on the morning of the escape. Because of course they had to get a couple of hundred men out of the hut and the 200 or so

18:00 that were going to escape into the hut. Because there was no movement from one hut to another during the night hours. So that we would never have discussed it. I would have never known if everyone else in my room might have been going and I wouldn't have known. And really the first time one knew who had gone was when they read the death names of the 50 that were shot and

18:30 then we heard that probably 10 or 15 were in the cooler. And so we slowly got the names of the people that were involved.

So was there any kind of tension in the air a sort of a sense of excitement about the fact that it was going on? In a small world like a camp you imagine there'd be a real (UNCLEAR)?

Yeah but everybody didn't know. You see all the people that were shifting from one hut to another.

19:00 All the people in my room would finally, the very last minute, know that I was going because I gave me log book to someone and all my belongings which were very few, I gave to people. And so they would know I was going and you would know that someone is suddenly going from there to that hut and you'd realise that is where the escape is

19:30 going from. See we didn't even know which hut the escape was from, cause the security was so good.

What about the business of storing food and compressing it and taking it in tins?

Yeah we made in, you know those square cocoa tins? We made a horrible brew which they assured us would if... You could only eat a teaspoon of it. It was terribly rich but

20:00 they said it would last you for weeks and weeks.

So again who made that and wasn't that a bit of a give away?

I think we even made it ourselves.

Would you have to do that in private in secret?

No because we would only do it at the very last minute.

OK. So the business of getting all the men all the escapees into the hut how did they operate that then?

Well they did it slowly over the day.

20:30 It had to be done in daylight because we knew first thing in the morning it was going to break that night. So that we knew we had to get everybody out of that hut and there were obviously not 200 spaces in a hut. I don't know the number but it was probably only about

21:00 what would there be? There were probably only about 130 or so in a hut so you had to get all of them out. And one or two might live there anyway and you had to have them. The hut was absolutely crowded with people, with 200.

21:30 So there were the first lot to go out were sitting round the tables in each room. In fact I think the first lot were sitting on the floor. The second lot were round the tables. The third lot were in the beds because it could be that they wouldn't go out till quite late at night. As it was of course I, number 86 went out at about five or six in the

22:00 morning.

Which was hours after many hours after you expected to go?

Oh lord I was to go out at about 10 o'clock.

Now I also read there were three tunnels originally. One was discovered and the other housed all the extraneous clothing and materials and equipment that you needed. So how did how did you get the stuff from the third tunnel into the hands of the escapees before they went through?

Well because the third tunnel wasn't, the second tunnel wasn't discovered.

22:30 So all we had to do was to go down it and grab the things and bring em up.

But where was the entrance compared to the entrance of Harry?

I don't know. I knew where the one that was discovered was. But I have no idea where the other went. But it came up, it was about to break when they built the compound round the exit. So that it was absolutely useless there was nothing could be done about that.

I know I'm being a pedant but I'm wondering how they matched the belongings to the number of the person who was escaping without

23:00 **revealing who they were and what they were doing and synchronised all of that to get the material for the goods for the night of the escape?**

No I'm not with you with that at all.

Well say all the all the tunnel exits are in three different spots and nobody but a few know where they are but one of them's holding all the clothing and the equipment and the passport papers and so on?

But it wasn't. It wasn't like that.

Right.

And every

23:30 man looked after his own stuff. Cause right at the last minute I was given a letter to Krupps Works. A forged outsvice. A sort of a passport which I could show the police. My letter saying I didn't speak any German. But so I had everything of my own. I had it all the time. No one ever had it for me.

OK.

24:00 **So before you were leaving is it possible to say farewell when you're handing over your log**

books and things to people? Do you is there?

Oh yes, of course because when I left the hut I said to one a the other men in it now here's me log book, bring it back if you possibly can. Here are, you had very few belongings but you gave them to someone on. And they knew that if you didn't get away

24:30 you'd ask for them back. There's no doubt about that. I gave my paints and things like that to someone. I can't even remember who.

Was it a little difficult to say goodbye?

Again I can't remember. Probably it was a joy. Probably everyone was saying you know you lucky bugger aren't you.

So they

25:00 **the last minutes well not the last minutes you were there for hours waiting. I'm curious about the Allied air bombing that night. You'd said earlier that there was a lot of radio contact going on between the camp and Britain?**

Yes. But they didn't tell us that that there was going to be an air raid on Sagan. And if they had if we had known I'm sure we wouldn't have gone that night because the important thing about that

25:30 was to. Gee wiz I'm getting senile. The important thing was to have light in the tunnel and the tunnel was connected to the power supply in the town of Sagan. I dunno how, and so that we knew that if there was an air raid the lights would all go out and then

26:00 we'd be in trouble trying to light the tunnel. And that's why we had to use these fat lamps.

So it was a bit of a bit of bad timing. Are you a superstitious man? Did you notice any omens?

I'm sorry any omens?

Yeah did you notice any

About what?

Well were there any indicators to suggest that this perfectly planned operation

26:30 **was going to run foul so soon?**

No. We knew it wasn't going to fail. We didn't, there was no way I would expect to get… You think how far Poland is from the Channel. I dunno how many thousand miles but it's many thousands and to have got across Germany meant that for,

27:00 to walk that distance even in good weather you'd be seen by hundreds of people. We knew this but I think the thing that not many people realised was that even with 50 deaths this was a huge success. Because it occupied, I've seen a report it was, that said 100,000 Germans looking for the escapees.

27:30 Now to take 100,000 troops away from the middle of a very big war is a wonderful thing. I believe it was a huge success because of that alone.

So can you tell me a little about what it was like when you know you finally got the word to go down. You'd been waiting all that time. Had you been wondering what was going on apart from the air raid? Had you been

No we knew that, we knew what had caused the hold ups. We knew that the tunnel had collapsed

28:00 several times we knew that the electricity had gone off because of the air raid and. I must admit that it was so long and I was so late I didn't think I'd be going at all. Because even when I went down the entrance shaft it was almost broad daylight and by the time I

28:30 got through to the other end it was broad daylight. And in fact the German had seen the men coming up out of the ground. I told, I think I said before we had a rope from there to the trees and a man in charge of every eight would count the people going past and when eight had gone he'd whip them through the forest hoping to get them away.

What can you recall what was going through your mind that night then when it was getting

29:00 **later and later and your chances were slipping away?**

No. No I can't remember. I probably just was thinking you know it's nearly daylight it's bloody silly to go now. Probably that was the thought.

What about when you got back up and the cat was out of the bag did you start sweating bullets thinking?

I panicked when I, when they started to shoot down the shaft, the exit shaft,

29:30 and of course I thought that they'd come down the ladder and then shoot up the tunnel. But they were very crafty the men who built the tunnel just did it very slightly like that not much so that you couldn't shoot along it. And of course there was no men in the halfway house to tow you along so it was a matter of crawling all the way and, I'm no hero. I really was very frightened

30:00 man. Very frightened.

What happened when you got out the other side and the Germans were searching and the gig was up?

Well, we the Germans at that stage hadn't found out which hut it went from. Pardon me. So they, it wasn't for an hour or two that they suddenly realised that it was from that particular hut. And they found out by getting everybody

30:30 out of all of the huts and then seeing the way that people were dressed. If they were not dressed they thought they'd been in bed all night. So they knew that it was from that hut and that's when the poor little man crawled back along the tunnel. And then so after about I think a day, they begged us to open it and we did this. We opened the tunnel and he was able to come up.

Was there any reprisals

31:00 **likely to take place among the men?**

Well an awful lot were put in the cooler. Everybody who'd been caught. Because I wasn't caught, I wasn't caught ,I wasn't put in the cooler. But everybody who was caught round the top of tunnel was sent to the cooler. I forget, I think they probably cut out Red Cross parcels for a week or something like that. Can't remember that.

Just to deviate for a second did you meet anyone inside who had

31:30 **come into the clutches of the German Secret Police or the Gestapo?**

No because most of them that were in the hands of the Gestapo were, or in the hands of the SS, were people that got into the hands of those people after the Great Escape. So that and we didn't see them.

32:00 They kept them away from they well they put them in concentration camps Sachsenhausen and so we didn't see them.

What was the morale like after the escape? Was there a fantastic buzz of victory?

Oh we thought we were, we thought we were marvellous. We were absolutely shattered when a few days after the escape the Commandant Von Lindener said

32:30 that 30 men had been killed trying to escape. The senior British officer said, "How many were injured?" And he told us none. And you know you don't kill everybody when you, they're trying to escape. That shattered us but we still thought it was a wonderful effort and that, we imagined that... See 76 had got away.

33:00 They'd only caught 30 and shot 30, there was still a lot that might get back. And we were shattered to find out months later to find out I think three, two to Holland and one to Norway, did get home. Out of all those men. And that they'd shot 50 not just 30.

When you say you were shattered I would say that would be an understatement?

It was an understatement. It was a

33:30 terrible blow to us. And it made those of us that cursed because we hadn't got out, realise how very fortunate we were. Because there's no question about it that. We found that the Germans firstly shot most of the, most of the foreigners they shot and then they shot the

34:00 unmarried men. And you know I thought to myself I'm not married I would've been one of them. Whether you would've been or not is a moot point but that was the way we thought.

It's a strange justice you know. Metering out mercy to men who aren't married and to men who are married you know it just is so extreme war?

Well mind you Hitler said in the first place, and I mentioned this before that

34:30 that every man that was caught was to be shot. And it was only when, whose the fat man? I can't remember his name. I remembered it this morning.

Goering?

Anyway the man in charge of the Luftwaffe, he objected very strongly to Hitler saying he'd shoot the, that they were to shoot them all. And

35:00 it was then put taken out of the hands of the Gestapo and put into the hands of the Luftwaffe and they would only. Hitler finally said you've got to shoot 50. So they did. So that's why all the rest were able to

get back or most of the rest were able to get back to the camp.

When they came back were they interrogated by their own kind first? And I use interrogated lightly?

No they were shoved straight into the cooler. We didn't see them for

35:30 2 or 3 weeks when they were brought back to the camp. When they were captured.

And were you able to talk to any of them when they got out?

Not until 2 or 3 weeks.

But you personally were you did you talk to some of them?

As I say.

Yes

Not for two to, and then I talked to a lot of them and, some of them got such a long way. Some of them got almost to the Channel. Some of them did a marvellous job. Some of them didn't. I would've imagined they'd go from Poland across to the Channel. But some of them went exactly the opposite way which is probably sensible. But yes, and the one's that we talked to had an had extraordinary experiences. They really did. Yep.

36:30 **You were also decimated in terms of top ranking officers at that point as well. Was how was that felt amongst the troops?**

Well we had enough senior officers for the. For instance, and you mentioned his name before. Starts with a W. The man in charge of the camp. The senior British

37:00 officer he was one that was sent to a concentration camp. But we had an Australian then that came up very quickly and was then the senior British officer in the camp. So that there were plenty of others to take their place.

Was there any talk of escape after that?

No we were told by the British we were not to try and escape.

That's

37:30 **right.**

We were forbidden. But we still, we wondered what would happen when the war finished so we dug a tunnel from the theatre. The theatre was, we were given a hut to make into a theatre and of course we scraped out the dirt there and built it up there so that the theatre was like that. We

38:00 we had a tunnel going from under these seats and, which was incredible because even when the German officer was sitting screaming with laughter at one of our plays there were men feet from them digging a tunnel. We had this just in case, at the end of the war they tried to do something to the surviving prisoners. But of course

38:30 this came to nothing when we were moved out of the camp at the end of January '45.

Okay. That's...

Tape 9

00:30 **Long day, isn't it? Rolling. So in that in that final year and in particular that final winter before the Russian offensive began I read about the lectures of Colonel Dean?**

Yeah.

Can you talk a little about that?

Well I forget the dates but probably at a guess 6 or 8 months before the end of the war Colonel Dean who was a paratrooper

01:00 came into the camp as a prisoner and he gave us a lecture on the probably outcome of the war. He said it would end in I think he said it was May and he was absolutely spot on

He was.

Because as you know it finished on what 4th or 5th or something of May. But he told us the probable outcome of the war. We were absolutely delighted and we were at a stage where we were prepared to believe anything.

01:30 So it was wonderful to hear from him that's what he thought. Because he was a man, he was quite senior, he'd been in a lot of the Offensives and we felt that if he says it's going to end in about May that's when it will end. It was a bit of a shock to be moved out when the Russians came because we thought we wanted to wait here 'til the end of the war but as it happened we had a lot of

02:00 walking to do. We were very short of food for the last, from February. From January when the Russians chased us out until May we had a pretty torrid time but it was wonderful to know that it was very close to the end. Because we had great confidence in what he'd told us.

I just remembered also as you mentioned that that after the escape almost a year earlier

02:30 **your commandant who'd considered a reasonable man he was moved on was he not? I don't know whether he was**

The German commandant? Von Lindener

Yeah yeah?

Yes he was. He I think he was even tried as a as a traitor or something extraordinary like that. I can't remember what happened to him. But he was good. He was a very pleasant man.

And the next fellow you got what was he like?

He was much tougher. But

03:00 the war was changing so much that he couldn't be very tough. Because he knew damn well that unless things were very changed he was going to be a prisoner of the Brits shortly. So that moderated his ardour considerably. I can't remember his name

Yes I've always found it fascinating that the Japanese basically didn't adhere to the Geneva Convention. They'd never signed to it so they really never bothered with it?

They didn't agree at all to it.

It still strikes me as fascinating

03:30 **that in a war situation there are still rules and that the Germans actually kept to them a lot of the time?**

To some of them yes. Yes it is amazing isn't it? Mind you Hitler didn't and it was only that, you see I think things like the man in charge of the Luftwaffe. Gosh I should remember his name.

Was it Goering?

What?

Was it Goering?

Goering you're quite right. That men like Goering knew perfectly well that if

04:00 if the Germans were tough on Allied prisoners there was a good chance that the Brits would do the same. Now we knew the Brits wouldn't. There's no way the British would go shooting prisoners just because the Germans had done that but and mind you this book Extemporary Justice shows what the British did to make sure that the people who were involved

04:30 in shooting the prisoners were all caught. And you see the only one's that were not caught were the one's who had been caught by the Russians and were in Russian camps. Cause all the others were, well a lot were hung. A lot were given quite long sentences. Some of them should of got more severe penalties but managed to get away with it. But

05:00 you should one day try and read that book 'Exemplary Justice' it's not available to buy but it's in most libraries and it really is a wonderful book. By it's by a bloke called Allen Andrews. Printed Published by Harod.

Yeah. Since we've started this project my reading list has kind of,

Yes I'm sure it would of. I'm sure it would of.

Did Colonel Dean guess accurately what the Russians would do?

05:30 No that didn't come into it really. His, that didn't come into his talk at all.

So did you have any idea from the radio or from any other scuttlebutt that dealing with the Russians was not going to be any picnic?

No. I think that the... When we heard that the Russians were about 10 or 12 miles away we were quite prepared to leave the Germans and go back to the

06:00 Russians. Cause we thought we'd be quite safe there but the, on our radios the Royal Air Force said that no man was to go back to the Russians. About half a dozen did and they were never heard of again.

Never. So that the advice we were given by the Royal Air Force was quite right. And so we just got to hell away from the Russians. And of course some of the men, we didn't

06:30 all go back together. There were groups and you can, there are books from various men who were in our camp showing that they went out quite a different way from us. And some of them were caught by the Russians and had a quite a frightening time. We had nothing to do with them. We never saw them. So for us it was pretty good.

07:00 **How did it come about and what was it like when the German commandant the new fella explained that you were all gonna have to march to it was Mos, Muscow you said?**

Muscow. He didn't say we'd march to Muscow. He just we were just told not by the commandant by the guards that the Russians were about 10 miles away and that we were to leave within an hour.

Gee they left it till the last minute didn't they?

Absolutely. And,

07:30 well I don't, perhaps they didn't even know till the last minute. So we were told to pack what food we could carry and any of our belongings and when the hour elapsed we were told we weren't going then. We were going, and it's in the book, I forget how long, but we were going in about another 2 hours, so couple of hours later we set off. Which was of course the first time we'd been outside the camp for a couple of years.

Well there's a few things

08:00 **to ask there. First is an odd question but what was your footwear like at this point? Were you still wearing those tight shoes from the Italian fellow?**

Oh no. Because I can't remember why but I'd had clogs for a while and I think probably my family must have sent some because I know my footwear was quite good. As a matter of fact I think we certainly, I

08:30 coped with the march very well. I came out of the prison camp weighing 11 stone now,

That's not too bad really for a prisoner is it not?

Not too bad at all. Now in this operation, these two operations I've had in the last 6 months I've lost over 2 stone and I now weigh about 12 stone. So I was thinner than this. Because really I'm absolutely cadaverous now. So I must have been very thin then. Mind

09:00 you the men who are very thin did better than the bigger one's because they had to carry so much weight round. And a lot of them especially the men that had only been in the prison camp for say a year they had a very rough time.

What about your muscle tone? Did you have any condition?

Oh no none at all. None at all.

The reason that I ask is because you hadn't been sent out on work parties then you weren't all none of you were necessarily

09:30 **used to that sort of long stretch?**

But we never, we were not allowed to work.

No I know. But what I mean is suddenly then you have to walk miles and miles and miles in harsh conditions?

Yeah. Well we seemed to cope very well. Because as I said and there's a diary in that book of exactly what we walked. But I would say that we walked about thirty 33 miles a day for the first 3 days and then we were put into

10:00 cattle trucks.

And some of that was through 4 foot of snow?

Yeah.

I don't know how you walked through 4 foot of snow?

Well no the roads wouldn't have 4 feet on them,

Okay.

because the traffic that'd been on it. So that unless we got out to the side we wouldn't. We'd be trudging through a bit of snow but. And of course we had wet feet all the time and this was one of the problems. That your feet

10:30 got wet and when you stopped walking the icicles formed between you're toes. And if you weren't very

careful you cut your feet when you started walking again. And we knew of this and we'd been warned of this so we just were terribly careful to almost warm our feet up before we started so that they were just wet and not with ice in them.

What other survival tricks did you use to survive that part?

Say again?

What other

11:00 **survival tricks did you use?**

I dunno. We just we just walked and were glad of it.

Sure. You said there weren't many German guards and they were all really old fellas?

They were the Fauksterm the Old Men's Army and we used to well quite honestly we used to carry their rifles for em.

Which as you can imagine how ludicrous that seems from this end

It does.

of the story?

And people say, well why didn't you turn round and shoot the bastards?

11:30 But why shoot them near Poland when they were trying to take you 100 miles a day closer to the Channel. Why not wait and shoot them later?

Any idea why they didn't just leave you to the Russians and take themselves off?

Yes because they considered that aircrew were very valuable as a…

Were they were going to repat [repatriate] you or swap you?

Yeah they would. See there were a lot of very famous... For instance one of

12:00 the men was Churchill.

That's right he was a relative of Churchill's was he not?

Yeah. And there were a lot of people like that. Well the man in the next bed to me in Italy was an army man and there's a drawing of his in that book. The Earl Haig who was the son of the Earl Haig from the First War. Now these men were considered by the Germans very valuable.

In fact wasn't there a botched repatriation of Churchill's

12:30 **was it his nephew or his cousin or the fellow that?**

I think ultimately they found he was no relation at all or something like that, but they, a lot of those men were sent to Colditz. But the reason that they didn't just let the Russians get to us was they thought we'd be a good bargaining, a valuable bargaining tool. So

13:00 they didn't so they hung onto us.

So when I mean the Brits were advancing and they were bombing were the Russians bombing from overhead as well?

When the Brits were?

Around about where you at Trent, Trenthaust, or I think that's where you were about then. After Muscow the Brits were advancing and they were bombings. There were Allied air bombings.

We were a couple of people were killed in a Royal Air Force

13:30 strafing not bombing. The Russians never strafed us because the only time we were near the Russians the weather was so foul the aircraft couldn't see us. So we got, then after the third day we were put onto cattle trucks and we then got right away from the Russians. Cause you know in a train going away from them you're going much more quickly than the army can march.

I'd

14:00 **like for you, if you could, to describe the point where the British pamphlets start falling from the skies and you realise that it's over? Was it**

Well that's not when we realised it was over. We realised that. The pamphlets were dropped on us when we were in Lubeck telling the Allies, the Germans, that any German found moving prisoners would be shot without a trial.

14:30 I was going to say something else and now I forget it.

Well it's its almost towards the end of you're your time in camp

It was very near the end of the war. Ask that question again.

I wanted to ask you if you could describe the point where those pamphlets dropped,

Yeah

and what that must have meant for you?

Yeah. As soon as the

15:00 British dropped the pamphlets on Lubeck saying that the Germans moved us very smartly out of Lubeck down to, I can't remember which. The first one we went to from Sagan was Trenthorst or Tarmstethaust. I can't remember which. The one we went to then when we left Lubeck and walked back down to the south, was the other one. It, one of them was an enormous communal farm

15:30 where every winter they used to keep about a thousand cattle in sheds and we lived in those sheds. Really the Germans didn't do anything to us after the Brits had dropped the pamphlets on us. So we just were marched right away from the danger area if you like. And we were

16:00 down to that place probably a week away from Lubeck when suddenly this little man in a tank rolled in, in a tank and said you're free and that was the end of the war. So that's how we found the war finished.

What nationality was the little man in the tank?

A Brit. And Englishman in a British tank. He just came in and went rolled through the wire and through the gate and flattened everything. You're free.

16:30 **Why does that upset you particularly?**

I don't know. It really does. It upsets me a lot. But it was it was incredible day, incredible day. And the all the Germans were giving themselves up and offering us anything we they had and, we got Leica cameras and Luger revolvers and we stole motor cars and... Incredible. We waited for the Brits to take us home

17:00 and they didn't so after about 4 days we gave up and started moving ourselves.

In those 4 days of waiting I have this image of that time between the Normandy Invasion and you know the end for the Germans and the advance of the Russians. I just have this sort of sense of this wasteland and truckloads of people just wandering all over the place. From concentration camps and prison camps and starving homes and?

Well there were no concentration camps down in that part.

17:30 Cause this was quite close to Brussels and Antwerp and so it was down there that we started to walk probably only about a hundred miles but to Brussels or Antwerp. And it was from one, both of those that the Lancaster's were coming in such large numbers to fly the prisoners out. So that

18:00 we had, we didn't walk for many days. That diary really, that long written diary you should read that because that tells up to the very end of the war and I think yeah it tells the story to the end of the war. It doesn't tell the story of us

18:30 stopping, waiting for the Brits and giving up. It doesn't tell that story. That, I haven't done a diary of that.

I'm wondering if in those last days you know they sound they sound a bit sort of remarkable and a and a bit cowboyish you know this ability to start you know grabbing cars and guns and so on after having been deprived of them for so long. Did you see sort of women and children wandering around or strange sights?

Strangely enough we didn't. Strangely enough we didn't

19:00 see. I can't think of a time when we saw civilians at all at the end of the war. Just can't think of it. We did before the, you know the week or so before the end of the war in Lubeck. We lived in a, we lived in a barn of a house where the owners were, was, their surname was Gustafo. And

19:30 they were very good to us but it obviously, they knew the war was about within a day of finishing but, what was her Christian name? The girl Gustafo went into Lubeck and bought us toothpaste and razor blades and things like this which she paid for. But we didn't see when the war was finished

20:00 and this little man came in the tank and said the you're free.

What is it especially about that image?

I dunno. But we didn't after that, we didn't see any civilians. I can't remember seeing any really. Not

one. We waited 4 days and then we started to walk and this lad Geoff Patterson

20:30 and I, and I think one other man we walked quite a lot every day until we were being picked up by British Troops until finally, as I said, we got into Antwerp and we were put onto these Lancaster's. Wonderful.

Were you feeling pretty confident at that point that you'd get through? Cause I also think those last days can be very dangerous for lots of people?

We were lucky because

21:00 they were in, right across Germany but mainly in the part of Germany where there were forests, there was a mob. I can't remember what they were called. But there was a mob of Germans that were hiding in the forests and killing any Allied people they could possibly get to. We were not near that area so that we managed to get away with it.

21:30 Yeah.

So when these Lancaster's showed up. I'm sure you I'm sure you'd seen a lot of Lancaster's I don't know if you'd flown any before or tested any but?

No I'd never flown a Lanc [Lancaster]. Never. They were, there were none when I was shot down. That was before Lancaster's.

In fact if you'd stayed in your Squadron 458 ended up flying Lancasters I believe?

No 458

22:00 flew Wellingtons for the rest of the war.

Pardon me. ,

Which was extraordinary but because, you see they stayed down in the Middle East. They flew round Italy and round Bardia and all along the North African coast so that there was no point in them getting the big heavy long range bombers. None at all.

After three and a half years away from flying and coming face to face with these enormous Lancaster's

22:30 **did you did you still wonder if you could fly?**

Oh I knew I could fly because flying's interesting. If you can fly a Moth you can fly any aircraft. The physical act of flying is the same in everything. Heavier in some, and of course the landing characteristics are different in most of them but it's very easy to fly. But the thing

23:00 that, the big change I knew at the end of the war was in the cockpit layout and the things that you had in the cockpit. You see the first aircraft I flew had about 2 or 3 instruments in it. Nothing else. The late, later one's had about fifty. The characteristics of a jet.

23:30 Now I could never fly a jet. I've never flown a jet. I've only flown piston engine aircraft. Even when I was an airline pilot I didn't fly jets. So that I don't quite know. If the pilot died at the controls I could go in and land the aircraft. I'd probably land it very heavily and not in the right spot but I could fly it. Because the

24:00 flying is the same.

So once an airman always an airman?

Well once a once a pilot always a pilot, yeah.

So the sight of these Lancasters it was in Brussels wasn't it? Did you, were you exhausted by this stage?

No, no.

You still you still had fight in you?

Yes.

And when you when you finally took off and left Europe was there a sort of a sense of good riddance? You know

24:30 **like to never go back there again or?**

No I couldn't remember that. But when I was an airline pilot someone had hijacked an aircraft somewhere around Frankfurt somewhere there, and I was flying an aircraft to England, a passenger aircraft, and the weather packed up at Heathrow and we were diverted to Frankfurt.

25:00 And this was probably three years after the war. And we were greeted at the airport by bloody Germans with Tommy guns and tin hats on and so on. And we knew that an aircraft had been hijacked and that

someone had stolen the passports of all the people on the aircraft. So when

25:30 when the, these armed Germans came into the cockpit and took our passports, we were very concerned with that. They, the crew who hadn't been POWs were not concerned at all. But we were. I was. I think that I was the only ex-POW on the flight but I was very upset about it.

26:00 **You were saying earlier today that you had a lot of trouble dealing with those particular nationalities. Pardon me. The axis nationalities afterwards in civilian life. As an airline pilot you would've had to have flown all around the world. Were there places you would deliberately choose not to fly to if you could?**

Well the company I was with, we flew only from Melbourne to England. At a certain, at one

26:30 stage the Prime Minister of Australia wouldn't let us operate from England to Australia. We were only allowed to operate from England to, of all places, where's the, where have all the murders been up at the, men that were killed?

27:00 You know that footballer that they made a fuss about and so on.

Oh in Bali?

Bali. So we used to fly into Bali. Into Denpasar and then when we wanted to get home we had to fly an empty aircraft back to Australia. Because we weren't allowed to operate an airline into Australia. Later

27:30 on we were. But initially we flew from, first from Singapore to England and then from Bali to England and a return trip to there as well. So there was a lot of mucking about which was the fault of the of the Australian authorities not of anyone else.

So landing

28:00 **back in England after all that time away you'd seen the effects of the Blitz years earlier did London or England have a different look or feel about it 3 years later?**

No they hadn't done much repairing in that time. It was still an awful mess. But England was such a big place that you could still find parts of England that hadn't

28:30 been flattened. Especially parts of London. I like England. I like it very much and if they hadn't done silly things and let a lot of nationalities in there a few years ago I think it'd still be a wonderful place. It's not now. But I'll wait 'til

29:00 you've turned that off before I tell ya that I can't imagine why anyone lives in Australia. I really can't.

The air's pretty clean. The weather's not bad. The food's good. The people are laid back?

Yeah but you, but you don't live in, you don't live in a mixed society because it's a nice day. Or do you?

I'm a different generation.

Yeah but I wouldn't of thought the generation would matter.

29:30 No I'd better, I'll say this later.

It might be worth talking off camera cause it's probably not relevant to this project.

Yes exactly.

I acknowledge it was a bit upsetting for you before but I'd like to talk about meeting that WAAF again. We met another POW who had a not your experience but heard the voice of a WAAF after 3 years of being incarcerated by the Germans and just couldn't believe it. It was you know like the voice of an angel.

30:00 **They played a vital role in their own way the WAAFs. I know she took you to be deloused and that wasn't very nice?**

Now wait on. Which WAAF are we talking about?

When you landed back in England and you were taken

Oh yes.

You said that you hoped to cut a line with her? Where you successful?

No because we had no money. We had, we couldn't get out of the camp. We had our filthy uniform that we'd been living in for 3 years and had

30:30 flown had swum the Mediterranean in, so I don't think I even saw her after she'd taken me into dinner in the hangar.

And I appreciate that you met your wife on the trip back to Australia?

Yeah.

But in between there did you did you sort of finally manage to meet and communicate with a woman and feel normal again?

I think it took a long time to feel normal and

31:00 I think that one of the problems was that I felt normal and wasn't and had I… In a different set of circumstances A) we might not have married. And B) if we had I'd have handled it so well that she'd have wanted to stay with me. And it's only in the last few years I've thought to myself that

31:30 probably a lot of the problems that we had were caused by my attitude, caused because I was a POW. Because it was a bit of a strain you know to be a POW for 3 years. It really was.

Did you have any difficulty in sleeping say alone in a room by yourself? Did you find that strange after years of being in bunk beds and dorms?

No, no.

32:00 I can't remember any positives or negatives about it but it would be wonderful to be comfortable. It would be wonderful to be warm. Because we slept on mattresses. You saw a picture of a bit of the mattress there. Stuffed with shavings which go hard after you've been on it for 10-minutes. So that anything we did back in civilian life would've been wonderfully comfortable compared with. In fact

32:30 anything we did, not in the prison camp would be wonderfully comfortable.

Now you mentioned these poor fellows that suicided not long after returning back to England?

Yeah, yeah.

Did you carry any sentiment that sort of mirrored the way they must have felt?

One of them, we didn't, I didn't hear about for

33:00 quite a time. The one that committed suicide, this lad back here after about probably 10 years ago, so a long time after the war. That I thought about a lot and thought what a waste cause he was a good fellow and I still don't know why he did it.

Evidently it messed you up quite a bit the being a POW and it made life very difficult

33:30 **for you how did it sort of repeat on you? Did it come back in nightmares?**

No I used to dream about the Great Escape for 4 or 5 years after the war on the anniversary of the Great Escape. Cause I'd been, I'd be thinking oh god tomorrow's a year from the Great Escape. Two years, three years. But after 3 or 4 years I wasn't dwelling on it so

34:00 I didn't think about it and didn't worry about it.

We're about to finish this tape and I think I am honour bound to ask you say the film version was a load of bollocks.

Yeah

The first time you saw it though was there anything in there that you registered with? Did you have a sense of pride that they'd made a film about this story?

No I thought, I thought what a pity it was such rubbish because

34:30 firstly if you could go back now and see it you'd realise that everybody looked so beautifully neat and clean.

In the film?

In the film.

Oh yes well, we blame that on Hollywood.

Yeah and also that, except for a couple of people who pretended they were English or Australian, except for them, they were all Americans. Now

35:00 there were a few Americans in the Great Escape and they were people who had been, who had joined the Royal Air Force because and there weren't many Americans in the Royal Air Force. But if they weren't in the Royal Air Force if they were in the American air force they wouldn't have been in our compound. So that, to do the film with, for instance that character

35:30 that said, "Snorkers good oh," to me that was so stupid. Yeah.

It's certainly mythologised your part in the war I guess. If they hadn't of made that film it still would be a spectacular story. So do you feel that despite the horrors that the war was that

there was something worthy about role in the war? That there was something just about fighting?

About mine?

36:00 **Yeah?**

No, no. I did nothing. If I had, if I had not been shot down none of my crew would be killed. They'd all still. Well,

Who can say?

In the next 60 years, whatever it is 50 years, anything might have happened to them but my inability to beat the two German

36:30 fighters meant that all my crew were killed.

Wasn't it a team effort? Weren't you flying a craft that was wasn't you know it was slightly beyond your control whether you could beat those Germans or not? Isn't that just war?

No. I should have been able to beat them. Not beat them but not be caught by them.

Have you beat yourself up about that for the last 64-years?

37:00 The last 64 is it. Yeah. No I, my feeling of success or lack of it because of the war, it was complete and abject failure. And I'm not saying that and going to burst into tears now.

37:30 I would like to be like a lot of my friends who succeeded very well. There was a bloke a friend of mine that was. He wasn't a school friend but he was with a group of young men that I knew when we were about twenty, twenty-one, named Peter Isaacson. Whose a man who owned one of the very big local newspapers and

38:00 sold it for millions. Now Peter Isaacson did incredible well in the war. He got a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] AFC [Australian Flying Corps] DFM [Distinguished Flying Medal] and to get an award when you're only a sergeant and then to be promoted to an officer and get another one or another two then is a great achievement.

Didn't you say medals didn't matter?

Pardon?

Didn't you say medals didn't mean anything?

No, I said my medals didn't matter. Mine are where I've been,

38:30 not what I've achieved. Mine just say that I was at Malta and the Middle East and Aircrew Europe. That doesn't mean a thing.

Why do you talk so often about your experience then if you have these feelings?

Because I want people to know what bastards the Germans and the Italians were. At this stage usually the people listening say, "I'm married to an Italian," or,

39:00 "My husband's German." So…

No, all I can say is I drive a German car.

Well I'm worse. I drive a Japanese car.

Why do you do that?

It's interesting. I had a very good Ford and it didn't have power steering and my son came out from France and said, "Dad, you'll have to get rid of this car." And we happened to drive past a Honda showroom and

39:30 we stopped there and before I knew it I'd bought a car. I was given a shocking trade-in price on my Ford. It was so bad that a few days later I went to another Honda place and they offered me $4,000 more but it was too late. I was committed to the other one.

Perhaps it was karma?

Yeah.

That's the end of the interview.

INTERVIEW ENDS