

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Douglas Hutchinson (Doug) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 17th June 2003**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/540>

### Tape 1

00:30 **Doug, I'd like to start by asking you about your family. Do you know when they came to Australia?**

Well, they were both Australians, parents. I was born in Cowra. They lived in Cowra when they were married. I was born there, lived there the first four years. And we came to Sydney and we lived at Marrickville

01:00 in the beginning and then we moved to Hurlstone Park and then the Depression came, of course, and father, who was a coach builder by trade, became unemployed and the family was split up and I went to one of father's sisters to live, and my sister went to a cousin of my father's to live. And my father went to his sister's place up at,

01:30 near Dungog to live on the property up there, and my mother took a job as a live-in housekeeper so, and that way we lived for a couple of years, and after that we came back and moved to Hurlstone Park, and from there I was married, and went to live at Earlwood, had a little cottage at Earlwood, and war broke out and I joined the service

02:00 and so I went on, through years of being in the air force.

**And were there particular subjects of interest to you when at school?**

Oh, no, well, I liked science at school, because number one, the uncle I lived with was Science Master at Canterbury High School. Where I was going to school at the time and I had to be pretty good at that. So I had to take an interest in it, and then

02:30 I used to play sport, general sport, cricket and football. Nothing of any great value or anything, but I played those sports. And then after that we all came together again and lived at Hurlstone Park, as I said, and of course, I became interested in aeroplanes, I suppose, like all young people in those days, and had the idea of

03:00 joining the air force, particularly when I saw the first flight of Hudson Bombers fly over the house on their arrival in Australia from America. And that gave me the idea and in 1938 I tried to join the air force and had a reply to say I'd missed the intake into it, and to apply again in another six months time when they had another intake coming up.

03:30 Well, in six months time I was married, and wasn't interested in joining the air force at that stage, and then of course, war broke out the same year, so I still joined the air force and spent five years and three months in the air force. Though originally I was on the air force reserve, and then I was called up and I spent,

04:00 I spent four, well, two years of that I was a prisoner of war in Germany, having been shot down and taken prisoner in Crete, and I stayed there until the end of the war. So I had a lot of experiences there, I suppose, one way and another. But it was, air force life was good. I went to, I did all my training here

04:30 in Australia, at Parkes, in western New South Wales, and then up at Evans Head, where I did a gunnery course up there, and from there I was commissioned and went to England, and did operational training in England, and from there I set out to the Middle East,

05:00 and when I arrived in Cairo, or course, at Headquarters, they posted me to 244 Squadron, which nobody knew where it was actually. They said it's somewhere up in Iraq. So we had to go looking for this squadron in Iraq, and we went up by train to Damascus, and by Nairn coach

05:30 across Iraq to Baghdad, and from there of course to the air force station. And they were there for about two weeks, and they didn't quite know where this 244 Squadron was, and finally we tracked it down, it was somewhere in the Persian Gulf. So we went by train to Basra, and there, we managed to get on a ship there and go down the Gulf,

06:00 and it dropped anchor about a mile off shore at Sharjah and we went across, ashore in Arab dhows and we got there in 244 Squadron, but flying Blenheims, and Vickers Vincents. Vickers Vincents was a pre-war biplane, with a single engine, but carried about a thousand pounds of bombs, and was a fairly big aircraft actually,

06:30 and we, I spent eight months in the Persian Gulf doing anti-submarine patrols and escorting convoys up the Gulf to Abadan, mostly taking aircraft and things on the ships up to the Russians, and they collected them at Abadan, and flew them into Russia, the Russian Front.

07:00 And after that, I was posted back to Cairo, and from Cairo I was posted down to Kenya to do an instructional tour down there. But I was only there for a short while and they packed up training in East Africa, and I was sent back up to the desert again, and I jointed 454 Squadron,

07:30 flying Baltimores. Well, I still had the same crew I had at Sharjah, and we led a flight of, or raid I should say, on Crete, a diversional raid right just at the time they were landing on Sicily, and being harassed a bit there by German aircraft and they decided they'd plan

08:00 this raid on Crete and try and attract a few aircraft from Crete to Sicily, but they had one hundred and twenty five fighters in this raid, and eight aircraft from our squadron which we led, and of the eight, six of them were shot down, and of the six, each one had four men in it, and of the six aircraft that were shot down,

08:30 only three of us got out of it alive. Three of the four in my crew, and the fighters, they shot down twenty five. It was one of those things that was badly planned from the beginning. First thing they forgot was that it was summer time in Crete, and they thought all the Germans would be in having breakfast, and instead of that they were out ready on their guns,

09:00 and we were flying at ground level, you know, fifty to a hundred feet, and the fighters were to go in first and shoot up the place, and create a bit of a stir, which they did, and of course, when we came they were just ready for us and virtually shot the lot of us down. Any rate, the pilot had his right arm shot off. First of all we crash landed on a nice flat bit of ground, we were on fire,

09:30 and it turned out the flat bit of ground was a minefield, and things went up of course, and the pilot had his right arm shot off, and a great gash in his leg, and the navigator had a great hole in his forehead, and I had bits of shrapnel all over me, lost a little bit of my left foot, and the other wireless operator was killed.

10:00 I got the lot of them out of the aircraft and got them clear of the burning aircraft, because I thought it would go up at any time because we still had bombs on board and, any rate, we were taken prisoner by the Italians, actually. They came up with their guns, firing their guns and yelling and we started to walk towards them and they turned around and ran, and yelled, and yelled, and yelled, and then they stopped

10:30 and we stopped, and they started to yell again, so we walked towards them again, and that happened three times, and by the time we got to the other side we realised we'd walked through a minefield. And they were frightened the mines would blow up, but anyway, they took us to first aid stations and they then went to hospital at Iraklion where they operated on me and pulled all the bits and pieces out of me,

11:00 and then that night I was loaded on a JU [Junkers] 52 [German transport aircraft] aircraft, German aircraft, with guards, and flown across to Athens where I went into hospital at Athens, and the next day they loaded me again onto an aircraft and they flew me to Salonica, in northern Greece, and I was in hospital again there, and from there they flew me to Sofia in Hungary,

11:30 and from Sofia they flew me to Belgrade in Yugoslavia, and then they flew me up to Vienna. And at Vienna I was put in the local jail, in great pain of course, and then the next day they took me to the railway station, and they cleared one of the compartments out on a train, and laid me out on one of the seats,

12:00 and I had four guards with me, with Tommy guns [Thompson submachine guns] of course, and off the train went. Well, every time the train stopped one of the guards would jump out and come back with a bowl of soup, or cup of soup for me, and any time I wanted to urinate one of the guards gave me his helmet to use and they tipped it out the window. And any rate, finally, we went across Austria and into Germany

12:30 and finished up at Frankfurt. And at Frankfurt I was taken to a, what was a rehabilitation hospital it looked like, and I was in a big room on my own and I was there for a couple of weeks and they interrogated me every day and then I finally went to the transit camp at Dulag Luft, which is also just near Frankfurt,

13:00 and there I was interrogated a couple of times, and finally they said, 'Well, right, if you won't tell us, we'll tell you' so they produced a file, and they went through a file and they told me where I joined the air force, and when I joined the air force, and where I'd been the whole time I was in the service and I couldn't tell them anything more than they knew. They even knew the numbers of aircraft that were on the squadron.

13:30 Where they'd get all that information from, no wonder people used to say, 'Don't talk, you're in the war

days.' Any rate, they then, I went into the transit camp and was there for a week or so, and then they loaded a group of us, in a cattle trucks on a train, and we went across Germany. It took a couple of days in these cattle trucks and, because they were always pulling into sidings,

- 14:00 and whatnot, you know, and I finished up at Sagan in Upper Silesia, in, I suppose it was really Poland originally, and Stalag Luft 3 was an officers camp and I spent, oh, nearly the rest of the war there. And then finally the Russians broke through.
- 14:30 Oh, before that, prior to that, the SS [Schutzstaffel - Defence Corps] had come into the camp with orders to shoot the whole lot of us, and just at that critical time the Russians broke through, and we were lucky they did, just disappeared, so we weren't killed, as we were prisoners of the Luftwaffe [German Air Force] actually. We weren't prisoners of the army.
- 15:00 And the air force people put us on the road, and marched us for a week in the snow, it was middle of winter almost, and they marched us in the snow, and we slept in the snow, and had very little to eat, and we finished up at a place called Luckenwalde, which is just south of Berlin, and it was a large camp. It had French, and Belgians and Danish, and Russians and all variety of people in it,
- 15:30 and we were there for quite a while. We were there for the Battle of Berlin. We used to see all the aircraft go over the camp and bomb Berlin and come back again in broad daylight. And then the Russians broke through and came through the camp, and they had great big tanks, came through the camp and they brought a battalion of women cavalry
- 16:00 troops in the camp, and they took charge and they had a lot of battles every now and again you know. Some Germans would be sighted somewhere and off these women would go and kill them, and took very few prisoners, but they killed, I think it was something like twenty two thousand Germans, within a mile perimeter of the camp, and I don't know, took a hundred odd thousand prisoners.
- 16:30 I've never seen such blood thirsty women in my life. But any rate they, the Americans, eventually came and tried to evacuate us. They brought trucks in and the Russians stopped them, and wouldn't let them take us, sent them away. And the Russians kept us prisoner for six weeks and then they had an official exchange of ex-prisoners
- 17:00 on a barge bridge in the middle of the Elbe River, and they swapped one ex-Russian prisoner for one ex-British prisoner, and that's how we got out. Then the Americans took us to Leipzig and took us back to Belgium, and then the British took over and flew us back to England. So they were virtually my war days.
- 17:30 And I had a lot of great times, made a lot of good friends in the prison camp and there was always something exciting going on. If it wasn't digging tunnels it was doing something, some sort of a notice might come round, it might get a notice round, it might say somebody was wanted to get out of the camp, and break into the commandant's office and open the safe,
- 18:00 and copy some papers and put them back again and there was always somebody who could do something, you know. There was no shortage of anybody. They had people there that could do anything you could think of. They were pretty good. We used to play Test Cricket against Britain, the Australians against Britain, and we used to play football, we had ice hockey in winter. The Canadians particularly. We used to get an area of ground and heat the snow up round it,
- 18:30 and flood the ground, and next morning it would be ice, and they'd give it another coat and so on we'd finish up with an ice playing field and they used to play ice hockey on it, and we used to have entertainment. We had two theatre groups. They, we got clothing through the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] and they used to have some blokes take the part of the women, you know, and they were pretty good,
- 19:00 some of them. We put on plays, like the Arsenic and Old Lace and The First Mrs Fraser and, oh, a whole host of plays they put on. And they had the two groups. One would put a show on and then the next one would be getting ready, and they would put a show on. Even the Germans used to come and watch the shows.
- 19:30 They had a band, of course, with the instruments supplied, once again, by the YMCA, and they gave us pretty good music actually, and we had a lot of entertainment. We built the theatre out of one of the huts. And the seating was built out of Red Cross crates, or they were like a tea chest that the food parcels used to come through the Red Cross in, and they turned all those into rows of seats,
- 20:00 and they made a pretty good job of it actually. People could do anything. But we, escape was always on the account, but being officers we weren't allowed to get our parole, so we never ever got outside the camp. We had, we were there at all times. The only way to get out was to escape. I remember, on the first occasion, the first Christmas I was in Germany actually,
- 20:30 I was in the compound called the Centre Compound, and the one next to us was the East Compound, and they had the North Compound further away, and this Christmas the Germans gave, we had a lot of food came from the Argentine, great big cheeses and all sorts of stuff, tons of food, and then the Germans decided they'd give us some beer, so they brought in great big kegs of beer, which was very low alcohol content, of course.

- 21:00 The prisoners generally made a lot of alcohol out of potatoes, and they had that going, so they laced the beer with this alcohol, and of course a lot of the blokes got pretty drunk. And they were climbing, they climbed over the barbed wire into this compound to see their mates, but being Christmas time, the Germans were very religious in a way,
- 21:30 and they didn't shoot anybody they just let them climb over the fence, and the next day, they rounded them all up and put them in the cooler for two weeks or something. I always remember that day. And then the barrels, the blokes decided, here's an opportunity to escape, so they cut the tops out of the barrels and climbed in and put the lid back on and when the barrels were collected
- 22:00 on the horse drawn trucks, they were taken back to the brewery, but when they got to the brewery they found they'd put the trucks on with the openings on the inside and another one hard up against it, and the fellows couldn't get out of the barrels, so they took them, took them prisoner, brought them back again, and of course, they got a fortnight in the cooler, for trying to escape too.
- 22:30 But we used to play regular football too. But after that I was moved to a place called, a new compound, another compound, it was built a little bit away from the rest of the camp, and they called it Belaria, and they sent all the bad boys there to start off with. I don't know why I was among the bad boys, but anyway, they sent eight hundred of us
- 23:00 to this new compound, and you couldn't dig tunnels there, because once you got down to four feet, you struck water there, and you couldn't tunnel, so we were stuck. We had to make the best of it, and there weren't any attempts to escape the whole time we were there. But any rate we survived and that was the main thing. But it had its moments.
- 23:30 We were fed, virtually fed, by the Red Cross, and we used to get a food parcel each a week from the Red Cross, and it used to have things in it like spam, and cigarettes, and prunes and tinned meats and herrings, and margarine, and tea and sugar. And we could spread it out. We got bread, bread only,
- 24:00 ration of bread, from the Germans, I don't know what it was made out of. Soya beans and, but it certainly wasn't a bread flour. Used to keep, keep as long as six weeks sometimes the bread. And that was all we got from them. Occasionally we'd get a bit of soup[ of some sort, potato soup, or something like that, and when the Red Cross inspection was coming around they'd reel in cart loads of potatoes
- 24:30 and turnips and cabbage and all that sort of stuff, because that was the only food they could give us. Because they had to make up the number of calories to give per man, or something, and they gave us that, any rate, we survived and you know, we used to keep ourselves most of the time by walking, or running, playing football and cricket and
- 25:00 they used to play hockey and baseball, and we had plenty of sporting equipment. And then the fateful day came when we had to leave everything behind, and we slept in the snow. The first night I slept in the snow, I slept with my boots on, and my boots froze. The next morning I had boots frozen to my feet, and I luckily didn't get frost bite,
- 25:30 but I learned then that you take your boots off at night time and sleep on them, to keep them warm, and stop them freezing, So, I think on that march we probably stopped in a couple of barns, a couple of nights we had in barns which was much more comfortable than sleeping in the snow. And any rate, when the end of the war came,
- 26:00 we were at Luckenwalde, and the Germans wanted to move us down to Munich, and we didn't want to go to Munich because Munich was being heavily bombed at the time, and so were the railways to start off with. Any rate they took a lot of the fellows down to the station and loaded them on the train, and the rest of them in the camp hid themselves, and they wouldn't be counted.
- 26:30 They couldn't find these men all day, and in the meantime, the ones at the station got out and got a lot of paint from the village, the town, and painted RAF [Royal Air Force] roundels on the top of the train, and RAF on it, and any rate the day went on like this and the blokes, the people in the town thought the RAF had taken over the town, you know. They'd been,
- 27:00 released from Germany and in the meantime the Danish, we had the Danish High Command there in one of the compounds, and they had a radio, so they radioed London, I guess, and the next thing we knew there was a flight of Thunderbolts came over and circled the camp, and blew up the railway line on both sides, for about a mile, and they had to bring all the blokes back
- 27:30 to the camp then. They never did get us to, anybody down to Munich. Then we had some exciting days there. That night the Germans just disappeared, out of the camp, there were no Germans there. They just vanished into thin air. and there were a big camp, had a lot of Russians there. The Russians used to work,
- 28:00 of course, and if they got sick and couldn't work, they didn't get any food. The only got food if they worked, so a hell of a lot of them died, and after the Germans had gone, I got outside the camp, of course, and there were great trenches, with bodies in them, hundreds of bodies, you know, and these big long trenches full of Russians that had died, and they just waited until the trench got full

- 28:30 and they filled it in. They had a rough time, the Russians. But then when the Russian tanks came in, all these poor prisoners that were, you know, pretty sick, a lot of them, they climbed inside these Russian tanks and went off for the Battle of Berlin. They weren't supposed to be taken prisoner, you see. They were frightened that they would get into trouble, so sick or not, they went off on these tanks to fight in the battle.
- 29:00 So that's how things were in those days.
- Tell me about your reception back in England.**
- Yeah, I went back to England, yeah, and I was in England for a couple of months. They didn't have any ships to take anybody home at the time.
- Did you require hospitalisation at that time?**
- No, no. I was pretty fit, you know, because in those days you had to be fit to be in the air force. You see, because when I first joined the air force I remember
- 29:30 going down to Woolloomooloo, they had a reception centre there, and you stripped off your clothes and we were run around naked for all day that day and they examined every little bit of your body, and your health was examined, and if you any anything wrong with you, you just didn't get into the air force. You had to be fit and healthy, otherwise, that's how so many blokes survived. But we...
- 30:00 I went back to England, and I had leave, of course. I had friends in England I stayed with, and we came home, when they sent us, brought us home, they had the old Orion, the ship the Orion, they cleaned it up and they put five hundred ex-prisoners of war on it, and they brought us home as ordinary passengers in cabins and things. And we came home.
- 30:30 We had an exciting day home. It was nice to sail into the harbour. I was away for four and a half years before I, you know, since I'd been home, and it was nice to see it and come home, and then they took us up to Bradfield Park, where all the people welcomed us home, or course, and we got discharged. Well, didn't get discharged. I was sent on leave from there, and then finally we called up and just discharged,
- 31:00 and that was it. No marches or anything like that today, we were just home, and I, you know, I missed it, when I came home, of course, like everybody, at a loose end, and don't know what to do, and I think I spent most of my time, I used to go to night clubs about five nights a week, or something, in those days,
- 31:30 till my money ran out. Not that you had much money because, I had more money than most people would because I was eight months in the Persian Gulf and in the Persian Gulf we were paid the highest hard living allowance of anywhere in the world practically. And we used to have a pay book
- 32:00 and our pay was paid into the bank in London. I never touched my pay at all in London. The only thing was put in your pay book, of course, was your hard living allowance. Even that had a reasonable balance in it when I left Sharjah, and I left all my pay in London, and of course, when I was in a prisoner of war camp for two years, and all my pay was still being paid into a bank in London,
- 32:30 not that you got that much money, I think I got, what was it, a pilot officer got about seven and six a day, and I was a flight lieutenant. I think I got about twenty two and six a day, and but it added up and I had a few bob [shillings] when I came home, and of course, you got deferred pay, which I think was about three hundred pounds or something, I got that deferred pay for five years service. Not like today,
- 33:00 when these blokes in Iraq, at the present time are getting, I think I read in the paper, where they're getting something like fifty thousand dollars a year, or something. You know, plus allowances. And they're not officers, they're privates. So, things have changed a bit as far as pay is concerned. When I joined the air force
- 33:30 I was getting five shillings a day, and then I became an LAC [Leading Aircraftsman] and I got six shillings a day and then, after I finished training I was made a sergeant for a short period, and then when my commission came through, I was discharged from the air force actually, so I was discharged from the air force twice. Once as a sergeant and then I was re-commissioned as an officer.
- 34:00 Then I got the discharge as an officer in the end. And lots of things you start to remember, but I've written a record of my war years, for the family, not as a book. But I've done it for the family, and I've got a copy of it inside there, which I started to look at to try and brush my memory up a bit on things, you know.
- 34:30 We had a... we were treated pretty well in many respects. Number one, when I went away from here, in the first place, went away on the Mariposa, which was an American tourist ship, and of course America wasn't in the war, and they had a normal lot of passengers on board, and we went to New Zealand, and picked up a few New Zealanders,
- 35:00 and then to Samoa and up to Fiji, and then on to Honolulu, and at Honolulu they turned the whole air force out at Honolulu, with every aircraft they had, to welcome us there, and they had all the Red Cross girls there, and they entertained us for the day, and showed us all over Honolulu, and we went to Hicken Field, and all over the island.

- 35:30 And they went across to Los Angeles, no, no, San Diego we went to from there and we were met there by big motor police, a crowd of motor police blokes and they took us out in buses out in Hollywood, and we spent the day in Hollywood amongst the stars, and they were making films and pictures, and we were entertained
- 36:00 really royally actually out there. Then we went back and the ship went up to Los Angeles and then we transferred to a train at Oakland, and went up the coast to Portland, Oregon, up to Vancouver, and then from Vancouver we went by train across Canada to Halifax.
- 36:30 And then onto a troop ship there. The first troop ship we had across the Atlantic. Roughest ship I've ever been on. We struck a heavy storm on the way across, and you used to look up to the top and the waves would be higher than the mast of the ship. You know, ride up the top of the wave like a surf boat, and then down the other side with the propellers out of the water, and we went across the Atlantic like that, and
- 37:00 then of course we arrived at Greenock in Scotland, and went down by train to Bournemouth, which was a reception centre. And they had a lot of people there, they didn't know what to do with them. They had that many, they didn't have squadrons to put them on, same thing happened here. With the training here in Australia. When I joined the air force in 1940, they had very few training facilities in Australia,
- 37:30 so they put us on the Air Force Reserve, and I had to go to school at West Murrumbidgee oddly enough, to school three nights a week, and learnt algebra and trigonometry and air, you know, air frames and things like that, and I did that until I was called up.
- 38:00 And when I went to Bradfield Park as initial training, I couldn't grasp Morse Code see, so I paraded the CO [Commanding Officer] and told if I couldn't do eight words a minute in a week's time, I was out, so I thought, well I don't know what I'm going to do now. So somebody suggested I go and see the Women's Emergency Signal Corps, which was a civilian thing at that time,
- 38:30 it later became part of the service, and I went to see these women in my spare time, and they sat you down with a cup of tea, and a Morse key and so on, and any rate after a week there I went back and I did twenty words a minute, so they promptly made me a wireless air gunner. I don't know why. I couldn't grasp Morse in the first place, and then they make me a wireless air gunner.

**I'll just pull you up there. We're right on the end of this first tape.**

## Tape 2

- 00:30 **Doug, I just wanted to go back and ask you, was your father involved in the First World War?**
- No, my father wasn't. He was, unfortunately, only had one eye. He had an accident chopping wood, and a splinter went up and hit him in the eye, and he was blind in one eye. So he didn't, wasn't in the service. His two brothers were, though, both his brothers were. One of them was my namesake,
- 01:00 and he lost his right arm in France.
- Did they discuss their experiences at all?**
- Experiences? Well, I never ever talked to them. Didn't know their experiences. I've actually got his war record in there, doesn't mean much. You know. A lot of paperwork with your name on it. Where he'd been and what he'd done. But that's all, nothing in his story at all.
- 01:30 But any rate, he, they, he was discharged of course, when, I don't know when it was, 1917 or something, I think he was discharged from the army, and he lived at Cootamundra then, after that, and he had a bicycle shop at Cootamundra, one arm and all,
- 02:00 and he lived there for years, and he retired up at his sister's place up at Dungog, where my father was during the Depression. So ...
- Can you tell me a bit about your dad's job as a coach builder?**
- Well, of course, my father was a tradesman. He made coaches and sulkies and all those sort of vehicles as a tradesman.
- 02:30 And they were all hand made, of course, in those days. He had a great variety, I've still got some of this old tools, a variety of tools that you never see today. And he, after they left Cowra and came to Sydney, he was still working here. I forget where he was working as a coach builder. But any rate, he, motor cars came into being, shortly after that,
- 03:00 and the bodies were built from wooden bodies, frames, on cars in those days. They used to use coachwood. Very straight-grained timber and very strong, and he was building motor car bodies and he did that for, oh, right up to the Depression, I think. He worked at a place in Newtown, Propert's, I think their name was.

03:30 And then he worked at another place on the corner of Missenden Road and the Parramatta Road, just near Prince Alfred Hospital there. It was a big place. I forget their name. And he worked there till the Depression, and then he got a job with some people called Starr Brothers, and they were doing baker's carts and milk carts,

04:00 at Newtown, and he worked there for quite a while. And then, of course, they finished up and off he went up the country to his sister's place.

**Did that create an interest for you in woodworking...**

Oh, it did. I learnt a lot in woodwork, and he used to fiddle around making things for quite a while. But I can't do it now. The hands won't do it. But he taught me quite a lot.

04:30 I used to go into work with him, particularly on Saturdays, in those days he used to work Saturday mornings. And he used to take me to work with him sometimes on Saturday mornings, and I'd see them building these motor bodies. And at Propert's, I think they used to make Crossley cars, I think was the name of the car at that time, and he was doing the bodies of those. So I learnt a lot,

05:00 because I had tools at home all the time, because he had plenty of tools. Anything I wanted to fiddle with, I could fiddle with. I made a few pieces of furniture. Since got rid of them, of course. I can still do things. You know, I did up that thing there. I did up that thing there. They were cedar cabinets in pretty bad shape when I got them. I rejuvenated those.

05:30 And the Chiffoniere in the lounge room, I did that up. It was painted, as a matter of fact, when I got hold of it. It was painted cream, and I stripped it all back and polished it, and put it in good order, so, you know, I used to be able to do all those sorts of things.

**Did you have an interest in the engines as well in the motor cars?**

No. No. Never had much interest in engines. I had a motor car, of course, in about 1946,

06:00 so I got my first motor car, and it was a Vauxhall 4, which has long since gone, but I never ever, you know, took much interest in mechanical things like that.

**Did your dad have strong feelings towards the Empire, or a strong sense of the Empire.**

Yes, though I think most people did in those days, you know.

06:30 We were an Empire and, we didn't talk about it much I suppose, but anything that went on that was anything to do with the Royal Family coming out, or Governor-General, or something like that, they would always be out to have a look, because I suppose it was because there was no other entertainment about in those days.

07:00 They, mostly they didn't have much time to do anything, or money of course, nobody had much money in those days. It was a pretty hard sort of a life, and your mothers of course in those days, were the backbone of the families, because they used to be able to make a meal out of nothing, and all that sort of thing, but they were funny old days, the days when the clothes prop man would come around,

07:30 the rabbitoh would come round, and the fruito, and all the tradespeople would come around, and the milk would be delivered twice a day, and the baker would come twice a day, and the postman would come twice a day, and days that people worked hard and earned very little.

08:00 **How much of an awareness of the global politics, or the politics in Europe, in '38, when you first joined the air force?**

Oh, I, you know, used to read papers and things about what was happening in Europe and so on,

**Did you ever sense that war was a real possibility when you first tried to get into the air force?**

Well, no, I don't think anybody, everybody took it as a sort of a bit of entertainment, well, excitement I should say, not entertainment. And they were exciting days,

08:30 and of course, most, the reason why a lot of people joined the services, was because they were unemployed and that was a job, and they knew where their next meal was coming from. Particularly army people. Air force blokes weren't quite so bad because they, in the majority of cases, were fellows that had had good educations, and they,

09:00 the majority of them came from fairly good families, and they weren't doing it for that, it was just, being young, I suppose you think great excitement there, and off you go.

**So what were your main drives, motivations, in 1938?**

Oh, in 1938, well, I'd always sort of had a bit of an interest in aircraft.

09:30 I remember as a boy we used to walk across from Marrickville, across to Mascot and see Bert Hinkler and Alvin Colman, and Kingsford Smith and Amy Johnson, see them all arrive over at Mascot. Then as a boy, I remember I was up at Cootamundra, and I met, oh what's her name,

- 10:00 one of the early airlines that was formed, and it was formed up there, and the aircraft, I forget, it was an Avro or something or other, and it had a water-cooled engine, and as kids we used to carry the water in kerosene tins, for the bloke to put in the aircraft, and one day he gave us a ride when he was test flying this aircraft. And that was my first experience.
- 10:30 **Tell me about that experience.**
- Eh?
- Tell me about that experience.**
- Well, I don't remember much about it. I can just vaguely remember the aircraft. And I was only about eight or nine, something like that, you know, I was very young, and of course, you don't remember these things too long. We flew around Cootamundra and, I think it was Cootamundra, yes,
- 11:00 Cootamundra it was, and any rate, after that I used to make model aircraft, not models like the true models, out of wood and that sort of thing as a kid, and then of course, I saw the first, as I told you before, I saw the first flight of Hudson bombers fly over home, and that sort of stirred things up a bit, and I decided
- 11:30 I was going to join the air force, and in those days they used to do something like twelve months training, here in Australia, and then they went over to England with a five-year short-term commission in the RAF. For experience. And they, it was a good life, but there weren't many, you know, they didn't have many aircraft.
- 12:00 I have a record in there of all the aircraft they had at the beginning of the war, and they had very few. Any rate, those blokes of course, that were in the air force in those days, went on to become Group Captains and Air Vice-Marshals and Air Commodores. They least they retired with seemed to be, an Air Commodore. You know, they all had a pretty good life, the blokes that were in the air force.
- 12:30 **What year did you finish school?**
- I finished school, I think it was 1933, I think.
- What did you spend those next couple of years doing?**
- Well, I, my first job, because it was just at the end of the Depression. And my first job, I got a job in a shoe store, Foster Shoes was the name of the company. They had seventeen branches around Sydney, Sydney and suburbs,
- 13:00 and they had some in Newcastle and so on and they had twenty seven all together. I joined them as a junior, of course, and I used to run messages, and they used to have a service in those days, not like today. If somebody came in to buy a pair of shoes, and they didn't have the size that the customer wanted, they would ring one of the other stores
- 13:30 to see if they had it. And if they had it, I used to have to go and pick the pair of shoes up and bring it back for the customer. And the customer waited mostly, or came back and picked them up and things like that. Nobody, you know, ever went out of the shop without buying a pair of shoes if they could help it. And I became a junior salesman and then I became in charge of their largest men's store,
- 14:00 and then I became a manager, who, when people went on holidays, others went on holidays, I used to take their place, then I finally got a show of my own, and that's where I was when I joined the air force.
- Tell me about meeting your wife.**
- My wife worked in the same shoe store, is how I met her.
- 14:30 We were married in March in 1939, and she, of course, when I was in the air force, she had to get a job. She left the shoe business when we were married, and she lived as a housewife for a while, until I went into, was called up, and she became a supervisor at Woolworths, and she spent the war as a supervisor at Woolworths,
- 15:00 and after the war she retired for a while and then she managed a ladies hairdressing salon, and she had a babies' wear shop, and she had an umbrella shop, and then she finished up, the last shop she had was managing a men's hairdressing shop and tobacconist's shop. She had a variety of jobs. She liked being amongst people, you know.
- 15:30 **What sort of places would a young couple go and visit back in '38, '39?**
- In '38 and '39, once again, you never had much money, so there weren't too many places to go, we used to go to the picture show, once a week, that was a big night out. And other days you might go to a trip to Manly on the ferry, the occasional trip to the beach.
- 16:00 But you didn't go out very much. You know, you visited friends mostly, friends and relatives, went and had dinner with them and they came to your place, and that was mostly what the entertainment was. It was entertainment at home. We had a few friends up around Earlwood and Bardwell Park, and they



used to come to our place, and we'd, you know, have some dinner.

- 16:30 Might just come to visit for the afternoon or something, and then tea. Something like that. But very rarely did you even have a bottle of beer of something in those days. Because beer was about one and threepence a bottle, and you couldn't afford it.

**Tell me, I mean, you were very recent sort of newlyweds, about six months married when news of the outbreak of war occurred.**

Yes.

**News of the outbreak of war occurred. Do you recall where you were when you heard the news?**

Yes, as a matter of fact I was at my mother's place.

- 17:00 We went there for dinner one night, and we were sitting in front of the fire, and the news came over the radio. That's how I first knew. And I didn't immediately join the air force. I didn't know what to do. I was married, I had a bit of a quandary just what I should do, and time went by and all my friends joined the army, and all the fellows about the same age were joining the army or something or other, and crikey, I've got to do something,

- 17:30 so I went and applied to join the air force, and I was called up and placed on a reserve, so I mean, being on the reserve I was actually part of the air force, because you had to, give you your word for the King and country sort of thing, you know and sign up, and then

- 18:00 I went to these night schools, this night school, that lasted for about six months I was on the air force reserve.

**How often would you be at night school at Marrickville?**

Three nights a week.

**Three nights a week. And that was covering all sort of basic theories of flight, basic drill.**

Yes, well, no. You didn't do anything like that. All we did was trigonometry

- 18:30 and algebra, mathematics, aerodynamics, and air flow over wings and things like that. And I've got, still got all the original notes I had when I went to night school, in there. I've still got those.

**Was that simply to keep you busy until there was enough room for you to be at...**

Sort of, it's basic training, you see,

- 19:00 of what you've got to learn. You see, I was over at Bradfield Park, and they give you the basics of training, and marching and a bit of Morse code, and general theory, and then they select whether you were going to be a pilot, navigator, or wireless air gunner.

**This was after the reserve, though.**

After the reserve, yes.

- 19:30 **Before you go on a sec, can I ask you how your wife felt about you joining the air force?**

I don't suppose she looked at it, liked it very much. But she never said very much, she sort of accepted it and that was it and I went to, after there I went to Parkes. I was at Parkes for eight months, during the, that was the hardest part of it Parkes, because you had to learn radio theory,

- 20:00 and you had to be able to pull radios to pieces and blindfolded, and put them back together again, and find out what was wrong with them, but the theory part was the hardest. You know, I'd been left school for quite a few years, and I was twenty four at that stage.

**Were you quite old on your course?**

Yes, I was old, actually. I was probably one of the oldest on the course as a matter of fact.

**Did you take it more seriously than some of the others?**

- 20:30 Yeah, I did, because I had to, there was no taking it more seriously. I had to because I couldn't absorb things like the younger blokes could and I used to have to study away to pass the exams, but I managed to, we used to have exams every three months or two, or month or something, and I went through them and I averaged about seventy-five percent in the things, but I remember one young guy who used to read comics

- 21:00 the night before the exams, you know. Never studied, never saw him pick up a book and study, yet he averaged ninety nine percent, but he didn't get a commission. He wasn't stable enough you see.

**Doug, can you tell me about that selection process at Bradfield Park where you were given your specialisation?**

Well, I don't know how it worked, but they just said, 'You, you and you are pilots,

21:30 and you, you, and you are navigators,' and so on. That's all they did I think.

**Did you have an area you wanted to move into?**

Yes, I wanted to be a pilot. Everybody wanted to be a pilot. That was one of the reasons for joining the air force.

**So was that a disappointing experience for you?**

It was at the time, yes, but it so happened they probably did me a favour, because if I'd been a pilot I probably would have been killed at some time or other, you know. As a wireless air gunner, I survived.

22:00 **Was there a stigma about missing out on being a pilot, or was there a loss of face amongst the lads?**

Oh, no. no. It didn't make any difference amongst anybody. They were all much the same. Rank or anything didn't make a great deal of difference, although in the RAF it was supposed to, because you weren't supposed to mix with the sergeants, and they weren't supposed to mix with the airmen, and so on.

22:30 But that went by the board. It might have been like that on the station where they were at, but outside the station it didn't make much difference.

**So were you able to get yourself keen about becoming a wireless gunner. Once you realised you weren't going to be a pilot. Did you take a strong interest in it, you wanted ?**

Oh, well,

**To do well in it?**

Oh, well, I just took it as it came, I was in the air force, and I was still in the air crew, and when you're in the air you're still in the same boat.

23:00 One bloke might be the driver, but the others have all got their own jobs. We didn't make much difference. The only difference it made was your chance of promotion was less as a wireless air gunner than it was as a pilot. And pilots got all the decorations, or, you know, mostly got decorations, because they were driving the aeroplane.

23:30 **Because you weren't so worried about the girls at that stage as some of the other guys?**

Oh, I didn't worry much at that stage. When I was on leave, I used to stay with friends. I didn't worry too much about women.

**Oh, but we hear all the time, oh, the pilots got all the girls, you know. 'Bastards.'**

Oh, no. that part never came. It was the uniform that got girls mostly. It wasn't so much the fact of being a pilot or a navigator or anything else, you know.

24:00 It was just the uniform.

**Were you proud in your blue uniform?**

Oh, I was. Yes, very proud of the uniform. I, they, everywhere you went in an Australian uniform was something a bit different, and people didn't see many of them so you were sort of something that they liked to see and they would like to talk to you or something.

24:30 It didn't matter where you went. When I went to America for instance, we were the first, first Australian troops to go into America in uniform. Because those blokes that were training in Canada, weren't allowed to go into America in uniform. They had to put civilian clothes on. We were the first ones in uniform in America, and of course, they couldn't do enough for us. We went into shops in America and places,

25:00 and they wouldn't let you pay for anything. You know, you'd go in to buy something and they wouldn't let you pay for it. And they, we never had to pay for our lunches in the studios in Hollywood and all that sort of thing.

**Can you tell me a bit about the, sort of, equipment you had at Parkes for your training. Was it good quality equipment?**

25:30 No, as a matter of fact it was makeshift, most of it. We had a very old type of radio that we used there and they didn't have any aircraft of course. Most of our training was on the ground, and then we started training on aircraft, and the only aircraft they had was Tiger Moths. And we used to get into the cockpit, the back cockpit of the Tiger Moth, with the radio

26:00 down between our legs, and we'd have this radio down here, on the floor, between our legs, and then at a later date they got hold of a couple of DC2s, not DC3s, DC2s, and they were a smaller version of the

DC3, and they used those as a travelling classroom, and we had, it took about nine, I think, nine students, half of them would be navigators,

26:30 because they had a navigation school at Parkes as well as the gunnery and the wireless air gunners school. And they'd have half of them would be navigators and half of them would be radio trainees, and we did that there. But it was much better than the Tiger Moths, because at least you had a desk with the radio in front of you, instead of down between your legs.

**Was that where you had your Morse code issues,**

27:00 **and learnt to do your Morse code successfully. Was that at that time?**

Well, where I couldn't do it was at Bradfield Park, but up there of course, I'd got up to twenty words a minute, and it didn't worry me much up there, but the only thing that worried me at Parkes, of course, was the radio theory, trying to remember it all.

**What were the most difficult parts of that?**

Oh, well, it was a lot of mumbo jumbo to me that I really didn't understand. I learnt most of it like a parrot,

27:30 you know, I didn't really understand a lot of it.

**Was that the theory about the science behind how a radio worked?**

That's right, yes. You know, I had eight months of that and it was a lot to learn. You wouldn't think there would be that much to learn about a radio, or operating it. And of course, once you learn it all, you never ever use it afterwards. A lot of things you learn that you don't use. And because if ever your radio went wrong once you were in the air,

28:00 of course, they had ground workers who would come and repair it. You didn't have to do it yourself, you see.

**You wouldn't have done your gunnery training at Parkes?**

No, I did it at Evans Head. Yeah, Evans Head, we went up there for a month, I think it was, and they had Fairey Battles up there, the original Fairey Battles that were used

28:30 in the French Campaign, in the early days of the war.

**Could you describe them for us?**

Pardon?

**Could you describe the Fairey Battles?**

Yes, Fairey Battles were a great big, looked like a great big Spitfire. Yes, that's what it looked like, only it had two cockpits in it, and they had a single Vickers gun in them, and they were no good.

29:00 They were a lovely looking aircraft for its day, but they were too clumsy, not really manoeuvrable and didn't have much speed. They used them up there, and we used to air-to-air and air-to-ground gunnery and you stand up in the cockpit with this gun, and on one occasion

29:30 we were doing shooting at drogues, a drogue being towed by another aircraft, and I think I had something like twenty-six shots in the drogue, and got back to the ground and the CO wouldn't believe it, you see, so he said, 'Something's wrong there, you'd better go up again, and do it again.' So I went back up and I think I got fifty-six shots in the drogue the second time. That's how I got a commission. I got a commission from up there,

30:00 and only two of us got a commission, of course.

**Was that just a raw, untapped skill that you didn't know of?**

Well, it might have been. I probably had a keen eye in those days.

**Had you had any shooting experience before?**

No. Not really. Oh, as a kid I'd done a little bit of shooting in the country, shooting rabbits or something, that's about all. Nothing, no great experience. And then I, with these drogues, you see,

30:30 they dipped the bullets in different coloured paints, you see, so if I went up, they'd use the same drogue for two of three people, and I might have green, and somebody else might have red, and somebody might have yellow or something, so they could count the holes in the drogue, you see. And then I did very well at that, but it seemed to be pretty good with guns at that stage.

31:00 When I went to England I used to go to the butts, as they called them, in the morning, and I used to train with, number one with a rifle and then with a hand gun and then with a shotgun, shooting clay pigeons.

**What was the location, sorry?**

Mmm?

**What was the location?**

Bournemouth.

**At Bournemouth. Oh, did you call it a butts?**

Mmm? Only the shooting, shooting range, you know. And . . .

31:30 **Was that freely available for the wireless air gunners to go and . . .**

Anybody, you could go there if you were an air gunner or something. It was just somewhere you could keep in practice. And I kept in practice every morning, I did pretty well with the clay pigeons because, that was the main thing, shooting from air-to-air, so it was a similar process. You had to fly

32:00 ahead of the aircraft or ahead of the clay pigeon, to hit the target. Otherwise you missed.

**Free ammunition?**

Oh, plenty of ammunition. No shortage of that, you could use as much as you wanted. I used to use a .38 revolver, and I got pretty good with those. Because when I was in Iraq you had to wear side arms the whole time we were up there, so I had to make sure I could handle a revolver.

32:30 **Was it merely a point of interest for you, or did you have a sense of it being for personal security?**

Oh, well, it was personal security number one, but another thing too, you had plenty of spare time on your hands at Bournemouth. You had nothing to, there were no classes or anything you had to go to, you just had to report each morning, see if you'd been posted somewhere, and then you'd have the day off, you see. But, if you wanted to go on leave,

33:00 or go up to London or something, you had to get a pass to go up there, and to leave Bournemouth, and it, they, there were hundreds of Australians there, it was an Australian reception centre, you know, and they took over the whole town. I think it was the Imperial Hotel or something I stayed at.

**Just take me back quickly to your commission,**

33:30 **and receiving that at the end of Evans Head. Was there some sort of passing out parade for everyone anyway. Was that a level of qualification?**

Oh, no. Yeah, we had a passing out parade at Parkes, just the fact that you'd finished your training, and the course would all march out and they took a few photos or something, but nothing public or anything about it. Just a parade on the parade ground at the station, that was all.

34:00 And, but as a commission, well, there was nothing as far as the commission was concerned. I was just discharged as a sergeant, and reinstated as an officer, with a commission. And when we were discharged here, of course, we just got a telegram to say, 'Return to Bradfield Park with all your gear', or something, well, we had to give them back everything.

34:30 But strangely enough they got most of my stuff, but actually it didn't belong to the air force, it belonged to me, all my equipment, because when you became an officer, they gave you forty pounds, in those days, and with that forty pounds you had to buy two blue uniforms, two khaki drill uniforms, and shorts and shirts and underwear, a torch and you had to pay for your bedroll,

35:00 you had to pay for everything, so everything actually belonged to me, but all the gear that I had, like bedroll and everything, they took. You know, it didn't belong to them, it belonged to me really, because I'd paid for it. But in later years of course, they were fitted out like anybody else, an officer in later years. But in those times it was going back to the times when an officer was a gentleman,

35:30 I suppose, and they sort of copied it. Because when I was at Bradfield Park, of course, one of the things I learnt there, they had books, you had to wear gloves and you had to do this, and they told you when to wear your mess jacket, and they told you all the rigmarole they taught you all that, but of course, you never used it in war time. But although gloves you did for a while, and then they went out, because nobody wore gloves,

36:00 it was only in cold weather when you put a pair of gloves on, you know.

**Do you recall the month that you finished in Parkes. Finished that part of your training?**

Yes, I left Parkes in October, 1941. Matter of fact, we sailed from Sydney on the 16th October, 1941, on the Mariposa,

36:30 and I came home on the Orion and I arrived home on the 15th September, I think it was, 1945.

**So at that point did you imagine that you were headed for the desert? Did you suspect that?**

What when I left here?

### **Or did you think you were going to England?**

No, I didn't think I was going there at all. I thought I'd be going to Britain and staying there. I, when we were at Bournemouth, they asked you what branch of the service you would prefer,

- 37:00 you see, so at those days, I knew somebody who'd been flying on Sunderlands before the war. As a matter of fact I knew a fellow who went over there when they first got the Sunderlands, to take delivery of them. A friend of mine. And I thought, 'Well, I'd like to be on Sunderlands,' you know. When they asked me what branch of the services I'd like to be in, I said, 'Coastal Command,' you see. Little expecting that I'd finish up.
- 37:30 The next thing I knew I was posted to a place called Bicester, which was just south of Oxford, and they were training on Blenheims, you see, so I did my operational training there on Blenheims, and little thinking that I was going to be posted, and then I was posted out to the Middle East, and I thought what am I doing out here. So we all got new aircraft
- 38:00 and we were to fly these aircraft out to the Middle East. The night before we left the bloke, the CO of the flight going out to the Middle East, pranged his aircraft, and he called for a volunteer to give up their aircraft and go out by ship. So we volunteered and gave our aircraft up to him to fly out, and we went out by ship. Well, we went out via West Africa
- 38:30 and we landed at Lagos in West Africa and flew from Lagos across to Khartoum and up to Cairo by Pan American Airways. And any rate, when we got to Cairo we discovered that none of those aircraft that left England arrived out in the Middle East. Whether they were shot down, or whether they ran out of petrol, of whether they got lost or something, I don't know,
- 39:00 but none of them arrived out there, so Lady Luck was sort of on our side at that stage, and we got out to Cairo and of course,

**I just need to pull you up. We're at the end of this tape, so I'll interrupt the story there.**

## **Tape 3**

- 00:30 **Doug, I just wanted to take a quick step backwards before we move on to the Middle East.**  
Yes.

### **Could you tell me about saying farewell to your family?**

The which?

### **Saying farewell to your family before setting off on the ship?**

Well, no, well, there was no farewell actually. We had a week's final leave, and my wife was living at Randwick at that time, in a flat with another girl,

- 01:00 and I just went to see them and sort of kissed her goodbye and off I went. And I went down and went aboard the Mariposa and off I went, nobody waved goodbye or anything. Although there were a few people down at the wharf who got a bit of inside information, I suppose, I didn't know where I was going at that stage or anything. So that was it, I kissed her goodbye
- 01:30 and that was it. Didn't see her again for four years.

### **Who was on the ship with you?**

We had a lot of trainees going across to Canada to do their training and there must have been about forty off this course that I was on. And of course, they had normal passengers. I remember we had Chiang Kai-shek, Mrs Chiang Kai-shek, on board, and he was on board,

- 02:00 and we had Big Chief Little Wolf, one of the big time wrestlers at that time, and a lot of notable people on board. And there was a few high ranking officers on board. And, you know, they couldn't do enough for us on this ship. The stewards on the ship couldn't do enough. They fed us, and gave us drinks,
- 02:30 and we couldn't pay for the drinks. And we had a terrific trip over there.

### **What was your date of departure?**

Date of departure was 16th October, 1941. and just before America went into the war. I suppose America was in the war about a month later. As a matter of fact, that's how close we went to the bombing of Honolulu.

- 03:00 So they, but we had a good trip over there. The sea was like a mill pond all the way going over there. We went without an escort, and the ship was floodlit all the way, it was unlike troop ships. Which had an escort. When we went across the Atlantic, we had a convoy of course, going across the Atlantic.

03:30 We had about seven destroyers and a couple of cruisers escorting us across. The Americans started off escorting us. They escorted us half way and then the British picked us up and escorted us, but we didn't have anything like the number of ships escorting us the second half as we did the first half.

**Can I ask you about the way you were received in America. By that stage they had obviously just entered war, had they?**

04:00 No, they hadn't entered the war at all when I was in America. They were still in the throes of peace time.

**So it only took a few weeks to get, two or three weeks to get to America?**

Oh, three weeks I think the trip was. Because it was a regular tourist run, Sydney to San Francisco.

**And what did you find their attitude towards the war to be at that time, the general public?**

04:30 Well, they didn't know anything about the war, at that stage. Nothing at all. You know, they knew that we were going over to fight for Britain, you know, that's all they knew.

**There wasn't much press coverage or anything?**

Oh, none at all. They were too busy making munitions and selling them over on and Lend Lease, which had started at that time.

**How different then was Canada to America?**

05:00 Ah, didn't see a great deal of Canada. We went to Vancouver. We spent the night in Vancouver and I remember, having been on a train for a few days, going up from San Francisco up to Vancouver, there was no showers or anything like that, so I went to a hotel, big hotel somewhere, to see if we could get a shower, you see,

05:30 and I remember there was a big ball on there, with all the beautiful ladies, well dressed, and all the men with their dinner suits and so on, and I went and asked if I could have a room to have a shower, and they gave me a beautiful room to go and have a shower and never charged me at all. They couldn't do enough. And then of course, I went around. It was a strange place, Vancouver, in those days you couldn't go to a hotel and have a drink, or something, you know, with anybody.

06:00 My first vision of Canada was walking along the road to find somewhere to have a drink. There's a sign said, 'Men', 'Women', you see, two different doors. And it turned out men could go in and have a drink there, and women could go in and have a drink there, but you couldn't both drink together. And you went in, there was no asking for a drink, you went into the bar

06:30 and they plonked a beer down in front of you. See, you couldn't have a scotch or anything. If you wanted a scotch you had to get a doctor's certificate and buy a bottle. And take it away. But all you could drink was beer. It was strange after the Australian way of drinking. And that was my first impression there.

**Was there a strong drinking culture within the RAAF [ Royal Australian Air Force] at that time?**

07:00 Oh, yeah, we drank pretty heavily. As a matter of fact, to give you an instance, when I was in Sharjah in the Persian Gulf, I was in charge of the Sergeants' mess and the navigator was secretary of the officers' mess and the pilot was in charge of the Airmen's Institute. So in our spare time, our job was to fly around the country buying, doing shopping. So we used to shop for food, of course, number one, for the mess, and we used to fly up to Bahrain,

07:30 and various places, and get a lot of groceries and ice cream and whatnot and bring back. Then in our spare time we might fly up to Tehran, or up to Cairo, or Gaza or somewhere, or over to Karachi, buying what grog we could get hold of, you see. So we'd fill the aeroplane up with grog, and bring it back, and split it three ways between the three messes.

08:00 **Who funded the messes?**

Eh.

**Who funded the messes? Was that money taken out of the wages?**

Oh, you paid. It was two shillings a day, I paid.

**That was for the officers? Two shillings a day?**

Yes. The airmen paid nothing. But you had to pay for your drink.

**Oh, sure. I was just wondering about mess fees.**

Oh, yes. Mess fees. The officers paid two shillings. The other ranks paid nothing. They got fed. Anyway, we'd bring this grog home and split it three ways,

08:30 and then we, in the officers mess, we used to charge threepence for a scotch, tuppence of a gin, penny for a liqueur, and a penny for, we used to get a lot of Persian wines and things. A penny for a glass of wine, and beer, beer was rationed. At the time, we used to get, occasionally, get a bottle a day, you know, sometimes.

09:00 **Were there attempts to brew your own over there?**

Eh?

**Were there attempts to brew your own?**

Oh, not on the station, no. In the air force it wasn't. Didn't have time. Because it takes a while to brew up some stuff. Any rate, you know, we used to sit out in front of the mess of a night time, in deck chairs, and we had a little Arab boy as a bar boy,

09:30 and he'd come round about a dozen blokes, you see, ask each one what they wanted to drink, and we'd tell him what we wanted to drink, and he'd come back and he'd give everybody their correct drink, no trouble, You could get blind drunk every night for two shillings, you know. Imagine, threepence for a scotch. That's four scotches for a shilling. And we used to do that every night. We used to drink pretty heavily. And we used to buy Corona cigars in Bahrain, for five shillings a box.

10:00 A box of twenty five, for five shillings. And we used to sit out and smoke Corona cigars and drinking our heads off, you know. We had a lot of fun, there.

**Was that a lot to do with the boredom, or the distance from home?**

Oh, we had nothing else to do. You've got to do something. But you were young and it didn't affect you very much. You seldom got a headache or anything.

10:30 We did pretty well, actually.

**Was there a problem with alcoholism?**

No, nothing like that, no. Down in Sharjah, it was hard living down there. Because, number one, there was nothing at Sharjah. Our mess was built out of coral blocks with a palm thatched roof on it, and it was pretty rough and ready,

11:00 and we lived in tents, and we had no comforts at all down there. And the water that we had to drink, you had to drink alcohol, because the water came from wells they had there, and there was a salt flat where we were, and they used to get the water out of the wells with a square of leather, with a rope on each corner, and they'd bring it up and they'd float the leather on top of the water,

11:30 and let it gradually fill with water and then they'd pull it up and let it go. If they were too rough with it and it mixed, there was salt water underneath the fresh, you see, and brackish water on top of the salt.

**Oh, yeah.**

And they had to sort of get it off the top. And it was filthy tasting stuff, and of course, they had to chlorinate it very strongly, and it was bit like taking a dose of medicine. We used to have to take a teaspoon of salt a day,

12:00 they didn't have salt tablets. In those days. A teaspoon of salt, and you'd have to have a glass of this water, and you'd have to hold your nose and pour the glass of water down your throat, so it wouldn't taste so badly. And, so even the cups of tea. Vile taste a cup of tea, but you had to drink something. So you had to put up with it. So the alcohol was a great relief. You only drank of a night time, of course.

12:30 You didn't drink during the day time. It was so hot down there, that it used to be, the temperate never dropped below ninety degrees, and the humidity was never below ninety-nine per cent humidity. Most of the time, and blokes, everybody had prickly heat rash,

13:00 and some died of heat stroke, and heat exhaustion. We could only fly from five o'clock in the morning up until nine o'clock in the morning. And five o'clock at night, till nine o'clock at night. Because the aircraft would get so hot during the day that you couldn't touch them. They'd burn the skin off your hand. The young fellows used to climb in them to do maintenance on them, and they'd only be in there five minutes and they'd have to be pulled out and somebody else would get in, and do some work,

13:30 and we used to fly dressed in just a short and a pair of shorts and a pair of sandals. That's what we wore when we were flying, and we always carried, everybody got hold of a two gallon thermos flask, and we used to fill that up with gin and lime mostly,

14:00 and we drank the whole two gallons while we were flying, all the time, you know. Everybody carried one of those, and of course, when they weren't in use for flying, we used to take them up to Bahrain and fill them up with ice cream, and bring them up. Bahrain wasn't, you know, was an Americanised oil company up there, Anglo/American oil company, and they had it all fenced in with cyclone fence,

14:30 and there was theatres and hair dressers, and whatnot, up there, all inside this compound, and we used to fly up there and buy this ice cream and bring it back for the mess occasionally.

**Weren't you concerned about flying in a plane with a pilot who was drinking a couple of gallons of gin?**

No. It came out as fast as you put it in.

**In sweat?**

In sweat, yeah. You used to have to carry a towel with you all the time to mop the sweat off your face.

15:00 Even when you were flying. You used to fly at fifteen hundred feet, and we'd do a four-hour patrol at fifteen hundred feet and it used to get terribly hot.

**You were there as part of Coastal Command, looking for submarines and doing convoy escorts, did you say before?**

Yes, well, actually. That's what surprised me. I said I'd like to be on Coastal Command when I was at Bournemouth, and when I got out to 244 Squadron

15:30 I discovered it was what they called a Naval Co-operation Squadron. And we were doing exactly what the Coastal Command did in England. We co-operated by doing anti-submarine patrols, and so, virtually I was in Coastal Command as I'd asked for, but not where I wanted to be.

**So it wasn't referred to, 244 wasn't referred to as part of Coastal Command?**

No, it was called a Naval Co-operation Squadron.

16:00 **But it was essentially the same duties.**

Doing the same duties, yeah. And 454 Squadron that I went to, after I came back from Kenya, that was also a Naval Co-operation Squadron when I was there, but then after I was shot down they re-formed, and they became part of the 8th Army Air Force. And they went up to the desert, and then they went up to,

16:30 in the landing in Sicily, and they finished up in Italy, after I'd left them. And they were no longer a Naval Co-operation Squadron.

**Was it at Bournemouth that you were crewed up?**

No, we were crewed up at Bicester, when we did Operational Training. You didn't get crewed up. You went and picked someone up and said,

17:00 'Would you like to be in my crew', or, 'Can I be in your crew'.

**Was there an actual time when they got you together in the one big space and said, right, 'Crew up.'**

Yes, yes. We did different training, you see, the navigators were being trained differently to the wireless air gunners and the pilots the same, you see. So you would all come together. All the time you were there, you'd gradually get to know them all, and then you'd make up between yourselves who you were going to crew with, and at Bicester

17:30 I crewed up with a young sergeant pilot, and he, although he was recommended to us by the chief instructor, he nearly killed us twice, by trying to land the Blenheim from about fifty feet, you know. And it bounced, bounced across the aerodrome, and on one occasion we nearly wiped off the commanding officer's office,

18:00 and we finally stopped on the ground, he came out and abused us for nearly wiping off his office. Nothing about killing ourselves, but any rate, I went out to the Middle East with him, and we were on 244 Squadron together, and he sort of disappeared. He became sick or something. I never ever did find out what actually happened, and we were without a pilot, the navigator and myself,

18:30 and this bloke, who was Squadron Leader Folkard, he was second in command on 244 Squadron, but he didn't have a crew, so we crewed up with him, and of course, we finished up going right through the war with him. But, until he had his arm shot off.

**Sorry, is the Blenheim a three or four-man crew?**

Three in the Blenheim, there was four in the Baltimore.

19:00 So when I got to 454 Squadron or course we had to get another wireless air gunner. Because there was two wireless air gunners, you see.

**One rear gunner and on mid upper gunner?**

Well, one mid upper gunner and one on the radio, you see. In the Baltimore, the Baltimore had four backwards firing guns in the floor, which the wireless operator operated, and the turret with four guns in it which the gunner operated, and this young fellow, another Australian,

19:30 he was the only time I had another Australian in the crew, as a matter of fact, and he came with us and



said could he crew up with us, so we said, 'Yes, OK,' so he was, unfortunately he was killed, and we used to take it in turns. I'd go in the turret today, and then he'd go in the turret tomorrow, and I'd be on the radio today, and he'd be on the radio tomorrow,

20:00 you know, that sort of thing, and just this particular day, the day we were shot down, it happened to be my turn in the turret, and he was on the radio and he was killed and I lived. It could have been the other way around, you see. A little bit of luck for me and a bit of bad luck for him. He . . .

**Can you tell me about any adaptation problems**

20:30 **you might have had to the equipment of the planes during operational training?**

Oh, well, in England, the cold weather got me mostly in England, because you know you had to wear a mask and a microphone on the front, and your nose would dribble all the time and your microphone would freeze up, you know, with ice, ice up, and your hands would get that cold you couldn't find the trigger of the guns. That was what sort of affected me more than anything in England.

21:00 **Was the equipment vastly different from anything you'd been using at Parkes?**

Different altogether, number one, they had a different type of radio, which was a Marconi radio. We had what they called a TR9, I think it was, at Parkes, and we had this Marconi at Bicester, and we, I had to sort of learn to use it all over again, but there was none of the sort of

21:30 radio theory to learn at this time, we had to learn how to use it, and I learnt that. But they were the only things I had to learn differently, even when we had to convert from Blenheims, when I went on to 244 Squadron on Blenheims, and then I went down to Kenya and they had Blenheims again down there, because it was an operational training unit down there, and we were instructors of course,

22:00 in our own field, and we flew a Blenheim back up to the desert, and then we had to do conversion course onto Baltimores, well, the conversion course was nothing, because we did the course at a place called Gianacis which was just near Cairo, and we did a conversion course there. The pilot, the Baltimore was a very narrow gutted fuselage

22:30 on it, and the pilot did his conversion course, by standing behind a pilot of the aircraft while he did a few circuits and bumps, and then he handed it around to our pilot and he just did a few circles and bumps, and our conversion, the navigator and myself, our conversion merely consisted of going and inspecting the fuselage on the ground, and seeing what was there. And that was all we did.

23:00 No flying or anything to train on it. So we went straight up the desert and joined 454. And we were welcomed up there. Supposed to be an Australian squadron, 454, an RAAF squadron, and there weren't that many Australians on it really. The bulk of the people on the squadron were RAF or Canadians or something.

23:30 **Did you experience any prejudices towards you as Dominion aircrew or . . .?**

No, Nothing like that. Everybody one and all. It was. It didn't matter what your nationality or religion was in the air force, it just didn't matter. You were all just. You see, my crew consisted of two RAF blokes and we had two Australians at 454 squadron.

24:00 But we all got on together. With the pilot, I kept in touch with them till they died, and they, the pilot, he was a permanent air force man, and he was only twenty three, he was younger than I was, and any rate, when he was shot down he had his right arm shot off, and nearly lost his leg as well,

24:30 and they had an official exchange of incapacitated prisoners, Germany and England, you see, so after we'd been there about six months, he was repatriated to England with this exchange, and when I got back to England he was CO of a station where they were training on DC3s to go out to Burma glider snatching off the ground. He, I had, he himself, wasn't flying the DC3s.

25:00 He was only permitted to fly Tiger Moths, with one arm, you see. But he was a Wing commander at that stage, and I had a couple of trips with him in a Tiger Moth, but that was all, and then he later stayed in the air force, he had various postings in the air force, and he, finally, didn't know what he was going to do.

25:30 He realised that promotion for him would be out, because he only had one arm and couldn't fly other types of aircraft or something, so he happened to look at the Air Force Gazette one day and saw them asking for people to go out to Lebanon to learn Arabic, so he thought, 'Oh, I'll go out there'. So he applied for it and was sent out to Lebanon to learn Arabic and he had loved the desert while he was out there,

26:00 so he was very happy about that, and he learned Arabic in Lebanon, and he was posted to Aden as Intelligence Officer at Aden. So he stopped at Aden as Intelligence Officer until his retirement came up, you see, and so he went back to England, and he didn't know what he was going to do and he happened to pick up the London Gazette one day,

26:30 and they were advertising wanting someone to go out to Aden as a civil Intelligence Officer, and so he applied for the job and he got the job, and back he went to Aden, so he was twenty-three years in Aden, and only left it when things got a bit rough in Aden, and I think Russia came into the picture there, or something there, and the RAF left Aden. He went back to England and retired then,

27:00 so that's what he did.

**Can I ask you about, you told us about your journey, your crew going down via ship to West Africa and then making your way across to find the elusive 422 Squadron? Why were they so elusive?**

Well, nobody knew where they were, I've got no idea. Nobody in Cairo had any idea. At headquarters, that's Air Force headquarters in Cairo.

27:30 Maybe it was the Australian RAAF headquarters, that might have been part of the problem, but all they knew it was somewhere up in Iraq. It was part of what they called the Persian/Iraq forces.

**Were they wholly mobile? Were they moving around a lot?**

Well, no, they had been at Shaibah which is near Basra, at one stage,

28:00 and then they went down the Persian Gulf. But nobody seemed to know. I don't know why nobody knew, and we had to find our way, we thought the best thing we can do is to go up to Iraq and see if they know where they are there. So we, those days as an officer, you had to find your own way around. You didn't get posted here, and you got together and you were put on a train or a boat, or something. You had to find your own way around.

28:30 So we went to the Transport Officer and we got some passes to travel around on a train, and we got to Suez, and then went across the Suez Canal, and got another train there, and went up to Gaza, and spent a couple of days there and then we got another train and went up to Damascus, in Syria, and when we got to Damascus we spent another couple of days there, and we got onto a Nairn Coaches.

29:00 It was a New Zealander who had started a coach run across the Desert to Baghdad from Damascus. We got on the coach and it travelled across the desert, about twelve hundred miles or something. No roads. They drove at night time because it was cooler, and they either followed the oil pipeline, or something of that way,

29:30 or they navigated by compass or something, but any rate, they went right across the desert, and it was quite a long trip. But they fed us on the bus and we arrived in Baghdad and then at Baghdad we were picked up there and taken out to the air force station at, oh, forgot the name,

30:00 but any rate, it was a permanent station that the air force had built after the First World War, and it was a big compound, fenced in, and they had all streets, bitumen-coated streets, and they had theatres, and swimming clubs and golf course and race track and houses for the married ones to live in, and it was like a little town on its own,

30:30 but they lived in luxury there, the permanent air force blokes. Or pre-war blokes, I suppose.

**What were your early impressions of the rest of Baghdad, of Baghdad in the main?**

Well, I didn't see a great deal of it. We were only there a short time, and we went around and had a meal at a hotel there, and spent the night there, and then we were picked up the next morning by truck, to take us out to the air force station.

31:00 **Iraq must have been a big opener for you, though?**

Oh, exciting days. Because in those days nobody knew much about these places. I went back to the old days, where you think about Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, that sort of thing, the old fables, and they were exciting places to be in, and any rate, we went from there, we got on a train. We found out there that they were down in the Persian Gulf somewhere, they didn't quite know where.

31:30 But we then got on a train, went back to Baghdad and got on a train, and went down to Basra and from Basra we went out to Shaibah, this place, Shaibah, and they told us they were down at Sharjah in (UNCLEAR). So any rate, we stayed there for a while, and then we got on a ship that used to ply from Basra to Karachi or somewhere like that,

32:00 I think it was called the British India Steamship company, or something, and it was only a small boat, and we got on there, there weren't many passengers on it, and we steamed down the Gulf for a few days, then they hove to off what was to be Sharjah, about a mile offshore, and they signalled ashore, and the air force sent out some Arab dhows to pick us up and bring us ashore.

32:30 **Were you warmly received into the Squadron?**

Oh, yes. They were all, everyone is always welcomed onto the squadrons. It's a friendly atmosphere on squadrons, no matter what squadron you went to.

**There were all English, were they, or were there some . . .**

No, no. There were a few Australians there, There weren't many, maybe half a dozen Australians there,

33:00 I forget now, but everybody, you didn't take much notice if they were Australians or RAF, because they were all dressed the same. You all spoke the same language, and did the same thing, you know.

**And were you flying ops on a daily basis?**

Flying? Yeah. On a daily basis. Well, mostly daily, some days you'd have off, depends whether your aircraft was U/S [Unserviceable] or not, you see. If it was U/S it might be U/S for a couple of days.

33:30 **Unserviceable?**

Unserviceable, yeah. And we also, not only flew Blenheims there, but we flew these big Vincents, which nobody had heard of, but they used to fly, we used to do four-hour patrols in those, but they had a top speed of eighty knots or something, and they, if you got a head wind, you used to nearly fly backwards sometimes in them. They were very slow, but they used to carry the load.

34:00 We used to carry all sort of things on them. I remember, going once and we had to get a main plane for a Blenheim, and we tied the main plane to the bottom of the fuselage of the Vickers Vincent and took off as though there was nothing wrong with it, you know, and off we went, brought the main plane back. And another time we went,

34:30 in one to Muscat in Oman and we had to pick up some Arab boot makers. We had what they called Askari [East African soldiers], they were an Arab regiment there, and we had to make sandals for them, so we flew down to Muscat, went there many times as a matter of fact.

35:00 But Muscat was in a ring of hills, and the Vickers Vincent was the only aircraft that could land there. And you'd circle round and round in the hills and finally come down and land on the ground, and load up and take off the same way. And one occasion we went down there and we loaded the boot maker in, and all his leather, and bits and I couldn't fit in, so all I could do was get my legs in the cockpit, and I had to hang on with my body outside the aeroplane,

35:30 while we flew home with all this load of leather and stuff. But, you know, it was no more difficult than hanging on to a motor car, because you're only doing forty or fifty knots or something, so you're not travelling very fast. So you're not likely to get blown off.

**It's a bit further to fall then from a car.**

A bit further to fall, that's all.

**What was the situation in terms of air superiority down around the areas where you were flying?**

36:00 Down there was no air superiority at all. It was just a safeguard, just escorting all the goods up for Russia, you see. It was a time when all the Lend Lease stuff they were sending up to Russia, because they were having a bad time, and they were sending ship after ship loads of aircraft and guns and things up, and they used to unload them at Abadan in Persia,

36:30 and they, there'd be RAF blokes who sort of assembled the aircraft there, and then the Russians would send their pilots down, their crews down, and they'd stand there until the aircraft was ready and as soon as the aircraft was ready, they'd hop in and off they'd go back to Russia with them. They, there was an awful lot of stuff came up for Russia, up the Gulf.

37:00 **Was the Luftwaffe or the Italians a concern in the Gulf at that time?**

No, well, we, the Persian and Iraq air force was formed originally because they thought the Germans were going to come down through the Caucasian Mountains and come down through Iran and Iraq, so that's why the force was originally formed up there. But of course, the Russians had advanced and stopped the Germans from doing just that,

37:30 so they sent them down to the Persian Gulf to escort them up to Russia. They were all going back down the other way, you see.

**They weren't a threat flying out of Eastern Africa at all?**

No, I think they sank one submarine down there, and a couple of ships had been sunk down in that area, but that's about all that happened down there.

38:00 **So the primary enemy concern was submarines?**

Submarines, yeah, yeah.

**What sort of detection did you have on board, detecting equipment?**

A pair of eyes, that's all.

**And that was basically the pilot**

That was the pilot, yeah. Or anybody, actually. You could all see. So they weren't, fortunately there weren't many down there, but they were there. And we were there to protect the ships,

- 38:30 because there was a lot of oil went down the Gulf, and we used to fly up, right up and down both sides of the Persian Gulf, and out into the Indian Ocean, and went down the Arabian Coast, down as far as a place called Salalah, in, we used to have detachments go there, and stay there, you see, Masira Island was another big base.
- 39:00 It finished up as an American base in the end, the Masira Island, and we used to fly up and down there, and then we had a couple of Catalina aircraft that were actually based in East Africa, and they used to fly up and the other end of their patrol would be Sharjah, you see, so they used to do part of the anti-submarine work as well.

## Tape 4

- 00:30 **Doug, as well as the direct convoy escort that you'd be doing, there would be random, sorry, not random, but regular patrol work.**

Oh, regular patrol work, as well as the convoy. Convoy escort would only be with the convoys, and they wouldn't be every day, so you would be patrolling the area looking for submarines. Because out there, we used to get a lot of reports of submarines, particularly from American aircraft flying over,

- 01:00 and they'd see a submarine, but when we went flying over looking for a submarine we'd find they'd be great big sharks, you know, the sharks there would be about forty foot long. I suppose they'd be like those sort of sharks they see in Western Australia.

### **The Whale Sharks?**

Whale sharks, yeah. And they were huge things. Nobody used to believe me when I used to tell them how large the sharks were there. Until one day, there was a picture in the Sydney Herald or something, and it showed a picture of a ship that was coming down the Red Sea,

- 01:30 the Osterius [Asterius?] I think the ship was called, and it had one of these great big whale sharks wrapped around its bows. They had a photograph of this shark wrapped, and of course they believed them then when I told them. It's funny how people won't believe you with things. Another thing I couldn't get people to believe, was when we were on this raid in Crete I looked back and I saw a bomb chasing us,
- 02:00 a bomb we'd dropped was actually the aircraft, and it was catching up with the aircraft, you see, and I told everybody and nobody would believe me. Any rate, one of the aircraft got back from the raid, and I met the bloke, don't know if it was this year or last year at Anzac Day, didn't know of him before, and he said he was flying at Number Two to us, he was in the aircraft flying at Number Two to us,
- 02:30 and he watched this bomb chasing us, and he said he thought it exploded underneath the tail of the aircraft, and then I knew my story was true. So nobody would have believed me before about this bomb chasing us. But we were flying so low that the bomb must have, well, we were bombing a bridge, and the bomb must have hit the ground flat and just bounced and sort of, its momentum just made it chase the aircraft back up again,
- 03:00 because we were pretty low, you see. That's what happened. So these things can happen and you don't know anything about them.

### **What capability did you have to take on a submarine, or to destroy a submarine?**

We carried, on the Blenheims we carried two 250-pound depth charges and 2 250-pound anti-submarine bombs. And we dropped those, of course, that's the only thing you had. You had to catch them close to the surface,

- 03:30 or on the surface, one of the two. Before they were effective. But that's what we carried. The Vickers Vincent carried the same load, and we carried pretty much the same load on the Baltimores, as well. It carried two thousand pound of bombs, it carried a bit more than the Blenheims.

- 04:00 **So who was in charge of dropping the bombs, taking care of the bombs, if you had just three of you on board?**

Oh, the navigator dropped the bombs. The navigator, when you're making a bombing run the navigator takes charge of the aircraft, and he guides the aircraft onto the target and then drops the bomb. Opens the bomb bay doors first and then drops the bomb. And down they go.

- 04:30 So, he had a pretty responsible job and had to have a pretty good eye, I suppose, for directing the bombs onto the target.

### **So he played the roles of both bomb aimer and navigator?**

Bomb aimer and navigator. And in the bigger aircraft, like the Halifaxes and Lancasters, of course, they had a bomb aimer and they had navigators, and the same thing with the crew. They had gunners, not wireless air gunners,

05:00 and they had radio operators or signals operators, as they called them. So things sort of changed over the war. The wireless air gunners were a thing of the past, and we, even in the Baltimores, the later crews that came onto the Baltimores, they had straight gunners and straight wireless operators. So everything changed during the war,

05:30 of course, as we know. Changed from Tiger Moths to Lancasters and Superfortresses and things.

**Were you ever successful in taking out a submarine?**

No. No. Never, no.

**Did you have a few incidents?**

No. I had a very quiet time, as a matter of fact, except when I, we used to, well, that's telling a lie. When I was on 454 Squadron we used to do various jobs there.

06:00 We not only did submarine patrols and convoy escorts, we did shipping strikes, and we'd got up around the Dodek [Dodecanese] and these islands, the Greek islands, looking for shipping and we'd strafe the shipping and bomb them. And they might only be small caiques, as they called them, a sailing ship, and,

06:30 or they might be freighters or something and they had a few good strikes on the squadron. 454 Squadron. They wiped out a lot of E-boats [German torpedo boats] and all that sort of stuff, you know, and there was plenty of it around the Mediterranean, of course. I've got a list in there of the number of ships that were lost in the Aegean Sea in the campaigns, Greek campaigns,

07:00 in the Aegean Sea. You'd be surprised, there was dozens and dozens of ships. War ships I'm talking about, I'm not talking about freighters and all that sort of thing. Actual destroyers and battleships and aircraft carriers, and all that sort of thing, and it's amazing.

**How long did you spend with 422 Squadron in . . . ?**

454.

**In 422?**

Oh. 244

**244, sorry.**

Eight months I spent down there in the Persian Gulf.

07:30 And that was a tour, and from there I was posted back and we had to make our way back to Cairo of course, and I think we had a job getting transport at that time, so any rate, we finally arrived back at Cairo and we were posted down to Kenya.

**We haven't met anyone who's been in Kenya yet. Can you tell us a bit about what the set up was down there?**

You had two or three, number one,

08:00 the air force had four, at least four stations down there that I know of. Number one, there was one at Nairobi, which was headquarters, and then there was a place called Gilgil, which was a sort of a place, an air force station near Nairobi, then one at Nanyuki, which was up on the top of the, what's the name the big valley, what do you call it.

08:30 Any rate, then there was another one Nakuru, on Lake Victoria. And they were two operational training units, and they trained blokes from all over the world. At Nanyuki, the town wasn't very big, mostly tin shacks and things, and we used to have to get up of a morning

09:00 and chase the wild animals off the air field before we started. It would be giraffe, and all sorts of gazelles, and deer and buck and all sorts of stuff roaming around, and you'd have to get rid of them. It was a lovely place. At one stage, food was very plentiful down there. They, it used to be quite warm of a day,

09:30 nice and warm during the day, but of a night time it'd be so cold you'd have to put your blue uniform on. Instead of being in shorts and shirts, you know.

**Did you enjoy the instructing role?**

Well, not very much, no. Not active enough, you know. I had to formulate a lot of notes to instruct on,

10:00 and it wasn't, I wasn't a school teacher by any means, you know. But I did all right at it I suppose.

**And there were people there from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, England.**

That's right, yeah, all over the place.

**Poles?**

Oh, I don't know. There were no Poles there. They mostly went to England the Poles. They came out of England.

10:30 **Zimbabwe? Was there a fair bit of traffic going between Zimbabwe and Kenya?**

No. Not a great deal. But they used to fly up through Kenya, going up to Cairo, or to the desert, and mostly South Africans, and they had a lot of South African WAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] that used to go up there. They were beautiful women, you know, those South African women. Big, tall girls, you know. Blondes.

11:00 They used to fly up through there. We used to see a lot of them. And down in Zimbabwe of course, they had another OTU [Operational Training Unit] down there. In Rhodesia it was called, wasn't it, then? And they used to fly up of course. But of course, we were inland you see, and they would possibly fly up via Nairobi, and up that way,

11:30 but when I went down there, I went down on a flying boat, a Sunderland flying boat from Cairo and we, of course, went down the Nile and landed at Port Bell on Lake Victoria, which is just near Nakuru, and from there we went to Nakuru and went to Nanyuki. No, flew down to Nairobi, and when we got to Nairobi

12:00 and we found that the CO from the station, from 244 Squadron, was already there, and he wondered what had happened to us. Took us six weeks to get down there. And ...

**So at this stage, you had the most magnificent global travelling experience. You covered a lot of ground.**

I was in thirty six different countries during the war.

**An unbelievable trip.**

Yeah, it was.

**But was there frustration at the lack of action**

12:30 Oh, a lot of the time yes. War, as far as the air force was concerned, it was one of those things, a lot of wasted time that you had nothing to do, and others you might be on it all the time. Depended on what branch you were in. You see, the ones in Bomber Command in England, now Bomber Command, the Australians in Bomber Command represented two percent of the total Australians

13:00 in the services. All services. And they lost twenty percent of the total Australian casualties. And Bomber Command on a whole had a hundred thousand men go through it, and they lost fifty thousand men. So you know, they were, almost every night they were doing a raid over Germany, and mostly for a very short period, because they were either

13:30 shot down or killed or something or other, and a lot of POWs [Prisoners of War] of course, and flocks of them came in every day from Bomber Command.

**So did you feel that was where the real air war was going on?**

That was where the real air war was.

**Did you want to be a part of it at that time?**

I wouldn't have minded, no. But I'm probably lucky that I wasn't, you know.

**At what point did you hear news of Japan and America being in the war in the Pacific?**

Well, get news of it?

14:00 **Yeah, were you crossing the Atlantic or something at that time?**

No. No. when Japan came into the war I was in, oh, I must have been, let's see.

**You left the 16th of October from Australia, didn't you? It was only the 7th or 8th of December that they . . .**

I'd have been in England

14:30 somewhere at that stage. Probably was at Bournemouth. Would have been at Bournemouth, because I spent the first Christmas at Bournemouth. Because I went to some family's home for Christmas dinner and they had, Lady Rider, I think it was, they had some group that used to entertain the Australian troops, you see, at Bournemouth, and this Christmas a mate of mine and myself,

15:00 were invited to a home at a place called Lymington, just outside Bournemouth, we spent Christmas there, and we had a very nice Christmas. They had a wonderful Christmas and the table was all decorated, and they had Australia right across the top of the table, done in flowers, and the husband of

this woman

15:30 was a Brigadier or something in the army, and the daughter was a commander in the navy, the son was a lieutenant commander, and the girl's boyfriend was there and he was a lieutenant commander, and we were two little pilot officers. But they were very nice and we had a great time there for a few days and we went back again. So that, I was in Bournemouth when the Japanese came into the war.

16:00 **How difficult was it for you to be stuck in Europe when Australia was now directly under threat?**

We tried to come home. Well, we were in Bournemouth then, because the other bloke that got a commission with me at Evans Head, he was a bit of a rough rider bloke, so he got a deputation up and got onto Winston Churchill,

16:30 and demanded that we be sent home. And Winston Churchill sent back and said, 'You're in the RAAF and you'll be stopping here. You won't be going home'. So...

**He received a letter back from Winston?**

Yes.

**Wow!**

We were stuck so, you see. We were part of the Empire Air Training Scheme, and we were trained for the RAF. We weren't trained for the RAAF at all. We were trained for the RAF. We might have been in the RAAF,

17:00 but we were actually attached to, and we were under their command and whatever happened was what they said, not what the Australian government said.

**Was that of great concern for you though?**

Well, it was a little bit at the time, yes. We all wanted to come home, and we thought we should be home, but it transpired, I never saw the war at home. I went away, when I went away,

17:30 there was not such thing as WAAAFs for instance, when I went away. There was no Americans here of course. I didn't meet many Americans in fact. I met a few odd ones in Cairo and I thought they were very nice fellows, you know, and that's all. But when I came home again, the Americans had all gone. There were plenty of WAAAFs of course, when I came home but the Americans had all gone.

18:00 So I really didn't see anything of the war here at all.

**Did you see what they'd left behind though, an influence?**

No, no. Only all the girls had been chasing the Americans of course, and getting themselves stockings, and so on from them.

**There weren't major cultural changes that you noticed?**

Oh, no, no. I think it changed the way of life with a lot of the women, because you know, they'd been used to the good times during the war years

18:30 and when it came back to normal life it was a different kettle of fish.

**Not to get distracted, just talking about that stage where Japan was entering the war and you were stuck in, hearing the news of Singapore must have been an enormous shock at that time?**

Yes. It was because, the first we heard was that the Hood [actually Prince of Wales] and the Repulse had been sunk by the Japanese air force there, and I had friends there, who I had been writing to in Singapore, as a matter of fact,

19:00 in the army, and of course, they never made it out. They died in Changi or somewhere, and you know, you couldn't get any news at all of what had happened to them.

**What did the British press say about the fall of Singapore?**

Well, it wasn't, well, we didn't see much press in England really.

**Was there outrage? Because, I mean, it had been put forward as the impregnable fortress.**

19:30 The biggest news item there was the fact the Hood and Repulse had been sunk. The bomb had gone straight down the funnel, or something, into the engine room and the ship sank in a short period of time, or something, but . . .

**And yet Singapore was the symbol of British Rule in the East, and once that went . . .**

Yes. Once that went that was it, yeah. But there was nothing much said about it,

20:00 or we didn't hear much about it. Well, probably we weren't sort of as interested as much as we should have been in that part of the world. We were interested in the European War at that stage, and with the

result that we, men who were in the European War were virtually part of the forgotten war, because here in Australia the European War might not have eventuated at all. But all they talk about here now is the Japanese War

20:30 which was their war, and the other was Britain's war. And that's all they talk about here, so, you know I joined the POW Association here in Sydney and Beryl my sister, joined it too. The Women's Auxiliary she joined. And any rate, they, the air force blokes

21:00 don't join those sort of things. I went in to a few meetings, and the only bloke in the air force there. They were all army blokes. Most of them had been in Singapore and Changi and so on, and most of them were friends and they'd all joined together, and they all knew one another, and they all came from the same units and so on. But with the air force, you had no particular unit. You joined the air force

21:30 and you could be in one unit today, and another one next week, and another one some time after it, and you were all over the place. You were never in the same place for very long. With the result that you never formed a close association with members of a unit, or a squadron. I belonged to the 454 and 459 Squadron Association. 459 Squadron was a sister squadron

22:00 who were flying Hudson bombers, and they were doing the same work as we were doing, and they were on the same aerodrome as we were in North Africa, and they did the night flying because they had equipment for night flying, and we did the day flying, and so we've got an Association of the two squadrons. And I went, the first time I went to a reunion of that squadron,

22:30 the only man I knew at the reunion was the Adjutant. He was the only man I knew. I didn't know anybody else. And the other day, as I just said to you, the fellow that got back from this raid, was the only bloke I knew that was on the squadron at the same time that I was there. So, all the others had come at a later date. Some of them had only been on the squadron a few months, and others had been there a year or two, a year or something,

23:00 and since I'd left there they'd had something like four different commanding officers, for instance. And they, you get moved around so you don't sort of make any real association with one particular group of men. They, you're a lost number sort of thing.

**Did that suit you at the time?**

Mmmm?

**Did it suit you, moving around like that?**

Well, it didn't make any difference to me at the time,

23:30 because I didn't even think about it. You know, you only thought about yourself and where you were, and you made a few, you had a crew and the crew stayed with you. They were the only friends you made, but in my case my crew was in England, and I was in Australia. I wrote to them frequently and I used to send food parcels to them at Christmas time. And I also sent them to friends I'd made in prison camp.

24:00 I used to send about ten Christmas parcels to these people, and over the years, and gradually one by one they died and I used to send it to their wives, and then their wives died, and I've finished up now the whole lot of them have died, and I've still got one left now, who was the son of my navigator. I still send him a few bottles of wine of something for Christmas, you know,

24:30 and that's some of the way I've been able to keep in contact with them. So, you know, it changes. I go, about once a month, I've been going up to Newcastle, to the United Services Club at Newcastle. A group of us started going up there from here. Some of the blokes I'd become friends with on the 454 Squadron Association,

25:00 and we had, we went up to this club because, number one, one of the COs lived up there and belonged to the club, and one of the crew members that I happened to know personally, or knew his family personally, belonged to the club up there, and half a dozen of us will go up there from Sydney once a month, and they had a monthly luncheon. Or not a monthly, they have a weekly luncheon,

25:30 but we go up once a month. And it's one of those places, it's a real club where you walk into the bar, and you might have to pay seventeen, twenty dollars, or something like that, and you pay that over the bar, and you drink in the bar as much as you like, until someone comes and says 'Luncheon served', and you all got down to the dining room and they serve lunch, and they have probably about four bottles of wine on the table,

26:00 for about eight people at the table, and all that comes out of your twenty dollars. There's no poker machines. All labour is voluntary labour, a few, couple of billiard tables, and a bit of memorabilia about the place, and everybody wears a name tag, everybody talks to everybody

26:30 and you sit at any table with anybody you like, and talk. It's the only place I've ever been that's been a real club. Everybody knows everybody. Any way, I started off, got a bit off the track there. Since I've been going up there, they've all gradually died off these fellows. And even the CO that lived up there, he



died, so all there is when I go up there now is the man that I knew that lived up in the Dungog area up there,

27:00 that's how I came to know him, and he still goes there, and I've got two fellows come up from Sydney with me on the train. So, when I go up now, where I can't walk or anything, I get taken up to Emu Plains station by Beryl's grandson, and he puts me on the train there, and I get off at Central, and these two fellows that go up with me, meet me at Cental and put me on the train,

27:30 bring me back, vice versa, and the one that lives in Newcastle, meets me at Newcastle station now, and picks me up in his car and drives me up to the club, which is only a couple of hundred yards anyhow. So, it's a good sort of a club. So there the only real associations I have.

**Tell me about 454 Squadron and how that differed from your previous experience?**

How do you mean?

28:00 **Yes, you went from Kenya up to 454, is that right?**

Kenya, yes.

**And they were in the Northern Desert there?**

In the desert there, well, it was no different. We were living in tents of course. Because in the desert you had to be a mobile sort of a squadron. We were at Charga, you were based at Sharjah, you see. Although we were still in tents there. But you had to be in tents up in the desert, because you were mobile. You moved from place to place.

28:30 For instance, we were in a place called Gambit 2, which was just near Tobruk, but the squadrons, all through the war the squadrons would be moving up and down the desert, from landing place to landing place, and the only difference to me was we were flying in a different area, over the Mediterranean

29:00 which, which undoubtedly was much more dangerous than it was in the Persian Gulf, and you were doing more dangerous things in the 454 Squadron than I was before. For instance, the raid on Crete, where I was shot down, was something that I hadn't done before, and we flew, had to fly at ground level, we flew at between fifty and a hundred feet,

29:30 all the way from Tobruk to Crete, across the ocean, and then of course, we went in, and of course, Crete is a mass of hills and valleys. Very hilly country and of course, we had to fly up the valleys and up over the spline at the end, and into the next valley, and so on, and it gave the German defenders an opportunity to shoot sideways at us, up at us, and straight at us

30:00 in some respects, so we, it was a pretty silly sort of a mission, really.

**Were you straight into Baltimores when you joined 454?**

Straight into it, yeah.

**Did you go straight into Baltimores.**

Straight into it. Yes.

**Had you done a conversion course whilst in Kenya?**

No, no. We did it at Gianacis near Cairo. My conversion course, and the navigator's conversion course, was just having a look at the fuselage of a Baltimore.

30:30 Didn't do any flying or anything in it. We just went straight to flying in Baltimores in 454.

**And you took on a new crew member who was an Australian?**

Who was an Australian, yeah.

**Can you tell me how it was different, how the experience of flying in a Baltimore was different from flying in a Blenheim.**

Well, the only difference was that in some of the Baltimores we had

31:00 .5 millimetre guns instead of .303s. You either had two .5 millimetres in the turret, or four .303s. but apart from that, well, the difference was that you didn't have to operate a radio and a turret at the same time. Because you had the radio in the turret in the Blenheims and you had to operate both. But in the Baltimore, you only had the turret with the guns in it, or the radio in the fuselage

31:30 and you sat on a stool and operated the radio, and then if you were attacked you'd just get down on the floor with these four guns in the floor.

**Where was that set in relation to the pilot? Where was it positioned in the . . .**

Well, that was one of the faults with the Baltimore, that if anything went wrong you couldn't do anything.

- 32:00 You couldn't get from one position to the other. The only two that could get from one position to the other was the gunner and the radio operator, but as far as the pilot and the navigator was concerned, they were separated. If the navigator wanted to give the pilot a course to do, he had to have a slip of paper and poke it up through a hole like this with his hand, you see, or a message he had to pass up. And you couldn't do anything. If something happened to the pilot, you couldn't do anything to help him.
- 32:30 because nobody could get to him. And they had a bulkhead between each one, you see. The navigator, or course, sitting out in the front in a Perspex dome cone, nose cone, and he was stuck there. He couldn't get back, so that was the only thing that was wrong with them. But as far as the aircraft was concerned, well, they left the Blenheims for dead of course,
- 33:00 because they had eight guns in the wings, to start off with, that the pilot could operate, and they had four in the floor which the wireless operator operated, and they had four in the turret with the air gunner you see. So it had sixteen guns on it, as far as defence was concerned, so that part left, and it had a much greater speed than the Blenheim too.

**Would the ground guns also be used for strafing as well as defence against enemy aircraft?**

Well that was what the belly ones were really meant for, was ground strafing

- 33:30 **So were you doing quite a bit of army support there?**

Oh, yeah, yeah. We did, after I left they did. I was doing, as I said, what I did was Naval Co-operation, but after I left they went to the 8th Army, the Desert Air Force and that's what they were doing. Strafing and bombing, troops and troop movements and whatnot, you see.

**So during your time you were doing convoy escorts?**

Yes.

**Submarine hunting?**

Submarine, anti-submarine work.

- 34:00 **And also attacking army?**

Any army and shipping, and we also did a lot of photography work too. They went out doing, just unarmed and taking photographs, you know.

**Like a precursor to the satellites, was it. Sort of like reconnaissance?**

Well, that's where you pick up where the ships were amongst the islands, you see. The aircraft would go out and photograph the area,

- 34:30 and then bring it back and then you'd know exactly where the ships were, and they'd know where to go. So...

**Were you meant to take photos when you dropped your bomb load, as well?**

No, no. No, they did that in Bomber Command, but they did it for a reason there. Because in many cases with Bomber Command the bombs might land five miles away from the target, you know.

- 35:00 I don't know much about it, but it would be pretty difficult, I would say, of a night time, and flying at perhaps twenty or twenty-five thousand feet or something, and dropping bombs, at pinpoint accuracy. It would be very difficult, wouldn't it?

**Were there any standout operations involving the strafing or bombing of enemy ships?**

Well, 459 Squadron, oh no, 454 Squadron, they went up,

- 35:30 after we were shot down in Crete, they went up and got onto a convoy of German ships up around Crete.

**Were there any that you were involved with, involving strafing?**

No, no, the only one I was involved in, of course, of that nature, was the one when I was shot down. They, because they only had about eight aircraft on the squadron at the time. They'd been flying Blenheims too, before.

- 36:00 Strangely enough, 454 Squadron had been in the Persian/Iraq forces as well, with Blenheims, and they were based up at Kirkuk in Tehran, in Iran I should say, and they came back down to the desert and then they re-formed in Alexandria somewhere with these Baltimores, and they went up,

- 36:30 but they'd only been in the desert two months or something when I went there, you know, it was sort of a new job for them. And they had a bad day when we were shot down. It's, I think, we lost six out of eight aircraft and one got back as far as,

- 37:00 just off the coast, and ditched in the water, and they got out all right that crew, they were lucky that the plane didn't have any petrol in it, and the tanks acted as floats, and the plane actually floated ashore,

and they recovered it I think. And the other one was this chap that I met that got home. One crew actually got home safe and sound.

37:30 But the one that, strangely enough you were talking about Zimbabweans a minute ago, the one that landed in the drink and got out, the pilot of that was a bloke who came from Zimbabwe. He lives there now, I don't know if he's still alive, but he lived there after the war. And I think he worked for some oil company or something or other, but it was rather strange.

38:00 But they had all came ashore, and next day they remembered that they'd forgotten to let the pigeons out of the plane. Because you carry pigeons during the war, for messages, you see. Emergency messages.

**I did not know that.**

Eh?

**Did not know that.**

Didn't you know that? You carry pigeons and of course, you put the message in the little capsule, and let the plane go, the pigeon go, and off it went back home with a message, hopefully,

38:30 that it'd get back with a message. If something happened to you, you see.

**Did you have them in the Blenheims and the Baltimores?**

No, we didn't have them in the Blenheims, only had them in the Baltimores. Because there was nowhere much for them to go down in the Persian Gulf. Although, strangely enough, in the Persian Gulf we used to friendly with a local sheik and his family, and we used to go hunting with the Arabs,

39:00 and the first time I went out hunting with them I was rather surprised, because we went out on camels with a falcon, you see, then they had dogs, like half bred greyhounds, sort of thing. And then you'd get out in the desert and you'd let the falcon go, and it would go off and it would circle round and round and round, and you'd watch it, and it would dive down, you see, and as soon as it dived down you'd let the dogs go.

39:30 And the dogs raced up, and when the dogs got there the falcon had got a rabbit, of all things. You wouldn't think there'd be rabbits in the desert, but rabbits. And they had the, the dogs would race up and take the rabbit from the falcon, and then you'd have to race up on the camel and take the rabbit from the dogs. But, it was great fun and we used to have shooting competitions with rifles. And they weren't very good shots, the Arabs,

40:00 but they had some beautiful rifles and things, all inlaid with gold and silver, and they, you know, lovely looking things. They used to swap rifles, and try them out. But we did pretty well against them in competition, anyhow.

## Tape 5

00:30 **Doug, I'd like, the first thing I'd like to ask you about is, when you went to America, you mentioned you went to Hollywood. Could you tell me about that?**

Yes, well, we went over, of course, America wasn't in the war, and the ship pulled into San Diego, and we were met,

01:00 the crew actually was responsible for us going to Hollywood. The crew of the ship. They radioed ahead of the ship arriving, and made arrangements and when we got to San Diego we were met by nineteen police motor cyclists, who had a lot of buses and they loaded us all in buses and the police motor cyclists took us through Hollywood, like you used to see on the pictures,

01:30 when the police drove straight through all the intersections, and we went like that through Hollywood, and when we got to Hollywood we went to Warner Bros Studio, I think it was, and we watched a couple of films. One was Days of Our Lives [The Best Years of Our Lives?], I think was the name of the picture. We watched them filming for a while,

02:00 and I forget the name of the other one. And Bette Davis was in one, and each, after we'd had a good look around the studios, we were taken to lunch. But they had young actresses take us all around for lunch, and I had, what's her name? Betty Williams was it, the swimming actress, who used to do swimming scenes.

02:30 I went to lunch with her, and we had lunch in a cafeteria, I suppose you'd call it, on the set. Then they took us for a trip through Hollywood itself, and showed us famous restaurants, like the Brown Derby, and those sort of places that were popular in those days. And then of course, it was back to the ship again, and off we went to San Francisco.

- 03:00 But when we got to San Francisco we had to leave the ship and we had to wait on the wharves, and we were taken in ferries across the harbour to, over the Oakland on the other side, where we were loaded into trains once again, and we had the old Pullman porters, on the train, the Pullman carriages and off we went to Vancouver via Portland, and Oregon,
- 03:30 through Oregon, and up to Vancouver. And it took, I forget how long it took now to go up there. It was probably, I think it must have been a day and a night or something. And then we left the train at Vancouver, and had a day in Vancouver. I went to a hotel to have a shower and get cleaned up,
- 04:00 have a shower and shave, and one of the leading hotels, very nice hotel too, and they gave me a room, or a suite it was, not so much a room, a suite, and I had a nice shower and cleaned up and went out and had some dinner then. And then it was a case of, we must have stopped on the train, I think, that night. So back to the train and off we went across Canada.

**Was that Esther Williams, the ...?**

What?

**Esther Williams?**

- 04:30 Esther Williams, yes, Esther Williams.

**What was she like?**

Oh, she was a lovely girl. Of course, in those days. That was a few years ago, of course. I don't know if she's still alive. I think she is.

**Did you meet her?**

Oh, yes, yes. I had lunch with her.

**Personally?**

Oh, yes, yes. So you know, we had great excitement. We were, actually we were the first Australian troops to enter America in uniform. And hence,

- 05:00 all the excitement. They were as excited about it as we were. Of course, there was a lot of press reporters and things around, getting information and taking photos and so on, you know. And some of the photos appeared back here in the Women's Weekly. It was there.

**What did you talk about to Esther Williams?**

Oh, a lot of nonsense, mostly, I suppose. I can't remember, but it wouldn't be anything too bright.

- 05:30 Probably asked a few questions about the film industry and Warner Bros and so on, but we'd been taken all over the set, and shown all the phoney streets, and houses with one wall on them, and that sort of thing, and went through the sets and, there was all sorts of people there. Of course, hundreds and hundreds of people around, they were dressed in everything you can imagine. From cowboys and Indians to
- 06:00 seventeenth century dresses and so on. Yeah, it was very interesting.

**Were you a big movie fan?**

Oh, not really. No, I never went to the movies very often in those days. We went to the movies when, just before I was married and once I was married, we used to go to the movies once a week, that's all. And of course, most of the movies you saw in those days

- 06:30 were pretty big movies. You didn't see all the rubbish that you see nowadays. It was something pretty startling and at least you knew the names of a lot of the actors and actresses.

**So tell me, how did you come to have lunch with the movie star?**

Oh, they arranged it, they arranged it over there. They arranged all these young actresses to entertain the fellows to lunch,

- 07:00 and they took us all to lunch. I didn't go on my own, sort of thing, the whole lot of us went to lunch. But there was all these young girls, or young actresses I should say, who were supposedly to be hostesses. And that's how I came to go. It wasn't by any of my own means that I went, it just happened that way. The same thing happened in Honolulu.
- 07:30 When we were in Honolulu we had Red Cross girls, American Red Cross girls in uniform, and we all had a Red Cross girl to entertain us. And they took us around the beaches and around the island. On one occasion they even cleared the beaches, while the fellows went in to have a surf without anything on, stark naked. And, but you went into the shops in Honolulu you couldn't pay for anything you bought.
- 08:00 I bought a couple of souvenirs to send back to my wife, and wasn't able to pay for them. You know. We were treated pretty liberally.

**Did you meet Bette Davis?**

No, I didn't meet her because she was on the set acting at the time. Dennis Morgan was, I think, the other one that was with her in the show. And oh, there were a few others. I forget the names of them now, so long ago,

08:30 and most of them are probably dead now, I haven't heard about them for years.

**And did they know much about Australia?**

Very little. Very little indeed, the Americans. They practically knew nothing at all, in fact.

**What did they understand, what did they know about what you were doing?**

Oh, they knew we were going to England, but they didn't know very much about the war,

09:00 because they weren't involved in any way. The only part of America that was involved in the war was the industry, when they were building arms and things which they were sending over to Britain on the Lend Lease plan, and that's all they knew about them. They didn't know much more. I think when the war actually hit America, the worst part of it was they shock that they got, you know. They were so laid back about it,

09:30 that they didn't think anything would happen over there. They were too far away from the war, but the war came to their back door. Then they started, you know, to sit up and take notice.

**Tell me about the crossing you did. You said that was the roughest ship you were on.**

Yeah, well it was a troop ship, the first troopship I'd ever been on. But it was pretty crowded, we, it was blacked out, of course, the ship was blacked out on the way over. We were escorted with a couple of American cruisers

10:00 and some destroyers half way across, and then the British navy picked us up and took us the rest of the way. As a wireless air gunner, I was allocated a gun on the ship, and it happened to be just a single Lewis machine gun, which was situated on top of the bridge, and there was no rail around it,

10:30 and I had to, you know you'd be on duty from eight o'clock to four o'clock, or something, in the morning, I'd go up there in the pitch black, climb up the ladder to the top, and you'd have to just wait there until the ship rolled in the right direction, and as it rolled, you'd roll with it, and you'd throw your arms around the gun and hold on, and pray that you didn't go over the other side. But I used to do that every day. I was on duty at some time every day

11:00 for four hours, and the ship used to go and the waves were so high that they'd be up above the top of the mast of the ship, and the ship would ride up the wave like a surf boat, and get to the top and it'd sit there at the top of the wave with the propellers out of the water, and then it would dive down into the next trough, and up into the next one, and it would be like that for a couple of days.

11:30 And nobody was allowed to go into the lounge room, or the dining room, because the furniture was flying around all over the place, and food, we got food but not the food that we would have got under normal circumstances.

**Was seasickness a problem?**

Mmmm?

**What about seasickness?**

Oh, no, I never saw anybody who was seasick. I had never been seasick myself. But people do get seasick. My navigator, for instance,

12:00 he used to get airsick. Every time we went up, he'd get sick. But, he had to carry on, nevertheless, you know. But I don't remember on that ship seeing anybody seasick. They probably were. If they were they probably kept to their bunks or something, out of sight.

**But really, that was your first active wartime duty in a way?**

Yes, it was. And it took about, I forget how long it took crossing the Atlantic.

12:30 About a week, I think.

**Was there a fear of submarine attack?**

Oh, yes. All the time. That's why we were on duty, and there was fear of aircraft. Long range aircraft, or something, when you got closer to England, where aircraft could reach you. There was always that sort of fear. But it was too rough to strike anything,

13:00 I suppose, was the real reason, and we were probably lucky in that direction. None of the ships were lost, of course, and we went up to the north of England, and down to Greenock, which is down in the Firth of Clyde, and there we left the ship and went by train to Bournemouth.

**Can I ask you about, now going to your squadrons.**

13:30 Yes.

**Can you tell me about the men in your crew?**

Well.

**Who was your navigator, for example. Tell me about him.**

Well, my navigator was an English bloke. He was a bit older than I was, too, I thought I was old, but I think he was thirty two, the navigator. A nice bloke. He was married and I went to his wedding, as a matter of fact, while we were at

14:00 Operational Training Unit at Bicester. He married, and he had one son, whom I still keep in contact with his son. He worked in a bank and he, it went, the day that we were shot down, he was sick, and he didn't fly with us. And we had, somebody took his place.

14:30 Another chap took his place. And he was the bloke, the chap that took his place, of course, became a prisoner of war, and had the front of his forehead blown out. And any rate, I never knew what happened to my navigator after that, because I got back to England before he did, so he must have stayed, must have been kept in the Middle East all that time. Nobody on 454 Squadron remembered him, because they were all a new bunch of blokes,

15:00 the same as I never knew all the blokes that were there when I got to the reunion. And he must have been sent to some other squadron, and I got home before he did, and I only saw him the once, I think, in England, and didn't see him again. But I used to write but I never got any replies from him, and I continued to write to his wife until she died, and it transpired, I found out from his son after his wife had died,

15:30 that his father had died six years previously. I didn't know, so that's what happened to him.

**How about the young pilot, who was he?**

The pilot, he was a permanent air force bloke. He had a five-year commission, I think, with the air force. He was twenty three. He was a squadron leader. In the air force, he'd specialised in navigation. He could work out a course in his head,

16:00 without having to put pencil to paper, or anything. He was so bright. So we never ever got lost. He, when I went to 244 squadron, he came about the same time, as second in command of the squadron, and he didn't have a crew, so finally we crewed up with him, so that's how we came to have him as a pilot.

16:30 But he was a funny sort of, typically English bloke you know, so he had the raid on Crete when we were shot down, and he, of course, we were shot down because, number one, he had his arm practically shot off, it was hanging by a shred,

17:00 and he had a great gash through his leg, and the aircraft was on fire, and Sandy picked up his arm that was shot off, and he threw it at the flap control, to knock the flap down, so we could make a crash landing. But unfortunately, we picked that mine field to crash land in, and . . .

**What was his name?**

Lionel Folkard. And he did well enough. He was, I didn't see him for a long time, because he went off into hospital

17:30 and had his arm fixed up, or taken right off, or whatever he had to have done to him, and I didn't see him for about six months. And then he, well, I didn't see him at all, actually. But he was put into a different compound when he came to the prison camp. And they had an official exchange of incapacitated prisoners.

**And how about the gunner?**

18:00 The gunner was, he was Australian, the gunner. He came from Melbourne. And I didn't know him very well, because I'd only known him a short time. He was killed of course, and I didn't know very much about him. The navigator, who took my navigator's place, he was an Englishman, he was married and had about three kids. I used to write to him,

18:30 and all of a sudden I didn't hear anything more about him, so I guess he died. And nobody offered to write to me and tell me, so I took that for granted. But he was a funny sort of a bloke too, but you know, we got on well enough together.

**What was he funny? In what way?**

He was a grumpy sort of a bloke, you know. Never seemed as though he was very happy.

19:00 You know those sort of people that you meet. We got on well. We never had any problems, or anything. Even in the prison camp, we didn't have any problems there. Although we didn't room together in the

prison camp. I, being Australian, or course, we went into a room, we had eight men in a room, and they were, we had all but one was an Australian. So.

19:30 And he went with some of his English compatriots. And roomed there.

**Can I ask, can you tell me what your duties as a wireless air gunner on a typical operation would involve?**

Oh, well, it would involve receiving and sending any messages if you were on the radio, and in the turret

20:00 it was a matter of keeping your eyes open and seeing there were no bogie aircraft chasing you or if there was any ships or anything you could sight on the ocean or on the ground, or something, you just had an intercom service in the plane, and you would tell the pilot. And of course, if you were attacked by another aircraft, of course, you had to be on the intercom and tell the pilot what to do,

20:30 which way to turn and always turn into an attack and where the aircraft was coming from and all that sort of thing. So that was actually your duties in the plane.

**How much notice did you get that you were going on a patrol or an operation?**

The night before, probably, you'd be told.

**And how were you told?**

Oh, they'd have a roster

21:00 you see, and you'd be on the roster for the morning's flight, and depending whether your aircraft was U/S or whether it was in flying condition or not. The ground crew would look after the aircraft and get it all ready for you, and you'd just go and get into it, and you'd go out a bit early and check everything was all right before you flew, and see that your guns weren't jammed and you had ammunition,

21:30 and if your radio was still operational and you'd do all those things before you took off.

**Does the crew gather together somewhere else before?**

Oh, they'd have a crew room, yes. Where the crew goes and we'd get briefed by the Intelligence officer, where they had to go and what they had to do. Gave them their orders for the day, you see, and off you went.

22:00 And times. Everything was done to time. Your take off time would be nine o'clock. Well, you had to be off the ground by nine o'clock. Or as near as possible to it. And it was just a simple sort of a routine. Nothing very complicated about it.

**So what's the first thing you would do when you got into the aircraft?**

Well, you tested your guns once you got airborne. Or perhaps over the water.

22:30 You fired your guns and see that they weren't jamming, and the same thing with the radio. You'd send a couple of radio signals just testing, and see that that was going all right, and the pilot of course, tested all his instruments and things before he took off. And the navigator, of course, that's what they did in the crew room, you see, once they were briefed on the trip. The navigator had to draw his flight plan on his charts.

23:00 Where they were going, and he'd be pretty busy most of the time because he'd have to take wind directions, and keep altering course and things, and if there was a drift in the aircraft and he'd have to correct the drift and all that sort of thing. Most of the flying during the war, of course,

23:30 was just flying off the seat of your pants, as the saying goes. Fly by the seat of your pants. It was not like today, where they have electronics and things, and all the electronics nearly fly the planes today. And the pilot just checks everything all the time, and they don't have to sort of physically work anything out or do anything physically. It's all done for them.

24:00 In those days, of course, everything depended on individually, whether he was working it out properly, giving you the right course to fly. Of course, sometimes, they go their compass back to front and they give you the reverse flight, or something, and you might go in the opposite direction to what you're supposed to. It happened in quite a few occasions, I think, that. It . . .

24:30 **Where were the pigeons kept?**

The pigeons were in a crate in the rear of the plane where the wireless operator was. And if they needed to get a message, when you went on a trip you had radio silence. And you couldn't use your radio at all. So they might release some information, they might have a convoy, or a least some enemy ships they were shadowing, and they could send a message back.

25:00 Toss a pigeon out the plane with a message and it would fly back home and get the information to the right people.

**How many pigeons would you have?**

Oh, mostly two, and whether any of them really got back, because I can't imagine tossing a pigeon out in the slipstream of an aircraft, what might happen to it. But they did.

25:30 **Who was responsible for releasing the pigeon.**

It would have to be the wireless operator. Well, he'd be told by the pilot of course. But he'd be the one that'd release it. Because there was a hatch down beside where the guns were, one the floor of the aircraft, that he looked after and he could let the pigeon go out the hatch.

**And when were they loaded on to the plane?**

26:00 Oh, when the plane was getting ready. In the morning, if you were going in the morning, they'd go aboard in the morning.

**Who carried them on?**

Oh, there'd be a pigeon keeper, I suppose, on the squadron. They'd have to feed them and things. I don't know how they trained them. They probably,

26:30 they wouldn't know really what squadron to go back to, because the squadron was continually moving up and down the desert, and that sort of thing, and so just how they operated that part, I really don't know. Whether the pigeons came from headquarters and they went back home to headquarters, is probably more what happened. And they probably weren't kept very long on the squadron.

**You say that you as, you were working fairly near this cage, were you?**

27:00 Yes, it wasn't a very big cage, and they didn't take up much room. There was a fair bit of room in the aircraft, that way. But you couldn't get through the fuselage, because they had bulk heads through them. There was so much other equipment that you couldn't get past.

**Were there occasions where you did send off pigeon messages?**

Eh?

**Did you ever send messages?**

27:30 Oh, yes. I sent messages many times. I went to, we were flying one time in Sharjah, and our aircraft went U/S, and we were flying on one engine. I had to send a message back to say, sort of a May Day message, because we were going to land at the first place we sighted, and which we did, and they were able to send another aircraft over to us

28:00 and they serviced that aircraft, they sent ground staff to service the aircraft, and they serviced it and then they went off with the second aircraft, and we were going to Karachi, I think it was, in India [now in Pakistan], from Sharjah, and we, the same thing happened a second time. And then when we got to Karachi, we had to pick up the CO there,

28:30 and his aircraft had gone U/S too. And he took our aircraft and flew back to the squadron, and we were stuck in Karachi, and we spent Christmas in Karachi, as a matter of fact, that year, and spent it at the Karachi Sporting Club, and we had quite a good time. And then we flew, we went back to the squadron by flying boat, then. We caught a flying boat back to Sharjah.

29:00 But those sort of things happened all the time.

**And what sort of situation would you send a pigeon message? Would you ever have to do that?**

You'd send a message if you were somewhere out, and you sighted some shipping or something, and you couldn't leave it, you were shadowing it, you'd have to get a message through because you wouldn't be able to use your radio, you see. You'd send a pigeon back, or if you crashed somewhere and you didn't have a radio, you'd send a pigeon back to say where you were.

29:30 And they used it for lots of things. But most cases, though, it was sort of experimental. Not like in the First World War, when they had pigeons. They sent messages all the time with them. And not all of them, of course, got back home again, either. It was only a chance.

**Tell me about the day, or the operation where you flew into Crete,**

30:00 **when you were shot down. How did the day begin?**

Well, that day, it happened at the time when the invasion of Sicily had started. And the invasion was being harassed by a lot of German aircraft, and they were getting belted to pieces by these aircraft, so they decided they would plan a raid on Crete,

30:30 a diversion raid, to give the Germans the idea that we might be going to land on Crete as well. And try and attract some of the aircraft from Sicily to Crete. And the plan, Lord Beaverbrook's son, he was a night fighter ace then, and he later become Lord Beaverbrook himself, came out, he was a group captain, and he was sort of in charge of the plan,



- 31:00 but we were to fly to Crete at sea level, about fifty to a hundred feet, and we were to meet up off the coast of Crete, with a hundred and twenty-five fighters, from the Middle East Fighter Command, and they were to go in first, and shoot the place up, and then we were to follow and bomb up targets of anything we could see that made a target.
- 31:30 And any rate, what they forgot in their planning was, they'd planned a time when they thought all the Germans would be in having their breakfast, and there'd be nobody out on the guns. The main thing they forgot, they forgot it was double summer time in Crete, and they'd had their breakfast and had been out at their guns for an hour or so, and by the time we got there and the fighters had stirred them up,
- 32:00 they were ready for anything. And we no sooner crossed the coast and we started to get fired at, and we were flying up the valleys at about a hundred feet, and looking for any target of opportunity, and of course, six of the eight aircraft were shot down, because they were able to shoot straight up at us, and from the sides of the hills,
- 32:30 and when we'd go down the valley, you'd have to go up the spine of the hill, and into the next valley, and they were able to shoot every direction at us. And we copped the lot.

**Was that the first time you'd been fired at in the air?**

Well, more or less, yes. We had distant fire in the desert, you know. People would fire at you with rifles and things, but this was concentrated fire there, and it was . . .

33:00 **What was it like?**

Well, you don't see small arms fire to start off with. It's only, you see shells exploding and you know you've been fired at when your hitting the aircraft and going through the metal. And they, of course, they can't fire at you with larger guns, because you're only at a hundred feet, you see,

- 33:30 and the anti-aircraft gun couldn't send a shell that way, unless they hit you and it went straight through you and it would explode.

**Could you see the people that were firing?**

No, not really, no. but I did. Yes, I did on one occasion and I fired back, but you can't tell much. You're going so fast when you're down at ground level, you know, and doing a hundred and eighty knots an hour,

- 34:00 or something. You don't really see anything on the ground. It just flashes past.

**So how do you know what to fire at?**

Well, you don't really. If you see something you think is worth firing at, you have a shot. But it's really difficult. Because number one, you can't depress your guns in the turret that much. You've got to be a fair distance from them, for your guns, to be able to press far enough downwards,

- 34:30 because they're not designed to fire downwards from a turret. There meant to fire upwards. And the bloke on the, the wireless air gunner of course, he could have fired the ones in the belly, as it were, because they were designed for ground firing, ground targets, but just when he was killed, I don't know, but he was killed. So it could have been killed with the first shot for all I know, because it all happened so quickly.

35:00 **Was it a surprising?**

Mmmm?

**Was it a surprise, the attack?**

No. Well, I didn't know until we crashed. And when we crashed on fire, in the mine field, I was the first to get out. I still don't know how I got out, I was in the turret. And I've got no idea how I got out, I can't remember. I do remember I was wearing a ring, and the ring got caught on the edge of the aircraft, and I was hanging by one finger

- 35:30 until the ring broke and I was able to pick myself up, I wasn't hurt in any way, but I nearly pulled my finger off. The aircraft, the fuselage, had split in the middle and I was able to get the wireless air gunner out first, because it was right where he was, and I dragged him clear of the mine field. I didn't know it was a mine field then, but I dragged him clear of the aircraft, because I knew the aircraft was about to explode.
- 36:00 It was on fire, and went back and got the navigator out the front, because the nose cone had broken to pieces, and I pulled him out of there, and got him clear, and then I went back and got the pilot out and I remember standing on the wing of the aircraft, getting him out, and the petrol cap, around on the wing, was on fire, and there were bursts of flame puffing up
- 36:30 from around the rim of it, and I thought the last moments had come. But anyway, I got him out, and we were all clear, and then we had the German, the Italians come then.

**Before they come, tell me, what was going through your mind at this point?**

Well, you don't know. Everything's being done purely by feel or something.

37:00 I don't know what you'd call it. But you don't even think about the plane being on fire, or anybody who's hurt. You knew you had to get them out of the plane, and you just went and got them out of the plane, you know, and that was all there was to it.

**Was there any fear involved in being attacked or knowing you were under fire?**

No, no. It all happened so quickly you don't have time to think. The first thing I could see was the pilot put the flaps down,

37:30 and I sang out to the wireless air gunner, the wireless operator, that we were going in, so whether he got the message or not I don't know, of whether he had already been killed, I don't know. Any rate, I just threw my arms around my face, and swung the turret around the opposite way, and we hit the ground,

38:00 and it was all over in a matter of minutes, couple of minutes, because we were only at fifty to a hundred feet, and down we went, and bang! You got out as quickly as you could.

**Why did you swing the turret around?**

Mmm?

**Why did you swing the turret around?**

Well, you swing the turret around so that you brace your back for the sudden, it's like a car, you see. You have seat belt on that holds you back in the seat, and when the thing stops you going forward,

38:30 so you swing the turret around so your back goes back, instead of your face going forward. Same idea. And throw your arms around your face, like that, so you don't hit your face on the gun.

**Were you trained to do that?**

Yeah, we were trained to do that. So I just did that. I didn't even know I'd been hurt when I got out of the aeroplane, you know. The first thing I knew I had a boot full of blood, and my boot was all torn,

39:00 and had blood all over me as a matter of fact, because I had quite a number of pieces of shrapnel in me, and cut me about.

**Had you been unconscious?**

No, I hadn't been unconscious, no, no, no. So...

## Tape 6

00:30 **When you, the plane hit the ground, what sort of impact did it make?**

Oh, pretty good landing. He was a pretty good pilot,

01:00 and it was pretty smooth, but it didn't last very long. We only travelled a short distance on the ground surprisingly, and we had the flaps down, which slowed the speed of the aircraft right back, and it just skidded along the ground, and without a great deal of damage, you know, but the fact it was on fire, we had to move quickly. And any rate, we all got out of it.

01:30 The three of us got out of it. The other one, I had to leave the other wireless air gunner at the side, where I'd dragged him to.

**He was the first one you found?**

He was the first one I found. But they must have picked him up somehow very shortly afterwards, because I've got a photograph of where he's buried, in Iraklion in the cemetery there. I've got a photograph of his grave. So he was looked after in that respect.

02:00 **Doug, can I just ask. You described this morning that you were being chased by a bomb.**

Oh, yes. Just after, well, it must have been about the first bomb we dropped. And we were dropping it on a bridge, but it fell a bit short of the bridge and hit the ground, and it bounced. It must have not gone down, detonator first,

02:30 it must have hit flat on the ground and bounced on the ground, and the speed it was travelling when we dropped it, it just bounced off the ground and went at the same speed and chased the aircraft. And I looked down and I saw this bomb coming. Afterwards nobody would believe me, but it was a fact, because somebody else in one of the other aircraft had seen it, and I only found out a year ago that he'd seen it. But he said it

03:00 exploded underneath the tail of the aircraft, but I didn't see it explode. It might have. But I didn't see that at all.

**So is it possible you might have bombed yourself?**

Yes, could have done. Yes, that could have been the case, but it, you'd never know because there were several things that could have happened. You see, we were shot down somehow, we were on fire, and the pilot nearly lost his right arm.

03:30 The navigator, something had gone through the turret, through the Perspex of the nose cone and hit the navigator in the forehead, and I doubt if it would have been the bomb that would have done that. It would have been coming from a different direction to hit him, because he would have been facing forward, and the pilot would have been facing forward, if anybody would have copped the bomb, if it was under the tail, it would have been myself

04:00 or the wireless air gunner. So...

**What condition was the air gunner in when you found him?**

Well, I couldn't see anything wrong with him. But something, intuition, told me that he was dead, which he must have been, because he was picked up afterwards. And I couldn't see anything at all wrong with him, as a matter of fact. But I couldn't carry him. I dragged him,

04:30 but you'd have thought, we were dressed in shorts and shirts, and you'd have thought I would have seen some blood somewhere, but I don't remember seeing that at all. And they just dragged him clear and then went after the others, you see.

**And the navigator, what shape was he in, with his head wound?**

Oh, well, he had a great lump, half as big as your fist, taken out of his forehead, and he finished up with a great hole in his forehead there,

05:00 and I suppose later on he might have had a plate put in it or something. He had a few other minor wounds, but that was all that was wrong with him. But the pilot of course, he was badly hit, and he, but they survived. That was the main thing I suppose.

**What first aid could be administered?**

05:30 Well, when we, the Italians took us to a first aid station, and they just dressed the wounds and took us to a hospital at Iraklion. We went to hospital there, and we were operated on there straight away. By a German doctor, or German doctors, I suppose, because each one would have had a different doctor. And I didn't see them again after that,

06:00 oh, until some time. I went up to Germany and had a fortnight in a sanatorium, in Frankfurt, and then I went to Sagan. But neither of them arrived in Sagan. The navigator arrived first, about, it must have been a month later than I did. That's why we weren't rooming together in the same room. And the pilot I never saw again,

06:30 because they sent him to the North Compound, where they had the Great Escape. He was there, but he wasn't there at the time of the Great Escape, because he had a, the repatriation of incapacitated prisoners. And he went home with that. But he was all right. He was ambidextrous. He lost his right arm,

07:00 and he could do the same thing with his left arm as he could do with his right, so he wasn't incapacitated in any way from that point of view, and he was able to fly a Tiger Moth aircraft in England, but he wasn't able to fly any greater aircraft. And he got promotion. Before I got home he was a Wing Commander, and he was in charge of a, CO of a station at Pusely, I think it was, in England. I don't know what county it's in.

07:30 And I went to see him a couple of times when I was back there, and he gave me a bit of a fly around in the Tiger Moth, but ...

**Did he tell you how he managed to land the plane with such a bad arm injury?**

I don't think he remembered himself, actually, because these things happen so fast that it's like being in a motor car accident. You don't really know what happened, it just happens so quickly, and you do things automatically,

08:00 you know. He probably knew in his mind what he had to do and just did it automatically without even thinking about it. So he'd been trained that way, I suppose. It's part of your training. It's the sort of thing that keeps you alive, instead of being dead, I suppose.

**When you were taken prisoner, you were taken around to several hospitals. It took you a while to get to the prison camp. How were you treated during that time?**

08:30 Oh, pretty well. After I'd been to the hospital in Iraklion, and I went there in a truck. When I got there the German officer, doctor I should say, operated on me. He could speak English, he was pretty good.

And he was talking about, matter of fact, he had a suit length of Australian wool he was going to have made into a nice suit. He went on about his Australian wool suit

- 09:00 he was going to have. Anyhow he operated on me, and they didn't have any bandages, as we know bandages. All the bandages were paper. They were like a roll of toilet paper, and they wrapped you in these toilet paper things. Any rate, I had a great lump of shrapnel in the middle of my back, and I had bits and pieces, and I had one through my elbow, and through the legs, and I got one up here on my forehead somewhere,
- 09:30 and he took all the bits and pieces out of me. I've still got a couple of pieces in my leg, small pieces. Matter of fact, I've got one piece which is right on the end of my little toe. You feel it by catching hold of it as a matter of fact. Any rate, he did what he could, and that night they loaded me onto a JU52, on a stretcher,
- 10:00 and it's a big transport plane. And I had one bloke shining a torch all the way and another bloke pointing a Tommy gun at me, and I couldn't move a muscle, and the escape hatch was about as high as this ceiling, because they were a pretty big plane.

**Did you encounter there any ill feeling?**

No, none at all. Never felt, came across it anywhere.

- 10:30 Any rate, they flew me from there to Athens, and I went to hospital at Athens for a day, and then they flew me again up to Salonika, which is in Northern Greece, and I went to hospital there for a day. And then they flew from there across to Sofia in Hungary [actually Bulgaria], and from there to Belgrade, and from Belgrade up to Vienna.

**11:00 Where were you interrogated?**

I was interrogated in the, first of all I was interrogated in the, at Frankfurt, when I was in the whatsaname hospital there, for a fortnight. I had a fortnight of solitary confinement. Big room, and they used to interrogate me every day.

**What was the, what was the manner of the interrogators?**

Oh, just a matter of asking questions and

- 11:30 they tried to intimidate you a bit, but nothing very serious, if you've got your wits about you. There, when the man, the officer couldn't do much good, they had a woman interrogator come in and have a crack at me for a few days.

**What was her approach?**

Oh, you know. Tried to turn on the charm a bit. You know, so that you'd give the right answers, or something, but it didn't make any difference to me, because I wasn't feeling very well,

- 12:00 so I wasn't really interested in the charm.

**What sort of questions would they ask?**

Oh, about what sort of flying and what you were doing and all that sort of thing, and who was in your crew and they thought I was flying a Spitfire, as a matter of fact, and it took them up till I got to Dulag Luft, which is a transit camp, before they realised that I wasn't flying a Spitfire at all.

- 12:30 But after I'd been there, and been interrogated every few days, they came up with a file and said, 'Righto, you won't tell us, we'll tell you.' So, they opened up the file and they started off telling me where I'd joined the air force, and when I'd joined, and where I'd been, and what squadrons I was on, and what aircraft I was flying, and they knew exactly what aircraft I was flying, and they even knew the number of the aircraft I was in,

- 13:00 in the end. They just read it off and never asked any questions, and that was the end of it.

**You said you still weren't feeling too well during the interrogation. Tell me how you were feeling?**

Well, I was on my back. I couldn't move very much, I had a leg that was aching like hell. You know what it's like when you have damage done to your foot, and you can't move your leg hardly. If you put it down below the horizontal, you're in acute pain, and I had bits and pieces off all over me,

- 13:30 and I was, you know, I was starting to feel sore. And I suppose there was a certain reaction catching up with me, from the crash, you know.

**How did you answer their questions?**

Mmmm?

**How did you answer their questions?**

Oh, I didn't answer them at all.

**You kept silent?**

I tried to be smarter all the time, but whether it went over or not I don't know.

**How would you be smart?**

- 14:00 Well, by saying 'You know the answer. Why are you asking me?' That sort of thing. And they thought we had radar on the aircraft, which we didn't, and they believed that, so I said, 'Well, you know, so why are you asking me about it?' that sort of thing.

**What did you think was going to become of you?**

Oh, well I knew what would happen.

- 14:30 We knew exactly what would happen to us once we were shot down and taken prisoner. They had officers' camps, and they camps where they had sergeants. Sergeant crew members went to an army camp, and the officers went to a Luftwaffe camp. And we had Luftwaffe officers looking after us all the time. And of course they were more the old school type blokes, they weren't Nazis.
- 15:00 And they treated us as they would expect themselves to be treated if they were prisoners. Some of the men that were shot in the early days, weren't taken to a prison camp, they were taken to some of the air force messes, and they just, you know, treated as another officer in their own mess by the Germans, and things like that used to happen, you know. And they, there was lots of people there
- 15:30 that knew a lot of the Germans, too. We had one man in the prison camp with me, the same prison camp that I was in, and he was a squadron leader, and he was flying Lockheed [actually Avro] Ansons, Ansons I should say, in England, you know, before the war,
- 16:00 and he was out doing a patrol over the North Sea, on his own in an Anson, and a German flying boat came up and flew along beside him in formation, beside him, and waggled his wings at him like that, and the German plane broke off and turned around and came and shot this bloke down into the sea, you see. And then the German landed on the water and picked him up,
- 16:30 and he said, 'Oy, what did you do that for? What did you shoot me down for?' He said, 'Sorry, old fellow but we're at war now'. But war had just broken out, and he was shot down, quite unwittingly. Didn't even know there was a war on. So, and he spent the entire war as a prisoner. Didn't see any war at all.

**What do you think was behind this camaraderie**

- 17:00 **between the two air forces?**

Oh, just that the air force blokes, generally, German air force blokes, they were men doing the same thing as the RAF men were doing. They were flying the same types aircraft, similar types of aircraft, I should say. And they did similar things all the time, and they were well educated people,

- 17:30 the same as the RAF fellows were. Well educated. You had to be well educated to get into the air crew. But they were the same, and they, you know, they were just men. That was all you can say. And the same as any man. Meet you down the street, and we start talking, and wouldn't say, 'I'm going to punch you in the nose', or something'. It's, 'Oh, it's a good day', or something. And a similar sort of thing.

- 18:00 **Well, you're doing the same thing, but that same thing is trying to kill each other.**

Yes, but they knew that they would be treated the same as they treated us. They knew the British treated the prisoners pretty well, and of course a similar thing happened with them. They were just ordinary people and had the same feelings as we had.

- 18:30 And they never made anything tough for us. The only times things got tough was when things were tough for them. If food was short for them, food would be short for us. That sort of thing. And nothing different. They were just the same type as ourselves. Spoke a different language, that was all.

**What did you think the Luftwaffe's attitude was to Hitler and the Nazis?**

- 19:00 The ones we had in the prison camps, they had no feelings for the Nazis, or the SS, or any of those blokes. They were right on the outer. And so much so that they were ordered to shoot us all at the end of the war, when the Russians were breaking through, and the Luftwaffe refused to do it. So Hitler sent in
- 19:30 SS people to shoot the lot of us. And fortunately for us of course, the very night the SS came there, the Russians broke through twenty miles away, and they went for their lives, and left us with the Luftwaffe. The Luftwaffe blokes put us on the road to march us out of the danger area, and they marched us for a week in the snow, we slept in the snow.
- 20:00 It was as tough for them as it was for us, and we finished up at a place called Luckenwalde, just south of Berlin, and we were there for the Battle of Berlin, and there till the end of the war.

**Describe to me then the Stalag 3, is it, the camp?**

Which?

**The camp you went to, was it Stalag 3?**

Yes, Stalag Luft3.

**Tell me what it looked like.**

- 20:30 Oh, Stalag Luft 3 was a, when I went there it comprised of three compounds. There was the East Compound, the Centre Compound which I was in, and the North Compound. The East and the Centre Compound were side by side, and the North Compound was a little bit further away. And each of those compounds had wooden huts, they each held about eight hundred prisoners,
- 21:00 and the rooms were divided, no, at the Centre Compound they were just an open hut with rows of beds. And they had a kitchen, a little kitchen at one end of it, and the toilet blocks were separate. We didn't have any hot water or anything like that, in the showers. Well, they didn't have showers in fact.
- 21:30 To have a wash, they had a wooden tub, and you used to have a roster for people to have a hot wash tub, you see. But not me, I wasn't getting into a tub after eight hundred other blokes with all sorts of skin diseases, and into a wooden tub that was never sterilised. So, I used to have a shower, I turned one of the taps upside down, so the jet of water from the cold water tap
- 22:00 would fly up into the air, and I would have dive under that and soap myself up and dive under again and wash the soap off. I had a shower like that, used to do that all the time. Blokes used to think I was made. But I used to shave every morning, for instance. Nobody else did. They all grew beards and whatnot, but not me. I wanted to shave all the time.

**What was the process they took you through to be admitted into a camp?**

Well, you were originally, it started at Dulag Luft, which was a transit camp, you see. They accumulated a few people there, and they, when they got enough they loaded a cattle truck up on the railway, and they sent you across to Stalag Luft 3. But anyway, when you got to Stalag Luft 3 you were photographed and your photo put onto an identification card. Which I've still got in there.

- 23:00 I've still got the identification card. They just asked a couple of questions. You know, your name and date of birth and so on, which they put on the card, and you just went into the camp then. And then when you got into the camp, they had an Intelligence Section in the camp for prisoners, and you had to go before this X committee,
- 23:30 or whatever they called themselves, X committee, and they'd ask a few questions, a few leading questions. And you could either answer them or you couldn't answer them. And they knew immediately by your answers whether you were a fair dinkum prisoner or not a prisoner, you see. A dupe put in by the Germans, you might be, so that's the way they sorted them out.

**What sort of questions did they ask?**

It might be, I forget what the questions were,

- 24:00 but I couldn't answer the questions, so they knew I was fair dinkum.

**You couldn't answer the questions?**

No, I couldn't answer the questions. They'd ask you leading questions, you see, which the Germans might be able to answer, but you couldn't answer. Or they used to get information in, blokes used to come in with information, and they'd get taken prisoner, you see. So they'd be able to identify that particular person. They would know

- 24:30 they were coming, bailed, probably bailed out of an aircraft, you see, and let themselves be taken prisoner, and they'd bring in information into the camp for one reason or another. It was all very hush hush, and they'd get the information that way. And ...

**So there was a fear of the Germans infiltrating the prison?**

Yes, well, that happened a few times apparently, and that's why they used to interrogate the people themselves.

- 25:00 **Surely the Germans wouldn't have permitted, that's something that would have had to be done secretly?**

The which?

**Did the Germans know about this?**

Oh, no, well, they knew that we had a group in there that called themselves the X committee or something. Well, you see, all the time in a prison camp there was a heck of a lot of things going on. Number one, they had to know when and where there'd be a ship. If somebody escaped,

- 25:30 they could get on this ship, at a certain port, or something like that, or some information that would be brought in about somebody the British Intelligence thought might be a spy, or something. And they'd

get that intelligence. And they'd get all this information on a radio. In every camp, they'd have at least one radio going all the time. Be planted somewhere, and every night they'd get messages from the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation].

26:00 Instructions from the BBC, every night, and that information would come round to each hut of a night time. They'd circulate this around each hut and then they'd take it back and destroy it. But the Germans used to periodically find the radios and destroy them, and they'd have another one and then they'd start building another one. But they used to build radios out of amazing things.

26:30 They were very clever, prisoners of war, you know. They'd things like light bulbs for valves, and they'd use toothbrush handles for insulators, and silver paper off cigarettes to make resistances. And they'd build a radio like that, and they, you know, were really clever those blokes. I learnt radio theory, but I couldn't do it.

27:00 That's how they were. And they used to all sorts. It didn't matter what they wanted, there was always somebody in the camp that could do it. They, you know, like the Great Escape. You take the Great Escape for instance, in the North Compound. They had tailor shops, they made clothes. They had tinsmiths that made pipe lines to take air to the face of the tunnel. They had blokes that could forge papers.

27:30 Blokes that could pick the pockets of the guards and take their photos and copy them. They could intimidate some guards, and they'd get them to bring them in things like cameras and films. Oh, it was amazing, the things that went on in a prison camp. It was a real lesson. They weren't all just bank clerks or something in a prison camp.

28:00 There was somebody that could do anything at all. And they used to get things sent in, too, in various ways. When you were flying, we didn't in the Middle East, but the blokes flying in from Britain, used to have silk maps in the linings of their jackets, and they'd have the buttons on their uniform would be a compass.

28:30 You screwed the top of the button off and you had a compass. I've got one that I had. The compass was a pencil clip, you know pencil clips? Like a pen clip. And on the pocket, and you just balanced it, it had a little indentation on it, and you balanced it on the point of the point of your pencil, and it went north or south. All the escape equipment was amazing.

29:00 **Were you issued with a clothing, was there a clothing, were you in prison uniform?**

In the prison camp. Yeah, well, when I was shot down I was only wearing a bush shirt and a pair of shorts, and stockings, and a pair of boots. Desert boots, rubber soles. And they, it was pretty cold. Short sleeve bush jacket. No singlets, anything like that, and when I got to Germany

29:30 it was July, but it was still pretty cold then. It wasn't winter, but it was still pretty cold. I had, was covered in blood, and of course, somebody took pity on me and lent me their battle jacket so I could wash the blood out of my shirt. Make myself look a bit more respectable. And then I had to get my own clothes back on again,

30:00 and I still only had a bush shirt and shorts on when I got to Sagan, and I got issued there. They used to issue you with clothing. It didn't matter whose uniform it was. You might have had a pair of French trousers and a Polish battle, Polish jacket on of some sort, and you got all sorts of clothes,

30:30 but at least it kept you warm. And of course, you'd piece together a full uniform. I finished up with a khaki army battle dress. That's what I finished up with. But you had to make your clothes last. And of course, we used to get clothing in our clothing parcels from home. They'd send you woollen underwear for winter, and, or socks

31:00 and shaving gear and toothbrushes and paste. All those of things, they could send you from home. From the Red Cross. It took a long time to get there, but you did get them eventually.

**Was there any way for you to communicate with home?**

Yeah, we, I think it was two letters a month and four postcards a month. They issued you with those.

31:30 And you used to write little tiny writing to get as much as you could on the page, and send them off, and they used to come through the Red Cross, and sometimes mail day would come and you'd get some letters, and they'd be twelve months old, some of the letters you'd get. Because they'd been around the world. Because mail in those days was very uncertain. I remember, when I got home I received a letter in the mail,

32:00 which my wife had posted to me when I was up at Evans Head at the beginning of my training. And it had been all over the world. It had postage stamps from everywhere on it, and finally caught me up back home again.

**What were the pictures on the postcards?**

What was on the postcards? It was just a card. No pictures or anything. It was just a card and a place where you could write,

- 32:30 and a place where you could write the address, you see. You had half a card which you could write on, and the other side which you could address. And the other side of the card just had Prisoner of War and Red Cross on it, or something or other, and that's all we got there to write. But I forget how many we had. I think it was, don't know whether it was two or four letters a month. Something like that anyhow.
- 33:00 And you could only write in pencil. You weren't allowed to have a pen of any sort. Because they used it for forging papers, and things like that. But you had to write in pencil and it was, sometimes it could be cut to pieces, when they would cut things out that you weren't supposed to say, or something. And the censors would get hold of them. Same things with the letters you received from home. There'd be bits and pieces cut out of those. Or blacked out with India Ink or something.
- 33:30 So that you couldn't read them Things like that. But you always got the mail. In the last six months I suppose, there was no mail went each way, either way. My wife didn't get my letters and I didn't get hers. So she didn't really know. And when I was shot down, she didn't know what happened to me for nearly six months.
- 34:00 She, first of all she got a telegram from Air Ministry to say that I was missing in action, and then she got a letter from Air Headquarters in Melbourne saying I'd been missing in action, and then she got another one from the Red Cross to say I'd been missing in action. And they didn't know where I was, what happened to me. And then she got a, finally got a letter to say that it was now known that I was a prisoner of war,
- 34:30 and so she got it from all three places again. She got another lot of letters telling her my Prisoner of War number, and where I was, you see. So then everything was all right. Strangely enough, I went away from Australia in 1941 and my Prisoner of War number was 1941. So it's funny how numbers come around, isn't it?
- 35:00 **What was the accommodation in the camp like?**
- We had, oh, rooms I suppose, a room would be, oh, nearly as big as this, and there were four sets of two-tier bunks around the walls, and then we had a,
- 35:30 we were issued with a straw palliasse, of course. And then they issued us with, like a doona cover, you see. Which you were supposed to put your palliasse in, but we used them as sheets, and slept between them, so that you had one on the top and one on the bottom, and we had a couple of blankets. That's was bedding, so that wasn't so bad, and then you'd be able to use, when you got issued with a great coat, which we did, of course.
- 36:00 I had any ordinary airman's great coat, I got from somewhere, and you needed it in winter there.
- Who issued you with that?**
- Oh, stores, stores would come in. Captured uniforms and stuff, or stuff that might come in through the Red Cross., something like that. And then the room had a table and two benches in it, and a cupboard in it, to keep food and stuff in,
- 36:30 and a stove, or not a stove, a heater, in the middle, not in the middle of the room, but on one side of the room. It was a tiled thing about, oh, might be four foot high, five foot high, with a chimney on the top of it, and you burnt briquettes in it. And we were issued with briquettes in winter. And you had to be rationed a bit, just to keep the rooms warm.
- 37:00 But even so there was no insulation, and the walls used to get ice on them in winter. And beside your bed, you'd have ice on the wall, but it wasn't that bad. Where they had shutters on the windows, you had to shut the shutters every night. And they had a hallway down the middle with rooms on either side of the hallway,
- 37:30 and they had a stove, a cooking stove, at one end of the hut, and you used to have your turns, to cook you'd have your certain times, to cook anything you'd have to go and they used to get these Red Cross parcels, and blokes that would want to cook something, they'd make a cake out of biscuits or something. They'd do all sorts of things.
- 38:00 Make puddings out of egg powder and ground biscuits, or something. And you might have Spam or something that they'd want to cook or something, a bit. And all that sort of thing happened, and you put all your, each one got a Red Cross parcel a week, mostly, until things got tough, and you pooled all your food, and it went into this cupboard you had,
- 38:30 and each week you had one of the men in the room was in charge of the food, so he'd have to ration it out for each meal, and that way we were able to make the food last a length of time, and we used to get loaves of bread from the Germans. It was probably soy flour or something like that, I don't know what it was made out of. But it certainly wasn't normal bread.
- 39:00 It was like a brown bread. But it used to keep well. We used to always keep a couple of loaves of bread, just in case something happened when we didn't get any food, or didn't get any Red Cross parcels. We'd have that aside so you'd have some, and they used to keep as long as six weeks. And they, I don't know what it was made out of,



- 39:30 but any rate, it was edible. And they used to give us ersatz coffee, which was made out of acorns. It was only used when you couldn't get any other coffee. And we had margarine made out of coal. And we had honey made out of coal. They issued us with it. And they used to issue us with fish cheese.
- 40:00 It was so pungent and repulsive, this fish cheese, that nobody would ever eat it. It went down the toilet. They were little round cakes. But, oh golly, it was dreadful stuff. But nobody ate that.

## Tape 7

00:30 **Doug.**

Any rate, we're getting back to the food. We had an exchange market, of course, for food. Lots of things you got in the Red Cross parcels, for instance, I hated herrings in tomato sauce, and I would never eat that, so they might go back to the Red Cross, to the exchange market, and you'd be granted a certain fixed number of points, for anything you put in the market,

01:00 and you might have more cigarettes than you want, and you put them in. although cigarettes, although cigarettes didn't have very much value in the prison camp, because we all had that many cigarettes we didn't know what to do with them. You used to get sixty cigarettes a week in the Red Cross parcel, so they weren't very much. Any rate, you could put all sorts of things in the way of food into the exchange and then get something that you wanted.

01:30 For instance, if you wanted a tin of spam or something you might go and exchange a couple of tins of sardines and some herrings and tomato sauce or something like that into the market, and then get your points and buy a tin of spam or something.

### **Who organised the market?**

Oh, it was organised by the camp. By a committee in the camp. And it worked very well, as a matter of fact. And we always had potatoes. They were cooked,

02:00 there was a camp kitchen there, and the potatoes were cooked there, and we got these, and they made potato soup and things. They gave us, made potato soup for us occasionally, and they always made alcohol out of the potatoes, too, in the kitchen, the camp kitchen. And we used to get prunes in the Red Cross parcel, and all the prunes went into the communal kitchen and they cooked them,

02:30 and then they rationed them out to each room, and we invariably had prunes with some Klim on it, you know, milk, you know, powdered milk mixed up, mixed up pretty thick, and we'd have that for breakfast, and it was one of the things that kept us, sort of, going all the time, and kept us healthy. Eating these prunes every morning.

03:00 **Where was the exchange market, physically?**

Oh, in one of the huts, one of the rooms. We had sort of store rooms in there, and they'd lock up all the food in there. And the Germans weren't game to pinch any Red Cross food. If they got caught with any Red Cross food from the camps, they were immediately sent to the Eastern Front. And that was like a death sentence to them, so there was never anything stolen.

03:30 Occasionally they might use some of the chocolate that was in the parcels. To bribe one of the guards to get something, and once they'd taken a chocolate they were gone, because they knew they could be reported then, and they would be sent to the front too, so they used to do whatever they were asked to do.

### **You weren't entirely powerless, then?**

No. The blokes were able, some of the blokes were able to wield a bit stick.

04:00 You see, some the guards that we had there were Americans. We had one bloke, by the name of George. I remember George. George had lived in America for quite a few years and he got the invitation to come back and see the Fatherland, you see. He got a cheap fare. So off he went off to Germany, and immediately he got back to Germany, they slapped him in the army. Or in the air force, as it so happened.

04:30 And poor old George was stuck there and couldn't go back home to America, so, one day he came down and said, 'Gees, fellows', he said, 'I don't know the other guards seem to be able to find tunnels', and they used to get a fortnight's leave when they found a tunnel, and he said, 'I can't ever find one'. And they said, 'That's all right, George. We'll build one for you, and we'll tell you when it's ready and you can find it'. So George was quite happy about that, and the blokes went about it, and they dug a tunnel,

05:00 and had it just about ready for George to find, and one of the other guards found the tunnel, and poor old George didn't get his fortnight's leave. So they're the sort of things they used to do. But they could intimidate George, you see. Once they'd given him the tunnel to find, they could have got him to bring anything they wanted into the camp. And that's the way we got parts of radios

05:30 and cameras and films. Anything they wanted they got that way. For escape purposes, you know. But they, you know, there was a bit of intrigue went on in all directions. Didn't matter what it was, it happened. And they ...

**So what was the guards' general attitude towards prisoners?**

Oh, the guards generally were older men

06:00 and they just wandered around nonchalantly. They had, they had an intelligence officer at the camp though, and he was the bloke that used to go through searching the camp and that sort of thing, looking for contraband. For instance, when that Great Escape happened, whilst it wasn't in our camp, we suddenly woke up one morning and the camp was surrounded by troop carriers,

06:30 and armoured cars, and a team of men were armed with machine guns, and they had big heavy machine guns, and they set them up on tripods around the camp and we were put on parade, and held out on parade ground, and had to stay there all day. And they went through the huts and they tore the huts apart, looking for contraband and one thing and another,

07:00 and they couldn't find anything they had a head count, and everybody was there, nobody missing. But we had to put up with that for, I think eight hours, we were on parade that day. So, you know, the camp guards were all right. But when you got these outsiders, they were sort of SS or something, and they came in because they were really mad about the North Compound Great Escape, you know, and they sent fifteen of the men back to the camp,

07:30 and they shot something like fifty one, or something. So,

**Did you see any instances where prisoners were mistreated?**

Ah, well, yes, some of them, some of them somehow got themselves into, what's a name, interrogation camps, what do you call them? Camps where they have all these Jewish people, what do you call them?

**Concentration.**

Concentration camps.

08:00 And they somehow got in there, and that's, they were really badly treated there.

**I mean in your camp?**

Not in our camp. But some of the men, when they were captured, were taken to Concentration Camps because they might have been, got rid of their uniform, and had civilian clothes or something on, you see. And they went there, and they were badly treated, but they finally got out again and finally got to their rightful place in the camp.

08:30 But generally speaking, there was no one in the camp that was actually badly treated in the camp. A few of the boys got a fortnight's solitary confinement, but that was rather an honour rather than a detention. But that was the only thing that ever happened in our camp. We were well treated. We had a couple of padres there, and we had a little chapel that we built

09:00 and we got leather there from the Red Cross, and we had a boot repair shop and we repaired our boots. As a matter of fact, I did some boot repairing while I was there, too. Mainly to get my own boots repaired, that's one thing, but I did everybody else's too.

**How important were the padres?**

Oh, one of the blokes used to have services, he used to run services and

09:30 well I, as a matter of fact, I was never religious, but I used to, we had cornflowers grew wild near the camp. It's sort of the national flower of Germany I suppose. And I used to go and pick these cornflowers and go and decorate the chapel with the flowers, and I was never a religious bloke, but you know, you didn't have

10:00 much to occupy your time, and anything like that you could turn to was a diversion and of course, the padres were army captains, or majors or something. They weren't air force men, they were army men, both of them. And we had a dentist there, and you could have your teeth repaired.

10:30 We had watch makers there, and they could repair your watch, you know, if they could get parts. A lot of the prisoners might have been shot down and landed in the sea or something, and their watch got salt water in them, and they'd rusted up and they'd be able to get these old watches from the blokes like that, and use them in repairing other watches. And they were pretty good.

11:00 Everything you wanted, there was somebody could do something. Or somebody. We had lectures. Different ones would lecture on different things, you know, and we had a, built up a library through the YMCA and a lot of the blokes learned a lot of things while they were there you know. They studied pretty hard. A lot of them went back, of course, and went back to university, and that sort of thing, and they just kept up their studies while they were in the camp.

11:30 **Did you study anything while you were in the camp?**

Strangely enough, I studied pig farming, like Mr Keating.[Reference to former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating's piggery interests] No, I studied pig farming, and all the things, ways you could do it, and I was thinking about getting a pig farm when I came home, to my wife's disgust. But it never happened fortunately, but it's strange

12:00 the things that capture your imagination, you know. There was lots of things like that.

**How did that come to be on offer?**

Oh, well. We had all these books, you see. And you could go to the library to get a book and study it, and it was just something to occupy your mind. I mean, I suppose I wasn't really going to have a pig farm. But I just happened to pick up a book about pig farming, and thought, 'Oh gee, this is interesting,'

12:30 and I sort of studied it right through then, and, but for no real reason. But these sort of things happen.

**Tell me what the daily routine was, then. What was a typical day like in the camp?**

A typical day would be, you'd get up about seven o'clock. Might even be earlier in summer.

13:00 In winter, of course, you got up as late as you could. Because it would be dark pretty much of the day, early morning and night.

**So you could get up when you wanted to?**

Oh, you could get up when you wanted, but we had to go on parade at eight o'clock, and they'd have a head count at eight o'clock. And after that was done, you were free to do what you liked. You could just walk round and round the camp, which a lot of us did a lot of the time, and others would be involved in escape activities,

13:30 or they'd be playing football, or cricket, or whatever the season might be. Or ice skating or baseball, and we all had little garden crops which you used to tend and grow a few vegetables. We used to get the seed through the YMCA. And we used to grow a few vegetables. I had a nice patch of lettuce and radish and,

14:00 oh, something else I grew there. Only a small patch. But we grew them in it. And of course, when they started to dig tunnels, the garden patches came in handy for disposing of the sand they dug out of the tunnels, mix it with the soil, and build up the garden bed. We really did grow a few things there.

**How was the parade organised?**

Oh, just in huts. You'd form up in huts,

14:30 the same as you would with the army, and they just went round and counted. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. But if anybody was escaping, of course, they were very smart at shifting around in the parade so they'd count somebody twice. To make up for the missing man, or something. But they invariably caught up with them.

**How long did the parade take?**

Oh, it might take half an hour, then the bloke that would count them would report to the commandant

15:00 and say, 'All present and correct,' or something, you know, and we'd get dismissed and off we'd go. But that would be the general day, and then of course, you had your turns in getting meals ready, and there were some of them as I say, used to study and go to lectures. There was always something to do.

**So you were free from parade till when?**

Till parade in the afternoon. Had parade again in the afternoon.

15:30 **When was that?**

Oh, about five o'clock, I think. Appelle, they used to call it. Appelle. They'd count you again, and then you were free again all night then, you know. And they used to have these plays that we used to attend, and they had a band, we had a band, jazz band, sort of thing, and they'd play music and you'd have that.

16:00 And they might have a boxing match, and there was always something going, you know. And you'd got and visit your friends in the other huts and have a bit of a talk with them, and we always made coffee and tea, because we used to get a packet of coffee and tea in the Red Cross parcels

16:30 so we always had that, and we got a tin of Klim that was American powdered milk, Klim's 'milk' spelt backwards of course. And we used to always have that for milk or for cooking, or in our tea or coffee, whatever we might have. But generally we always had something to eat. We never had a feed. The only feed we ever had was the first Christmas

17:00 I arrived in Germany, and there was a whole host of food came from the Argentine, of all places, and it was those great big round cheeses, covered in maggots. Or jumpers as they used to call it. Jumper

cheese it was called in those days. And you'd scrape the maggots off and eat what was inside, cheese you know. There was biscuits and there was tin meats, and there was cheeses, and oh,

17:30 everything you could think of. We had a terrific feed that Christmas. And that was the Christmas the Germans gave us the beer. They misused it of course, so we never ever got it again. And then, after that Christmas, I was moved from that Centre Compound where all that happened, up to Belaria, which was a couple of miles away I suppose. It was a branch,

18:00 another compound, they picked people from all of the compounds. They didn't take them from the one compound. They came from all the compounds, certain men. They were supposed to be the bad boys, who, you know, were occupied in tunnelling, and that sort of thing, that they knew of. But how I got into it I just don't quite know, but anyhow, I got moved too, and there was seven hundred and seventy-eight

18:30 in the compound at Belaria, and there were four hundred and forty nine British RAF men, and I think one hundred and seventy-eight Canadians. I think there were forty-eight Australians, and there were twenty eight New Zealanders, and about fifteen South Africans in the camp.

19:00 So we had a sort of a mixed kettle of people. And we had a few of the Night Fighter Aces in there, like Wing Commander Beaumont, and Wing Commander Bader, tin leg Bader bloke, and Wing Commander Cheshire, and Wing Commander, they were all Wing Commanders, all these night fighter, the blokes for some reason. I suppose they were permanent air force blokes, and they'd done well and got promotions in the Battle of Britain.

19:30 **Did you meet them?**

Oh, yes. They were just in the camp and they were the same as everybody else. and we had one VC [Victoria Cross] winner in the camp, a Scots bloke by the name of Reid, he'd won a VC in Bomber Command. And we had an Australian Sheffield Shield cricketer there. A bloke by the name of Carmody. He came from Randwick. So we at least had an Australian representative in the (UNCLEAR) people there, so we had a, you know,

20:00 quite a cross section of people.

**Did the Australians stick together?**

To a point, yes. We used to play test cricket against the English. We used to play test football against the English. Of course, the Canadians and the, didn't play those games anyhow, but they used to play ice hockey.

20:30 We flooded an area of ground and made a hockey field, in winter, and they played ice hockey and skating. We got a lot of skates hockey sticks and things from the YMCA, they used to keep us well supplied with sporting equipment, the YMCA. And they, that was pretty good for winter sport, and we,

21:00 there was nothing else much in the competitive way. Everybody else mixed. It was just in those times we played sport and we'd pick an Australian team.

**You must have had a bit of an advantage in the cricket, then?**

Yeah. We did. We did pretty well in the cricket. We did pretty well in the football, too. But they were big days, high days and holidays.

**Did you participate in the sports?**

Mmm?

**Did you take part in the sports?**

21:30 No, no, no. I was never a sportsman.

**Were you ever punished for anything in the camp?**

No, no, we were never punished. Well, as a whole we were punished a couple of times. For instance, after the Great Escape we never had a Red Cross parcel for about a month. That's punishment. And we did nothing. It was just a reprisal after the Great Escape, and they stopped our food supplies.

22:00 And we had to survive on potatoes and soy bread, or whatever it was we got. But they used to make pretty good bread, you know. At one stage we had some bread that was nearly five years old. And it was sliced, and it was wrapped in foil packets, sealed, they were sealed of course. And it was baked originally for the Panzer troops. And it was never used and they gave it to us to eat.

22:30 And it was perfect, after five years. So just how they made that bread, I don't know. Whether the fact that it was sealed in airtight, in foil, I don't know. But any rate, in those bad times we had to survive on bread, and potatoes and potato soup, and perhaps, we got a lot of sauerkraut. When we were having an inspection by the Red Cross,

23:00 they were supposed to give us, you know, eleven hundred and eight calories a day, or something, some number of calories. So to make up the calories that were delivered to us, they'd rush in before the Red Cross came with great barrels of sauerkraut, and most of the blokes didn't like sauerkraut, but I didn't

mind it. It was only cabbage, that had, fermented cabbage,

23:30 and it was quite good. At least if filled up a hole I suppose, if you were hungry.

**What was the toughest thing about being in the camp?**

Oh, the fact that you weren't able to get out of the camp. We were officers and we weren't allowed to give our parole to the Germans. So we were never allowed outside the camp because we wouldn't give our parole.

**Tell me what that means.**

24:00 Giving a parole. Well, your parole means that you're, what's the word mean? When you're on parole you're duty bound not to do something, you see. So we were duty bound not to side with the Germans in any way, so we had to stop inside the camp. We couldn't go out. So the whole time I was there we never got out of the camp, except when they moved us from one camp to another.

24:30 So that was the greatest thing, bugbear, and of course you sort of get sick and tired of seeing the same face across the room from you all the time, and you don't get out to get a change or anything, and they were the hardest parts I think.

**Was there tension between some of the prisoners?**

25:00 Oh, occasionally somebody would get a bit hot under the collar or something about some silly thing, and they might have an argument, but nothing very serious. It was a matter of the heat of the moment or something. Nothing.

**How did the prisoners discipline themselves, or each other?**

Well, they, there was a code of honour, I suppose, what you might say, amongst them.

25:30 Everybody would help everybody, you know, If you were asked to do something, you'd do it in any way that you could. As a matter of fact, you'd go looking for something to help somebody, for something to do, you see. So they all helped one another in every way that might be wanted. It might be something wanted for escape purposes. For instance, when they were digging the tunnels

26:00 they used to have various ways of getting rid of the sand. They tried putting it up in the ceilings of the huts, and the ceilings would collapse or something or other, and then they had to shore up the tunnels, and they'd take all your bed boards from underneath your bunk, and you'd finish up with your bottom hanging down between the boards, or something in the bed. And you'd just put up with that. It was part of the game, and they used them.

26:30 The first surprise I had when I went to the Centre Compound, I walked into the hut and I see bed boards, flying through the window by the dozens, you know. And I thought, 'What's this?' And I looked out the window, and here were some fellows supposedly doing broad jumps and digging up the sand, you see, with their feet as they did these broad jumps, and from underneath the sand they were pulling out these bed boards that had been planted there for some tunnel job

27:00 and they were getting them out to use in the tunnels. And that was my first experience in a prison camp. They, you know, those sort of things. And people just accepted it. It was part of prison life, camp life. You know, that you gave up your bed boards if they wanted them, and just put up with it. So, you know, food of course, there was always people on with the food rationing. They'd never try to pinch some food,

27:30 or something, or anything like that. That was the only discipline they had, and

**Did a hierarchy of officers, a chain of command, at that stage...**

Oh, yeah, we had an officer in command of the camp. We had a group captain, who was the senior officer. They called them senior officers, and he of course had his staff, and they were responsible for anything that happened in the camp.

28:00 And anybody that did anything wrong of course, would be paraded to the group captain and put over the coals. It might even go on their record when they got back to England, for all you knew. Things like that, that's all. That was the only control we had.

**Was he especially accountable to the Germans?**

No, he wasn't accountable to them.

28:30 He merely protected our interests with the Germans. If we had a problem with the Germans, he would be the one that would front the Germans with the problem and sort it out with them.

**What sort of problem might that be?**

Oh, it might be something to do with food, or it might be something to do with wanting, shortage of Red Cross parcels, or it might be a shortage of some clothing. You know, something of that nature, but nothing ever very serious. He might get paraded to the CO,

29:00 to the Camp Commandant, because they discovered a tunnel somewhere. The Camp Commandant would lay the law down to the senior officer, and then he'd have to pass it on to the rest of the camp, you see. Things like that. But not a great deal. He was just like the father of the camp,

29:30 sort of thing. You went to him with any problems that you had, and he sorted them out.

**Was boredom a problem in the camp?**

Well, not really. I suppose you did get bored at times, but there was always something going on to occupy your mind and you never thought about it. There would be boredom when you first went to the camp, because you were being locked up and you'd never been locked up before or something,

30:00 and with nothing to do you'd get bored, but after you'd been there for a while you'd find things that occupied your interest. It mightn't be a physical interest, or even a mental interest, something, they might be playing football and you go and watch the football, and it takes the boredom out of it. Or you might go to a play, or a musical evening, or something like that. And all that tended to keep people occupied

30:30 and kept their mind out of boredom, as you might call it.

**How did you cope with being cut off from your wife and family?**

It was a bit hard at the time, but I'd already been away from my wife and family for a couple of years, and another two years didn't make that much difference to me. The only difference it made was you weren't able to write letters that you'd normally write,

31:00 and you were rationed with your letters and so on, and that was the only difference it made.

**And you didn't know when you'd be coming back, did you?**

No, I didn't know when I was coming back. Well, I didn't know when I was coming away when I'd be coming back. I mean, I went away and didn't come home for four years, so it was harder on my wife, I suppose, than it was on me. I had things to do and my time was occupied all the time I was away.

31:30 And I was seeing something new all the time, most times. I mean, the fact that I was in thirty six different countries was something I could think about and write about and all that sort of thing. So where my wife would be at home, and she'd only have the daily chores and go to work, and that sort of thing, and it wouldn't be the sort of excitement that I might have. So she'd be worse off than I would be.

**32:00 Were you worried about growing apart, or not seeing her again. Were there any worries?**

Well, you do tend to grow, it changes your lifestyle to start off with. You see, when we were first married we were just little suburban husband and wife, you know. Living in a little cottage, and we had our friends. And when I came back. I had none of those friends. A lot of them had been killed during the war,

32:30 others had moved away. My wife had made new friends and, of course, in many cases they became my friends, too, of course, then. But you lose track of things. For instance, I'd be walking down the street, and somebody would be coming towards us, and I'd have to dig my wife in the ribs and say, 'Quick. Who's this coming down the street towards us. What's his name. Quick!', you know. And she'd have to tell me who they were.

33:00 I wouldn't remember, you know. And that sort of thing. It changed your life, and your life changed altogether. I mean, from being out in the suburbs in a little cottage, I came out to a unit out at Bellevue Hill, which was two minutes from Bondi, and a couple of minutes from Bondi Junction, and you got on the tram at the front door and went into town, or you'd go to the races, or even the football.

33:30 They were only five or ten minutes away, you know. All that sort of thing. It was a different lifestyle altogether. Where we didn't party on before the war, after the war of course, people were always having parties, and you were going to parties, and having a few drinks, and all that sort of thing. And going away for weekends and things, because we had more money then. More than I did before the war.

34:00 Then I got a job in a different line than what I'd ever been in before. I'd been selling shoes before the war, and when I came home the first job I had was a Sales Promotion Officer with Masonite Corporation, a building board, an industry which I'd never been in. but I learnt a lot about it and met a lot of new people in that way.

34:30 And it changed your whole life really. You know, your way of living and your friends, and that sort of thing. When I did come home of course, I always ribbed my wife about it, that she didn't recognise me. When she went up to Bradfield Park, by invitation, to welcome everybody home, you know. She went up there, and I'm yelling out to her as I came in,

35:00 and she didn't even recognise me. Looked straight through me, and of course, that upset me a bit, but not for long. But...

**Did you look different?**

Oh, I did look different, yeah. I suppose I did. Because I was in the uniform. She hadn't been used to seeing me in a uniform, because I'd only seen her a couple of times before the war, once I'd joined the service. And I'd grown this moustache, you see, while I was away. And of course,

35:30 I suppose she'd sort of, in a way, forgotten, at a distance, I suppose, I might have looked different too, I suppose, which we wouldn't have been close at that stage.

**It must have been difficult to settle back down to civilian life.**

Oh, it took a long time to settle down. I didn't take a job for, oh, quite a few months.

**Why was that?**

I didn't want to go to work.

36:00 I didn't know what I wanted to do, you know. I used to go to night clubs I suppose, for or five nights a week, we used to go out to a night club and have a meal, supper, that sort of thing, with friends and things. We had a lot of friends there, and they've all since died. As a matter of fact, none of them are alive today, and you lose track of them.

36:30 **Why do you think that you wanted to do that, to party all the time?**

Oh, I don't know, it was something that I'd been used to doing all the time I was in the service. I mean, all out spare time in the service, you never sat at home and read a book or something. You were out and about and did things and went visiting, and even in the mess, you'd go to the mess and spend the night drinking with all your pals

37:00 and telling stories, and enjoy yourself you know.

**What about in the POW camp?**

Well, in the POW camp, you had a lot of friends with you, all the time, you see. You couldn't be a loner, because you had all these people around you all the time and everybody were good mates with everybody, and shared things with everybody, and you know, when you came home,

37:30 you left all that behind. The war was over, you no longer were one of a lot of people. You were a loner when you get home. And you've got to make a new life altogether. And that's what we did, you know.

**Was it difficult to be alone, when you got back?**

Well, I hated the unit out at Bellevue Hill. I used to walk up and down in there, like a caged lion, because I'd never lived in a

38:00 unit before in my life, and been away all those years, where you could do what you wanted to do. Here I was in a unit, and of course, I used to, that's one of the reasons I used to go out. To get out of the place and go to a night club or something or go out with friends and do something. And I never went out on my own, I always took my wife with me.

38:30 Never at any time did I go anywhere without my wife. So, she was still having a good time, that she missed when I wasn't there, I suppose.

**So, a few years in a prisoner of war camp, and you felt trapped in a flat in Bellevue Hill?**

Yes. Yeah. Funny isn't it. Well, that's the way it was. And of course, we might have had a family had I not gone to the war. But with the result of going to the war we never had a family, because we became,

39:00 sort of, I suppose, self contained, without a family or something, so we never had a family.

**Did you ever want one?**

Oh, yes, I would have liked one, but my wife didn't want one. She'd come from a big family. There were ten in her family, but of course, being one of the older ones she used to have to nurse the younger ones, I suppose,

39:30 and it might have put her off a bit. Before the war she said we would have a family, but when the war was over, we didn't. You know, she decided she didn't want children. She'd become a business woman, and she was so used to going to business and managing stores, she, after I'd been home for a while, during the war she, before the war she worked at Foster's Shoes, a shoe store, same as I did, that's where I met her. And we were married,

40:00 and she left work and was a little home wife, you know. And then when I went away to the war, of course, she had to get a job to support herself, because my wages weren't coming in any more, and she became a supervisor at Woolworth's, and she was a supervisor at Woolworth's right through the war, and . . .

**Have to stop you there, we're just about out of tape.**

## Tape 8

- 00:30 Any rate, she stayed at Woolworth's until I came home, and then once again she left work, and we spent a few months round and about, and I managed to get a job at Masonite Corporation, and she still stayed at home for a while, and then she got sick of that, because she missed going to work and being amongst people,
- 01:00 so she had various jobs. She managed, number one, a ladies hair dressing business in the centre of Sydney somewhere, Trust Building, I think it was. And she managed that for quite a few years, and then she became a partner. When that was sold, she became a partner with a man that run that hair dressing business, in a hair dressing business
- 01:30 out at Bondi Junction. Then they sold that and she managed a babies wear shop in the Imperial, the old Imperial Arcade, and then she managed, that shop was sold, and it was turned into an umbrella shop, so she managed an umbrella shop in the arcade. Then, after a while, after she'd been there a couple of years,
- 02:00 a friend of ours had a men's hairdressing business down at Circular Quay, a hair dressing and tobacconist business, so he asked her if she'd go down and manage that, so she went there to the men's hairdressing and tobacconist business down in Bent Street. And she stayed there for a few years. And I used to go in there and help her. After work I'd go in
- 02:30 and do the books for the money, and fix all that sort of thing for her. And then she finally left that, and that was the last time she worked after that.

### **Did she ever tell you how the war was for her?**

Oh, no, she used to just write about she'd been to various places with some of her friends, and that sort of thing,

- 03:00 but she never ever did anything. She talked about her work and the friends she made at work, but that's all she ever talked about the war. Nothing else. And other friends that she'd made. And of course, some of the men that I knew in the air force, that knew me, and that had come home from England or somewhere, would come in and see her,
- 03:30 and some of the wives of men that were Prisoner of War with us, they'd go in and formed a sort of a wives club of the Prisoners of War. And they used to get together, and I don't know if they did anything much, but they'd arrange parcels, and things like that, to send away. And she met an old lady, well, she wasn't as old, but we used to call her an old lady, lady by the name of Fanny Austin.
- 04:00 Fanny Austin lived at Gordon. And at that time, Fanny Austin was sending parcels to the soldiers, and she used to come in to see my wife, and my wife would help her get things that weren't on ration tickets. For the parcels. Things like razor blades and various things like that. And she'd help her. And they became very great friends,
- 04:30 and my wife used to go and help her do that parcels up and send them off for the soldiers, you see. And she used to send parcels to me when I was in the prison camp. Used to send me, not food parcels, or anything. But books she used to send to me, and she sent me some wonderful books. She used to buy the books out of her money, she had something she called Silver Horse Shoe, and she used to use this Silver Horse Shoe,
- 05:00 and she used all her own money. And she'd buy these books at Angus & Robertson, and they used to have to censor the books, and wrap them up to send them. She couldn't buy the book and take it away and wrap it up. It'd have to be censored there and then. Somebody would have to read it. And she'd do them up. And I got some wonderful books from her.

### **What was the purpose of the censorship?**

Mmm?

### **The censorship of the book?**

Of the books. Yeah.

### **Why was that?**

- 05:30 Oh, I don't know. Perhaps there was something or other that shouldn't have, put some message in it for you. I don't know. So it was censored that way, and wrapped up by the printers. And I'd get these books, and then after the war she, this old lady started to send parcels to the aged pensioners in London when food was very short.
- 06:00 And that's what virtually prompted me to send parcels, food parcels, to my friends over there, you see. She used to go up and help her do these parcels up, and send off, and then she used to get all sorts of letters from these people of course. And then she started a collection, then when food became more plentiful, she started to get together a collection of books, because books were scarce in England,



- 06:30 for children in the East End, children's books. So we got a collection of second hand books, and both myself and my wife went up at this stage and we'd sit up there and we'd clean up all these children's books and bind them, if they were torn in some way, and fix them up. And we had a great stack. And then we had to get them to England and get them distributed. So the Managing Director
- 07:00 of Cowell's Whitehouse, as it was know, down in George Street, near Wynyard, probably wasn't there in your time, you wouldn't remember it, it, but he volunteered to get all these books packed up and sent over to England, and he would get his people in England to distribute the books, so we did that, and then after that, she got an idea of
- 07:30 making story books out of old Christmas cards, so one of the radio stations got onto the story and they said anybody with Christmas cards, they could leave them in the Mobil Service station and they'd be collected and sent to you, and you could post them, and the postman used to come there laden with these flaming Christmas cards, and deliver to them.
- 08:00 And in the end the Christmas cards started to come from all round the world. And it finished up she had Christmas cards stacked three foot high in every room in the house. There was barely space to walk between the stacks of Christmas cards. There were millions of them. Any rate, she used to cut, carefully cut all the pictures out, and paste them into drawing books, you know. And she wrote a story,
- 08:30 she had a beautiful hand in printing, she'd write a story and put these pictures in for these, and used to send them to all the schools and anywhere, and she sent one to Princess Anne and Prince Charles, when they were children, you see. So any rate, she got a letter back from Buckingham Palace, thanking her very much for these books and things, and then, any rate, she carried on and got a few other people interested in them.
- 09:00 And eventually she died, you see, and she left the house to my wife. And she had one proviso. We had to dispose of all these Christmas cards, but we were not to burn them. They had to be given to somebody who could use them. Well, there were millions of them. Well, at that time I was selling wallpapers, where I was working, and we had a lot of wall paper cartons you see, so this old lady
- 09:30 had originally been the first woman librarian at the Sydney Morning Herald, so every one of those Christmas card was catalogued, and stacked in type of card, and same pictures and that. And there were hundreds of the same cards, and we had to get rid of these. So we couldn't just pick up a stack and stick in a book, because they might get all the same Christmas card you see.
- 10:00 Well, my wife had to go through them and sort them out and give them a mix in each box, and of course, going through all these Christmas cards we found a lot of money, because people used to send a pound or ten shillings or something for Christmas, for somebody, and they never took it out of the card, so all this money was there. So we got all that. And any rate, we got all these things, and I had to find people to give them to, so I had drivers who were delivering wall papers,
- 10:30 and masonite, and laminex, and all that sort of thing. So they used to deliver them for me. And I got on to all the schools and social clubs, and they, 'Oh, yes, we'll have some'. You know, and we'd send them boxes, and they finished up they still had millions of cards. And so, one day I was listening to the radio, and one of the things, it was 2KY or somebody,
- 11:00 and they were saying that were getting together a collection of Christmas cards, and anybody with old Christmas cards, leave them at one of the service stations, and they would be picked up, you see. So I thought, 'Well, this is a chance'. So I rang the bloke up on 2KY and said, 'Look, I've got a lot of Christmas cards here'. He said, 'Well, just take them up to the service station. We'll get them picked up'. I said, 'No there's too many to take up to the service station'.
- 11:30 He said, 'Well we'll send a station wagon out'. I said, 'Oh, well they wouldn't fit in the station wagon'. He said, 'Well, we'll send a truck. We'll send a utility truck'. I said, 'No they wouldn't fit in a utility truck, either', I said. He said, 'Well, we'll send a truck out'. He said, 'We'll send three trucks out', so I said, 'OK, send three trucks out'. So I had to load all of these boxes of Christmas cards on to the trucks.
- 12:00 There only way I got rid of them. But going through, sorting them all out, I got Christmas cards from Churchill, from Mountbatten, I got a number of them from Mountbatten. I got quite a few from well know people, you know. And it was amazing what a cross section of cards there were, and where they came from.

**When your wife was sending you books, what did she send you? What sort of books would she send you?**

- 12:30 Well, I remember one book was very good. It was, sort of a handy, not a handy man's book. It was a book showing you how to make various things out of practically nothing. And as a prisoner of war, of course, you could find out how you could make something that you could use as a prisoner, for this book. They were good books. Oh, I forget what the other books were, but I remember that book. I had a bookshelf above my bed, and I must have had twenty or thirty books
- 13:00 that she'd sent me. Over my bed, you know.

**Did the Germans monitor what books you received?**

Oh, they went through, they censored of course, they always censored every parcel that came. But they never damaged them in any way, they were good.

**What about homesickness. Was that a problem for you?**

Oh, you were away so long, you never, homesickness never worried you.

13:30 You always wanted to get home. You were dying to get home. But you never got homesick. It was just one of those thing. Everybody was glad to go home. That's the only thing that affected you. Nothing ever affected me in that way. You just get that way that you just accept things as it happens. You just accept what's there. That's it. You know, it's no good thinking about everything else.

14:00 **Did you ever get depressed?**

Mmm?

**Was there depression?**

No, I never got depressed. No, you learnt to accept things as they are. You don't think about something else, otherwise you do get depressed. Once you learnt to accept what you've got, that was it.

**Tell me about some of the people there that didn't cope very well with the captivity?**

14:30 Well, frankly speaking, I can't think of anybody that didn't cope well, as a matter of fact. They all coped pretty well. And even in the hard times, and the good times, too. You know, we had hard times. When we got to Luckenwalde, we didn't have a cigarette to smoke, or food to eat. And we went around picking up cigarette butts, if you could find one,

15:00 to make a smoke, and you'd be going through the garbage looking for a lettuce leaf, or cabbage leaf, or something to make food up. But you didn't worry. You just accepted what you had, and that was it. We lost a lot of weight in those last weeks of the war, but apart from that, it was nothing. We went back to England and everybody was as happy as Larry to get home, of course,

15:30 and they gave us a lot of leave, because they had no ships to bring us home. And I, we went from Leipzig, when they had the exchange of prisoners, Russian prisoners for British prisoners, the Americans wanted to put on a great show, and they had two hundred and fifty DC3s lined up on the air port at Leipzig,

16:00 and they loaded us all into these DC3s and then they just started up when everybody was loaded they started up, and they took off line astern, two hundred and fifty aircraft, and they flew us to Brussels. And when we got to Brussels, we were let out on the loose for the night, and they gave us ten shillings each. And I got, went to Brussels,

16:30 and we were out, I couldn't spend the ten shillings, because everybody wanted to buy me a drink or something. And we had a good night there. Mostly, when I say people, I'm speaking of army blokes or something, you know. Not talking about the civilian people, because they probably didn't have anything anyhow, but the army blokes, you know, took me around and they looked after me all night, and the next day the British

17:00 sent over Halifaxes and Lancasters, and flew us all home, and I was back in England, at the very aerodrome that I'd left when I went out to the Middle East. And it was no longer an air force station, it was a transport depot for the invasion. But it still had runways there, and that's where I landed, back at Bicester, which I'd left to go out to the Middle East. Strangely enough.

17:30 And we were taken to Brighton, there was a reception place at Brighton. The same as we had Bournemouth, when we arrived. They had Brighton, became the place, instead of Bournemouth. And we were taken there, and we were given money of course, and everything

18:00 was fitted up, and I had to go and find a tailor to make me a uniform, and I was able to buy the barathe cloth. I think I had to get that from the stores or somewhere, and take that to the tailor and have a suit made, a uniform made, and get myself fitted out with shirts and things. And then we were given, oh, something like six weeks leave or something, so

18:30 I went down to, oh, any rate, I went down to one of the blokes that I went out to the Middle East with, I went down to his mother. He was killed incidentally. I went down to his mother's place and spent most of the time there. And we went to the first post-war Derby, horse race. Went to that with her,

19:00 and had quite a good time. Or I did, I should say, and had a rest, and put on a bit of weight. They gave us plenty of ration food tickets, and when we left Brighton, at least, Brighton, yeah, Brighton. They gave us a ration of tinned, Australian tinned fruits, and all sorts of food, and I had this great big suitcase of tinned food that I took with me when I went on leave.

19:30 And I stayed with her for most of the time. Some of the time I had a look around, but most of the time I stayed down there. And, because, she'd lost two sons in the war. Her eldest son, and the one that was in the Air force with me was killed. Oh, the eldest sone was in the air force, too. He was killed, and her younger boy had joined the army.

- 20:00 But I never ever became friends with him. He had his own friends. He was younger, a younger generation, you know. And it, and then or course, we had to wait for a ship to come home. And then of course, I came home on the old Orion, they did it up, cleaned it up, and sent it home, we came home and crossed the Atlantic again and went through the Panama Canal this time, and crossed,
- 20:30 the first stop we had was Panama on the way, and the second stop was Wellington, in New Zealand. The only two stops we had.
- I want to ask you about coming home in a minute. I've just got a few more questions about the camp?**
- Right.
- Tell me, what was it like watching the Battle of Berlin?**
- Berlin, the first we knew of the Battle of Berlin, was of course when, one day, in the middle of the day, in broad daylight,
- 21:00 three thousand American aircraft flew straight over the camp. They were dropping what they called windale, foil strips that interrupt the radar, and they flew straight over the camp, went to Berlin. They had Fighter Escort with them, they dropped bombs on Berlin, and they flew back again,
- 21:30 straight over the top of the camp. And I saw no German interference in any way with them, and they flew back over again. It was an amazing sight. The sky was full of aeroplanes. And that was the first, and then or course, the Russians broke into the camp, and they took all the prisoners. Jumped on these tanks, the Russian prisoners, who were not supposed to be taken prisoner, you see.
- 22:00 They all climbed on these tanks, and off they went for the Battle of Berlin. And...
- Did you know what was going on?**
- Oh, we knew what was going on, oh yes, yes.
- How did you know?**
- Well, we got the German newspapers to start off with. And we got all the information over the radios that we had. In Luckenwalde, for instance, we had the Danish High Command, and they had a radio and they used to get information and pass it around. They were all in the one camp,
- 22:30 I should say, in the one compound, and they passed the information around, and then of course, after the Russians came around, they put in this battalion of women cavalry into the camp, and they killed, I think it was twenty two thousand Germans within a mile perimeter of the camp, and they took a hundred odd thousand prisoners, and . . .
- 23:00 **Did you see any of that fighting?**
- We used to get strafed nearly every night by aircraft. Don't know what they were, whether they were Russian or German, or what they were, but we got strafed invariably every night. And we were sort, we were only about twenty or thirty mile from Berlin, you see, so we were virtually in the thick of it.
- So what did you do when you were being strafed?**
- You couldn't do anything, You just had to sit and watch.
- 23:30 **Was anyone killed?**
- No. Fortunately, no. Strange that they weren't, but there was nobody killed.
- So what's it like, tell me what it's like being strafed? What do you see, what do you hear?**
- Well, very frightening. I mean, you go to ground as soon as they start strafing the place, and, but we sort of kept control of the camp.
- 24:00 The British prisoners took, tried to take control of the camp, because the Germans had gone, but it was very hard, because we had French and Belgian and Russian and Poles, and all sorts of people in different compounds there. And of course, you couldn't control them, they just went amok.
- What did they do?**
- Oh, they just disappeared, a lot of them, started to just go off on their own. I suppose a lot of them got killed, because they
- 24:30 were in the line of fire, sort of thing.
- Was there panic?**
- No, not really. There was no panic. We just woke up one morning and there wasn't any Germans there, they'd gone overnight. Just disappeared and they left us there. So somebody had to take over, so we

took over ourselves.

**What did it feel like, to wake up and find them gone?**

Oh, well, a relief I suppose you might call it, in a way.

- 25:00 That they were no longer there, and we didn't know what the future was going to bring us. Because we didn't know what the Russians might do when they got there. But they merely came into the camp with these big tanks that they had, T-tanks, I forget what they called them [T-34s?], and they ran up, where we tried to keep everybody in their own compounds,
- 25:30 they ran up through the camp and wound up all the barbed wire with their tanks, and knocked all the fences down, so it was a free for all, anybody wanted to get out and do their thing, or something, they were able to because they were no longer kept in their compound. And that was the only thing the Russians did. And then we had times like, say, Marshal Kuchev [?],
- 26:00 was in charge of the people that went through the camp, he was the Commanding Officer, and he came in one day and said, 'How are you off for food?' and we said, 'Well, we haven't got any meat', you know, He said, 'Right. We'll get you some meat'. So the next thing, they wheel in two cows, on the hoof. And we got two cows for meat, so we had to find somebody to butcher the cows. Then he said, 'How are you off for smokes?' So we said we were pretty well out of smokes.
- 26:30 He said, 'All right, I'll get you some'. And a carload of raw tobacco leaves came into the camp, and that was our smokes. And that's all they did. They didn't do anything other than that. They didn't give us any food of any kind. So we had to have parties go out and try and find food. I found a field of asparagus, is what I found,
- 27:00 and a whole heap of asparagus shoots, and other got various things that they found here and there, around the countryside, but we didn't know where to go so we just had to stay there. Well, we weren't allowed to leave, because the Russians wouldn't let us leave. They kept us prisoner for six weeks.

**That's a strange situation.**

It was a strange situation. The Americans came in to take us out, with truck and things,

- 27:30 and they wouldn't let the Americans take us out. We had a negro division, or something, came in with trucks to take us out, and they wouldn't let them. They sent them off and kept us there, and then, of course, they had this official exchange of prisoners, when they took us to the Elbe River in trucks, the Russians did, and they had this exchange on a barge, single barge bridge, across the Elbe River, and they had to swap us in the middle of the river,
- 28:00 man for man. That was the end of the Russians.

**One at a time?**

One at a time, yeah.

**Why wouldn't they let you go?**

I don't know. They were never our allies, of course, really, the Russians. They were on our side, fighting the Germans, but they were never our allies, I don't think, although the Americans plied them with materials and equipment and so on. They never really appreciated it.

- 28:30 They were funny people I think. They were like a lot of animals. The men themselves, you know. I remember an occasion when the Germans put the dogs into the compound with the Russians because they were playing up, and next thing, the Russians threw the tail and the skin of the dogs, over the fence. They'd eaten them, you know.
- 29:00 Because they only got food when they worked, and if they were sick and couldn't work, they didn't get any food. With the result, I think, a lot of them died, and they had these open trenches there which the Germans threw the bodies into. And when they were full they covered them over. And they were just outside the camp. They weren't far away. I went and had a look at them.

**Could you smell that?**

No, not much. Because they were dying too quickly to smell too quickly. You know, the thing soon filled up.

- 29:30 **So the Germans treated the Russians a lot different to . . .**

Oh, yeah. Yeah. The Russians, they hated the Russians of course. It was a death sentence to get involved on the Russian Front. They hated the Russians, and the Russians, vice versa, hated the Germans. So it was a bit of sort of quid pro quo, sort of thing.

**What could you see of, could you see the bombing of Berlin from your camp?**

- 30:00 No, you couldn't see the fighting, no. Couldn't see that at all.

**Could you hear it?**

You could hear it. In the distance, yeah. You couldn't see anything.

**Did the possibility of a bomb landing on the camp occur to you at all?**

Oh, not really, no. We were never frightened of that happening. Because the only ones

- 30:30 that might drop a bomb on the camp would be the Russians, or the Germans. But never the British, because the British knew exactly where all the camps were, and who was in the camps, you see. They would never have dropped a bomb. They knew exactly where they were. And there was a story once where Group Captain Cheshire, you know, the Victoria Cross winner,
- 31:00 he was in the camp. Not in our compound, I think it was in North Compound, that he flew over the camp to drop a parcel to his brother. So they knew exactly where the camps were and who were in them. I think the Red Cross passed all the names on, of course, because the Red Cross knew everybody by name, and rank and number.
- 31:30 They would pass it on back to Air Ministry, so there was no doubt about where anybody was, or who they were. So nothing ever happened that way.

**And these female Russian cavalry. What were they like?**

Well, they were very mannish women. They were dressed in light khaki clothes,

- 32:00 with, I think it was a blue cape they wore over the top, and they had a sabre on their side and rifle over their shoulder, and khaki cap on, light khaki cap on, and they were a blood thirsty lot, you know, they, any time any message come in that there was any Germans anywhere, sighted anywhere, they'd be off, and they never brought them back,
- 32:30 they just cut their throat or something. And that was it.

**What did they have to do with the prisoners?**

They didn't have anything to do with the prisoners. But it so happened, they were part of the army that was based there, you see. And they had nothing to do with it at all. The only thing they liked doing was, there was a lake there which I presume was the water supply for the town or something, and they let us swim in that,

- 33:00 and these Russian women used to delight in throwing a hand grenade while into the pond while everyone was in there swimming. And you can imagine what it was like. The water would go whoomph! And that gives you a hell of a shock. And they used to think that was funny. They'd laugh their head off.

**What did the prisoners think of it?**

They didn't think much of it at all. Oh, well.

- 33:30 **It would have been quite a while. You wouldn't have seen so many women for quite a while, would you?**

Oh, they weren't women. Well, we did better than that, though. They put a lot of refugees into the camp, and . . .

**When was this?**

At the end of the war, the people that were on the road and they herded them all up and put them into the camp. They were Estonians

- 34:00 and Latvians, and all that sort of thing, and all these women came into the camp, and you'd have to share toilets and everything, with the women. And they thought nothing of it, and some of the blokes of course, hadn't seen a woman for a long time. And they fell for these Latvian women, some of them, one bloke, I remember, married one of them.
- 34:30 So it went on. But the Russian women, you wouldn't touch them, you wouldn't want to.

**So how did you feel, like, you were without your wife for years, and without female company. Was that hard?**

No, it didn't worry me. I wasn't that young. Somebody younger might have. But not me. I was old enough at that stage, I was what, twenty-eight or something then.

- 35:00 It didn't worry me at all. Physically, I probably wouldn't have been up to it anyhow, because you know, you were in pretty poor condition. When the war, when the war was ended, we hadn't been fed properly for a long time, and physically, you're just out of condition.

**When did,**

- 35:30 **was there any homosexual behaviour in the camp?**

No, no. I never knew of any. Never knew of any at all. Well, they were very careful in their selection of people in the air force. You went for a very rigorous mental, physical examination, and mental examination, and you had to be just one hundred percent before they let you into an air crew,

36:00 with the result that the blokes that were prisoners, they were young people who were very fit, or they had been very fit. They were mentally strong, because they'd had a fairly good education, and they were the cream of the country, you might say.

36:30 And that's why the Germans were trying to hold on to us, because they thought they'd have the best exchange value of any other troops. Because they were sort of, virtually they were the cream of the country, really. And they, of course, were all mentally and physically pretty fit in a way.

37:00 Even though they'd been starved for years, and lost a lot of weight, a lot of them. That sort of thing. They were still mentally and physically fit. And that's something you had to be. You had to be mentally fit anyhow to fly in the air force. The conditions that they put up with, because the majority of those people in the prison camps were blokes who were in Bomber Command, and of course, you had to mentally fit to fly over Berlin at night,

37:30 with hundreds of guns firing at you, and aircraft being shot down, and bombs being dropped, and flashing bombs as they exploded on the ground. You just have to be mentally fit. It would be a very frightening thing if you weren't. You'd really go off your head.

**When did you feel the most fear?**

Ah, oh, I don't know.

38:00 The most fear I probably felt was when, well, I knew, or I felt I wasn't going to come back again the morning that we took off for that last raid. Something told me I wasn't coming back again, and true enough, I didn't come back again. But I didn't get killed, but I thought I might have been killed. But I didn't, I just didn't come back again.

38:30 And I somehow knew I wasn't coming back. I don't know what makes you think that. I didn't know the full story of what was going to happen to us, but yet I had that feeling. I'd been up, you know, dozens of times before and I never had that same feeling that I wasn't coming home again. So there's something tells you. That's the only time you might call it fear, I suppose.

39:00 But if it really was, I wasn't frightened but I had that feeling that I wasn't coming back again. And the only time I really felt a bit of fear was when we were at the Operational Training School, and that first pilot I had, nearly crashed the aircraft twice when we were training, and when he was bouncing from fifty feet, and the aircraft was going boing, boing, boing,

39:30 like a kangaroo across the ground, while we were heading straight towards a great big brick building, which was a peace time hangar, with offices and things in it, and we're going straight at that, and he virtually pulled it out, and we climbed up the wall of that building. That was the only time I was really frightened. But it wasn't through fear of flying or anything, it was just fear of what I thought might happen.

40:00 And that was the only time I was really frightened.

## Tape 9

00:30 **OK, Doug, Tell me, what sort of things would you talk about in the camps?**

Oh, food, they talked about. Food was always a great subject in the camp, and where they were going to have a good feed when they got home, all the good restaurants in London, and the type of food they were looking forward to.

01:00 That was a great subject, and of course, a lot of them would talk about their private life or something, and they, I don't know what else they mostly talked about. They talked about day to day things, or perhaps talked about a tunnel or something that had been built and had been found,

01:30 and talked about how the war was going, oh, things of that nature they'd talk about mostly. And they had, generally just small talk, I think, really. Think of some subject that was topical for the time.

02:00 We used to get German newspapers, and you'd learn to read part of the newspapers, and read the German. You'd understand some. You wouldn't really be able to read them, but you'd be able to understand what they meant by the things in the paper, and you'd have a general up to date, or as far as they wanted you up to date, news of how the war was going. You'd get that in the paper.

02:30 Then you'd get the true story from the BBC and they all told lies, so you really didn't know how the war was going at all. And the German people, we used to have fields outside the camp, and the toilets of course were just like pits. They had to be pumped out with a row of holes along the wall,

- 03:00 and they used to have to be pumped out periodically, and they had the so-called honey carts, they used to call them, and they'd come in and pump them out, and they'd take all the effluent out, and they'd spray it over the fields outside the camps, and they used it for fertilizer. And there used to be a terrible stench, and of course, they used to talk about those sorts of things. And then there was,
- 03:30 Don't know what else they'd talk about. They'd talk about sport perhaps, and cricket matches or something that we might have. They'd talk about those. Who played and who didn't play, and who was a good player and who wasn't a good player, and they'd talk about various people that came into the camp, what they'd been doing or something.
- 04:00 You used to hear some amazing stories about what happened to people that would turn up as prisoners of war. I remember one bloke who jumped out, bailed out a twenty three thousand feet, and his parachute didn't open, and he landed in the forest and hit the top of the trees, and it was winter, and he slid down the trees into a snow bank, and he wasn't hurt.
- 04:30 And he'd jumped out from twenty three thousand feet. Amazing things like that that happened. You know, everybody had a story. I've got a book, well, not a book, sort of a booklet thing, that somebody wrote, with stories that happened to the blokes that were in the North camp, where the Great Escape was, and what had happened. Each one wrote their own story in this book, only a short paragraph or something,
- 05:00 and some of the stories of the things that happened to those blokes, are absolutely amazing. You wouldn't believe it, you know. You'd think they were lying, but they really happened. You think you're going to die, instead of that, this bloke jumped out at twenty three thousand feet. He's a goner for sure, but no, what happens to him. He slid down the branches and into the snow. Snowdrift. And lived. And there were many stories like that.
- 05:30 And these are the sorts of things the blokes used to talk about. What happened to them and where they were taken prisoner, and what happened to them when they were taken prisoner and many things like that. They'd talk about, some of them had been in other camps, and they'd come and tell you stores about what's happened in the other camps. Like the people that were in the concentration camps,
- 06:00 they'd come and there'd be stories about what happened in the concentration camps. And how the overs were worked, and how the people were gassed, and all that sort of thing, and there was always something to talk about. But nothing that you'd probably, nothing that would be important to you perhaps, but it was just something to talk about.
- 06:30 **You told us about the American guard. Were there any other, well, for want of a better word, friendships between guards and prisoners?**
- Oh, no. Well, there were a few that were intimidated. They weren't friends, but they were intimidated. But this George I spoke about, of course, was an American, by virtue of the fact that he'd been naturalised as an American, and he spoke with an American accent,
- 07:00 and was in every way American. But the others were just guards that were intimidated by given them gifts of chocolate or something like that, and getting them to do little things for them. Much against their grain. They'd be frightened stiff that they were going to be caught. But they were rarely caught. If they did, they had to be very careful, because if they did,
- 07:30 they'd immediately go to the Eastern Front, their death sentence.

**What did you think of the Germans?**

Of the Germans? Well, the army officers, of course, were a different breed to the air force officers. Or the air force generally, the Luftwaffe generally. The army officers, well the SS, still,

- 08:00 generally no different, even the army was no different to a British army man or an Australian army man. They were just ordinary people who are brought into a war and forced to fight for their life. That's all they were. Any German I spoke to, they'd just have a normal conversation.
- 08:30 There was never any arguments or anything with them. They were just normal people. Like the SS and those, well, they were a different kettle of fish. They shot all the fifty one people that escaped out of the North camp. It was the SS that shot them.
- 09:00 They came into the camp, into our compound, and were ordered to shoot the whole lot of us. And it just showed that they were no different to anybody else. They were cowards. And as soon as the Russians broke through they went for their life.

**So, how long were you under threat of being shot?**

Oh, only for a day, two. Couple of days probably.

**Did you know it at the time?**

We knew what they were there for, yeah.

- 09:30 **So how did you react to that?**

Well, the Luftwaffe told us, you see, that they were sending the SS into the camp, because they'd been ordered to shoot us. So we knew what was going to happen, and had the Russians not broken through, they undoubtedly would have shot the lot of us.

**Did anyone discuss any sort of form of resistance you might make?**

Well, you couldn't make any resistance, because a man with bare hands can't fight anything, a team of machine guns, can they?

10:00 **No, but was there a sense of desperation at that stage?**

Oh, no. no. They all had the attitude, 'Well, we'll wait and see what happens', you know. Don't count your marbles before, or what the saying is. They'd just wait and see what happens.

**Did the Luftwaffe say they were opposing that decision, did they?**

Yeah. Oh, they did, yes. That they opposed it.

10:30 And they didn't have any orders of where to take us. They just put us on the road and they marched us until we came to another prisoner of war camp. Which happened to be just south of Berlin. And it was an army camp, it wasn't an air force camp, but it was another camp, and it was a bit further away from the Russians.

**Which was the camp with the row of apple trees?**

That was at Belaria. They went along the side of the road.

11:00 Well, in most German roads, they seemed to plant fruit trees, apple trees, they looked after them too. And you know, they'd put a lime band around them, to stop the grubs and things, caterpillars, climbing up the trunks of trees, and nobody touched the fruit. The fruit was never stolen. Even when the war was advancing,

11:30 we had the road completely chock a block, with refugees on the road. Walking with cars, pulling carts, with horses and cows and things pulling trucks, and the road was chock a block for day. They never did touch the fruit trees. It must have been some sort of European honour, that you don't steal somebody else's fruit or something or other.

12:00 Even though they might have been starving, some of those people. And there were thousands of them went along the road, at this particular time. I don't know which direction they were coming from, whether it was the east or the west, but most likely, the east, and they were going past the camp, and there they were. You know,

12:30 I thought, 'Gee whiz, it could be me out there, or my family'. And I don't know what, where people actually went, in the war you know, when these towns were bombed and the towns were completely obliterated. Where the people went. How they kept alive. Where did they go? You never heard of people being killed or anything. In Berlin, of course,

13:00 there was thousands of people killed, but they just bombed the whole city there, and the suburbs. In Dresden, Dresden was the most dreadful thing you've ever heard of. The British fire-bombed Dresden and a fire ball took charge of the whole town, and the fire was so fierce it lifted buses up into the air, with the heat, and the whole town was destroyed,

13:30 and I forget how many thousand people died in the inferno. And a similar thing happened at Hamburg. The people of Berlin, of course, it was done bit by bit there. It wasn't the whole city. But Hamburg and Dresden were two terrible things, I reckon. It was worse than the atomic bomb, really. When you come to think of it. Except the only difference was

14:00 the atom bomb was just one bomb, and there were thousands of tons of bombs being dropped by hundreds and hundreds of aircraft, and that was the only difference in the two.

**Did you think that tactic was justified?**

No, I don't.

**Tell me about your thoughts on that subject.**

I think, well of course, unfortunately, that would never have happened,

14:30 it would never have happened had not the Germans bombed London. And they might have made a right terrible mess of the east end of London. There were thousands people killed, women and children killed and so on, they stuck it out in London. But it's like this Palestine and Israeli business

15:00 where it's tit for tat. You know, one bloke comes in with a bomb and kills a dozen Russian, Palestine, Israelis, and what happens. They go in with tanks and things, and shoot up, or helicopters and bombs and kill another, and then they retaliate again. And it just goes like that. It's very silly when you come to think. Somebody's got to stop it.



15:30 But of course, the officer in charge of Bomber command, Air Marshal Butcher, no, Butcher Harris they called him. He was quite unpopular you know. Even though he built up Bomber Command and bombed Germany to its knees. But they only bombed Berlin and the civilians because the Germans bombed London.

16:00 **What did you think of Bomber Harris?**

Well, he was a, I think it was all wrong. I think bombing of civilians it doesn't matter who was in charge of the Bomber Command, I still think in a war, the bombing should have been confined to troop movements,

16:30 rail movements, shipping, anything to bring them to their knees. But not to kill the population, the civilian population. That's what I think about it. But it's one of those things that happen. You've got no control anyhow, you've just got to keep your thoughts to yourself. And that's it.

**Did you ever feel animosity towards the enemy?**

17:00 No. Never at any time. I mean, if I had a bloke shooting at me, I'd feel animosity to him. I'd have to shoot back at him. Admittedly, that's sort of tit for tat, but still he's trying to kill me and, to save my life, I've got to try and kill him. So, you see, I suppose with a Bomber Commander, it's a very similar thing, only on a very much larger scale. They . . .

17:30 **So why did you, what was your motivation for joining the war then?**

Oh. Empire, I suppose. And country. I mean, we were part of Britain at that stage, the British Empire, and Australia was committed from the day war broke out, Australia was committed to help Britain, and I suppose a sense of excitement

18:00 or something like that makes people, because we were all volunteers in the early days. They had a few conscripts towards the end, but we were volunteers. Everybody volunteered. They weren't forced into the army as they are in other countries. We went our own way, and I suppose it was just youthful excitement or something, to see the rest of the world,

18:30 what's going on and what's happening. You know, you're brought up as a child in my younger days, you had toy soldiers and whatnot, and the fact of soldiers was always in the forefront. You read your history, and it was all about wars, and soldiers, and glamour and all that sort of thing.

19:00 I suppose it's inbred into you in a way, but times have changed, and those sort of things don't happen today, and they will never ever get the number of volunteers to go to war today as they have in the past, because young people have never been brought up that way to think along the lines of what a soldier's like.

**Is that a good or a bad thing?**

19:30 Can be a bad thing. Because what's going to happen will be like Vietnam, where they sent all the blokes up there, everybody got up in arms and there was great demonstrations and things about the whole business, and then when the soldiers came back from Vietnam, they wouldn't recognise them here and it took them years before the returned soldiers from Vietnam

20:00 were sort of recognised. And well, it was a bit like Iraq. There weren't many people killed. There was only five hundred and sixty or something men killed in Vietnam, Australians I mean. There were none in Iraq, or one. But the likes of Korea. For instance, Korea, I think we lost something like five thousand odd men in Korea.

20:30 So things have changed in many ways. Number one, war is no longer something where you give a man a rifle and say, go on, fight the other bloke. Now, it's a very technical thing where equipment is so far advanced. They've got things they see of a night time. They wear night glasses. And they have machine guns instead of .303 rifle.

21:00 And they have tanks that have so much electronic equipment in them that it's not funny. And aeroplanes that virtually fly themselves. And all that sort of thing. Times have completely changed, and young people don't want to go to war, because these days they earn too much money working. I mean, most people here today, young people today, earn as much in a week

21:30 as I used to earn in six months. That's the way things are today.

**When you came back from the war do you think that you achieved, were you adequately recognised for what you'd done?**

No. I think I got three hundred pounds deferred pay. Or round about three hundred pounds deferred pay. For five years and three months service. It was a bit ridiculous.

22:00 And I started off when I joined I got five shillings a day as an AC1[Aircraftsman 1st Class]. I got six shillings when I became an LAC [Leading Aircraftsman] and then I got, I think, six and sixpence a day after six months. And even when I got a commission, I got seventeen and sixpence a day pay, as a pilot officer,

22:30 and it went up a little bit with each increase in rank.

**That happened in the camp, didn't it? Tell me about that story.**

Well, actually it had come through before I was shot down, but I hadn't been advised, you see. So the Red Cross sent the certificate through to advise the Germans that I'd been promoted to Flight Lieutenant,

23:00 and they come round and handed it to me and congratulated me for my promotion. But it didn't make any difference to me because I wasn't going to go anywhere with it, and I wasn't getting any extra pay there and then. It was certainly being paid into the bank in London, but it wasn't affecting me in Germany, so it wouldn't have mattered two hoots to me, at that stage.

23:30 I had a bit more money probably when I got out of the service than I might have had.

**The other story I wanted to ask you about, the girls on the bikes going past the apple trees. Tell me that story.**

There was a lot of traffic went along that road beside and the fence of the compound was only ten yards from the roadway, you see.

24:00 And all the traffic went up and down, it was a fairly busy place, and these girls might have been working in our camp in the office, or something, or they might have been somewhere else working, and they used to all ride bikes, there was very little motor traffic, and they'd ride bikes and the blokes used to stand there, and have a competition to see who could undress the girl and make her fall off her bike in the shortest time, you see. So girls would walk past and the blokes would stand there,

24:30 and they'd mentally undress the girls, and the girls would catch their eye, and they would somehow know what they were thinking or doing, and the bike would start to wobble, and then they'd fall off the bike or something. And it was a great game. They used to have bets on it, to see who could do it in the shortest time. But, oh, they used to make up all sorts of things there to do.

25:00 But they were like any other girl I suppose. They got embarrassed with the blokes were staring at them. And they got some idea of what they were thinking. So, that's what used to happen.

**Did you in any way miss the camp?**

Oh, I missed the company of the blokes that were there. I certainly did. We had a lot of friends there,

25:30 and we had a lot of funny times and good times. I suppose you could call it good times if you wanted to, because anything was a bit different to what happened yesterday was a good time, because it was something different, and you had some enjoyment out of it. So I did. I missed them. Because when I look back on it I tell you what, I wouldn't have missed my two years in the prison camp for anything.

26:00 It was one of the most interesting and enjoyable, in a way, times of my life. And I look back on it now, and I can think about it and think well, you know, they were great times, amongst a lot of fellows who were larrikins, and you had a lot of fun that you made out of nothing.

26:30 And you miss all that, oh, you did. I don't now. But I did when I first came back.

**What did it feel like to leave, to say goodbye to the camp? Was that hard? How did that feel?**

Well, I was always going to go back to England and take a trip to Germany and have a look at the camp and see what happened, but they very smartly disposed of the camp,

27:00 and I read a letter written to somebody, I don't know who now, about a young fellow whose father had been a prisoner, and he'd sworn, his father had always wanted to go back so, his father died, and he decided he'd go back and have a look at the camp. So he finally, he made his way to Sagan camp and couldn't find anybody in Sagan

27:30 who knew where the camp had been. Any rate he hunted around, and hunted around, and he finally found where it had been and it was in the middle of a pine forest, which it was, and all that was there of the camp was a few heaps of bricks here and there. Probably bricks that had been under the stoves or something in the huts, and that was all there was of the camp. There was nothing left.

28:00 And they must have disposed of them very quickly. I suppose they pulled the huts down and moved the huts and made houses out of them for people who didn't have houses to live in. but there was nothing there. Nothing at all. And I always thought I would like to go back to England to live, because when I was in England I, I realised later, that when I was in England as an officer we lived a different life from somebody who didn't have a commission.

28:30 Because I only went to the best places, and I only got invited to the best places, I met a lot of nice people, I stayed with a lot of nice people, and, in fact, had a great life there. But it would have been a different thing for me to go back to England and try and find work, and get a job, and live anything like the life I had been living over there in the air force. So you know, that's how things change.

29:00 And I came back here. And of course, we weren't earning much money. As a sales promotion officer at Masonite Corporation, I started off on six pounds ten [shillings] a week, no, six pounds a week, and then we used to get an increase in our pay every year, there was no awards or anything, we used to get an increase every year, and at the best of times there

29:30 I was getting ten pounds a week. And then I left there and went to this other company, and started another building materials company with one of the directors, and even when I retired from work I was only getting a hundred pounds a week, you know, compared to what people get today. Well, say that's two hundred dollars a week. And the average wage is about six hundred dollars or something.

30:00 So people today have that much more money, they would never want to volunteer to join the services and leave the pay their getting. I was reading a bit in the Sunday paper about a young man who had a family and he was complaining he had to pay ninety nine thousand dollars in stamp duty on the purchase of a house.

30:30 And he was complaining about how much money it was. But he was earning a hundred and eighty thousand dollars a year, you see, and he must have been buying a house of a much better value. Well, people aren't going to leave that sort of life and join the army at all. Though the army blokes today, I read in the paper somewhere, these blokes in the SAS [Special Air Service] forces

31:00 are getting something like fifty thousand dollars a year, and then on top of that they get a pretty big allowance, or something. And that's not bad for the army, is it? That's not an officer. That's just a soldier.

**When you left the army then, how difficult was it to settle back as a civilian?**

Well, I, it took me a long time to really settle down to the normal life style. You know,

31:30 having a nine to five job, that sort of thing, but fortunately with the Sales Promotion job that I got after the war, that wasn't a case of sitting down in an office nine to five. I used to have customers come in and distributors to look after, and it would be a case of let's go and have a drink, or let's have some lunch or something, so I sort of led a fairly free and easy sort of a job I had then,

32:00 and it didn't effect me quite so much as if I had a nine to five job and had to sit at a desk all day, or something. It would have been a different kettle of fish then. But I came out of it very well. I was probably very lucky to be able to get a job of that nature.

**Did you ever dream about the war?**

No, no, no. Never. Oh, I might think about the prison camp occasionally, but never dream about it.

32:30 I think about the service occasionally, being in the services, and the people I met, that sort of thing. You used to meet all sorts of people. When you come to think of it you've got blokes that were in the air force, like Mr Whitlam, he was in the air force, Gough Whitlam. There was, what's the other prime minister, he was also in the air force. The one that had the bashed up face.

33:00 **Gorton.**

Gorton. He was an air force officer. And one of the blokes that was in the same room, lived with me in the prison camp, for instance. He belonged to a family who made beds in Melbourne, and their motto was, 'Steel's Beds', what do you call them,

33:30 the, oh, I forget what it was, their motto, but anyway, he went on and became secretary of the Victorian Racing Club, and he was Mayor of Melbourne. Lord Mayor of Melbourne for a while, you know.

**What was his name?**

Oh, Steel. Rupert Steel. And 'Steel's Beds, the Playground of a Nation',

34:00 was their motto for the beds. Yes, that's right. 'Steel's Beds, the Playground of a Nation'.

**Another thing I wanted to ask you about, there's been a lot of movies and TV shows that depict prison camps, and I wondered about your impressions on their accuracy.**

Well, none of them are very accurate, but they're actually, what did happen is expanded upon to make them

34:30 more attractive to viewers seeing these films. But the thing is, the Great Escape for instance. Well, the Great Escape, that was really what happened. But they make it a little bit more flowery to make it more attractive to the people going to see the picture. But it is exactly what happened.

35:00 **Do you like those programs?**

Mmmm?

**Do you like those programs?**

Yeah, I like them. Matter of fact, got them all on tape in there. Most of them.

**What ones do you like?**

Well, I've got a whole host of war films. There's a lot of films been coming out recently . . .

**About prison camps?**

Documentary films about what actually did happen. Like Pearl Harbor, the Battle in the Pacific, and the sinking of various ships,

35:30 and I've got one in there on bombers, and the one on fighters, and I've got one on the Spitfire, and the Battle of Britain, but they're all documentaries. They're not like the films that we saw. They are documentaries. And I've got a few of them sort of films.

**How did the war change you?**

36:00 Ah, oh, I suppose it stopped me, changed me from being subservient to an employer, who was very strict, to being my own self and doing my own thing, and everybody else had to accept it. That's the only difference it made to me. When I was working before the war,

36:30 working in the shoe store, and we used to have to wear, in the hottest of summer days, we had to wear a three piece suit, with a waist coat and collar and tie, and a coat. Weren't allowed to take your coat off, and we had to serve anything up to sixteen customers at one time, we had shoe boxes stocked twenty odd high up on racks and you had to climb up a ladder to get the bottom box out

37:00 without pulling the rest down. And the owner's wife used to come into the shop and she'd inspect you, without directly inspecting you. But she'd be able to tell you how many buttons you had on the sleeve of your jacket, and how many buttons and what colour your shirt was. And if she didn't like it, you'd very soon be told about it.

37:30 That's the sort of conditions we had to work under. Today, you can find one person serving on a whole floor and then you've got to go and look for them, to get a pair of shoes if you want one in stores.

**But how did that, how did the war, you said that before the war you were serving in a shop.**

Well, yeah, I was subservient to the bosses.

**And afterwards?**

You know I had to work jolly hard, and lose a lot of sweat in the shop, dressed as they wanted me to dress.

38:00 And how I had to do it. And I worked like a slave. But after the war, the war changed me. I would never have gone back to that. As a matter of fact, I went into the head office, the big store, the biggest store, to see the manager there who used to write to me and the staff director came up and said, 'Are you looking for a job?' and I said, 'Not on your bloody life'. So you know, that's what it did for me. I could tell the boss he could stick his job,

38:30 to himself, if he wanted to.

**So some aspects of civilian life you were impatient with, they were annoying?**

Oh, because life was very hard before the war. Nobody had any money, and you had to work very hard to make a quid, but the war changed all that. They had more money and everybody, there was very little unemployment, and they, of course, women started to work,

39:00 so two people in the one family were working, and they had more money to spend and things changed completely. The life style was entirely different to what it was before the war.

**And what did you think of that?**

What did I think of that? Oh, well, I'd grown into it during the war. Having only myself to think of, when I was away, before the days of the prison camp,

39:30 I could go any where and do anything I pleased. And I always had a few bob in my pocket, and, you know, I was never pushed. Although I didn't have as much money as some people did, because when I was training as an air man I was getting six shillings a day in pay. I had to give four and six to my wife, irrespective. I was forced to do that.

40:00 So I had one and sixpence a day pocket money. So I couldn't go out with the boys and go into town and get on the grog or something because I didn't have any money to do it. So I had to sit there and study. And that probably did me a lot of good in a way.

**We've got only about a minute left on the tape. Is there anything you'd like to say before the end. Any final message to Australia?**

Well, I think the air force today

- 40:30 is a great life, and I've tried to encourage a couple of Beryl's grandchildren, two boys, to join the air force, because they get good education, they're sent to a university to get their education, they get very well paid and they get a sort of a social life, as an officer in the air force today.
- 41:00 And I think it's a good thing and I recommend it to any young man today, with the way the world is today, they're likely to be sent to any place in the world doing policing, police work, and even things like the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their chances of being shot down were very slim, because there was no opposition to shoot them down.

**I think we're just out of tape, so I think we might call that a day. Thanks very much.**

Good.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**