Australians at War Film Archive

Rollo Kingsford-Smith - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 21st August 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/570

Tape 1

00:30 **It's a real pleasure to be here, and it's a real important thing for the archives, even if it's not recognised now, it's a kind of far sighted thing, it's sort of put away for a long time, which is what we're hoping to do. We're rolling, so, if, the first thing I could get**

01:00 **you to do is, as I just explained, basically is give us a summary of your life and career, and I'll push you through that with a few questions, but we won't go into any detail now, we'll come back to that in a bit later. So maybe you could start by telling me where you were born, and a little bit about your family background.**

Okay, I, how is my voice coming across anyway, it's a bit hoarse, I know that.

You're sounding good.

I was born at Northwood, part of Sydney, on the Lane Cove estuary,

01:30 in 1919. And it was a, being a wonderful time to be around there as a child. The harbour was still full of fish, there were turtles in the river, there were aboriginal carvings everywhere you went. Houses were, in the lawns they had aboriginal carvings. And children could wander about in the bush as much as they liked, it was quite safe. Unless you fell over.

02:00 And it was a, I had a very happy childhood. And then when I was about six or seven, my father went to live in Albury, he started a business in Albury. And I went to a local school there, and before we'd been there long, the Great Depression of the 1920s, 1930s commenced. And I really look on myself as a child of the Depression.

02:30 As I started to get older, I decided my career would be in medicine, I planned to go to Sydney University and study medicine, be a doctor. And the, as the Depression got worse in my father's clients all disappeared, and his business closed down, I realised I couldn't go to university, he couldn't afford it. We came back to Sydney and I was lucky enough, I got into Sydney High School, I

03:00 don't know if you know Sydney very well, it was a hard school to get into. I had wonderful teachers in Albury, incidentally, who really brought the best out in me. And so at the age of 15, I left school and got a job, because I worked out there was something else I could, no doubt other things I could do, but I needed some money. I then decided that the next profession I could take would be engineering. Because at that time,

03:30 you could get an engineering diploma from Sydney Technical College, which later became University of New South Wales. It was called a diploma because it wasn't a full time course. You went part time and you usually worked, you worked for an engineering firm who had you as a sort of engineering cadetship. And it was necessary then, to improve my basic education of English, and Science and Maths,

04:00 so I went to night school for two years. And was just about to join the engineering firm, who promised me the job, when they became another victim of the Depression, and they went broke. About the time they went broke, the threat of Nazi Germany became worrying the western world and the air force started to increase. I'd never intended to fly, because everyone expected

04:30 me to fly, because my name was Kingsford-Smith. And I thought, "Well, that's one thing I won't do." But the air force made a career in the air force so attractive, an air force cadetship. I'd be taught well, I'd be paid very well, I'd be looked after, so I applied in 1937 to join the air force. And I was accepted as an officer cadet in 1938.

05:00 Was interesting, my name is Kingsford-Smith, but until I joined the air force, I thought my family name was Smith. My father called himself Smith, and all my family did. We all had a family given name of Kingsford. That came from my grandmother, a Miss Kingsford, who married my grandfather, a Mr Smith. And when my father

05:30 registered my birth, I don't know why he did it, but he put a hyphen in the name. To join the air force you had to produce a copy of a Birth Certificate. The air force found that in fact, my name was Kingsford hyphen Smith and that's what I've been called ever since. And that's how it, the name Kingsford-Smith until, as I said I, produced the Birth Certificate. At the time I entered the air force, and I don't know what

06:00 the government had in mind about its defence forces, but we had, at that time, no permanent army. We just had an instructional corps that went round instructing the citizen forces. We had a tiny air force that would get lost if they flew far. And we had a navy, it wasn't bad, they had some good ships

06:30 and they were a full time force. When war, just before war started, the Australian government realised that Australia's greatest risk was the exposure of its coastal shipping to a German raider in the Pacific or Indian Ocean. This is what happened in World War I But World War, but in World War I it was getting closer.

07:00 The intelligence organisation found that the Germans were, in fact, preparing to disguise some merchant ships as raiders and arm them and put them in the Pacific and everywhere. And all Australia's shipping of goods and people went by sea, we don't realise it these days. The road, for example, the Hume Highway between

07:30 Sydney and Melbourne wasn't sealed the whole way, I'd driven it and part of it was pot holed and unsealed. So virtually nothing went by road, there were no long distance buses, there were no long distance semi-trailers hauling up and, roaring up and down the highway. The trains were puny little things with puny little steam locos, and they hauled passengers and some freight, but anything important went by

08:00 sea. There was even a daily shipping service from Sydney to Newcastle. If you wanted to travel to Newcastle, (UNCLEAR) you often went by sea. If you wanted to ship some goods to Coffs Harbour out of Sydney or Nowra, or further down the coast, they went by little coastal freighter. So they had two squadrons, maritime squadrons, one in Sydney, one in Victoria

08:30 of very ancient aeroplanes called Ansons, which later on became a trainer, and those were the squadrons where the air force was really busy. As soon as war was declared we were out, patrolling the coast, up and down the coast, checking with every ship that came in, sending a description of it to a central war room place, so they could

09:00 make sure it was where it should be. And as the first AIF [Australian Imperial Force] convoys left to go to Egypt in early 40, we escorted them and did anti-submarine controls beforehand. And that was where I started getting very lucky, and I really was very lucky throughout the war. I learned a bit about all weather flying, and I had as a flight commander, a very wise, one of the wisest men in the air force who

09:30 taught me that, you know, it was no good thinking you could go to war unless you could fly in all weather, and really understood the weather and were capable of putting yourself, putting a hell of a load on yourself, and at that time, also, because I was very interested in navigation, I was, after I finished this tour, which was 6 Squadron, I was selected to do a navigation course. Because at that

10:00 time, the air force had no navigators. And we had what were called observers, and that went back to World War I and a two seater airplane, you had a bloke in the back seat who had a gun and would fire at an attacking aeroplane and might drop some bombs or pass the pilot a bar of chocolate or something or other. And as they decided they needed properly trained navigators, some

10:30 pilots were chosen and I like navigation. And I did two navigation courses, so I really learned a bit about navigation. There was no electronic equipment in those days, you, in fact, navigated by the stars, if you were going a long way over the sea. And I instructed in navigation for a while but I always had an opportunity to fly. So I was a, after I finished my tour of duty in

11:00 maritime work, in maritime business, I was an instructor, or a staff officer, but always had the opportunity to fly. I was then in early '43, posted to England to go to 10 Squadron, the Sunderland squadron, I was doing maritime work over the Atlantic because of my navigation background, and my maritime experience. By that time, I was a squadron leader and fairly experienced pilot,

11:30 an experienced aircraft captain. Because if you have a crew, you're a lot safer if a captain discipline the crew and stop a lot of people chatting and talking about their girlfriends and what, and what they did last night, or tried to do last night. And my instructing experience gave me this experience. When I got to England, I reported to the Australian

12:00 administrative headquarters in London, and the air officer commanding said, "Well, welcome to London, Kingsford-Smith, you're posted, I see you're posted to bomber command." And I could see on his desk he had a copy of the same signal I had that said I was going to coastal command. And I could read upside down a bit, and so I queried it, and then he said, "Well we've had, we're temporarily short of flight commanders," by that

12:30 time, I would've been a flight commander, "in our bomber squadron, so we'll send you to bomber squadron. And as soon as a replacement comes, you can go and fly your Sunderlands [flying boats]." Of course, a replacement never came, so from 43, 44 and 45, I was in bomber command. So I arrived in

one of the first three Australian Lancaster squadrons called 467. The same wise old bloke who had taught me how to fly in all weathers back in

13:00 Sydney, there as squadron commander. And again, his influence was very helpful. So I flew here, for the squadron, 467 Squadron, based in Lincolnshire. A little wartime field called Bottesford, near Grantham, for some months. And then we moved to a permanent RAF [Royal Air Force] base called Waddington with beautiful messes and

13:30 close to pubs and all the rest of it. And a new squadron was formed, 463, and I was offered the command. And so I formed 463, sorry.

That's all right, take your time.

I formed 463 Squadron, did my tour of duty, which I'll come back to, and was posted to command a heavy bomber training school,

14:00 because the losses were so heavy, the training organisation and the factories were producing a pipeline of trained crews, and new aircraft, as reinforcements to replace those that were shot down. So at this training establishment, it was called a heavy bomber conversion unit,

14:30 we worked virtually 24 hours a day. Crews came in, we trained them, they went out to squadrons. And at, in the end of 1944, and I'll switch a bit here, Qantas turned up. After the Japanese occupied most of the Middle East,

15:00 Burma and Malaya and Singapore and the Dutch East Indies, as they were called, the air service from Sydney to Australia, England was cut. Qantas then got some Catalina long range flying boats and they flew them from Western Australia all the way to Ceylon and bypassed the Japanese. In the Catalinas, they were in the air for so long, they were about 30 hours, and

15:30 you saw two sunrises, you were given the Order of the Double Sunrise if you were a passenger. They carried about two passengers, that's all they could carry, a tiny amount of freight. By about the end of '44, the demand on this service was so high, they realised they had to replace the Catalinas. The Australian government and Qantas did a deal with the British government to get some Lancaster bombers, which were

16:00 to be converted to an aeroplane called the Lancastrian. The bomb bay was filled with fuel tanks, the turrets were taken out and the aeroplane made a bit more streamlined and about eight or nine passengers could be seated in it. The aircraft was still uninsulated, but noisy as hell and as cold as hell, but they did the trip. Well, Qantas sent a couple of

16:30 crews to pick up the first Lancastrians. They arrived in London, and it was, as I said, a government-to-government deal. They went to the English Ministry of Supply who controlled all production and said, "We're going to pick up these Lancastrians," and all that paperwork was dealt with and then said, "We'd like our pilots to be converted to these Lancastrians" because previously they'd flown flying boats. And the Ministry of Supply said, "Well, we don't do that, go to the Air Ministry."

17:00 So the chap in charge of this Qantas team went to the Air Ministry and told them what was happening, they said, "We'd like our fellows to be given a conversion course at an RAF training school" and the Air Ministry said, "We can't do that, your pilots are civilians, we can't let civilians learn to fly on His Majesty's aircraft." So one part of government was saying, "Take Lancastrians," another part of government was saying "We won't train you." And this became, went to a bit of a stalemate and a mate of

17:30 mine who'd been on course with me before the (UNCLEAR) was then a senior officer in air force headquarters rang me and said, "Look, Rollo, you're running a Lancaster finishing school, or conversion course, do you think you could train these fellows under the lap." I said, "Sure," you know we were fighting one war. And two Qantas pilots and the man in charge came up to

18:00 a place called Wigsley, another wartime place where I was based, still in, near the border of Lincolnshire, near Nottingham. And they were nice fellows and I said to, and I got an instructor for them, and I said to the station commander, who was an RAF man, who was a Canadian, I said, "If you see any fellows in the officers mess in strange

18:30 uniforms, look the other way, don't ask me who they are because I don't want to tell you." He said, "Okay." So the Qantas people did this conversion course. The man in charge, a chap called Scotty Allan, very well known in history, and Scotty never acknowledged this, Scotty got talking to me and he said, you know, "Rollo there's not, if you stay in the air force, what's the future for you?

19:00 You, the air force will be wound up at the end of the war, why don't you join Qantas? We'd be very pleased to have you. You are an experienced Lancaster operational pilot," and by this time, I had a Lancaster instructor's ticket myself, I got one, "You have a Lancasters instructor's ticket and you also had a civilian first class navigator's certificate," which I'd applied for, they don't

19:30 exist now. He said, "We can offer you a captainship straight away," or captaincy, I suppose, and I, he said, "We have permission to take suitable people from the air force, because this is a national priority."

So Scotty Allan talked me into this, he was quite forcible, and I went down to London and put in

20:00 my resignation to the air force. This is authority for the air force letting me go, went down to Qantas, they had an office in London, and confirmed in writing I'd join them. Then there was a strike in the Avro factory, they hadn't strikes in the war and delivery of Qantas aeroplanes were held up. And Scotty Allan was a true Scotsman, he said, "I don't want you on our payroll until I can, you can fly and you can

20:30 earn you living" and then he started prevaricating and messing around. And while he was still prevaricating, the Royal Air Force contacted me and said, "Rollo, would you like to command 627 Squadron?" Now 627 Squadron was a Mosquito pathfinder squadron. It was the only one of its kind in the air force, it was unique. And it was much more attractive for me, I could join straight away and, pie in the sky with Qantas. I went back to London and tore up my application to leave the air force and tore up my

21:00 application to join Qantas and then posted to command this pathfinder squadron, the flying Mosquitos. And about a year before, the war had become a high technology war, it was a war of the electronics and the airwaves and it was just about, to find the target and to defend yourself, you transmitted a signal.

21:30 And you, we had all kinds of radar. As soon as you transmitted a signal, the Germans had equally sophisticated equipment, they picked it up and honed in on it and shot you down. And a lot of people were being shot down, I lost a lot of people out of my squadron one night, who they had some new equipment, the Germans knew it was coming, they knew what the frequency would be and they honed in on it. And this particular squadron was only attacking precise targets,

22:00 military targets, aircraft factories, essential railway junctions, gun batteries, power stations, you name it. And they had, a lot of them were in occupied territory and they were run by the Germans or the Germans had, if it was in France, the Vichy government, which was pro-German,

22:30 was running them. It was important to destroy the target and not kill innocent Frenchmen or Danes, we went to, I mean Norwegians, we went to Norway, Belgians, Poles, everywhere. So we had to bomb very accurately, so the pathfinder had to mark exactly the target, and what we did was, we dive-bombed the target, we used our eyes, which couldn't,

23:00 they couldn't hone in on the eye, on your eyes, we marked the target using our eyes instead of any electronic equipment, and this was, the target was eliminated by another squadron alongside us who went in very, very briefly using their radar, just so they knew they were in the area. And they dropped hundreds of brilliant flares, so that was in middle of the night, the area around the target was illuminated. The Mosquitos

23:30 could see it, we flew round, very low down to 300 metres and dived from 300 metres, which was a quarter of a thousand feet, dived down to about 400 feet and dropped the target indicator. You couldn't miss, really, and the Mosquitos were so fast, and as they flew to and from the target so high, because they were made of wood, the German radar didn't pick them up to well, it wasn't as dangerous as it seemed. It was

24:00 a very good way for a married man to be going to war. And I was flying in that squadron when the war finished. So that covers that.

Yeah, that was.

Then I stayed in the air force for some time, but I'll come, I'll deal with that later on.

You never picked up the Qantas offer after the air force?

I never picked up the Qantas offer. I decided there were some aspects of Qantas I like and some aspects of Qantas I did not like. And the air force I was, the air force treated me well.

24:30 Shortly after the war, in 1946, the British government decided to have a grand celebration, victory celebration, in London. Every crowned head of Europe that'd been released from prison, whatever, came, all the Presidents, the President of America, the President, all the Prime Ministers, except Chifley who'd fallen out,

25:00 not, yes, Chifley had taken over from Curtin. The Australian government had fallen out with Churchill, by, because of the way Churchill thought he could tell Australians what to do and the Australian, look, I can't remember whether the Australian Prime Minister was Chifley or Curtin. Curtin died about that time, anyway. But the top brass there was quite fantastic, the present terrorists would've loved it. And each country that had participated in the war,

25:30 was invited to send a military contingent to march in a grand march in the middle of London. The air force contacted me and said, "Would you like to go?" and I said, "Yes," "Well would you like, you've got the command, providing you form it. And here are the rules." So I formed this air force component down in Melbourne, taught them how to march very well,

26:00 I had a very good old drill instructor warrant officer that I knew. In fact we marched better than the army, who straggled along. And we were all in the army and the air force and the navy went to England in a navy County class cruiser called the Shropshire, which had been given to the Australians. Now,

these County class cruisers were designed and built in the days of Empire and they

26:30 were designed to cruise for a long time in the colonies in the tropics, so they had to be reasonably comfortable and carry a lot of crew. (UNCLEAR) You couldn't fit a whole contingent in a modern day cruiser, full of guns and weapons and ammunition, but this old ship took a couple of hundred of us. Not in great comfort, but, you know, I was reasonably comfortable, I was the CO [Commanding Officer] of the air force contingent. But, and we

27:00 set off and we, from Sydney, and we marched through Melbourne, and we marched through Adelaide, and we marched through Perth. And we got to Cape Town and we marched through Cape Town and we got to England and we marched there, and we had the grand march. So I thought, well, the air force had treated me pretty well, it was a wonderful trip. And they, generally, the operational side of the air force treated me well, and the administrative side and the financial side, I

27:30 was constantly at war with. So I decided to stay in the air force. And to continue I, by about 1949, I was commanding an air force station in Victoria. The military sort of started to lose control of the air force, and civil bureaucrats took over. Now during the war, and until just after the war,

28:00 a man, say, commanding a unit was supposed to use his initiative and his experience to carry out his duties in the way he thought best, to achieve whatever role the unit had. To look after his, the personnel under him, and generally do a good job, well, as the, as it changed, all those became unimportant. What became important was to comply with regulations, even the regulation was so bloody stupid and

28:30 you were doing something that you knew was conflict of interest for the air force or the people under you. Well, I fell out with these people about four times when I was commanding air force station at Ballarat, and in the end, I couldn't take it anymore. I had two children at that time, I married my wife, my present wife in 1940, so, by the time we'd produced two children. It wasn't fair to them, to have me

29:00 grumpy at them every night, so I left the air force and went to a company called De Havilland Aircraft, where I'd done a favour for the Managing Director many years before, not knowing he was the Managing Director. He was a stranded motorist on the road. So he was a good mate of mine. But when I said I was interested, we negotiated a job and I stayed there and finished up becoming Managing Director and

29:30 chairman and chairman of a lot of other associated companies. But anyway, that's the air force, but you've really come here to talk about bomber command.

Well, we've come here to talk about a lot of things, and that is exactly what we wanted, that is a really good summary of everything. What have we got on the clock there? We want to go back to the beginning, actually and we'll pick up on a lot of things, we will talk a lot about bomber command, but I think we'll talk a lot about the early

30:00 **RAAF as well, because I think that's an interesting, as you said, its very interesting historical topic. But before we do that, I just want to ask you a few things about your childhood to give us a bit of background about who you are**

Yeah.

as a person before we go into who you were as an air force officer. Can you tell me a bit about your family, about your mother and father?

Well, my father, my mother was the daughter of an Englishman

30:30 who, at 17, ran away from home, and came from a reasonably well heeled family in Nottinghamshire, and his father was a bit of a tyrant. So he ran away from home, in the words of his relatives "to go to the diggings." This was in 1840s, to go to the diggings, the diggings were the mining, the gold mining at

31:00 Ballarat. He was, I'm not sure what he did after that, but he finished up in Sydney, and it's interesting, because he was a terribly, terribly strict man. The old devil begat two illegitimate children, which I didn't know about until I researched the family history,

31:30 and he came to live near here and Bundanoon. And he was the store keeper, and he ran the post office. And of course, these country villages were very important and if you lived in Bundanoon, then, you didn't hop into your car and go shopping at Moss Vale, you shopped in Bundanoon. And if you had a farm round Bundanoon, you supplied, first of all, the local market, so they were quite

32:00 important, busy towns. They were on the railway line, the railways sort of helped them set up. And he did very well there, he had a big family, my mother was the youngest, he had about, I don't know, about eight kids. And he had, as far as I can see in my family photographs, he had a tennis court and lots of tennis parties. He had stables with horses for all his daughters and

32:30 vehicles, buggies, or four wheeled ones, I've forgotten what they called them, they had two horses on them and they could prance around and go to church. And my mother was born there her relatives stayed there and then he came to Sydney and was in business in North Sydney, built himself a big house at Woolwich Point,

33:00 in Sydney, where the Lane Cove River joins the rest of the harbour. Giant house, where he lived when my mother was married, where my father met her. And he used to travel by ferry, everyone travelled by ferry in those days, visit his girlfriend and would purposely miss the last ferry home, so then he

33:30 would, wouldn't dare stay in this great house, but my grandfather had a boatshed, fairly comfortable boat shed down the water, so he'd spend the night down the in boat shed. I don't know whether he was alone or not, I've never found that out. Anyway, my grandfather died, and my mother and father married before World War I.

What was your father's background?

My father's background,

34:00 he had a very good life, he played around a lot. The first I know of him, he was working, he was a mathematician, and he worked quite first for the people who set up totalisator's company. There was a well known, at that time, Sydney University professor, who did the mathematics of the tote

34:30 system, and my father worked at that. I don't know what job he did. And then he worked in a mapping company, there were a lot of maps made in Australia at that time. And then he decided to go to Albury, and be, what he called a business broker, you know he was a real estate agent but didn't sell houses, he sold businesses. He had businesses on his books and people wanted to by a business

35:00 and that, in the country in those days a business would be a pub, a bakery, a butcher shop, a blacksmith, you know, or a general store. And in Albury, he had people on his books from as far as a hundred miles away. And it was quite a good business.

35:30 And he took me with him when he travelled to places far a field, Griffith and Murrumbidgee area and the Hume Weir as it was being built. And, but when the Depression came, nobody had any money to buy anything, so the poor people who wanted to sell their businesses, couldn't. So he just ran out of business, about 1930, came to Sydney and started various businesses, but because of the Depression, none of them

36:00 were terribly successful. And he retired, because he was a man of his times, he smoked, God knows how many packs of cigarettes a day. He was a, you either drank beer or you drank whisky, well, he was gentry so he drank whiskey, and he drank a hell of a lot of in his day. Despite all his heave consumption, whiskey and cigarettes, he had a very good life to 77

36:30 then just suddenly dropped dead.

What was he like as a father?

Oh, most gentle person, and he loved Australian outback. Most of his life had been spent with his friends, had a lot of wild friends, camping anywhere you could camp and fish and have parties up and down the coast. And one of them got given, or soon found out where all the wonderful rivers were and places like that and every weekend the family would spend out

37:00 far away from Albury as we could get, by a river, including fishing, camping, and he would, he always wasn't a good businessman but he was good fun and he was a good father and he taught me to appreciate the Australian outback. Which is one of the reasons I came to live in Southern Highlands, before that, I lived right on the harbour.

37:30 Because he taught me how to row when I was a small boy and he taught me to love the harbour. But the real strength in my family was on my mother's side but my father, incidentally, came from quite a famous family. His grandfather was a bloke called Richard Ash Kingsford, who came to Australia

38:00 way back in the 1840's, he was a lay preacher and he could speak very well, he'd get up in the pulpit and frighten the pants off you. He became a member of the legislative assembly of the government of Queensland, he became mayor of Brisbane, he was a very good politician, he could really speak. He then became a pioneering sugar miller, he went to Cairns and had

38:30 the first sugar mill there, which he later sold to the Australian Sugar Refining Company. And he became mayor of Cairns. He had a, he had daughters, one of whom became my grandmother, he, the local bank manager was, my grandfather, a bloke called Smith who

39:00 his father had been a master mariner, but then back to my grandfather, Richard Ash Kingsford. His wife died when he was in his 70's, and he decided to go to Tasmania, I don't know why he decided to go to Tasmania, but when he was there, he met a young woman and married her. And in his 70s, begat his first child and then he came back to Cairns which was the place he loved, and built a great mansion with 16

39:30 bedrooms on it, he was a very ambitious guy, wanted to fill all the bedrooms. Well, that finished him off. The house, interesting (UNCLEAR) it's quite a famous house, not of ill repute, but of great repute, during the war, we had a secret army in it, based in Brisbane, sort of behind the scenes terrorist

40:00 unit that, and I've forgotten what it's called, and they made his old house, and they had a house on the hill as their headquarters, and raids on Japanese in Singapore and Jakarta and Moresby done by army

blokes in little fishing boats which would go up and the headquarters was my grandfather's house which was, he died before he could sell it.

40:30 And then the other great-grandfather, a chap called Smith, left England and became a master mariner in Sydney and a whaler, there were some whalers operating out of Sydney in the 1840s and on, in a bay in Neutral Bay was where they had the whaling station, if I remember correctly. And

41:00 he lived in Pyrmont Street, Pyrmont, I found that in the records and he was married with a couple of children and he just disappeared it was never ever found out what happened. And I can't find any record of,

41:30 he just, his ship didn't turn up. It was rumoured he had American friends and he went off to America to help fight in the American Civil War which was on then. But whether that was true, and people did that, and he and his family travelled across the Pacific, backwards and forwards all the time, there were no passports, you just "We'll go to America, to California." He had many friends there, but anyway,

42:00 he disappeared.

Tape 2

00:30 **I'll move through this, so your great grandparents begat the next generation.**

Yeah.

And who are they, who are in your parents' generation on your father's side?

Well, on my father's side, there was a, my elder brother who went to America, and became a shipping executive and never came back to Australia. And another brother who joined the Royal Australian

01:00 Navy in, younger than my father, before the war, and he was an officer in the Australian cruiser Sydney when it sank the German raider Emden just off Cocos Island. Another brother, wasn't a terribly wealthy, healthy guy and I don't know, and he became a, I don't know whether he had a war record, but he became an

01:30 architect, and the youngest son in the family was Charles Kingsford-Smith who way back in 1915, when he was 17, was a motorbike fanatic. He owns, well, he had a motorbike and he tried to join the AIF in, before he was 18 and his parents found out and hauled him out. On his 18th birthday, he enlisted in the AIF, was in February

02:00 1915, by September, he was in the trench at Gallipoli, he was at Gallipoli, which was pretty rough. And because his, and then when Gallipoli was evacuated, he went to the Western Front in France. Where because of his motorbike enthusiasm, he became a despatch rider, a sergeant despatch rider, which he liked, it suited him. And then in

02:30 1916, the RAF, which was starting to lose people in the Royal Flying Corps, started recruiting some pilots from the AIF and he heard of this and applied to join the Royal Flying Corps. Was accepted late in 1916, and by 1917 he was an officer and a Lieutenant Royal Flying Corps,

03:00 flying over the Western Front. And he flew there for a while, then one day when he was pursuing a flight well over the German lines, he was attacked by some Germans and wounded. They, behind him they, they shot over his shoulder down there, and shot off about a third of his foot. He nearly bled to death before he could, he managed to get back and landed. And he was then taken out

03:30 of the squadron and hospitalised for a while, because reconstructing a damaged foot is quite a business. And then he was an instructor, and then he decided that he would stay flying. He tried to, the Australian government offered a prize to the first crew to fly an aeroplane from England to Australia, and Ross and Keith Smith did it in a Vickers Vimy [aircraft]. My uncle and a colleague

04:00 got another aeroplane, but they used to play up a lot and the, they, and the disapproval of the Australian High Commissioner in London, because they were always in trouble. And so the High Commissioner told them "It's no good you fellows entering, you won't get any endorsement from the Australian government." So he then said well he's not

04:30 going to, returning to Australia until he could fly. And he went to America where he had a sister that he, another one in the family who went to America. He stayed with her for a while and then he went to Hollywood and became stunt pilot, where he got, he frightened himself and, because he was hanging from the undercarriage of an aeroplane while the aeroplane's flying along,

05:00 shooting with a camera, and he couldn't get up again. Because the force of the wind was stopping him. He thought, when they eventually land, his head will be the first thing that hits the ground. Anyway, he got up, so he did come back to Australia by sea, and joined an early airline, West Australian Airlines, flown by a World War I guy. Which was then the longest airline in the world. He, there were

05:30 essential ports and hamlets all up the West Australian coast and it, the only way you could go up, say from Perth to Broome or to Wyndham or to Derby or to, no, I've forgotten the various other places anyway, you went by sea. So this little airline ran a service all the way from Perth to Broome, maybe further, he

06:00 joined that. And it took some days to get all the way up, he made a lot of friends and he got into a lot of scrapes, and he married. And he, because he, I don't think he was good husband material at that time, his wife later divorced him, which was a disgrace in those days, to be divorced, and my mother didn't want to

06:30 talk about it, her brother-in-law, because he was a divorced man. People were very strict in the '20s. He then started a trucking business, and the name of the place, is on the tip of my tongue but I think I might've, I might've put it in my book, up the West Australian coast, they had, where they had wool industries, and he,

07:00 there were no trains so he went out to the farms and trucked the wool bales back into the port, where they were shipped away. And he then came to Sydney and had an air charter service with World War I aeroplanes. Then his ambitions to fly the Pacific, which had been getting stronger and stronger as the years went by, started to get even stronger. And he

07:30 talked about it to a bloke called Charles Ulm. Ulm wasn't a pilot, Ulm was a money man. They decided to raise, to get themselves known, they would fly around Australia. Had been done by the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] years before and it had taken about six months. They said, "We'll go round in a week" or something. So they flew round Australia in about a week and filled the newspapers and got support from of all people, dear

08:00 old Jack Lang. He was a patriotic Australian, despite his, you know, funny financial problems, to go to America and buy an aeroplane and fly the Pacific. And the rest of course of course, is

Some of the story is very well known, but I'm interested how that history affected you, growing up. Did you hear all these stories or

No. I didn't even know he was flying around Australia, until one of my mates at school,

08:30 he was a Biggles [famous pilot] fan, and we used to read about the Red Baron. In fact, my interest in aviation is made by a school friend I had when I was 10. And he got all the comics there were about World War I and all the aces, and he followed everything. I wasn't interested. And,

09:00 my father was interested, my mother wasn't interested in her scallywag brother-in-law who was divorced, so there wasn't a lot of discussion. And when he did fly around Australia, about that time, I remember friends of my father's sort of, when we saw them, patting me on the head and saying "Well, sonny, of course, I guess you'll be a burden like your uncle." That term burden always sticks in my mind, he was

09:30 called a burden in the press. And I was determined I wasn't going to be a bloody burden. I was going to be a doctor, I used to sort of change the subject. It was very patronising, I didn't like, and as, when I came back to Sydney and I met him a few times, and found he was such a delightful person. He had a wonderful personality, he, before he was married, you know, he had so many girls in bed with him, you couldn't

10:00 imagine. He didn't even try very hard, they just. In fact when, I'm jumping about, when he was still in England and an instructor, he and some of his mates would go down to London and he'd be sent out to get the girls and bring them back to where they, their hotel, where they were partying. He could always do it, and so it's said, when I got to know him, I found out he was a charming man, I

10:30 followed all his flights and I started a scrapbook where I had some of the best record of newspaper accounts that I kept and I gave it to the Queensland museum some years ago when they were collecting this sort of stuff. So, I still didn't intend to follow his career until circumstances forced me into the air force.

What about the World War I side of things, did your father have a role in the war?

No, he didn't. He was

11:00 the eldest, he had children, he was responsible for other members of the family and he, and for whatever reason, he didn't go. It was, he wasn't criticised for it, I know that, the family all reckoned that was his job to stay home. He had a big,

11:30 very close family, my father's family were terribly, terribly close family. As soon as one member was in, had a problem, all the rest gathered round. And he, one brother was in America, and two brothers were overseas, well, one was not well, he was the one had to stay at home.

Did your uncle or anyone else tell you stories of the war?

No, no.

What was your

12:00 **connection with the British Empire growing up, were you**

I thought they were a pain in the ass, actually. Quite early in the piece I realised how the UK [United Kingdom] government and the UK, people in power, still regarded us as a colony. For, at one stage, when America started to

12:30 be the leading power in civil aviation, they had to, because they had a big country. England didn't have a big country, there was no, aeroplanes didn't play an important role in England. And even in the 30's, flying there was really, they were terribly enthusiastic about their flying clubs everywhere, with Tiger Moths and this and that, and Gipsy Moths and they were flying for fun. But if you wanted to fly from one part of England to another, you didn't fly, they had these

13:00 great bi-planes that used to fly across the Channel to Paris and they, you know, they were all wings and struts in the wire, they said they had a built in head wind. So the Americans really started making aeroplanes that were really useful. They were all metal, English aeroplanes were all wood. They had retractable undercarriage,

13:30 they had a variable pitch propeller, which, you know, is like having gears in a car, if you've got fixed pitch propeller, it's like driving a car without any bloody gears. It's either, the engine speed and the road speed don't match each other and there's one speed. So round about middle '30s, the Brits signed the, talked the Australians into,

14:00 talked the Europeans into a civil aviation association, I've forgotten the name, which would have to approve different types of aircraft. And the Americans thought it was restrictive and said, "Bugger you, we won't join, we've got to a very healthy industry with Douglas DC2s and DC3s and Boeings."

14:30 And that meant that it was illegal to import an American aeroplane into Australia at that time. That's what I'm coming to the Brits talked them into, and when Qantas started off flying overseas, all they could buy was an English bi-plane aeroplane, a De Havilland 86 which came from the company I later joined, and I flew the 86's, it's a terrible aeroplane. Put together in a hurry to stop

15:00 the Australians insisting that they be allowed to use American aeroplanes. Quite a number of them crashed and killed a lot of people. Then I found that when Charles Kingsford-Smith wanted to enter an aircraft in the Mac Robertson Miller 1934 air race, which you may have heard of, the De Havilland Company built a special aeroplane,

15:30 the De Havilland Comet which was especially built as a racer. And somehow or other they were able establish that my uncle's application to buy one was too late. So he went to Lockheed and got an aeroplane, really, of a type they'd been making for some time, a Lockheed Altair and decided that he would fly it. And he was told it was illegal to bring

16:00 that aircraft into Australia. Well, he twisted the arms of ministers and got it into Australia, hotly criticised by the British press and British government. And, you know, if you bought an American car, it was the wrong thing to do, you had to buy British.

Was that something that you knew about at the time?

Oh, at the time, yes. Yes, I was sensitive about it, because I'd become interested

16:30 by the time of the, just before the war, I'd become interested. I also saw that the RAAF was equipped with wood and fabric and wire aircraft, whereas the Americans, because I was really interested in aviation then, the American air force had all metal aeroplanes which would, you know, fly twice the speed. Now, we were a peace loving nation, but we could've spent our money, our dollars in better ways then. And

17:00 when the war started, because you know, Bob Menzies announced over the radio, and I sat up listening to it, "England is at war with Germany because of what they are doing in Poland, and therefore, Australia is at war," and within hours or days he said, "We will form a second AIF to come to the aid of the mother country."

17:30 And I was then, just commissioned in the air force, and I thought, "Wow," you know, "something interesting is going to happen." He then said, "We Australia will form and expeditionary air force with so many squadrons which will go overseas with the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. And so there'll be one Australian military formation, in the Middle East." They all went off to Egypt first of all,

18:00 then to be used as directed by the British. Well, the Brits talked him out of that, because they didn't want an Australian, large military organisation of Australian senior officers there. They said, "Well, look, we can do that, you don't need to do that. What you should do, because you've got all this wonderful weather in Australia and so many people are good pilots. Be a, the

18:30 place where air crew are trained to fight, under the RAF control." And this thing called the Empire Air Training Scheme was formed, and just about every ex-bomber command man you talk to, joined the RAAF under the Empire Air Scheme, was partly trained in Australia, and he could've, he then had two-thirds of his training in Australia one-third, then some more training in Canada then some more training

and then they'd go on the squadron.

19:00 **Your experience is actually a bit unique, or not completely unique, but more interesting in a way, because you didn't join the Empire Air Training Scheme.**

I didn't join the Empire Air

You were already in the air force when the war started.

I was already in the air force.

Can you just talk a little bit about the circumstances which you joined the air force under?

Well, I joined, the air force was expanding, because, I said earlier, the, everyone realised the threat from Germany. The Australian senior military officers realised the threat

19:30 from Japan, but they were poo-pooed by the government and they were poo-pooed by the British experts who said, "Look, we've got Singapore. Those funny little men try and attack you, the fleet from Singapore will fix them in no time." You know, this is really true, and I had senior officers talk to me about that, when they used to come and lecture us. So I joined the, I had what was known as a short

20:00 service commission. The air force and the army and the navy used to get young men in as cadets and train them for a permanent career. The air force didn't have the money to do that, so they offered you a short service commission. You know, after you were commissioned, you signed up for four years and then if you hadn't blotted your copy book, you could stay. And of course, as the air force was continually expanding, everybody stayed. Also, the RAF, even then were

20:30 short of air crew, and about half the output, for about three or four years from the officer's training school at Point Cook, about half that output went to join the RAF and had a short service commission in the RAF. And mainly they were, flew in the north west India forces, and they flew over Afghanistan, the, Afghanistan was a hell of a problem in the 20's and 30's

21:00 and they were mainly kept under control by the RAF. If the Afghanistan, or Afghan tribe would play up and raid the roads, an old RAF bomber squadron would fly over their village and drop a note saying "We're going to bomb the hell out of you tomorrow, you'd better skedaddle." The next day, they'd come over and bomb it and wreck all the huts. And that was to punish these fellows

21:30 for raiding a convoy of trucks or whatever on the roads going over the Khyber Pass. The only thing was, it was fun, but if you came down because of engine failure, what the Afghans did to you was terrible. And then the other thing that the Australians went to, was to a place called Mesopotamia. It was Mesopotamia

22:00 until it became Iraq. And even until in 1948, we were still, 1958, just when Saddam Hussein started to get into power, in 1958, as recent as that, it was still a British military protectorate. Royal Air Force were still in Iraq, a place called Ar Banyan [Habbaniya], not far from that, from Baghdad, I've flown past it and talked to people in the tower there,

22:30 nice (UNCLEAR) accent. And they patrolled, they patrolled these pipelines, which Iraq would try to blow up as they are doing now. And the RAF ran the whole show they had, their vehicle, they had, mainly had armoured vehicles which, armoured cars, because the desert was so hard and so flat, they could speed these armoured cars across the desert. And had one machine gun in a little turret which they could shoot

23:00 after these poor devils. And you can understand why the Iraqis, you know, were keen to get there own country back, the way it, and what the Brits did, I know I'm alluding, after World War I, because the Saudi royal family from Arabia helped them, one of the Saudi family was put into Mesopotamia to become the king.

23:30 He was the king of Iraq. And there was a royal family there, and they were, you know, pretty typical sort of, for everybody else, they lived very bloody well, but Baghdad was a delightful place to visit, I visited with my wife, and in 58. And it was two days after we left that the fundamentalists took over, murdered the king and his family,

24:00 and murdered a lot of people, and came to the pub where my wife and I had been staying and took out all the white men, hanged them, from the street lamps outside. I got a tip off from the taxi driver that I was there, who wouldn't take my wife and me to this hotel, he didn't speak English, but he refused to take us to this hotel. And that gave me a clue and made some enquiries and they said you know, "You shouldn't be here."

24:30 So we pushed off.

Wow, you were very lucky.

Terribly lucky. That's why I said I've been lucky, I've had

Charmed life, in many ways.

Anyway,

Just going back to the air force.

Yes.

In joining up in the early days of the RAAF,

Yeah.

did you find you had troubles living up to the name Kingsford-Smith?

Only for a while, the firstly you had to pass with a very tough interview committee, first of all, you had to satisfy them that you were

25:00 thoroughly British. We had British passports in those days, I had a British passport. But I was conscious of my obligations to king and country, and I was educated in the good character and all the rest of the crap. But one thing against me, was my name Kingsford-Smith, they thought I'd think I was pretty good, have tickets on me. And I really had to use all my powers of persuasion, to convince them that the name Kingsford-Smith didn't mean anything to me. And also,

25:30 I had, because I had a friend, I'd studied the navigation, and navigation being a black art in the air force, and here was a kid might understand a bit about navigation and that, I saw them noting that down. I was 17, noting that down every time I talked about it. So they did in fact accept me, then they knocked me back because of health then I had to get a certificate to say I was healthy and that, and they accepted me. But the air force was

26:00 really a different branch of the army. The first thing in the morning, we did a lot of drills, we were issued with assault 303 rifles and side arms. We were inspected with our rifles and side arms every morning by a tough, disciplinary warrant officer. The rifle had to be spotlessly clean, not on the outside but the buoy had to pull through the thing and clean it. And the side arm, the bayonet and the scabbard

26:30 had to be shiny and clean. Your buttons had to be clean, you had to march beautifully. And rifle practice on the rifle range was terribly important.

Did you ever use a rifle during the war?

No. But I used to carry a revolver on some operations, I thought it might be handy, but otherwise it was better not to have it. The revolvers you were issued with, which were a Smith and Wesson 38,

27:00 which were a military revolver. It was hard to hit a bloody haystack, even a few yards away, because the scatter, the bullets went everywhere. I tried it, and I then bought an American army PX4 [Beretta] point .22 long rifle revolver. And because the bullets were small, it had a chamber carried 10 bullets, and I could shoot terribly accurately with that. On those operations I thought I needed a revolver, I carried that. Because it had, it

27:30 would bring anyone down, it was, a long rifle bullet was sort of slightly bigger than a usual one, and slightly more power behind it, went out very fast. But I didn't get rid of that till I came up here, because it was illegal, so I chucked into a ravine.

Getting back to the training in the air force.

Yes, training.

What about flying, can you tell us about your first flight, and what they were on?

Well, we did a lot of drills, and a lot of lectures before

28:00 we were allowed to fly. And then, we were taught to fly. We were taught to fly safely, you were taught to carry out forced landings, because everyone's made forced landings, engines were very unreliable, but those old aeroplanes could usually land on a very small paddock. If you were flying over paddocks and you had a, engine failure, you made a forced landing, I've done it myself, and you practiced forced landings a lot.

28:30 We were taught to fly at night, but just, but flying at night was dangerous and it wasn't encouraged. We really weren't taught any navigation, was sensible to fly along the railway line and the stations in those days, used to have the name of the station in big letters, you just read that. You were taught to map read, but you weren't taught if there was no map to read off. You never flew over cloud, you were taught some instrument flying, but

29:00 not a lot, because it was dangerous. You were taught to fly in formation, which was good fun, and very good for air patterns, and the air force was very good at air patterns. But they had these old bi-planes, our fighter was a thing called a Hawker Demon, it was the most delightful aeroplane to fly. It was, had a, one Rolls Royce engine in front, it was a bi-plane, the fixed undercarriage, it was

29:30 the most aerobatic aeroplane I've ever flown, it was a beautiful aeroplane to fly. It had one .303 gun [rifle] firing forward, a pop gun. And then we had some flying boats, they were amphibious flying boats with one engine, big old engine, wooden propeller, which, and I flew in those once or twice. Flying back to Melbourne,

30:00 we hit a fairly strong cross wind of about 70 knots, we had 45 degrees drift. In other words, to go that way, I flew that way. I was flying, flew at about 80 knots, just a strong wind, yeah.

Were you aware, were the people in the air force at the time aware about how under classed their air force was?

Not, not, no, we were

30:30 filled with a lot of, and I sound anti-British, I'm not, because I admired them tremendously when I served them, but we heard a lot of British crap, really, that we had the best aeroplanes in the world, because they were British. The American aeroplanes flew too fast and landed too fast, and it wasn't safe to fly an aeroplane that landed too fast. And they'd crash and burnt. The British aircraft industry ran a very, very good propaganda campaign,

31:00 I admire them tremendously. They sold second-rate aircraft all over the world, convincing people they were first-rate aircraft. But when, see, even the maritime aeroplanes we had, the Anson, BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary] at that time had bought in an aeroplane the same size, to carry VIPs [Very Important Person] around. It was all metal, it had a retractable undercarriage, it had

31:30 variable fixed propellers, it could fly 50% faster and three times further, it was a civil aeroplane, our military aeroplane, the Anson, which had one turret at the back with a pop gun sticking up. It was totally inadequate, but as a maritime reconnaissance aeroplane, with long range tanks put in it, we put in long range tanks, and with navigators put in, the pilot became the navigator, he

32:00 was taught to navigate, and then we, because we used to fly from Richmond to bases at Coffs Harbour or Evans Head or near Taree or south to Nowra or to Moruya, we had, members of ground staff, who we'd need once we got on the ground there, were taught to fly in a linked plane, hours and hours in the trainer. The captain would take off, level at its height,

32:30 hand over to the chap called the driver pilot, who could be an AC [aircraftsman] 1 engine fitter, an AC 1 or an AC or whatever, air frame fitter, he'd steer it beautifully, set a course, more accurate on course than I could, when we got to our destination, we'd take over and land it. And then the captain had been given a navigation course to navigate out over the sea, but in 19, in November or December 1939, the war had been going for

33:00 a month, we'd known for two years it was coming. A German armed merchant raider did appear to lay mines along the coast of New Zealand and the mines sunk two ships. And then a ship, about 600 miles out in the Pacific, disappeared and it was assumed he'd come over this way and sunk the ship. And we went out looking for this German ship, or survivors in their, in

33:30 their boats. In case we found him, we carried bombs, and the bombs were World War I bombs, weighing a lovely 100 weight each, 112 pounds, why they'd make 112 pounds, but it was 100 weight. And now, that was the state the air force was in, we had, these things had been in the bomb dump over 20 years, because, you know, we were in a peace loving nation until just recently, just before that.

34:00 **Was the arrival of that German craft a lesson, did that hit home at the time?**

It did hit home, because just before that, the Australian government realised, no, not before that, about that time we realised how inadequately armed we were. And the Royal Air Force had ordered, it really must've upset the British industry, the American Lockheed aeroplane, called a Lockheed Electra, which was a civil aeroplane, big version of the one

34:30 BHP had. And they'd ordered it, a maritime aeroplane and they called it the Hudson, Lockheed Hudson and we bought these Lockheed Hudsons from America and they'd been ordered by about that time, or just after that time, the Ansons, the Australian defence minister had realised how hopeless we were. And they arrived in the 1940's just as I was leaving the squadron. It shows you our mindset at that time, they were brought out my sea,

35:00 they could easily have flown out, but we always imported every aeroplane by sea, so we bought the bloody things out by sea. Now the Hudson was a fantastic maritime aeroplane, it was a good operational aeroplane, it stayed in service for many, many years in the war against the Japs. And the Hudson, by the end of the 1940s had replaced the old Ansons and became trainers. But even to fly the Hudsons, we had to bring in civil pilots to teach the air

35:30 force people to fly this aeroplane. It was a civil aeroplane, much faster than any other military aeroplane we had from America. But the air force, get this, the air force was very spit and, I'm, that's all right, the air force was terribly spit and polish, because we, most of our officers had been trained in the army. As I said, we loved using our rifles and showing how good we were at drill

36:00 and we had to march terribly accurately, our quarters had to be immaculate to be, they were inspected about twice a week and you know, you really were in trouble if your quarters had a spot of dirt.

How did you respond to that discipline when you first joined the air force as a 17 year old?

I didn't mind it, a lot couldn't take it, a lot pulled out after a while. And by the time I joined the air force I was 18, but I'd applied when I was 17. I thought, well, that's

36:30 what it is, I'll go along with it, but, this is so childish, we a lot of study to do, and we had a, your bed had to be made immaculately, it had to have an edge on the counterpane under the bed

You've stepped out of frame, you'll have to sit down again, sorry.

Oh, I'm sorry.

That's all right.

And it would take me 10 minutes to make my bed in the morning, because if everything was, and

37:00 lay out the clothes in the drawer, the underpants there, singlets there, childish as hell, and I was studying till quite late at night, so I was so bloody tired, I thought, "Now if I get into that bed, I've got to make it in the morning," so I slept on the floor. I was simply, I was young, I was tired, but the easiest course was to sleep on the floor. So when I got up in the morning, I had

37:30 my clothes out, I don't know where, in the morning, I packed all the drawers the night before, I only did it once. It didn't worry very much at all. I got into trouble, I got into trouble once for having a dirty butt on the rifle and I hadn't used Brasso. We always had tons of Brasso in our quarters, we cleaned everything, everything was brass. And I hadn't,

38:00 I had a record, on my record, that I was hailed up before the commanding officer and fined five schillings, I think. And that was, they were good people, that was how you ran an air force in those days. It was a sort of an airborne army, and they couldn't really take off from their base,

38:30 fly to the extent of their range and at night, find a target, attack it and find a way back to the base. So you had to have an enemy who would only fight you in the daytime, and not too far away. And, well, the RAAF changed very quickly.

We'll talk about that, we'll just stop for a second because we're out of tape again. We'll talk, do you want to take a short break?

39:00 Yeah.

Tape 3

00:30 **Yeah, how did you go to the toilet in the Lancaster?**

Well, there was an Elsan [chemical toilet] toilet in the aircraft, but it was very hard for anyone to use it, because you couldn't leave your position. You were tied in my communications link and oxygen link, even if you undid your straps, but the pilot couldn't leave. So we had a tin, which we called the piss tin. If you really had to have a leak you, the flight engineer would pass you the piss tin.

01:00 It wasn't easy, though, because, the height at which we flew, it was always cold, it was always in the winter and the winters were very long, it was bloody cold. It was minus, more or less consistent minus 20 degrees Celsius, and with, your body organs shrink at that temperature, you had layer after layer of clothing, you had to get your dick out through. So it was

01:30 quite a job to do it, but you usually didn't pee down your clothes.

Before we …

So you tried to hold it though, as long as you could, till you got on the ground, and you didn't drink an awful lot in the air, until you were within an hour of landing and you'd be thirsty, so you'd open a tin of orange juice.

Well, when get up to those long term,

02:00 **those experiences, perhaps you could tell us about your first flight in an aeroplane, the first time you went up.**

As a civilian?

No, in the air force.

In the air force. Well, let's talk about the first operational flight I made in the Lancaster.

What I want there is to touch a little bit on your training and your first experience as a pilot.

Well, it's a long

02:30 time ago, I, was as I expected it. I trained in a very interesting aeroplane, we had two kinds of basic trainers at Point Cook, old Gipsy Moths, they were developed and later became the Tiger Moth. And the Gipsy Moth was a De Havilland aeroplane, a scaled down

03:00 version of the De Havilland DH4 World War I bomber, everything was just scaled down. Particularly the engine, the engine, the first Gipsy Moth had an engine of 60 horsepower, and they later came up to 80. We also had a fairly new trainer called an Avro Cadet, which actually had a metal frame, was covered in fabric, and it had brakes, too, there was a, the Moths didn't.

03:30 It actually had a tail wheel. And I was taught to fly on an Avro Cadet, my instructor was a delightful guy who became a good friend over many years. And then once we'd learnt to fly, we six months learning to fly, we then flew on to an advanced type of aeroplane, it was a Westland Wapiti. The Westland Wapiti was a,

04:00 wasn't, had been, until quite recently, in service in the RAAF and in the RAF. And the Westland, the first aeroplane to fly over Mount Everest was a beefed up Westland Wapiti, it had a fairly powerful engine and lots of wings, which meant it would go really high. And it was so high of the ground that to get into the pilot's seat,

04:30 you climbed up through foot holes in the side. And some smart ass said to me, one morning said to me, "Well, now we know why we have parachutes, in case we fall off." And it was an interesting aeroplane to fly, and it had no brakes, as I said, they didn't believe in having brakes. A big, big aeroplane, and as you taxied up to the tarmac,

05:00 outside the hangar, the end of your session, you had to sort of reasonably not go barging round knocking out other aeroplanes. And as you got near the tarmac, two ground staff would rush out, and underneath each wing, was a hoop, a bit like half a netball hoop, and they grabbed this hoop and guide you in like two tugs on an ocean liner. You couldn't

05:30 guide the aircraft when you were travelling slowly on the ground unless these people were hanging on to you. One would push, go quickly, the one would pull back so you could turn a corner. That was what you got used to.

Are there any particularly influential people, you mentioned some in your early training and your early career in the air force that gave you, particularly, lessons that stayed with you and all throughout

06:00 **your flying career?**

Yes, I'm, it's funny you know, an organisation with strong discipline, is a great breeding ground for (UNCLEAR) and they gave me a lesson and taught me to be like that. If you've got any witnesses at all, it brings them out. I met some wonderful people, though, people who were senior to me who taught me a lot.

06:30 And of course, whenever you're through an experience like that, you make friends who'll be your friends for a lifetime. Just about all dead now, I seem to have survived them. When I got to my first squadron, I had as a flight commander a more senior fellow, a flight Lieutenant who loved the air force and who really believed that the air force should be a fighting service, not just an outfit, you know, go to air pageants and

07:00 do aerobatics and formation flying. And he taught me importance of coping no matter what the conditions were. I was even escorting the first or second AIF convoy to leave Sydney and go off to Egypt. Went up the coast, our aeroplanes didn't have a terribly long range, so we landed at

07:30 Coffs Harbour, I think, no, no, Kempsey, Kempsey, as the convoy went north, and we had to land at Kempsey to refuel. And we couldn't escort at night time, because we couldn't see, we had no radar. So at first light, we had to be out over the ships and we were taking off, we were due to take off in a fairly heavy fog,

08:00 on an airfield with no runways. This man said, "It's easy to take off in conditions like that. You know the dimensions of the airfield, take off on the longest run, which is diagonally, taxi along one fence and have one of your crew watch your wing tip, making sure you don't bash into the fence," because you couldn't see far "until you get to a corner, then turn and set the

08:30 diagonal run on your compass, then head off on that." Most air force senior officers by that time just said, "We can't take off." This man said, "Well, of course, you can take off, you are supposed to be out over the ships by a certain time." He used to, he liked formation flying because it was fun, and you'd formate on him fairly close and he'd call, and those were the only times we had voice radio.

09:00 It was quite complicated, the wireless operator had to be pulling leavers and doing all sorts of things every time you transmitted or received. And he's call across on the voice radio, he'd say "Smithy, where the hell are you, I can't see you," and I'd be, you know, very close to him, he'd say "Oh, now I can see you. So far out, I can hardly see you, come in closer, come in closer." As my wing tip would get closer and closer to his fuselage of his aircraft, his radio operator could see it,

09:30 I could see the fear on his face. But this man, Balmer, believed that you should do anything that you want to do in an aeroplane. And, but he particularly, he made me learn how to fly in all weather, he gave me lesson after lesson after lesson, in other words, you fly in good weather with a hood over you, and you just have to perform. And so, when I went onto operations,

10:00 in England where half our flying, more than half our flying was in bad weather, bad weather never licked me and it did, could kill a lot of people.

You were fighting …

That was, again, that's where I was lucky, I had this man who I, who was killed one night when we were operating, I formed a new squadron and he was commanding the squadron I'd been in and he went on

10:30 operations, he'd been promoted. He'd been promoted to leave the squadron and take a more senior job, and once you've been moved to another location or if you know that your tour is finished, you should never ever fly again, because that's when you catch it, and he did. And he was shot down on an operation, he shouldn't have been shot down. And he's no longer around to help me. Because I used to help him,

11:00 he was a man who, single man, he used to get into all sorts of trouble with ladies, quite often wives of senior officers who were overseas in the army or something, fighting in the desert. And I'd get a phone call from him in the middle of the night, "Oh, Smithy, Smithy," "Yes," "I'm in a spot of bother, I'm in such and such a town," which might be

11:30 an hour or an hour and a half drive away, "and I got out a window of a house and the car's got a flat battery, can you come and get me." So I was able to repay him. To everybody, no one else saw that side of him, but I did.

12:00 **Around this time, are you, were in a relationship or**

Yes, I had a wife at home, who came from a family of journalists, she used to write me wonderful letters about twice a week and so that kept me straight and narrow.

Just on the coastal patrol stuff, are there any other particular significant events, or can you tell us roughly about, more or less about your time on coastal

12:30 **patrol, you spent some time there.**

I did, no, it was interesting. Your out over the sea, and it's amazing how little you can see if you're in an aeroplane over the sea. Someone in an open boat in the sea, it's very hard to pick up from an aircraft. You see, you do see all sorts of things, whales and sharks and

13:00 the most amazing weather conditions and water spouts, if you keep your eyes open. In fact, again, coastal patrols, without radar, which they have these days, really taught me to use my eyes over the water. And because otherwise you miss things.

You seem to be a very keen observer, you have a great love of the physical nature of flying and the physical environment.

Yes, yes.

What, did you have cause to reflect when you were on those long patrols over

13:30 **water and what your uncle had gone through when he was crossing the Pacific?**

No, no, I was busy doing what I was doing. No. My, we know, once I got in the air force my uncle had, played almost no role at all, I was very busy doing my own thing. In fact, it used to annoy me, when I came back, the end of the war

14:00 all the journos [journalists]would start, or even in England, start talking about my uncle and I used to get a bit rude to them, which was wrong of me. But, you know, I was, had done my own job and done my own thing and that was it.

What did you love about flying? That time on coastal patrol.

14:30 It's hard to say, I suppose what, there were some things that you had to overcome, and they weren't that hard. It's really easy to fly an aeroplane than drive a car. It became more complicated as time went on, I don't think I'd like to fly an aeroplane today, when all you see is a mass of instruments, and nearly all now days, and it's all bloody well digital stuff, a mass of

15:00 cathode ray tubes in front of you. You hardly look out at all, I don't know whether I would like that, but I was lucky enough I flew when, I think, the time when flying was most interesting. We did, during the war, we did resort to electronics more and more and more and it made quite a difference to the way we fought. It was interesting, in the end, the eyeball's come back

15:30 into being important again. But what I liked about flying, I suppose if you've got no one, when I flew, you've got no one looking over your shoulder, what the hell you're doing. You've got a job to do, and you've got to make decisions, how to carry it out. You've got a crew who fly, in all operational flying I had a crew. Who you know very well, but you want to keep them

16:00 on the job. A lot of inexperienced captains, who trained with their crew, were the same rank as their crew, thought it was taking too much side to tell them what to do and to discipline them. And you'd have two gunners chatting together over the intercom and they shouldn't, keep them quiet and the skipper

wouldn't like to say something to them. I didn't hesitate, I kept my

16:30 crew on the job all the time, and they appreciated it. But I think, lots of good captains did that. It was very hard if you were junior in rank, I was much more senior to them, and I'd also had a lot of experience as an instructor. I did an awful lot of training exercises in the aircraft and so although I was a CO [Commanding Officer] of the squadron, my air bomber and I on the bombing range, had the best results of anyone on the

17:00 squadron. Because we trained and trained and trained. I trained and trained and trained in fighter cooperation with fighters, because I'd seem the benefits of training. It's very hard to see all that if you don't have a lot of experience.

Can you take us through the times you left coastal patrol to go to England and the time, the moments when

17:30 **the decision was made that you would leave the coastal patrol?**

Well, I went to coastal patrol because the Empire Air Scheme had started and they realised that they had trained people to go to England and were getting new aircraft in the RAAF. We needed a new mustering in the air force, job of navigator. They realised they'd have to start navigation schools, and we had no navigation instructors, no one knew anything about navigation. So some of us were picked to go and do,

18:00 be navigation experts. And some navy people, some merchant marine sea captains and some air force people who'd done navigation courses in England ran it, and we were taught, were given a navigation course, which qualified me at the end of the course. I friend of mine said, "You know there was a civil navigation certificate," I said, "No," he said, "Let's go and get one," and our

18:30 course enabled us to have a first class civil nav certificate. But only one or two people have that. They weren't terribly important, it was nice to have it. And you really learned navigation so I haven't done the course, I was a navigation instructor, at Point Cook, back where I learned to fly. Then I went to Sydney to be a station navigation officer and station operations officer and ran the operations room, by

19:00 the time I was married. And I went back to an operational training unit and became chief navigation instructor. I was lucky, though, in all these jobs I'd done a lot of instructing in the air and a lot of flying. I, for example, was able to fly my wife and baby from Sydney to Bairnsdale. When the baby was born, there was a time when civilians couldn't get permission to travel interstate. The limited railway

19:30 facilities, so overloaded in the war in 1942 that civilians who wanted to travel interstate just couldn't by a ticket, you had to have an authority to buy a ticket. Well, I had a wife and baby in Sydney, and I was in Bairnsdale in Victoria, it's this place. So I got one of our smaller aircraft and flew on a navigation exercise to Moruya,

20:00 and she was able to fly in a little tiny airline from Sydney to Moruya, and because Moruya wasn't going out of New South Wales, I landed at Moruya airstrip, which is an airstrip built for sort of coastal reconnaissance aircraft, and she and the baby got out of this civil aircraft and got into my aircraft, and we flew them from Moruya back to Bairnsdale where I landed on, in one of our satellite fields., I wasn't silly enough to

20:30 land on the main air field, because what I was doing was highly illegal. And I had a crew, a wireless, I think a wireless operator with me, and flying across the mountains from Moruya to Bairnsdale, we flew over some high ground, it was a hot day, and the aircraft was very bumpy, and my wife became a bit airsick. So she handed the baby to the wireless

21:00 operator. The baby thoroughly wet by this time, and the wireless operator was, operated by key and while he was nursing my eldest child, now a woman in her 60's, base called him, so there he was, nursing this baby and tapping away on the key. I wish I'd taken a photo of that, I'm sure it's the first time ever an operator on one of His Majesty's aeroplanes has nursed a

21:30 wet four weeks old baby, and communicated with base. And anyway, we got to Bairnsdale, and I'd arranged for a fellow in Bairnsdale taxi driver and of course, to even run a taxi in a country town, you couldn't get enough petrol, he had a charcoal burner, he turned up with his old charcoal burner, picked us up and took us into a grubby little flat we'd rented on top of a shop

22:00 and, so, I've forgotten what got me talking about that. But various things that I, that you did

Life in the air force.

Life in the air force.

The war in Europe was hotting up at this stage, and you obviously were needing, can you tell us a little bit about how you got to go over to Europe, or the decisions you made at that time?

Yes, the war in

22:30 Europe was hotting up and the war out here was, had hotted up, and we had no, virtually no operational air force out here at all. Our army was in the Middle East, all our air force operational squad, bar one or

two, were in the Middle East or in England, and we, if we had enough air craft here, I would've gone to an Australian squadron in the Pacific,

23:00 but we didn't have any, enough air craft here. So I was sent to 10 Squadron, the Sunderland [flying boat] squadron on anti-submarine patrols, which were, you know, absolutely essential for England, the subs were sinking so many ships in the Atlantic. But when I got to England, as I said earlier, I diverted to bomber command temporarily

23:30 and I stayed there for three years. But I received a signal that I was to go overseas. I could go home and take leave. Went home and took leave, and I was told to report to such and such a wharf in Sydney and board a ship, which was an American naval troop carrier. Which meant that I new I was going to the west coast of America, that's all I knew.

24:00 A friend of mine came with me, and we travelled across the Pacific and enjoyed it very much. The Americans were wonderful people. It was interesting, the war between the north and the south was still on in those days. The captain of the ship was a southerner, who was a delightful man, and most of his officers were goddamn Yankees [Americans]. This delightful southerner, I think preferred to talk to

24:30 these two Australian officers, than the Yankee officers he had. You know, it was a very efficient ship, but it was interesting to see the break between the south and the north. We landed at San Diego, which is a navy port, and the ship being a US navy ship was dry, and I used to want a few beers each day and it took us about

25:00 two and a half weeks to get across the Pacific, maybe longer. I hadn't had a drink and neither had my friend, and he drank more beer than I did. And this dear Captain Powell, the southerner, said, "Well, you boys have got four hours to go ashore, enjoy yourself, then we're going north." We were the only people allowed off, the ship's officers weren't. Then we got down to the wharf and hailed a cab. And my friend said, "Take us to a pub." And the driver, who was a Mexican guy,

25:30 shrugged his shoulders and "Huh?" and we said again "We want to go to a pub," and he said, "Huh?" and we said, "We've been on that ship for nearly three weeks, we haven't had a, we've been locked up," and the driver said, "Okay." And he took us to the closest brothel. We went inside, saw what was offered and said, "We'd rather have a drink." We then got out, and got into another cab and told us, told him to take us to a tavern.

26:00 And when we got to a tavern we then found that there was a city election that day, and all the taverns were shut. It's something we don't do in Australia, when there's an election on, you can't, you know, taverns and pubs are closed. And we found that Tijuana, then, a little Mexican town was only about half an hour's drive away, and we got a cab to Tijuana, where we could get a drink. We were this determined to get a drink. Got to Tijuana, where there were a lot of

26:30 fellows in hard hats, there was a ship building industry there, drinking hard liquor. So we had a few shots of whatever, of bourbon and realised that we were running late for the ship and just got back to ship in time. And, but, you know, if your young and you go ashore wanting a drink, and you don't get a drink, well, you travel to another country. Once again, to travel across an international border, we didn't have to produce any

27:00 passports, we were just in uniform.

This was your first experience of a country outside Australia?

Yes, yes. I, the place I went to was a whorehouse by accident. And the next was a tavern, where they said we, which was, the bar was closed and

What was your trip like

27:30 **across America?**

Well, we went by train to San Francisco, we had a wonderful time, and then up to Vancouver and by train right across Canada. Again, wonderful time, wonderful people. We went to a sort of embarkation depot near the port of Halifax, where we waited for a ship. And there was a French ship, the Pasteur, which had been

28:00 grabbed from the French just as the, just after France collapsed, and taken out to England, otherwise it would've been kept under control of the Vichy French government. And it was a very fast ship, it was a brand new ship, it never sailed before. It was built for the trans-Atlantic trade and was fitted out to carry troops. And it went across the Atlantic, without escort, went at

28:30 about 25 knots the whole way and in a fog most of the whole way too. And we got to Liverpool where a lot of other air force people who served the (UNCLEAR) first landed in Liverpool. I had my first experience of warm, flat beer, which I got to like quite a lot. And I've been to England about 65 times since, and I, nearly every time that I've gone back, I've gone, the

29:00 first thing I've done is go to the pub and have a pint of bitter, draught bitter. Which is better than the wartime stuff, but it became quite a good drink. You could drink a lot without, you know, getting into too

much trouble. It was called (UNCLEAR) for obvious reasons.

That first crossing of the Atlantic it would've been under the, a lot of submarine attack, and were you

29:30 **aware of the battle of the Atlantic that was going on?**

Oh yes, very much so. We were told to have expected to have a schedule to do our anti-submarine lookout, which you couldn't do it at night time but then a submarine would only attack you if it could see you, and particularly those who had maritime work knew what to look for, yeah, you'd be, a number of us would be around the

30:00 ship. Was interesting, though that, I was in the senior officer's cabin, I was a squadron leader. There were nine of us in the cabin, which was a bit bigger than that toilet that you fellows have been using. There were, just was a bunk long, three bunks there, three bunks there, three bunks there and the door there. As soon as you got out of bed, of course, you couldn't get dressed because someone else was getting dressed. But the troops didn't have nearly as much luxury as we had. So

30:30 it was pretty rough, but it wasn't a long trip.

Did you, how did you feel about being promoted and heading for England as a squadron leader? Did you feel adequately prepared to go and command men in battle?

Yes, I did feel adequately prepared, and I didn't worry about it. I was more adequately prepared than most. And I thought I was going to fly, go on, do coastal work which I reckoned I could do pretty well, I knew

31:00 the game, I knew the people that had been in that squadron. The commanding officer of the squadron had been the commanding officer of the station at Richmond when I had been station operations officer, and he used to tolerate a lot of my, the things that I did that I shouldn't have done. And I was looking forward to working under him, but in the end, I

31:30 didn't. But I was, I did not want to go to operations command, when I, when the AOC [Air Officer Commanding], chap called Wrigley said to me, sent me in to bomber command, first question I asked was what sort of question I'd be flying because I would've not liked to do it if they were an aircraft that I knew a bit about and didn't like. He said, "You'll be flying Lancasters." And Lancasters were the newest, hottest heavy bomber there was.

32:00 It had a very good reputation, I knew very little about it. When I was told I was flying Lancasters, I didn't argue any more. I may not have been successful even if I had argued and I'd been sent to fly something I didn't want to fly.

Had you ever wanted to fly fighter planes or fighter aircraft?

Not in particular, I didn't, I had sort of reverse snobbery. The fighter pilots were pretty snobbish, I thought they were sort of

32:30 not as bright as the heavy bomber pilots. Also my interest in navigation, which I developed as a, before going into the air force.

The difference between a heavy bomber pilot, and a fighter pilot, what separates the two?

Well, during the war in England the fighter had the top button of his uniform undone, of his jacket.

33:00 No, there's not much difference.

I'm thinking personality types, if you

No, there's not. They used to think there was a personality type, and maybe there is. Yes, there is a bit of a personality type. You can tell some people are thinking types and some more impulsive types when you get to judge people. The thinking type usually went to fly the bigger aircraft.

33:30 You needed endurance to fly bigger aircraft, not, you needed to be able to concentrate on the job for a very long time, a fighter pilot didn't have to do it for long. But there really wasn't that much difference. People, it depended on the training you received. The indoctrination you received. But a fighter pilot today, in the RAAF today, is a

34:00 bomber pilot, a fighter pilot, he's operating a mass of electronics, the poor devil, and he, you know, the F18s that we have in the RAAF are bombers and fighters. They strike aircraft. And all he does, when he's shooting at someone, he launches a missile anyway. And the

34:30 electronics tells him that, when to press the button.

Before we get onto the bomber command, I just want to go back to your love of navigation. What did you like most about navigating?

It was a challenge, and what made me interested in navigation, I left school at 15 to get a job. And I made friends with a fellow who was in the citizen military forces, in the militia. And he was an artillery

officer.

35:00 And in a country like Australia where you're mobile, you had to know where you were. And the only way you knew exactly where you were, and you had to know where you were if you were going to shoot at an enemy that you couldn't see because he was a field gunner, you'd shoot at an enemy maybe 10 miles away. The only way you knew exactly where you were, you took, you fixed your position by the sun. And I found how they did this was intriguing, and particularly when you were in a valley

35:30 and you didn't even had the horizon you could use, where they used a mirror. The mirror was, to make sure the mirror was dead flat, with a little flask of mercury, which you opened up and the mercury would always be dead flat, if you weren't jolting it about, and you took a reflection of the sun in the mercury, which was like a mirror and you then took the observation of the sun and that gave you double the altitude of the sun. And

36:00 I was intrigued with this enough to find that actually, in the valley, you could find out exactly where you were with the aid of a sextant and some tables and a flask of mercury. And then I then started to be interested in how Charles Kingsford-Smith navigated across the Pacific. And I read that up, so I talked to the air force.

36:30 When I tried to convince the first selection committed that I knew what I was doing, I mentioned my interest in navigation, because I realised that was starting to be important. And they then diverted me into the navigation strand, and I found it very enjoyable. Flying, just flying long distances can be very boring. If you're doing the navigation as well, it's more interesting. These days, of course, you can have a

37:00 ground position indicator, you just push a button, you read where you are. So navigation is longer a talent.

Can you tell us a bit about getting a star sight in the aircraft as you're flying along?

Getting what?

Getting a, shooting a, getting a star sight from the

Oh, it's very hard. In the air, an aeroplane's moving round all the time, and quite often you're, you don't have a proper horizon so for the aircraft, they

37:30 developed a bubble sextant. Although, early in the piece, you used to use a marine sextant and you sight the horizon and sight the object, you know, a star or the sun or the moon. Had a bubble sextant and taking a shot with the bubble sextant, the bubble moves around a bit all the time, because the aircraft is moving, so the bubble sextant would have a device,

38:00 which took an average of the sights. Other words, you'd take, could take as many sights as you like and would average them, and therefore, the average would be more or less where, the mean position of the bubble. And then you got an altitude and you had tables which enabled you to work out a position line, and then if you wanted know where you were you took a, shot something else and you worked out another position line and worked out where you were.

38:30 But again, on all my bomber operations, the navigator didn't use, only once did the navigator take a sight. We had electronics device called Gee, which would give you a position up to about a couple hundred miles from England till the Germans jammed it.

39:00 Then you navigated by DR [dead reckoning], and when you got close to the target, the Pathfinders which would use different radar had marked the target and you came in on the, you navigated, came in on the target. But you still needed your navigator also. He didn't have an easy job, he had a very hard job. He navigated by dead reckoning in bomber operations, and to

39:30 navigate by dead reckoning, he had to know the correct wind speed and direction at the height at which you were flying and the pilot had to fly the accurate courses. The pilot's military flying course was 010 and a flying course is 015, well, you know, poor dead reckoning bloke couldn't cope. So you had to have a crew that were extremely efficient, extremely well trained and extremely well disciplined, and to stick, to concentrate on what they were doing.

40:00 And the challenge to the crews was the first time a lot of these fellows went to operations, they'd never done it before, where if they were in a ship or in the army, the new boy has got more senior non-commissioned officers looking over his shoulder saying "Look son, do this, do that," or whatever. You get guidance. Sitting in an aircraft, at the end of an intercommunications link, and he had to,

40:30 although the captain could guide him and give him instructions over the intercom, the captain, he couldn't go up and talk to the captain and say "What do I do now?" He had to make his own decisions and he had to discipline himself. And of course, if you came up against a German fighter pilot, who'd already he shot down 16 aeroplanes and knew exactly what to do, and you were on your first mission, it's no wonder they were shot down.

41:00 And this used to upset me. Losing people upset me more than flying myself. I had a new crew come into the squadron, I'd meet them, I'd talk to them and I'd give them some duties, training duties. Before I

got to know them, they'd be on a mission and they'd never turn up again. No one knows where they are, even today, they're still part of the one thousand four hundred who lie in unknown graves, somewhere over Europe.

41:30 and that those that were shot down became prisoners, all right, we knew in due course, maybe one or two of the crew were prisoners. Seldom did the whole crew survive and particularly if a fighter got you when you had a full bomb load and the bombs exploded. Well, the bombs would explode and there'd be just one brilliant flash.

42:00 But then fuel in the aircraft …

Tape 4

00:30 **You can walk us through your first flight in the Lancaster and the introduction to that particular aeroplane.**

All right. When I joined bomber command, I was posted to an operational training unit and they had old twin engine Wellington bombers there. And this was in introduction to bomber operations,

01:00 and you formed your crew except for your flight engineer. You, it was interesting how a bomber crew formed. You sort of milled around till you talked to people you thought you could fly with. And I, of course, was a squadron leader and a bit senior officer then, and it was a bit hard for some of the sergeants and pilot officers to talk to me. But some of them were smart, they thought, "If he's a squadron leader, he might be able to fly

01:30 better than some of the others." Which I could, because, and, not an inherently better pilot, but a more experienced pilot. And I lucky I had a gunner who lived near my wife and because, well I found, he and I knew came from the same area. He joined my crew and we finally formed a crew, and you flew Wellingtons. And training, operational training was very

02:00 close to the real thing. There weren't Germans shooting at you, but you were coping with the same awful weather which killed so many people. Coping with aircraft, which might have an engine failure on take off. And the final exercise, and what interested me, you were told to take leaflets, the propaganda war was very important, you were always dropping leaflets on each other. And we went off to France to drop leaflets in enemy territory.

02:30 And you were given an area where there wasn't supposed to be much opposition, and if you didn't survive, if you didn't come back from that leaflet exercise, of course, you were failed. If you got back, you were passed. And then, but what impressed me, though, was the high standards of efficiency of training. The RAF was really an efficient wartime machine by 1943, it was the best air

03:00 force in the world, because they'd been fighting for their life since 39, and also since 1940, they'd been the only force that could attack Germany, after the British forces were kicked out of France and Dunkirk, the only way you could take the war to the Germans was by bomber force. You could attack the German submarines with the, in the Atlantic, but the Germans were attacking England, they were bombing England, they were sinking English ships. The only way you could get at their

03:30 factories and their communications links was the bomber force. So the bomber force had got rid of all the senior officers who weren't any good, and learned tactics and they were a highly efficient force, and they impressed my tremendously, and I enjoyed being with them. I didn't think much of the Wellington, it was an old aeroplane. And then I went onto another aeroplane and finally flew a Lancaster, and it was such a delight to fly. I went, there was a

04:00 training unit called a Lancaster finishing school, were you flew the Lancaster and the flight engineer joined the crew. And then I was then posted to 467 Squadron. But by the time I went onto operations, I was completely confident in the aircraft, but I had no idea what to expect, attacking a German target. And it was usual, and I insisted on it, I did two trips as a

04:30 sort of a passenger, or second pilot, with an experienced operational pilot and it was quite interesting. It was fine weather, we attacked the German city of Aachen where there were industries we wanted to attack, and we could see the, as we approached it, the first wave had gone in, and from the long distance, I was standing up beside the pilot with nowhere for me to sit in the aircraft, I could see from a

05:00 long distance away, the anti-aircraft fire, the tracer fire, shells exploding, aircraft being hit and going down. It was horrifying. The first time since I'd been a boy at Sunday school I started to pray. And, you know, knowing he had to fly into this cauldron of fire and hopefully survive. And so we flew into it, and all the firing got closer and closer and we

05:30 dropped our bombs and came back. Then I did another one, this time, I knew what to expect. And I found I could look around and see more what was going on. So by the time I did my first trip, and took my crew, because I didn't want to take my crew unless I knew what to expect. It was the drill, anyway. I knew what to expect, and I was able to guide them, and after a while, once you got used to it,

06:00 I stopped praying because I realised there were more people on the ground praying to the same God, that I be shot down, and I was praying. So by sheer weight of numbers if prayer counts for anything, that it was no good me praying. In the end, I learned that the power of prayer doesn't count for a damn thing. But, and, after a while, I was, usually when you're in a flight you make adrenalin

06:30 if your flight, you make a adrenalin, which is God's gift to primitive people. Once your adrenalin is flowing you can, it's a fight or flee drug, you can run faster, and you can fight better. Well, sitting strapped in an aeroplane, you can neither run or fight with your fists and the adrenalin used to, first of all, pour through my body, and I could feel my body, which was cold, and my feet were freezing

07:00 always. Feet get very cold, sitting in minus 20 degrees or so temperature, I'd feel this warmth going down to my feet. Then and I was very lucky, the adrenalin affected me more than other people. It speeded up my brain functions because I couldn't speed up my leg muscles. If your brain functions, if your brain goes, operates quicker, you don't know it's operating quicker, everything else slows down. And three or four things that might happen just at once,

07:30 you think, "Now," with a fast brain, it happens in sequence, one, and two, and you can think of what to do with each one. The other thing, the adrenalin did, was it improved your night vision, again, it couldn't go to my other muscles, it went to my eyes. And you could see further at night time, which was a fantastic asset. So what with the adrenalin, I actually started to enjoy it in the end. With, you know, I,

08:00 and a lot of people had adrenalin, but I talked to my pilots, I seemed to benefit more from it than others did. Maybe because it flowed to my brain easier than anybody else, I don't know. But after the first terrible fear, "God please save me from this," stuff, you got used to it. And then of course what happened of course was that the adrenalin effect would wear out after you'd been subjected

08:30 yourself to it, say, 20 to 25 times. And even those people who did benefit from adrenalin, the last four or five operations, were taking a bit casually, and that's when they were shot down quite often. But the first, the casualty rate was awful. I formed a squadron in November 43, and I had about

09:00 25 crews come in. Within six months, I'd had 25 crews shot down. Not the same crews, but I'd lost the equivalent of the whole complement of my squadron in six months. And then towards D Day, June [6], '44, when the Allies landed on,

09:30 at Normandy, in the three months before that, our operations were intensified, we weren't really bombing German targets, we were bombing the communications, particularly communication and transportation system, which the Germans would need if they were fighting off invaders. And that, particularly the railway system. Everything moved by railway in Europe as it did here. The roads weren't crash hot, there were no

10:00 autobahns or fast roads. The armies and civilians moved by rail, which was very efficient, but it was also very easy to attack. If there was a rail junction, you destroyed it so the Germans would protect it very well. And we suffered terrific losses attacking rail junctions. Also because they were in France or Belgium, we went very low in to bomb them, and so we had more loss, I had more losses

10:30 in some of those targets than I did over Germany. But, now I've lost my thread.

That's all right, well, we'll continue on this operational matters. How, you were obviously didn't go immediately into these very large scale operations, you had to be trained up on the Lancaster. Can you take us through the Lancaster bomber and just in your minds eye walk us, describe for us the

11:00 **Lancaster and what it smells like inside and how do you get into it and how do you start it up and what a take off is like?**

Well, you got into it easily, and you got up and down through the Lancaster fuselage easily because you were about 20 years of age. I've tried it more recently, it's bloody hard. The Lancaster had a door, you've seen pictures of Lancasters haven't you? It had a door at the

11:30 side, it was up a bit from the ground, sill was about that high. You'd chuck your parachute in first, you wouldn't climb in with that strapped onto your backside, you'd, the pilot would go up climbing over a spar in the middle of the aircraft and put your parachute and a dinghy on the seat, climb in. The Lancaster had a number of benefits, it was designed after a lot of war time experience. The

12:00 visibility from the pilot's position in the Lancaster was superior to any other bomber. So you could see round easily. It was, it didn't have a steerable nose wheel, like the Americans did, it was a tail ward aeroplane. It was very easy to control on the ground, it had very good differential brakes. If you wanted to turn to the right, you'd put the brake on and press the right pedal and the brake acted on the right wheel that meant you could turn to the right. You had very

12:30 good communications with your crew, your flight engineer was standing beside you, the navigator was just behind you. But in the air, the aeroplane took off very quickly, it was highly manoeuvrable.

Can you describe a take off for us in a Lancaster?

Well, rather hard to describe in a way, well, you lined up on the runway, you only used a runway.

Did you talk to your crew, and what sort of intercom communication was going on?

Well you

13:00 **At this time.**

Yes, you checked with the crew before you started the engines and they were all okay and taxi out. You wouldn't necessarily talk to them again before you took off. You talk the navigator that he might have certain instruments switched on. You do a pre-take off check, you and the, and on all the instruments and everything else, all the switches

13:30 in the right direction. Your fuel tanks were full, everything was right. Oh, you would just check your crew were okay and you'd run through that with the flight engineer. On a big aircraft, it was quite a drill, quite often it was written down, so you would miss nothing. It's hard to remember everything. You then, if you weren't on an operational flight, you'd tell the tower when you wanted to line up on the runway, and they'd give you permission to line up on the runway and permission to take off. When operations were on, there was radio silence,

14:00 and you lined up on the runway when the fellow in front of you had gone, and you waited till you got a green light from the little caravan by the edge of the runway. Once you got the green light, off you went. As you took off, the navigator would be reading the air speeds and telling you what speed you were going at, because you would be watching where you were running down the runway was pitch dark and hardly any, a blackout everywhere and only tiny little lights down the runway.

14:30 Watching that, and watching the, and the aircraft always flew overloaded, so the run was longer than it should be. The navigator told you when you reached sort of unstick speed, he told you the speed and you would unstick it, and you would lift the aeroplane of the runway, the moment you got off the runway, you were onto instruments. You were flying by the instruments. As soon as the speed had built up enough, or, as soon as you were off the ground, you retracted the undercarriage,

15:00 the flight engineer would retract the undercarriage. Then the navigator would be giving you the speeds and as soon as we were fast enough, you would retract the flaps because you needed some flap, take off flap to get off the ground. But once the aeroplane was clean, with wheels tucked in and the flaps pulled in, you knew then, that you could cope with an engine failure. If you had an engine failure while the wheels were down and the flaps were down, well, you went straight into the ground. And

15:30 killed a lot of people on the ground as well, there were usually houses everywhere. Once the aeroplane was clean, you could relax and then you started to climb to altitude. And when you climbed to, you climbed fairly slowly, but you aimed to be at altitude as you hit the Channel, and you crossed the enemy coastline as high as you could. And then you knew that as you were getting close to the enemy

16:00 coast, they had you on their radar. The German radar was very good, they had long range radar and gun control radar. But the long range would pick you up and that's when we started using our own counter-radar devices.

Are those particular black boxes that you were carrying?

No, what we had, they found that little strips of aluminium foil the right length, the same length as

16:30 the wave, if you dropped a hell of a lot of this aluminium foil, they couldn't see through it. So every aircraft in a certain position was shown to drop this window, this foil called window. I had a, it was in a roll with, beautiful aluminium foil. And that confused them, the Germans, for a while. The first time it was used, it confused the Germans completely, but in the end, they got the

17:00 hang of it. And we still dropped a hell of a lot, but the air bomber would be busy chucking this stuff out when I tell him to. And as you got over, within range of the German guns, the battery of guns, the big heavy anti-craft guns would fire at you. And they would fire the battery of fire at once, about three or four or five aircraft, and the guns would fire at once. Now as they fire, there's

17:30 a little bit of muzzle flash, which you wouldn't see, but the muzzle flash would reflect on the ground. And just around the ground around these guns, going out not very far, there would be a little bit of twinkling of light, and I found that if I looked very carefully, I could see it. A lot of people couldn't see it. You knew, you then could assume that about six, five or six shells were on their way to you set to burst at your height,

18:00 right where you were. Now, they that predicted your direction and your speed, because they didn't shoot you, they shot at you where you would be by the time the shells got up there. So that if you stayed along the same course and same speed, and they were accurate, the shells would burst around you and bring you down. So the first thing you did, once I saw those flashes, I altered course or speed so that I wouldn't be where I, they thought I'd be.

18:30 And the shells would, sometimes, they'd be shooting at someone else, but if they were shooting at me, the shells would burst to one side, or behind, and your air gunner saw some or in front. If they burst in front, you'd fly through the cloud of smoke, and you'd smell the cordite immediately, sometimes very close, you'd see it and then smell the cordite, but you'd never hear it above the noise of your engines.

19:00 But once you smelt the cordite, you knew they were getting close. And once you were over the enemy occupied territory, you concentrated on navigation, you concentrated on watching out for enemy fighters.

Could you hear the flak?

No. The engines on these aircraft were terribly noisy. Also, I always flew, I remember when I was over enemy territory at maximum continuous power,

19:30 flat out, because I believed in height. The higher you were, the longer it took the fighters to get up to you. In fact, I gradually developed, over the time I was flying, a different, my own procedure, which I would've had I stayed and done another tour of operation in Lancasters, told all other pilots to fly. Most pilots were taught to weave a bit

20:00 so that your gunner could see down if you went from one side to the other, the gunner could see down. Or if you were under attack, to do a thing called a corkscrew, go like this and this and this. And I found that that lost you height and confused the navigators like anything, and the navigator was terribly important. Unless he guided you to the target, you wasted your whole effort. And so I concentrated on flying dead straight and level, telling the navigator if he went to sleep, I'd kill him.

20:30 And the navigator by, was a little bloke, by standing up in his turret, the poor bugger, the whole time over Germany, he'd stand up and crouch. Couldn't stand up high, he'd stand up sort of crouched. He could look down and swing his turret from side to side and look down. And by concentrating and flying very, very, very, accurately, I could get higher than nearly all the other aircraft. And higher than some of the German fighters, some of German fighters had an operational

21:00 ceiling of about 20 thousand feet. Others had an operational ceiling well above mine. And I had less air combat than other crews, other crews flying lower and weaving about, had double the number of air contests I did, had. The other thing is, when my gunner told me an enemy fighter was approaching, instead of weaving around, I would pull the engines back on one side of the aeroplane,

21:30 the same time, roll the thing onto one side and the same time push, the rudder would roll to one side, I'd push the rudder that way, full the amount it would go and the aeroplane would just, it would turn over and just drop out of the sky, it wouldn't fly, it would drop. So you can imagine your poor German fighter, he's lining up someone and the aeroplane just drops out of the sky, disappeared.

You side-slip it or do you, are you rolling it over?

Not flying, you really,

22:00 you lost all lift. You turned on one side and took off half the power, and the aeroplane just lost all lift and just dropped. Now the first time I did it with a full bomb load, I thought, I was scared because you have to pull out of this. I found it pulled out quite well, the bombs stayed on and the aeroplane didn't break up. And if the gunner, the gunner and I did a lot of practice at this, if he was quick enough and saw he the fighter, at the right time,

22:30 we did that procedure. The only dangerous thing about it was, there might be another Lancaster below you. Well, the air bomber was always watching out and he'd always tell me if there were other, if he could see other aircraft beneath us.

How did that feel, you were flying in massive formations, yet you were flying individually?

Well we were flying in massive groups, see, you couldn't formate at night time. You couldn't see well enough to fly formation at night time. So we were given a time we were supposed to be

23:00 over the target because the maximum number attacking the target at the same time, you'd swamp their defences. And you also swamped the fighters. And we flew in a gaggle, but there's an awful lot of sky, some would be at 20 thousand feet, some would be 20 thousand 500, 21, or me, I'd be up 22 and a half, 23. And some would be here, some would be a hundred metres over there, there's an awful lot of sky. You

23:30 sometimes saw, as you were close to the target, you saw other Lancasters and you did have collisions. And this, a lot were brought down by collisions and a lot of us had close collisions. I've had, seen a Lancaster just come across the top of me like that. Not flying at a right angle, but at an angle. It missed me by about 50 feet. And see, 50 feet, is as good as a mile.

24:00 But yes, it was dangerous, but there was no alternative. And what you had to do was watch out like hell that you didn't have a collision. The most dangerous thing was that you could drop your bombs on someone else. Once again, your air bomber could see if there was another Lancaster below him, and he wouldn't, he would

24:30 guide us just to one side or something like that.

Was there any particular technique to get the heavily loaded Lancaster up to that very, that, as high as you could?

Yes, you, there's a speed, depending on your load, at which the wings of an aeroplane gives you the

maximum lift for minimum drag. See, if you fly an aircraft with an

25:00 altitude, whatever, it's going along like that, there's an awful lot of drag, and not much lift. If you fly just like that, you go, you might have no drag and not much lift, but there's a position, which I used to call getting on step like you do in a speed boat, it's by, by holding it level, I could get an altitude, because, you could fly an aeroplane at a number of altitudes on long flights. I'd get an altitude where the speed would

25:30 pick up by a couple of knots. Once the speed picked up by a couple of knots, I pulled the nose up a little bit, turned that speed into altitude. And I'd get to a height where the speed would drop off, and I'd level out again, wait till the speed picked up a bit, and I'd change that speed into altitude, and you gradually, slowly, and also as the fuel load went down, you were lighter, a lighter aircraft flies higher.

26:00 And you, I gradually got to the greater height. Now, of course, it varied with each aircraft, I, as squadron commander, I felt it was wrong to have my own aircraft. You usually had your own aircraft and I noticed the difference. The ground staff really concentrated on making sure the squadron commander had the best serviced aircraft. Remember, I was to be flying on the same target as members of my squadron,

26:30 my aircraft would be in better condition than theirs, so I didn't have one. I'd ring the flight commander and I'd say "Give me an aeroplane." And usually he might have a crew who weren't flying or on leave or air (UNCLEAR) or service. He usually gave me the duff aircraft no one else wanted to fly. And I flew a wide variety of Lancasters, and I found they were all different. The techniques I'd use on one, mightn't work on another. One I could get up to 24 thousand feet,

27:00 and another one the highest I could get would be, maybe 22 and a half. But it was very interesting, of course, to see the difference in all these aeroplanes. They might be made in different factories, nothing was exactly the same (UNCLEAR). But my technique was to get high, and I couldn't have done unless I had such a competent gunner and competent navigator. But then when we reached

27:30 the target, particularly if it was a target in, tactical target, a target in occupied country, because then you came down to a height at which you were told to bomb, which sometimes it was very, very low, extremely low, we also went up again, but over a German city, I didn't fly that much. You see, by that time, well, before that time,

28:00 being in the air force and interested in Germany and what was happening, knowing I was going to go to war with Germany, I noticed that as the, as Hitler and his military forces overran all the weaker countries of Europe. France, and first of all, with Austria and Czechoslovakia and then France and then Holland and Belgium and Poland, and these places

28:30 they had no hesitation, try to wipe out Warsaw and Rotterdam by bombing, it was total war. As this went on, the masses of German people seemed to get hysterical in their adoration for the Fuhrer. He was really showing them that the Germans were a master race, "Look how they wiped out all these lower breeds around them." They had no hesitation in seeing their neighbours who were Jews degraded and carted

29:00 off to be exterminated and moving into their house. Or accepting from their cousins and brothers who were in the army, they'd captured in France or Belgium, whatever, I reckon, and I realised it was total war, so I didn't really mind if, and I don't mind admitting it, that if my bombs strayed off a little bit. But the things that I've read and it's been said that the bomber command went to war against

29:30 defenceless German civilians, well, I didn't attack one German city unless we were after a legitimate target. So defence factory, munitions factory or something, or a railway junction. I also knew that all the people, civilians were working in that factory and were participants as much as I was, it was total war.

30:00 And a good example of that is, the city of Dresden. Now, Bomber Command have been vilified for cruelly and wantonly attacking Dresden. Now, Dresden was not a legitimate target for year after year after year, so it was never attacked, there was no point attacking it. But towards the end of the war, and in 1945, two things happened. Because Dresden had never been attacked, the Germans started putting some of their

30:30 essential industries, particularly electronic industries in Dresden. And also, by the time it was attacked, the Russian forces were only about 300 miles away. And all the German reinforcements, the Russians were gradually advancing, all the reinforcements to the German lines, were going through, well most of them, through Dresden. The Russians said, "Look, you've got to wipe out that railway junction there," that Dresden was attacked as a

31:00 legitimate target. And there had never been, bomber command weren't interested in it when it wasn't a legitimate target.

Was the railway yard the legitimate target, or the whole of Dresden?

All the railway yard. See, the bombs strayed, the Americans bombed it also. Their bombs possibly strayed. You would've, some of the bombs we used were incendiary bombs. Most German houses were built of wood.

31:30 We found that there was an awful lot of energy in those houses, if you set them on fire with incendiaries, you de-housed people who worked in the factories and had nowhere to live. Now, some of them were killed, but most of them got out, but they had nowhere to live. And it was a legitimate target, as I said, it was total war. The Germans, these, all these cities were terribly

32:00 well defended. The Germans had no hesitation at wiping out Warsaw or Rotterdam when it was, what was defended. They attacked London and Birmingham and Coventry, the other thing they were doing, that, the other part of the war that a lot of people forget. The air attacks on Germany persisted right to the end. Right to the end of the war, the Germans were working on their weapons of mass destruction, you can call it these days, their ballistic missiles. They started working

32:30 on the ballistic missile and a pilotless bomb early in the war. The, they had some famous, people who were famous with rocket propulsion. And the first research establishment was up on the Baltic coast was attacked by bomber command, would slow them down but, so they spread the production of these V-2

33:00 rockets out all over Germany, a bit here and a bit there and a bit there and it was very hard to get it and they finally put these rockets together.

How aware were you of these strategic developments in Germany, as a squadron commander and

Oh, fairly well aware. I was well aware because we were, I had an, we had an intelligence meeting before every operation, and we were told what the target was, why it was, and if you couldn't attack that target you attack this target because it was doing this.

33:30 You knew as much as you could, but of course, it was, the Germans didn't tell you what they were doing, so the information came through unreliable lines you were, sometimes you were completely wrong, sometimes you were 50% right, sometimes it was 80% right. That's why even the intelligence on this Iraq thing, Saddam Hussein didn't tell George Bush what he was doing, but you heard from various, maybe reliable, maybe unreliable sources. But we were often,

34:00 I've lost people because of bad briefing.

As an Australian squadron, how were you, were you treated as exceptionally by bomber command, were you used on particular targets because you were an Australian squadron?

We were treated exceptional in a way, because we were so much better than the rest. But the Lancaster squadrons, and the Australian Lancaster squadrons shone. We didn't have wives and kids close to us, we were the,

34:30 really, and I hate saying it, rather the pick of the air crews, Australians sent overseas and because we were sent overseas early. We were motivated, we wanted an end to the war and get back home. But towards the end of the war, the Lancaster was the most efficient bomber, so was used on the hardest targets, so we had the heaviest losses. The Australians had, I gather from a book written by an Englishman, had less people

35:00 doing early returns, failing to attack the target, they pressed on better. See, quite a lot of crews would drop their bombs over France or the, or short of the target because they looked at the opposition and they'd drop their bombs and say fail to attack the target and come back. It's very hard if, you're on your own and there's no one there watching you, and you're inexperienced and scared and you're crew are scared too.

35:30 And that's why, every time you bombed the enemy, you had a photograph which showed, which showed, which exposed the plate on the camera, the time the bomb hit the ground. We even then had early versions of tape recorders, they were called wire recorders. Everything that was said in the aircraft was put on a spool of wire. They disappeared, people, a lot of people think it's weird but what, there were no tape

36:00 recorders, it was put on a spool of wire. That could be played so you could, you know exactly what went on in an aircraft. It wasn't so much to catch the defaulters, but was to improve your techniques, improve the bombing. See it was noticed that, from the photographs, that a lot of bombs went to one side of the target. That was analysed, well, why did that happen? How can we stop it happening again?

So ...

The whole business was towards

36:30 improving efficiency, but to answer your question, the Australians were very well regarded. The, I could do anything as a CO of an Australian squadron. I had my own aircraft, was a little Airspeed Oxford, which belonged to the squadron, or belonged to the station, I don't know but if I wanted to go on leave I'd take it. If I was going to call on friends, I'd take it. As I moved around, I was able to move my own doctor. I had

37:00 an air force doctor who was a Scotsman, and didn't mind cooperating with me and hiding my medical defects, because I wanted to be, stay in air force post-war and I did have a weak chest. He used to treat it and gave me drugs and wouldn't put it on my records. When I moved to another station, I was able to

move him. So, if you did your job, and we did, we were treated remarkably well.

37:30 When, nearly, is that tape nearly finished?

It is nearly finished, yes.

All right, I'll tell you a bit more now.

Well, maybe we, are you going to start another story or

Another angle, yes, another story.

Maybe you can do it on the next, we'll stop the tape.

Okay.

Tape 5

00:30 **All right, maybe we'll start, if you want to tell us about, where were you going at the end of that tape, do you remember where you left off?**

Early in the war, after the army were beaten by the Germans and had to leave the continent at Dunkirk, and the Brits realised that they were really up against it,

01:00 they, this Empire Air Scheme was conceived. And they came to Australia and said, "Well, you know, as far as, you know, the AIF and things, this is great, but we really need air crew. We're making the aircraft, but we're not making any air crew, you'll have the air crew. And you don't have to worry about defending Australia, the Royal Navy and the massive defences of Singapore will protect you." And so

01:30 set Australia up as an air crew training organisation, in that we trained pilots, we trained navigators, we trained wireless operators and gunners. And an agreement was signed that these people would be sent to England for two years. This is before Japan came into the war. Now, but, there was an agreement signed between Churchill and Menzies. Then, as the war progressed

02:00 and particularly in the three months before D Day, in about April, March or April 1944, when we were attacking these highly defended tactical targets, the railway junctions and coastal gun batteries and coastal German radar stations, our losses started to go up tremendously. Now, at the same time, the RAAF

02:30 started to get, at last, some heavy bombers from the Americans, the Liberators. And Curtin said to Churchill, "We would like some of our experienced bomber pilots back those who have done a tour of duty. They've done a tour of duty for England, but we want them back here." And Churchill said, "You signed an agreement, so they'll be, stay under our control for two years. If we want them to do a second tour, we will." Well, you know, as that agreement had been signed before Australia was fighting for its life against Japan and,

03:00 it was, that was the attitude of Churchill. And what happened, Curtin then started just to bring people back, without any further ado, some crews were just, after they'd finished their tour of duty, were just sent back to Australia. And the English government, I can't remember who the letter was, I saw a letter,

03:30 but I can't remember who it was signed by said to five group headquarters that this group, the 463 and 467 Squadron, "This Australian policy, this administrative decision to return crews to Australia to repatriate them, were contrary to the agreement made by the Australian government that they'll stay here for two years, may cause some shortages in RAF squadrons" because half the crews that went over there, the Australian crews, served in RAF squadrons,

04:00 they didn't serve in RAAF squadrons. "May cause some shortages and this is not to be allowed to happen. These crews, these shortages are to be replaced by reinforcements going to the Australian squadrons." Which meant once that my licence started and 467 got started and built up, in about April, we found we were getting no reinforcements. The reinforcements that we thought we would get, were going to nearby RAF squadrons. It meant

04:30 that I was flying people who I would normally have rested, they might have a new gunner or they might've, one of them might've been ill or one of them might've been, had a nasty experience and they were new and I thought I'd give him a rest. I found I was flying people I shouldn't have flown, so my losses went up. And meanwhile on side of me, there were RAF squadrons at full strength, a lot of Australians in. Which wasn't good enough, and I went,

05:00 took my aeroplane, my little Oxford, and flew down to, close to London where I had a friend I used to stay with and got on a train and went to London. And went to RAAF headquarters and got nowhere about this. And I put it in my diary that I did this point but then I complained again, and finally they got the message in RAAF headquarters and the Senior Australian air force officer, Air Vice Marshall

05:30 Wrigley and his senior staff officer, came to Waddington and visited us, and saw actually what was happening. And they were aghast. I showed them the figures. The next thing I heard was that Stanley Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner, ex-Australian Prime Minister, was coming up to see for himself. I got a message from his office he was coming up. He'd come without any staff, he wanted to find out for himself, just a car and a driver.

06:00 And could I fix accommodation on the station for a couple of nights. And this was also passed, I passed this to the group headquarters. And about three days before Bruce was due to arrive, the station commander, was an RAF station, there were two Australian squadrons, the station commander was a very pleasant Englishman, a group captain (UNCLEAR) came to me and said, "Rollo, your High Commissioner is coming up." I said, "Yes sir," he said, "Well, do you think you could

06:30 put him off?" so I asked why, he said, "Well," he said, "It's difficult having him up here, it's inconvenient really." I said, "Why is it inconvenient?" he said, "Well, for a start, we have no accommodation for him." Well, that time I was the president of the officer's mess, and I knew there was accommodation. And this bloke knew I knew, and he was so embarrassed, because he completely disagreed with what I was told to do.

07:00 Anyway, I'll, and I'll just go back a bit. Just before this happened, my concern was so apparent that the flying group headquarters operations officer, staff officer, officer operations asked me to come and see him. And he showed me a letter which, where his group was instructed to take my crews and put them in an RAF squadron. And he was appalled, and I was appalled.

07:30 And anyway, we'd been told that Bruce wasn't to come. He was an anglophile, I think was the right word, he was an ex-Australian Prime Minister, he was our High Commission, to be told he couldn't visit two Australian squadrons. Anyway, I sent this message to Bruce, he came anyway. And

08:00 he came, and that's the time I became a republican. I know it's that exact date in May when I became a republican. The word republican didn't come into my mind, but Australia should leave this British Commonwealth and have our forces under control of a man like Churchill, who was great for them. But you know, Churchill's misdeeds are well known, when he diverted

08:30 the 7th Division, on it's way back from the, Egypt to the defence of Australia, diverted it to Burma, to try to protect Burma. Curtin heard about it, he didn't even tell Curtin, Curtin heard about it and had the Division diverted back to Australia again, and it was, you know, on a convoy of ships. And I think if he'd spoken to Churchill, and said, "Show me on the map where Australia is," he wouldn't have known. Anyway,

09:00 shortly after,

Just back on your decision on that day, as it were, to become a republican and that betrayal as you saw it by the British government.

Yeah.

How did that make you feel in your position in bomber command, which was essentially defending England?

Oh, I was a member of the air force and I was, my duty was to do that so, it didn't worry me one slightest little bit. Later on, I was made an honorary ADC [aide de camp] to the Queen as an air force officer, and it didn't worry me, I did my duty.

09:30 If I'd been told to murder some innocent Germans, I don't think I would've done that, but I wouldn't have been told to do that.

At any time in your career did you want to come back to Australia, to defend Australia in a more direct way?

Early in the piece I did, very much, but there was nothing much I could do. But I knew we didn't have any aircraft in Australia to do it. We were dependant on the Americans, and the Brits had nothing to spare, they sent out a few Spitfires to defend Darwin

10:00 but we, it wasn't till we started to get aircraft, I wanted to come back. I tried several times to get back but I couldn't. Besides, I wasn't really needed. We had the crews we needed in Australia, and obviously it was important to defeat Germany. And particularly when, in the last six months of the war, when I'd go to London, I'd see these bloody V2s [rocket propelled unguided missile] coming down. The Germans were bombing

10:30 London indiscriminately with these ballistic missiles, and they were a true ballistic missile. You never ever heard them coming they travelled faster than the speed of sound. Next thing, there's a bloody great explosion. They were working on two other things, they were working on a nuclear weapon. Now had they been able to put a nuclear weapon in even in the last month of the war, they would've won the war. They were also making a longer range one, and once you go ballistic, once you can shoot something up and it gets out of the force of gravity, it's not that much harder to make it go all the way across the

11:00 Atlantic to New York. The only problem is to navigate it to make sure it lands in New York, not in the

sea. But they were working on that too. So the Germans, the fight against Germany had to continue towards the very end, they had, all their big factories had been shut down, as I said, they were subcontracting and spreading stuff out everywhere. And they were spreading stuff out over the whole of Europe. I attacked an aircraft factory on the French Mediterranean coast that was building

11:30 aircraft for Germany. We've attacked Philips electronic works in Holland, where they were building electronics for the Germans. Not the Dutch did it willingly, the Germans moved in and took it over with slave labour. And they built ships in Poland, so they spread stuff out everywhere, it was very hard, you just had to bomb and bomb and bomb

12:00 and try and stop it. Anyway,

How did you feel about your crews being sent home, then? About Curtin's decision to send your

Well, they didn't send any of my crew, they sent some other crews. None of my fellows came home, I think for some of the RAF squadrons, they completed a tour of duty, in fact, even some of mine might've completed a tour, no, I would've known. But completed a tour of duty, not many, just a few came home, but Curtin had said this is his policy, they were going to come home if he needed them. That was fact. To

12:30 an Australian, it was, Curtin said, "an Australian government first responsibility is to defend Australia," now the UK government couldn't accept that, our first responsibility was to rush to the defence of England. I was told "Look, don't worry what happens, once we've licked Germany, we'll come back. We'll come back and kick the Japanese out of Australia." Now I had a wife and child here, you know, and this is how I felt. If we were under Japanese military

13:00 occupation, so you know, if you elect a government, you elect a government to defend your country before anything else. Now, in the beginning, we had no enemy in Japan, our country was defended by getting rid of the Nazis, the Nazi government of Germany. How, we, I was going to say, shortly after

13:30 Stanley Bruce visited, Curtin came to England. Not because of the fuss I'd been kicking up, but because he was disgusted with various things that were happening. Because of the fuss I'd been kicking up, and also the other station, the other squadron commander there, a friend of mine, he came to Waddington. And the RAF turned it on beautifully for him. The RAF didn't do what Churchill

14:00 did, there was an official dinner turned on. Now I'd met presidents so I was host that dinner. I had Curtin on my right and senior RAF officer on my left and a senior Australian officer, Wrigley sitting opposite me, but I had none of my squadron there, because we were operating that night, well, I just couldn't go. So, and then Curtin came down to see the fellows off, came down onto the airfield to see our blokes off.

14:30 He was going to wait till they came back, well, fog descended and bad weather so they were diverted to another field so they never came back. Churchill, I got access to Churchill's papers down the archive some years ago and Churchill was disgusted with the way he was treated. I've forgotten his exact words, he didn't come all the way down to sit down and be lectured by a pompous old fart or something. Churchill,

15:00 Curtin, did I say, Curtin, anyway Curtin's papers, Curtin got an invitation when he got over there and Churchill well, Curtin, he must like, he made it was like a quiet weekend "Come down to Checkers my family will be there and have a quiet weekend with my family and myself," and Curtin thought that would be great. Well, he went down to Chequers and there was the whole of the British war cabinet there. Churchill's family weren't about, and that's in his papers in the archives.

15:30 And he was disgusted, because he was told, you know, he couldn't have his crews back, he couldn't do this, he couldn't do that. Anyway, he, what happened after his visit, I started getting my crews. I would doubt if I would've got my crews to replace the losses I was having if it hadn't been for Curtin's visit. And that's that story, but the British military

16:00 forces were quite fantastic people, they were real experts at the art of fighting war. And of course, in bomber command, we were fighting total war, which the Germans had invented, was necessary, particularly, and I realised how important this was when I saw these V2s. I was drinking in a pub in London in early '45, and I heard this bloody great explosion. Terrific explosion, said, "What's that?"

16:30 it was an exploding gas main, the official word for it. But it's a V2 bomb. And they also had

Did you know at the time it was a V2 bomb?

No, I had, I was making enquiries, but the Germans, and the first terror weapons the Germans had were what they called bug bombs. A pilotless aircraft with a, little aircraft which was packed with explosives, and it was shot off by a catapult, so it didn't need a runway and no wheels. And it was

17:00 guided by automatic pilot. And it flew to wherever it was supposed to fly, and the engine automatically cut out, it would dive onto the ground. You'd hear these things coming and they had a buzzing sort of sound. You'd hear buzz, buzz, buzz, buzz, buzz, buzz, this bloody thing coming toward you. The moment the engine cut out you dived for cover under the table because you knew it was on it's way down. And they were horrifying, because they made you frightened before they landed. Well, the RAF,

17:30 I think got onto those in the end, they got a lot of, they grouped appropriate gun batteries all the way along the coast, shot them down as they were coming over. And then they, the first RAF jets, which could really fly very quickly, started shooting them down. Or even as they were over open fields, because they, you shoot them down, they're going to blow up, you couldn't shoot them down over London, they shot them down over the fields of Kent and some poor bloody farmer might cop it. But,

18:00 and then we found where all the launching ramps were and we attacked the launching ramps and so in the end, in the end they became less of a threat. But they, and they were called the V1's, Victory one in German, the V2 was the ballistic rocket which really was a threat. Because you couldn't stop it, and it could be fired from a mobile launcher on the back of a truck. So once you tracked where it had been launched, that launcher would be out

18:30 50 miles away.

On the, back if we can, away from the larger, bigger picture, strategic and political sort of show, just tell me a bit about your personal reflections at the time in bomber command in England. Perhaps to begin with if you could tell me a little bit about your crew, I know you talked a lot about the process of crewing up, but who were the particular personalities that you ended up with in your crew?

I, my, I

19:00 had a crew of an Australian air bomber, an Australian navigator, one Australian gunner and one Australian wireless operator. The other gunner was an Englishman. Then, when we got to the squadron, the navigator went on a trip like I did with another crew to see what it was like, he never came back. So I lost my navigator before he started ops, official ops.

19:30 His aircraft was shot down. I had another Australian navigator, of Polish descent, by the name of Kebelcki, on his second tour of operations, a fantastic guy. And he was, he was older than me. Then I had another delightful Welsh gunner, his name was Reece, and of course being Welsh,

20:00 he was called Di, and it was years, it wasn't until after the war that I found out he had a different given name. My gunner was a small chap, the rear gunner, he could sit comfortably in the rear turret and could almost stand up, as I said. And the whole time we were over enemy territory, he went like that with his turret. And the only time I ever returned from an operation was an electrics in his turret, the electrics to his suit didn't work.

Can you explain that

20:30 **the position of a rear gunner, and what the electricity suits do and**

Well, the rear gunner was in a bloody cold part of the aircraft, and so he could see better, he moved the Perspex, the rear, because they had Perspex, and you can't see through Perspex terribly well at night time, particularly if it's curved. So he was buffeted by a wind, 200 mile an hour wind, minus 40 degrees Celsius at times. And if he didn't have

21:00 electrically heated gloves, the suit and shoes, he would've got frost bite. He would've been useless because he was so cold. So you had to heat him with all these electrics. This chap, and it was in the middle of winter, when it was really cold, his electrics weren't working. And I discussed it with him for a while, and he said he'd stay there. Well I realised that by, he'd be useless after an hour when we were over Germany, and also he'd lose his fingers and he was going to be a dentist, his father was

21:30 a dentist, that's how I got him, I knew his father. And, you know, so I decided well I'll pull him out of the turret. Well to go into, over Germany to Berlin without anyone in the rear turret was not fair to my crew, so I came back. Now, a Lancaster could carry on, I've done a trip with one engine failed, it wouldn't, that didn't worry me a bit, you could still fly very well on three.

22:00 With other equipment failures, without a rear gunner, I wasn't prepared for the whole crew to go all the way, so I did a return. Which was a shameful thing to do, I, took me a week to lift my head up.

This was one of your first operations as squadron commander

Yes, I, it was one of my first ops. I'd done a lot of operations in 467 Squadron with the squadron commander. But, it's one of those decisions

22:30 you make. This is where it was interesting, you being a captain of an aircraft, you're confronted with situations, you've got to make a decision. But, you know, if the radio's not working, it's not important. If anything else is not, if all the engines aren't working properly, that's not important. What was important was having a rear gunner. And

Can you talk about the culture of shame and about how important it was

23:00 **not to turn back and what happened to people who did, and maybe about LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre]?**

LMF didn't worry us very much at all, it happened in

Be very careful of your mike.

I'm sorry, sorry.

Sorry, LMF.

LMF, and I've read some books about some squadrons where they, they really had very little discipline. They, the air crew

23:30 got very, very drunk in their messes. Well, I made my blokes turn up for a parade in the morning, they hated me for that. Because, but, you know, you couldn't, you had to be there, ready to be on parade, even though it was, I dismissed them, I saw they were there. Some squadron commanders, because they were squadron commanders, didn't fly very much. And they mainly only

24:00 took targets in France and they were known as Henri's, "He's an Henri." That's H E N R I. And you had to show you were prepared to do your share of the difficult targets, they were watching you. You had to make sure they were well trained and you looked after them as well as you could. And there's not as much bullshit in an Australian squadron as there was in an RAF squadron.

What

24:30 **kind of bullshit?**

Well, rank was taken much more seriously in British forces. Title was taken seriously. And, you know, I had wonderful discipline, and everyone, no one would dare call me anything but Sir. But you could relax with them, get drunk with them and join them.

25:00 And I didn't wear a peaked cap for example, I had a little forage cap I used to wear, the same as they wore. The, on, in summer uniform, I didn't wear my campaign ribbons, I thought, "Crikey," you know, "pin them on and pin them off, take them off every time you send a shirt to be washed"

25:30 Now a lot of that was pretty consistent with Australian commanding officer.

If you weren't a stern figure, were you a father figure for, I mean you're not very old but

No, I wasn't a father figure, and I couldn't be. I had the same problems that they had, in fact, when I was commanding, when I was chief instructor and commanding the heavy bomber operation unit, I used to talk to the pilots, the captains,

26:00 give them a bit of pep talk about their responsibilities and they talked about where they wanted to go, and one of them said, "Well I, one place I don't want to go," and I said, "Where's that?" he said, "463 Squadron, they've got a bastard of a commanding officer there," that was me. "Make you go on bloody parade," he said.

Was there any time where any of your men came to talk to you perhaps about an issue of, well, not LMF, but their

26:30 **fears or**

Only one. Only one. And the only LMF I ever experience myself, and he was a man who, I thought was genuine, and before he got to the target, he always turned back. And his crew, I talked to his crew, and they said, "Look," I know he's second name, I won't repeat, I can't remember his first, let's say, Bill. They said, "Look, Bill's not scared,

27:00 he really wants to press on and attack the target, but something or other happens and something goes wrong and we come back. And we support him, he's a good captain," this is, you know, the obvious thing to do. And if this man had turned back once more, he would've been declared LMF, which is most degrading. You were taken off in disgrace and you finished up in some disgusting army job that cleaned latrines.

27:30 And so I said to him, an English navigator, a very experienced navigator, a delightful fellow, a Flight Lieutenant, came to the squadron for his second tour, he was on his own. And I thought, "Now, he's a strong man. If I put him in this aircraft, replace the navigator with him, and made him captain, he'd no doubt be the strength they need." So I talked to the

28:00 pilot, and I talked to his crew, and I said, "If I put a, if I change your navigator, not that there's anything wrong with the existing one, with this experienced bloke, who's done a couple of tours, and make him captain, how would you feel?" And the pilot said, I keep, I asked him if, the pilot, his name was Shomburg, said yes, he'd go along with it, the crew said they'd go along with it, they were, and the Flight

28:30 Lieutenant said he was happy, he'd be captain, and I told him what the problem was. Off they went, and because they never came back again, and that's quite a (UNCLEAR). And it really, really makes me ashamed, I should never have done that. I was trying to save Shomburg's dignity and

29:00 I killed this poor bloody flight Lieutenant and the whole crew and I never thought that would do that to me, and I've never talked about it before. But anyway, that was the only case of lack of moral fibre, apparent lack of moral fibre we ever had. Now, you can turn this thing off, will you? You couldn't do

much, you see, one thing I haven't explained was that you were not only an operational pilot,

29:30 but commanding a lot of flying people, but you were running a thing like an airline. Now imagine an airline, imagine like Qantas that today, you wouldn't know where you were flying tonight, but you had to send 20 aircraft to a location you didn't know where, carrying a load you didn't know what it would be, and whether in fact you would have

30:00 20 aircraft. Because eight, three of them were shot up the night before and so the administrative work was a full time job, and that's why some squadron commanders didn't fly very much, because they were running the squadron. And the management training I received there was fantastic, you learned to do what would take a week, you know, previously in a day,

30:30 because you had to get aircraft crewed, crews had to be

Can you take me through one of those days? How would that start and, you know, what were the things you had to do?

Well it start, in the morning, well, for a start, if you'd flown two previous nights and you had a rough time, you'd be pretty certain you wouldn't fly that day. But if you'd flown the night before, you hadn't flown the night before, you'd have an idea about the weather. Now, the weather

31:00 over the enemy wasn't that bad, you could still bomb through clouds with the Pathfinders, was an electronic aid, but you, the weather over England by the time you got back, running short of fuel, maybe with an injured crew, was important. You had to be able to land, otherwise it was no good killing everybody. So you know from the weather if it was definitely off or maybe on, if maybe on, then it could be on. Now the first thing in the morning,

31:30 you'd be told "Ops [operations] are definitely off," so you could relax and get on with really, training exercises. We always had new equipment and it was essential that the crews had training to fly the new equipment.

Well, what was the reaction when you got the news that ops were off?

Wonderful. Absolutely delightful. I'll tell you something about that in a minute, if I don't wander off.

Go on, yes.

If ops were off, operations weren't off, you would then be told,

32:00 usually by midday, that operations were on. The moment operations were on, the first thing that happened, all telephone links from the station to outside world were cut. You couldn't ring your girlfriend and say, "Look darling, I can't take you out tonight, I'm flying," you couldn't even tell your wife, this, some poor bloody wives, the Englishmen had their wives, living in the village next door, these poor girls were, would know and that'd upset too.

32:30 And I used to know that they would wait around camp counting aircraft as they were coming back. Anyway, once operations were on, the first thing you did was, you had a meeting of squadron commanders, be a telephone hook up. Each squadron commander in the group, plus the squadron, plus the group

33:00 commander and the various intelligence officers and meteorological officers would have a conference, telephone conference. At Waddington, there'd be the two squadron commanders, our met officer, the station commander and base commander. So (UNCLEAR) some would be only two, and you'd discuss the target and the route and the Pathfinder techniques, how the, there was a wide variety of techniques, and I won't go through it now,

33:30 mark the target for you. And the time, the, particularly the weather report, and the time on target, and when everything else was relevant, and these things would be kicked around, the decisions would, decisions might be made by group headquarters, they might be made after the discussion. Anyway a, there would be a decision. Well then what happened after that, was you, you didn't tell anybody where the

34:00 target was, didn't tell a word. And first of all, checked up on your aircraft, now, there was a separate maintenance group that, whose job was provide me with my aircraft, it wasn't, with a senior officer running it, but he looked after 463 Squadron aircraft. You get onto him and he'd tell you what aircraft you would have. Definitely or maybe, he might, two nights ago, two of them might

34:30 have landed at a field close to the coast coming back from Germany with one engine out and it hadn't yet been fully repaired and delivered back to the squadron. So, or one aircraft would come back shot up, and you know that you might have so many aircraft. Or you might be told you only had to put on a part of your squadron. Usually it was maximum effort, if it wasn't maximum effort, you didn't worry so much. Then you checked the flight commanders, they owned the crews, what crews would they have.

35:00 And then the next thing is that, every pilot with me would do a night flying check. Everything in the aircraft have to work properly, so the pilot would get his full crew, and they'd take off and test everything. They'd test the guns, they'd test the navigation equipment, they'd test the bomb sights, the whole bloody lot. So they'd come back and they know, well, I want an aeroplane that's mechanically

35:30 sound to fly tonight or “I’ve got some defects,” and they’d tell the engineering people and the defects would be, they’d get a promise to be fixed or maybe it’d be fixed or can’t be fixed. Then knowing the time over target, you work off it, back from that. Time over target is whatever, say, one in the morning. You work back from that, the time of take off, from that the time of briefing, from that the time you’ve fed the buggers, because they mightn’t have another meal for

36:00 12 or 15 hours, they had to be very efficient, or if they bailed out or tried to avoid being captured, they mightn’t have a meal for another two days. So you’d get onto the messes and tell the messes. And then a hell of a lot of organisation. Then, now I seldom did a night flying test, because I was busy doing all this, but my crew would go out to the aircraft and check everything. There, for each distinct crew member,

36:30 there would be, the gunners would have a gunnery leader, the navigators would have navigation leader, the engineers would have an engineer leader, now the various leaders would call meetings, and they would decide well, the opposition, or the gunnery leader would decide the opposition are likely to have, requires this time of ammunition in the aeroplanes. So the gunner himself would ensure that it was the right ammunition, it was his, he was the man who was going to fire that gun, he’d check

37:00 that the gun trains had the right ammunition loaded in. The bomb aimer, now would check that all his equipment’s working properly. Then depending on the target, the bomb load at the last minute would be decided and then the bomb dump would have to load the aircraft. Then, depending on the target and the weather, the fuel load would be decided. Now if a full fuel load was essential, because of the weather,

Tape 6

00:30 **All right, so, Rollo, if you could take us, we were going through the day on a day when you had to prepare for a bombing raid. The pilots are doing their checks of their aircraft, what would happen after that?**

Okay, well, what could happen after that, and sometimes did, you found that because of changing information that came into high command or changing weather, the target was changed which meant that you took off the bombs that you put off, put on and put other bombs on. You

01:00 drained some full, you changed all the maps issued to the navigators, it was bloody hell, and the people because, I didn’t have to do that, I just had to make sure it was done. Then the next thing was that the crews had a meal, and they did fairly well for eating seeing England was so short of food. You know England, that I

01:30 remember is Spam and brussels sprouts and potatoes and potatoes and potatoes. But they had a meal and then they went to a number of briefings, the, as I think I mentioned before, each trade had their own briefing, particularly the navigators, they had to be very well briefed, because they had to get us there, and they drew out the appropriate maps. And then we went to a briefing room where

02:00 the whole squadron sat down in the briefing room, everyone who was flying that night. And they got a weather report, a report from the intelligence officer, I got up and said something, once in a blue moon the station master might say something. Then we joined together as crews, and I’ve got a photo that I can show you on that too. And each pilot briefed his own crew.

02:30 And then you went and got into your flying gear. And you’d get into a bus, a WAAF [Women’s Auxiliary Air Force] driver would drive you out to your aircraft, the crews would start taking their gear into the aircraft, the navigator had to take along a lot of maps and the bomb aimer had to take maps that he needed. The other gunner, you know, might me taking something. I’d go and see the ground crew chief and talk to him.

03:00 Then you had a, I always had a nervous piss on the tail wheel for luck. Made sure I had my lucky charm. You’d climb in, you’d know the time you were due to start the engines, and when you were ready, you started the engines, you checked the crew and you’d taxi onto a taxi track. And you could see other aircraft on the taxi track. There were no lights, but they had their nav lights on and you could see them anyway, no matter how dark the night was. And then you got

03:30 to the runway and you waited your turn, you got onto the runway. Once you were ready to go, you got a green light and off you went. By this time, turning off your nav lights. Then your heart was in your mouth for the next 30 seconds until you had your wheels and flaps up and you could cope with an engine failure and then off you went.

Why was that such a dangerous time for the Lancaster?

Because, well, it was, first of all, it was overloaded, dangerously overloaded,

04:00 just staggered into the air. It needed maximum power from all four engines to stay airborne. If one of those four engines failed, you could, you’d crash straight ahead, because you had a lot of drag, and you

had these flaps out which were the take off position. They were giving you lift, but they were giving you drag, and you needed the power of the four engines to be able to fly. As you gradually picked up

04:30 speed, with all this apparatus hanging out, you gradually withdrew the flaps little bit by little bit. You got your wheels up as soon as you could, because they weren't doing anything for you at all, but the flaps were. So not until the aeroplane was completely clean, and you could accelerate, then you could fly on three engines. In fact, something I, particular about the Lancaster I liked, the Lancaster could fly with a full load on three engines,

05:00 providing the engines failed at the right time, one engine failed at the right time. It could fly fairly well on two engines, although you'd dump your bomb load. On just one engine, you could keep it in the air on a slight downward path, it wouldn't fall out of the sky. I, at the end of the war, when I was flying Mosquitos, I heard that my brother and some friends of mine had been in a prison camp,

05:30 and I heard through sources where there were a lot of air crew ex-POWs [Prisoner of War] milling around an airfield in Germany. I wanted to bring them back and so I borrowed a Lancaster, which again shows what you can do, if you're running a good squadron, you only run a good squadron because you manage it properly and you fly yourself, you can, you had a lot of freedom. I went and, to another squadron, I borrowed a Lancaster, crewed it with Mosquito people, who'd never flown in a four

06:00 engine bomber, which they despised immensely. I flew to this particular airfield named Rhein, in Western Germany, and on the way there, one engine started to overheat, so I shut it down. I landed on, I wanted to pick up my brother, I landed on three and taxied up, it was interesting landing, the runway was, had

06:30 bomb holes, bomb craters in it. It had been bombed but you could do this between the bomb craters, it wasn't that bad. And I went to one hard standing, with a couple of other Lancasters there, and a lot of air crew milling around, but I couldn't see my brother, he'd been seen earlier in the day. But I was taking up precious parking space, there wasn't much, and I had a lot of really ill men who had every disease you could think of.

07:00 Stomach diseases, lung diseases, broken limbs, some of them were lousy, you know, had lice in them, because they'd been sleeping in fields and been pushed across Germany sleeping in cattle trucks for some months. So I took off. Now the Lancaster, as I said, only had three engines, I started on four, and got the crook one running long enough until I had rudder control, and before it overheated and seized up,

07:30 I stopped it. But because I was, only had enough fuel to get back to England and no bomb load, I had 24 bods [bodies] in it, but they weren't as heavy as the bombs, it took off on three, I went back to England, landed these guys at this place specially set up for them, on three, taxied in, then did the same thing to get off again. Started running on four, stopped the fourth, and on three with

08:00 none of the passengers, and no bombs and hardly any fuel left, it took off like a rocket. Before that on one occasion, when I was chief instructor of the heavy bomber conversion unit, when I first went there, it had a bomber called a Sterling. Sterlings had been phased out, they were the first heavy bomber and they were bastards to fly. And we lost a lot of our trainees because of engine failure and all sorts of failures.

08:30 And you were talking about the smell of aircraft, they stunk, they had hydraulic oil leaks everywhere, and hydraulic oil stinks like hell. And I became allergic to it, gave me all sorts of lung problems, very strong smell, hydraulic oil. Anyway, the Sterling pilots, the Sterling instructors were dead scared if an engine failed. They, their morale wasn't terribly high, and when the Lancasters came they said, "Is this like a Sterling?" I

09:00 said, "No way is it like a Sterling." I took them up, about five or six of my Sterling instructors, they'd never flown a Lancaster, and we were flying along at about 4000 feet, I said, "Look," and I stopped one engine, I pressed a feathering button. They all went like this and they got used to it, and I said, "Look," and I feathered another one on the same side, they didn't believe what happened. By that time, I got carried away, I got stupid, I said, "We'll even fly on one," they said, "It won't," I said, "Yes it will."

09:30 I'd never flown on one before, I feathered the third and it flew along nicely, except in about 20 miles we would've come down to the ground. Then I said, "We'll start them up again," well, the trouble was, two of the engines I'd stopped had the generators running. And I, generating no power and the batteries, it was a brand new aeroplane, the batteries had come from the factory, not fully charged. You need a lot of power to start them up again. But

10:00 I thought we were going to have to bail these fellows out and I was going to have a very, very red face. And anyway, we turned off every circuit in the aircraft, the radio and other stuff, we flew along, seeing if the batteries would recover. And finally, I was able to start one engine. It nearly didn't, then I had a generator going and then I thought it shows the Lancaster would fly quite safely on two and

10:30 gently lose height on one.

But with a bomb load on, you need to have all engines.

Yeah, but even with a bomb load, if your height and fair speed, you get by on three. I would've gone

ahead and attacked a target with three.

On that point at getting off the ground, did you lose any aircraft on take off?

We lost, I don't think we lost one, we lost one where he

11:00 swung on take off. When you opened up, these aircraft were very sluggish because they were heavy as anything, they were overloaded. And to get them moving and you didn't have a terribly long runway, you had to open up the engines fairly quickly. And the engines, all the propellers were rotating in the same direction so there was a certain amount of torque, which tries to shoot you off the other way. One or two guys ran off the runway. One ran off the runway and ran into another aircraft and the whole bloody lot blew up. But I

11:30 don't think we lost one on take off. Other places did.

Must've been very frightening that 30 seconds or so till you get high enough.

Oh yes, yes, you really, your brain was working flat out, that's the, I just finished up saying the good things about the Lancaster it was a very good, the only thing about the Lancaster was, so that it could carry such a bomb load, was armed with puny guns. Now they were point .303

12:00 calibre guns, which really didn't have a heavy, much of a hitting power. The rear turret, had four guns that very, fired rapidly, they shot out a great stream of bullets but after about a couple of hundred metres, they didn't do a lot of damage to an enemy aircraft, especially if they struck a few minor parts or a bit of an angle. Whereas the Americans, right from the beginning had 50 calibre, point five inch which did much more harm when they hit.

12:30 And the German fighters that used to attack us had 20 millimetre guns, and when they hit you and they exploded, almost didn't matter where they hit, they did a lot of damage. But the Americans on the other hand, because they had all these wonderful guns, and the ammunition's very heavy, they could not carry many bombs. By the time they went, say, as far as Berlin they could carry four thousand pounds of bombs, the Lancaster could take 12 thousand pounds of bombs. See, a little

13:00 Mosquito could take four thousand pounds of bombs to Berlin. But they were, you know, they were deadly in the air though if they saw you, because they had a whole lot of gunners and could all be shooting at you with these heavy guns.

Can we just keep going through a bombing raid, you're off the ground, what happens next? What does, what is the crew doing at this stage?

The navigator is busy still plotting his course and

13:30 seeing if he can get any later weather reports. The air bomber is making sure he's got everything he needs okay, and just checking up that he can see through to the bomb bay that everything's right there. The gunners are looking around, the flight engineer is checking the equipment, the radio operator is sitting listening to see if any radio messages come, which they can come at any time, altering the target which could even happen

14:00 once you were in the air or calling you back. So, and we were all looking out for other aircraft over England.

Is there much communication between the crew on the way out?

There should be none, unless it's necessary, and that was the biggest weakness of unskilled, untrained crews, they would chat, you know, nice in their aircraft, they were comfortable and they would talk about "Hey, Bill, do you remember when we went out last night and such or other happened, Jack pranged his

14:30 car" or "we met these birds," and whatever it was, or "What are you doing tomorrow." Well that was, as far as I was concerned, was verboten because this, they got used to doing this, they'd even do it over Germany if things looked a bit slack. Next thing, one, they'd be pounced by a German night fighter they'd never been aware of, and they'd be shot down.

How would you communicate between the crew members if you needed to, what was

Oh, intercom. You had a microphone,

15:00 we were on oxygen, because the aircraft wasn't pressurised, and we flew at 20 thousand feet. At night time, it paid to put on the oxygen on take off, because when you get to about eight or nine or 10, you might forget to turn it on. You don't know you haven't got oxygen, you just gradually get, run out of oxygen, you get, it goes up here, and you get silly. So you've got to, you're breathing oxygen, or the captain should insist you are, your microphone's on, so if you want to talk

15:30 in a hurry, you don't switch it on, and you always tell if anyone is breathing heavy. So if the gunner wanted to tell me there was a fighter approaching or the anyone of the other crew looking out see another aircraft close to me, he wanted to tell me straight away without switching on his microphone. So you really left it on unless you,

16:00 you might turn it off when you were back over England, you had, you were sucking in oxygen, your communication if you wished immediately with all your crew.

What would you hear, apart from the sounds of other people breathing?

You'd hear nothing, the noise of the engines drowned out everything. You had four engines and two of them very close to you. Just one there and one there going flat out. And they also had stub exhausts which meant that, an

16:30 exhaust on you car, an exhaust and a silencer, stops that awful noise. These things, an exhaust and a silencer pulls out power, so these had stub exhausts so the minimum amount of power is pulled out and they were blasting this roar, unbelievable roar straight into your ears, and like all other bomber pilots, I'm, got industrial deafness. I can hear you but I can't hear high frequencies.

What about if a fighter was approaching,

17:00 **what would you hear through your intercom in that case?**

Well you hear, well your gunner would see it and he would tell you what he would see. A fighter, and usually the fighter had seen you and he had you on his radar. He'd say "A fighter," and he's say where it was, "low astern, port side, and he's come round to attack, get ready to dive." Now normally it would be to get ready to

17:30 corkscrew, and he was coming from the starboard side, we didn't use left or right, because he was looking that way and I was looking that way and left can be very confusing. So starboard side or port side, up or down. If he was coming from the starboard side, I'd get ready to turn to starboard side, that's to turn towards him, and he'd say "Dive" and down I'd go, or corkscrew, and the same thing when you were doing a

18:00 bombing or if anyone saw another, likely to have a collision, they'd warn you straight away where the aeroplane was. But on the bombing run, you really handed over to the air bomber. The moment he saw the target, was his aeroplane, and he would guide you, he'd tell you where it was and how close it was and what enemy fire he saw in front. And once the target was on his bomb sights, and it was travelling, the bomb sights were

18:30 some fine wire line going up like that. The target would travel down these wires, between them, and once you started travelling, he'd be telling you "Left, left, right, right, left, right" whatever, and when he saw it right where it should be, press the bomb release button. You'd know the bombs had gone, because the aeroplane would jump up in the air,

What was that

then he'd hold you on the course until the photo flashes went, where you photographed where the bomb had hit.

19:00 And the captain then said to the navigator, "Give me a course for back home." Now, a course back home wasn't always straight back home. We don't made it too easy for the Germans, so you did a dog leg back home, you'd go this way and that way and this way. And I had an occasion once when I was attacked just after leaving the target and I was flying, throwing the aircraft around

19:30 a lot, and the navigator's oxygen tube became disconnected in the manoeuvres. He didn't know he wasn't breathing oxygen, he just couldn't tell it was cold air coming in. And it was time to go to do, start a dogleg, instead of going straight home you go the long way. And he gave me a course I thought was wrong, I said, being an ex-navigator, I always kept a bit of a mental plot.

20:00 I queried his course, and he said, "No, that's it," and I queried again, and he said, "If you don't like my courses, I'll come up on the flight deck and fight you." Now this man, never in (UNCLEAR) history he'd say he'd come and fight anybody, he was the most placid chap, he'd never say that to his captain, and then I spoke to him, I heard nothing. And I said to the flight engineer, "Go back and see what's happened." Well, to move around in the aeroplane, you unplugged

20:30 this thing, the intercom, you unplugged your oxygen, and you put on a portable oxygen bottle, because you couldn't be without oxygen for a second. He put on his portable oxygen bottle, and went back to see what happened. He found that the navigator was lying across his desk with his oxygen disconnected. So he reconnected the oxygen, the first thing he did, then he plugged into a telecom, intercom jack,

21:00 said where he was, what had happened, and I said, "Well, come back to the front." Then he went back every now and then to check on the navigator. By the time I got back over England, now I had to then navigate the rest of the way, back to the English coast, because I'd remembered the flight plan, it wasn't that hard. The wings behaved as they should. When we got down to 10 thousand feet, and we were still on oxygen, the navigator came good, he didn't remember a thing about it.

21:30 Not happened to him, complete blackout the moment he blacked out. And he was then able to navigate us back to Waddington, which would've been beyond my capabilities, because he was on the electronic navigation equipment. So, and I've, just go on a bit, we all went, well, at least all the pilots did, tried out, were tried in a decompression chamber. You get into a decompression chamber and they pump it up to

22:00 20 thousand feet or whatever, and, to see what happens. One of the people and there'd be, say, there were five or six of us, one would have no oxygen. And you'd be asked to do things, and if you've got oxygen, you could do everything, write things and tap your nose and this, didn't have, you had no oxygen, you got as silly as could be, and you could see what it'd do to someone. And the same thing

22:30 happened when I was, early in the war, when I was a navigation instructor, I used to do, sometimes, a daily met flight. So that the air force would know what the weather was like, we'd send an aircraft up to about 18, 20 thousand feet, one of these Hawker Demons. The bloke would, and we'd have a hygrometer, which measure the humidity, strapped onto a wing strut, you look out and see the humidity and write it down, read the

23:00 temperature and right it down, read the weather conditions and write it down, you'd come down and give all this information to the met officer. Now, I just used an ordinary Demon, I had no oxygen. When I came down, I used to say to myself "God, my hands must've been cold, I couldn't write sensibly." It took me years to realise I couldn't write sensibly because I was running short of oxygen. But if you climb up Everest and take months

23:30 to get up there, you're going to acclimatise. If you go up in 10 or 15 minutes, you're not.

How was oxygen delivered on the Lancaster?

There was a giant stack of oxygen bottles and it was piped, two pipes, and each crew member using them had a flexible hose, you see them in hospitals, just the same sort of thing, to a mask clapped on his face.

What about the

24:00 **portable bottles you mentioned, where were they, were they always**

There was a portable bottle by the flight engineer's position, right on my right hand side. And there would be one or two others in the aircraft, I've forgotten where they were but I know that the flight engineer had one. He was the man who was supposed to move around the aircraft if anything needed fixing and others had a job to do. Your gunners couldn't move around, the wireless operator, radio operator couldn't leave his set,

24:30 so really the flight, the flight engineer may have had the only bottle, as far as I remember.

Was there any occasion where you had to leave the pilot's seat?

No.

Would you have been able to, were there plans if you'd been injured, what would happen to the Lancaster?

There was no other pilot in the aircraft. They would've bailed out if they were lucky, if I had known I could no longer fly and I wasn't going to come unconscious, I would've bailed them out.

25:00 It wasn't easy jumping out of an aircraft like that. You could break your back or break a limb as you were getting out and of course, you could fall into the sea or into enemy territory, or the aircraft could crash on top of you.

How did you practice the bail out procedure?

I don't think we did, no, I didn't practice. I

25:30 practiced getting into a dinghy, if you landed, ditched into the sea, your dinghy was released automatically, you had to get into the dinghy without tipping it upside down. So I practiced that. You got, it was handy to know what it was going to be like, see if you can do it in daylight and one night you've got to do it in the dark and you're tired and it's raining and waves are high well, it's nice to know that you've done

26:00 it before and you can see what you are doing. Doesn't so much need practice but it's getting yourself acclimatised to the conditions.

How prepared were you if you did go down in enemy territory?

Well, you carried an escape kit as I've mentioned to you. If you landed in German territory, well, you either were

26:30 captured, or if you landed in a town that had been bombed, you were never seen again, they strung you up on a lamp post or whatever. And hid your body so you stayed missing. But once you got onto the ground, you had some, what we call 'wakey wakey' tablets, I'll think of the chemical name,

Benzedrine.

Benzedrine, Benzedrine. You take a couple of Benzedrine, you really get up and go. And then for energy,

27:00 you had some concentrated energy drink, concentrated chocolate, malted milk tablets, you could chew

that, if you had, if you were drinking out of a pond and you had time, you had some stuff to purify the water, disgusting chemicals you threw in it. Or you drink from the pond and get some bacterial disease, but if, you were pretty much on your own if you bailed out over Germany.

27:30 But if you bailed out over enemy occupied territory, particularly France and Holland until the Germans wiped out all the underground, but France, when you weren't in a town, you could go to a country farmhouse, 90% chance you were looked after. And they were incredibly brave, the people who did this because if they were caught doing it, the whole family would be shot straight away by the Germans.

28:00 And they would, depending on the situation they were in, if they were regularly visited by the Germans or they had neighbours they didn't trust, they would feed you and possibly hide you and give you something to eat and send you off then next night. If they were in a town, they'd find it even more difficult. But if they felt reasonably secure, they would know who the underground people were, they never ever

28:30 told, and next thing, you'd meet a member of the underground. The first thing he would do was make sure that you weren't a plant, because Germans would to that to find out who they were. You'd be asked questions which only a genuine Australian in bomber command would know, and you'd be asked, you know, silly questions about, which were quite wrong about Melbourne or Geelong or Sydney or wherever, and if you "Oh, yes, I remember that," well if you remembered that

29:00 you were a fake. And then they would arrange for you, usually if you were shot down in France and the underground movement line hadn't been compromised, they'd get you to the Spanish border. And then you'd be handed over to a guide that'd take you across Spain. Well, to do that, you needed false papers, to give you false papers, they needed money,

29:30 so you gave them the money. They needed a photograph,

Can you explain this photograph on, for us?

I always carried that photograph, I've shown you today, the photograph.

Yes.

And they had wonderful forgers, it surprised me how many forgers there were in those days. And they'd buy you train tickets or whatever, they would

30:00 tell you what you needed to know. You were usually, I was a Pole and I said, "Why am I a Pole?" they said, "No one speaks Polish, and no Poles speak French or German, therefore the fact that you can't speak French or German, because you're a Pole explains why you're not a Frenchman. And they can't communicate with you because you're a bloody Pole," so, I was told, that was the reason given to me, I don't know why. Their language was evidently very difficult.

30:30 **Did you have a name?**

No. I must've, but I've forgotten it, I always, I forget names, you can make one up. I must admit I had a name on the, I would've, had I gone, no, I remembered. Had you gone down, and you needed false papers, they would tell you what name was appropriate for you to have. Because they were locals, they would, they knew what to do. But my brother,

31:00 I'll just mention this, it illustrates it, was flying a very ancient Whitley bomber, he went to England very early in the piece, it was a twin engine bomber, coming back over Germany. And somewhere over Germany, they were shot and had an engine shot out, and they couldn't get back to England, they were losing height all the time. So he ditched in the, just about where the North Sea comes into the Channel.

31:30 And one of the crew members was killed, didn't get out of the aircraft, and they were picked up by air sea rescue crowd, he was then posted to a squadron, there were two squadrons in bomber command whose sole role was to help the resistance forces. The resistance forces played a very major part in that war. And these two squadrons dropped them food, ammunition, radio sets, messages, and even took people in

32:00 and out of the occupied countries. One night my brother went and dropped food and guns to the, to Warsaw, to the beleaguered Jews in Warsaw. He did lots of things, I don't know all of them because, even in his logbook, he wouldn't put where he'd been, he'd just give it a number, because security was so tight. One night, he was taking a Frenchman to drop him down near Lyon,

32:30 and what you did, the people on the ground, they were organised, and they would be waiting for the passenger you were bringing in, they called him a pod, P O D, and you'd go to the right place and you'd get a torch shone at you, and then you'd fly very slow and very low over this place and the chap would jump out by parachute If you were to pick him up, you went over in a plane,

33:00 a plane called a Lysander which was short take off and land, and you'd land at the prepared place and picked him up. Well, the Germans knew my brother was coming, so they shot him up. He was flying a Halifax, two engines shot up, with the wheels and, flaps down, maybe not wheels, he couldn't gain height and couldn't start the engines, he knew he'd have to crash. So he crashed it about

33:30 three or four miles away, far enough away that the Germans on the ground couldn't get to him straight

away. And as the aircraft was full of secret equipment, he decided I remember him telling me “We must set fire to it.” He said petrol is very hard to ignite, he didn’t believe it was hard to ignite, usually it ignites easily. So in the end they got out a Veri pistol and shot a Veri cartridge into this mass of petrol flowing out, and the aeroplane when up like a bomb. Then,

34:00 because of this one bloke from the resistance he had with him, this man organised some contacts and my brother and his co-pilot, always had two pilots on these flights, got in with the resistance and they moved from house to house to house until they got to the Spanish border. And they were waiting for a guide who would guide them over the border, over the mountains and they were betrayed to the Vichy French Police. And the house they were in was raided and the guys were

34:30 captured. And the Vichy French put him in solitary confinement, all this time, he’s in civilian clothes, they didn’t torture him or anything, but they beat him up just for good measure. And he was in this ghastly cell where it was too low to stand up and the only bunk, that there was a wooden slat, a bunk, and on a slope like that, and when he lay on it, he rolled off. So he slept on the stone floor. He had no way to wash, no way to wash his clothes, he stayed unwashed,

35:00 and on a starvation diet and solitary confinement, every day for a bit of over a month. And they handed him over to the Gestapo because he was fair prize for the Gestapo interrogated him everyday, and strangely enough, never physically tortured him, because they wanted to know where he’d been. Well, the system was so good, my brother didn’t know where he’d been, he didn’t know the names of the people he went to, you were taken there in the dark, and my brother was a man capably stubborn, and didn’t have a lot of

35:30 imagination, every time a question, the interrogator, very good English, a lot of them had been to an English school usually, asked him a question, he’d say “I am A 4 5 6 7 8 9 10, P Kingsford-Smith, flight officer,” that’s the answer he gave every time. He said, “I’ve got to say something, I said that.” So what they did, they decided to soften him up, this was a terrible Gestapo prison in the middle of Paris called Fresnes, F R E N S E S, I think and they were always

36:00 killing off poor Poles they had or others who weren’t so low, they needed to be sent to an extermination camp, they just shot them against the wall, they took him out and lined him up against the wall and shot the Pole, but not my poor bloody brother. This is what, you know, that demoralises you no end. Anyway, you never talked, I know he didn’t and they, just one day, they handed him over to the Luftwaffe [German Air Force], who

36:30 had their own Luftwaffe prison camps and he went to a prison camp, just on the Polish border which were all, nearly all bomber command people, he met a lot of my friends. And when he came home after the war, he had a letter from nearly every French family he stayed with. They knew him, but he didn’t know them. So he couldn’t know anything. We didn’t.

37:00 And anyway, and when he was with the underground, an English intelligence system told me where he was, because they got messages, they knew what was happening. When he was captured by the Vichy French, he disappeared from the face of the Earth, there was no, they didn’t tell anybody, didn’t tell the Red Cross, the Gestapo didn’t tell anybody. Months and months went by and finally he was handed over to the normal prisoner of war camp and

37:30 they told the Red Cross they had him. It was quite amazing, I’d go to London and be told “Rollo, your brother Peter was last with some people at such and such village.” But another friend of mine, a fellow who replaced me, took over the squadron, he was a second tour man, he was shot down on his very first trip, this is after D Day, in Belgium. And he knew what to do. And he took some clothes off a

38:00 scarecrow or something, but he mainly had his uniform, and he wanted to get to a town and he hitch hiked a ride from a truck and they dropped the tailboard and clambered in, and it was full of German troops. Any they grunted at him, and he grunted at them. He got out at the next village. Just grunted. They were pretty demoralised. But he finished up in the middle of town in the basement

38:30 of a wealthy Belgian woman, who had about 10 evading Allied POWs in her basement and she was on a street corner, and on the opposite corner was the German, local German army headquarters. And she said, “I’ll look after you guys. There’s no way you can get out, you’re going to stay here until the Allied, ground forces overrun the town,” which they did.

Amazing. Did you ever have the experience of an airman who, from your squadron who’d gone out and gone missing, who actually came back

39:00 **through these channels?**

Yes, but I didn’t get a chance to talk to him person to person. He came and spoke to us briefly. We were as busy as hell and he had a programme of talking to people. But he told us how he was captured, he had a bicycle, he’d stolen a bicycle, and he had civilian clothes on. He was riding his bike, which was much better than walking around or going by train, you weren’t interrogated.

39:30 And he came to a roundabout, and he turned left into the roundabout. There was a policeman there, you turn right into a roundabout over there. He said, “I just turned left into the roundabout,” instead of turning right.

Well, we'll stop the tape, we're actually, we're about to run out.

Tape 7

00:30 **Okay, yeah, perhaps you could tell us about the waiting for**

Yeah, all right, well now, to me as a squadron commander, and all my experiences as a squadron commander or a flight commander, there's a big difference between killed in action, and missing in action. Now, as a squadron commander, and like any squadron commander, I felt a great affinity with my men. They were loyal to me and I did my best to be loyal to them.

01:00 The ones that had been with you and flown with you on a number of trips you knew quite well, the new ones you didn't know. You were responsible for their training and their general well being. And if you knew they'd been killed there was a lot of grief for just a short time, too many people had been killed, but if you never saw them again, if they went out and you'd briefed them to go on the raid, and you'd gone on the raid too, or you waited behind. When they were due to call up Waddington tower,

01:30 whenever I got back, I'd go straight into the tower. Even before I got back, if I was in the queue, I was listening out to see who was calling who was calling, who was coming back. I'd go into the tower and I'd wait. And some stragglers would turn up and then I'd wait until I knew they'd run out of petrol. Then I'd start ringing the airfields around where they might've landed, because there were airfields set up for people with damaged aeroplanes, particularly a damaged undercarriage or damaged flaps, where they might have to land too quickly.

02:00 So these fields and a row of bulldozers down the runway and as soon as you landed they got a bulldozer and they bulldozed you off the airfields, then the next aircraft could come in. You'd ring them and he wasn't there, and you'd ring around and then you never knew what happened, and that was the most distressful part I ever had. You might find within two or three weeks they were prisoners, usually you never heard. You might be,

02:30 it might be like my brother, took three months and found he was a prisoner, but most of them were just missing and missing forever. Now and then a body is found, you read about it in the paper these days that the bones are identified or the IDs, identification disks are identified. But they could be in the sea, they could be in a deep hole, they could be buried under a hedge, they, and that was the most distressing thing, never knowing what happened to them. What could you say to their next

03:00 of kin, you wrote, I made a point of writing a letter to every next of kin, it wasn't that hard for me. I had a WAAF orderly woman, who would start a letter with their address and have my name on the end and I'd just have to know what to dictate to put in the middle. If I was flying, the adjutant would put in what was in the middle. But if they were missing,

03:30 you didn't know what the hell to say. And usually, if you're on the ground, you do know what's happened, you've seen the fellow die. But this uncertainty was awful. That was about, all I wanted to comment on that, really the thing that, you know, still gets at me.

Can you describe that scene in the air, it's probably obviously early morning, the sun's rising, the planes are coming back, is,

04:00 **can you describe that scene as you're waiting in the tower, you're looking out?**

Well, no, you're just waiting and talking, there's always something happening. An aircraft might come in and say he was, had an injured crew member on board, and you'd have the ambulance waiting. You would talk to the people in the tower, and you just wait, just wait.

04:30 Usually it wasn't light, usually it was still dark, sometimes it was light. Coming back into light, of course, you were lucky, you saw some wonderful sunrises. It was interesting, most of the targets, Germany and the Baltic Coast and even Norway, I've attacked a target in Norway, well, very high latitudes and

05:00 the, as you climb, the horizon dips. In other words, you can be flying along in pitch dark, if you climb up three thousand feet, you're in the daylight, you go down three thousand feet, you're in the dark. And the, at an ordinary height, the sunsets earlier and rises late, if you want to make the sunrise earlier, you climb up a bit. You can't do it over Australia, you can do it where the latitudes are high.

05:30 And it's just an interesting phenomena that would, I, you know, once or twice I found myself drifting into the area where I could be seen and I hastily dropped my height a couple of thousand feet so I couldn't be seen.

You must've been, your community there, you must've known some of the wives or the people that were, partners were flying.

06:00 **Did you ever have to tell them the news that people hadn't come back?**

No, I didn't, fortunately, I wasn't encouraged to, but I would've had I knew them at all well, but I didn't, none of them I knew. A couple, the, as far as I was aware, no Australian had a partner or a wife living, who lived in, with

06:30 a partnership with him nearby. They might've had intimate friends who, a WAAF on the station, these kids suffered, but you didn't know who they were or you pretended you didn't know who they were. And single girls found it very hard just to hang around for a husband, if a single woman, they're supposed to be in the armed forces or working in the defence industry. The whole of the country was geared up for war.

What did you do after you'd

07:00 **been in the tower waiting and, if a plane didn't come back? What did you do then?**

I'd go back, I'd go to bed. I might at times go back into the mess and kick someone around to open the bar to have a drink. If I wasn't flying, once I'd briefed the fellows and seen them all off and know they were all gone on their way, I'd go back to the bar and comfort myself with whoever wasn't flying,

07:30 more than I should've and then I'd go back to the tour when they were due to be calling up and wait for them. But, you know, it was a very civilised war, with the facilities you had on the ground. Like I said, with clean sheets and a bar and female company, there wasn't an awful lot of sexual harassment or anything, the women were wonderful women,

08:00 but they were fighting, very, very good looking girls too. They had a job to do, and they did there job and they didn't fool around very much, but naturally there were intimate relationships. That had to happen, it was inevitable, but

How did you deal with that, for the loneliness of command, I guess, you're in charge of the squadron, did you make any liaisons with, the said WAAF or

No, I was very

08:30 friendly with some of them, and had I not been a commanding officer, and had I not had a loving wife at home, I obviously would've because some of them were the most attractive women, and they felt a need to, you know, comfort me, I think, and I felt a need to be comforted, and they were fun to be with. Some, you know, if you strike someone who's fun to be with. But I found it hard to have a relationship, because I was very young and took my

09:00 job very seriously. I found it hard to have a relationship with a woman under my command.

How about relationships with the men, did you form close relationships knowing that they'd be, possibly they might not come back?

With my crew, we used to go away together, because I reckoned that a crew needs to stick together, get to know each other, how each other thinks. One crew member always went off on his own, another had a girlfriend somewhere.

09:30 In fact, he was very lucky, his girlfriend was young, and the girlfriend had a mother, he used to look after both of them, which was just, you know, quite a lot of stamina, both the same night. But about three of us would go away together, and one, the gunner had a car, and, I didn't, I had a staff car, but I didn't, I'd take that away on holiday with

10:00 my crew. We went to places we could go to. I'd go to London quite often, where I met old RAAF friends, but not friends I'd made in the squadron, friends I'd made at Point Cook before I, or in my squadrons in Australia or in London. Or English friends I had. I liked to

10:30 have something to do with them. And so I suppose about every two out of three times I had some leave, I might go to London. Now the trouble is, being a squadron commander, you could only go when you could get time off. The other crew members were entitled to a break at a regular interval, because they worked seven days a week, four weeks a month, and might get a 24 hour leave pass, and then they might get a

11:00 seven day leave pass. Now, when they were absolutely due for it, but the squadron commander could only go when things were a bit slack. So I never could really plan anything and I suppose one of the reasons I never had a close relationship, you can plan to go away with a girl for a week, you might, you might be tempted, but you can't plan it till the last minute, and she'd say "It's not a convenient time to go away," or something, so you didn't do it.

11:30 So I could turn up on various English friend's households and ring them from London and say "Can I come?" And they'd say "Yes." They were real friends. Or you'd stay at a pub in London and meet people you knew and really get drunk most nights. I found that alcohol relieved the tensions immensely. I used to worry about kids who didn't drink because they used to get

12:00 terribly, terribly tense and they, not all of them, but they suffered and some of them couldn't cope. But if you could relieve the tension, and I was under a lot of pressure, and I was very tense. And I drank more than I should've. Fortunately I was able to get rid of drinking more than I should've once I came back. My wife saw to that. But, you know, I've got plenty of wine in that refrigerator

12:30 there behind me but I don't drink the way I did when I was in England. When I had the opportunity, you didn't drink, obviously you didn't take it up in the aircraft with you, you didn't fly on ops when you were drunk. But if you knew you weren't going to fly for a while, you drank, well I did.

I can understand that, you, I mean the, your squadron suffered some terrible casualties. What was the highest loss of any one operation?

13:00 One operation, we were attacking, well, the highest loss, I had twice in 463. And one night in Berlin, we weren't supposed to send many, we sent 14 aircraft and I didn't have to fly, and four were shot down. That, so while I was, and they were all killed, it was all over Berlin, and so I lost 28 of my squadron, only had a squadron of 158. And if you lost, say, on the three or four previous

13:30 operations, seven or eight in each operation, you see, it was not the one loss that got you down, it was consistent losses. And for the youngsters flying, they know that last night they'd survived and the night before they'd survived and would they survive again, if they're going back to the same target, and you know, one example I mentioned they never let me down. But the,

14:00 you were so busy, you didn't, I didn't have time to feel lonely or isolated. The RAF were very good, there was an RAF station commander who watched me as I was watching the people under me. And we would meet up now and then, I'd go to his house, he had his, because he wasn't flying, he had his wife and kids living with him, and

14:30 I'd eat and drink with them. And he was a, from a very well established aristocratic English political family. And he was most unEnglish, he was a most delightful person, and he used to explain to me the funny habits of the English. He'd spent a lot of time in America, he'd been a test pilot. He said how the English

15:00 aristocracy, who drove around in their Rolls Royces, had to have a chauffer tuck a rug round them when it was cold. In America, they put a heater in the car. Even to the war, the best English cars didn't have heaters in them, you had a rug wrapped around your feet. He told me how to, if I wanted to buy a Rolls Royce, there was a way to go about it. Now, the Rolls Royce sales rooms were in, car sales rooms in

15:30 one of the best known squares, Nightingale sang in one square, anyway, if you go into this

Barkley Square. Barkley Square?

Yeah, yeah, Barkley. "If you go in there, Rollo, dressed up like a pox doctor's clerk," a pox doctor's clerk is supposedly a young man well dressed, "The salesman

16:00 will size you up in a minute, and put you off with rude disdain," he said, "Get your old gardening clothes, the oldest shabbiest gardening clothes you've got, and go in there and, you know, be pretty vague and they'll know you're a very rich aristocrat, rather eccentric, and they'll be all over you." He thought that, that was his idea of humour. He

This family was looking after you on the base,

16:30 **did you go to them to seek comfort from, or release from, relief from stress?**

No, but they made a regular point of keeping in touch with me. And there was someone even higher than him, a base commander, Waddington was also the airfield for 463 and 467, with a station commander who ran all the facilities on the station. But also, a base for three stations, and the base commander was there. And the base commander was an ancient chap, of about

17:00 45, he was very ancient to me, he was unmarried and he was, lived in the mess. And he was in the bar most nights and he used to, we used to drink together very often. He made sure he kept an eye on me, we were good friends. He did his best to help me get the postings I wanted when my tour of duty had expired, but I couldn't get them.

When you were getting those heavy losses, did you think, come to twice about your request to have done that, go on, to do a

17:30 **longer tour, extended tour there?**

No, you didn't. I tried to get onto the special divvy squadron I mentioned earlier, my brother was in. My base commander gave me an introduction to the station commander of this base, and he said, "Now, he's just lost a squadron commander, so go down there very quickly, fly down, see him and give him my name,

18:00 you might get this job," and I wanted to try this job. Apart from the fact that my brother had been shot down, it seemed to be not as dangerous as main bombing. It was long flights on your own that interested me. And I went down to this place closer to London, I flew down a Lancaster, and the job had just been filled an hour before I got there. Then I tried to get back to Australia to see my wife and child, and I couldn't. And posting

18:30 to a training station to make use of my experiences was inevitable and I took it, I went to the training station. And it was, the training unit and commanded that, and we taught the fellows to fly from twin

engined old aeroplanes into four engine bombers. And that was a flat out job, it went nearly 24 hours a day, because we were really busy turning out aircrews to replace those

19:00 who'd been shot down. And then at the end of that, I was offered a job at a station where I knew people, they had a new commanding officer who was an Australian, I felt I'd never get on with, and I didn't push it, someone else got the job. And then I wanted, I was offered a job back commanding one of my Waddington squadrons again. And

19:30 Australian air force headquarters wouldn't let me take it, which was I suppose fair enough. But the fellow who took it was shot down. And then I had the chance of going to this, taking this Mosquito squadron and it was kept from the Australians, the fact that I was going to this Mosquito squadron, it happened very quickly, they didn't even know about it, the RAAF headquarters. Their records showed that I never served in that squadron, not until they corrected it after

20:00 the war. So I was flying Mosquitoes when they thought I was still instructing people to fly heavy bombers.

Can you tell us about a particular mission on the Mosquito, and the task that you were doing?

Well, the missions were mainly, well, I thought they were going to be short missions. They were all bloody long range missions and the Mosquito was not comfortable to fly a long way, because it was very, very sensitive. On the

20:30 Lancaster, when I was flying back and I was always dog tired, I'd been up all day and been flying for hours at night I might've been up for 24 hours. On a Lancaster, if you just dozed off for a second, the aeroplane would keep droning along. If you dozed off a bit too much, the flight engineer would nudge you. We had an automatic pilot, it wasn't very good, but the Mosquito was very sensitive. If your eyes left the instrument panel for a second, it would drop a wing and pick up speed, it frightened the daylights

21:00 out of the navigator. So I had to stay wide awake. It's awfully hard when your eyes are going out of focus. At great height, there's no horizon, see, so you're watching the instruments all the time. The instruments on the panel would go double and fade, and I'd really have to correct my, focus my eyes and they'd go single again, stop fading, it was really hard work. But it was, on the other hand, we were 28 or 29 thousand feet, it was

21:30 quite a safe height to be flying, I didn't worry too much about the enemy. But, anyway, I take one, the first one was to eastern Czechoslovakia. Now, it's a long way from England to Czechoslovakia and back. And it was close to the Russian line, the Russians wanted a railway junction destroyed. And instead of marking, I went out first and found the wind

22:00 over the target. Now, to bomb accurately, the bomb aimer has to know exactly the track the aeroplane's making over the ground, the instruments in the aeroplane tell you what track it's making through the air. So he really has to know what wind there is at the height he's, what height, the wind speed and direction, at the height he's flying at. Which he sets on his bomb sight, so it makes a correction to the aeroplane's movement through the air.

22:30 Now, many of the raids we'd give them a forecast wind, and a forecast wind can be really wrong, terribly wrong. So on a, towards the end of the war on a target where we didn't want to kill any Czechs, we only wanted to wreck the railway line, a plane would go out and find the wind. Now there's a procedure to do that, it meant for precise flying, an accurate height, accurate speed, which made it easier for the people on the ground predicting you, but on a Mosquito wasn't bad. You found the wind as accurate as you

23:00 could, and quite accurately. You then radioed that by voice radio to a bloke called a master bomber who then had a Lancaster with a radio operator with a key, who keyed it out to the rest of the force, and they set that accurate wind on the bomb sight. Then the last one I did was, included on, was to Norway. Submarines were one of England's greatest threats, and the submarine bases, German

23:30 U-boat bases had been on the coast of Belgium, very largely so with France. Well, towards the end of the war, we were bombing them out of existence, we bombed them and bombed them and bombed them, we laid mines on the approaches to them and things, and you think some poor submarine crew and commander coming back, they've had a very tiring, hazardous mission, in the Atlantic where they'd been depth charged and survived, and they're just getting close to their base and they hit a mine, sown by a

24:00 Lancaster. They were blown up. So in the end, they moved this submarine base to Oslo, near Oslo, in Norway. And they reckoned it would be safe there, well we knew it was being set up, as soon as it was ready to go, we went in and destroyed the fuel tanks. And that was a very interesting raid, too,

24:30 there was a US, German navy base, and the marking point was right between about five giant fuel tanks, really, you know like huge gasometers, and I was dropping a target indicator right in the middle. And I was diving on it and there was a gunner there, who was really game as anything. All the time I was diving, he was shooting at me, it was a rapid fire,

25:00 20 millimetre gun, I could see the tracer bullets. And this gun, he must've fired it a lot, it had a bit of, it

wandered around, and the bullets, instead of coming straight at me, wandered a bit all round me. And they didn't hit me, and he kept firing until I dropped the target indicator, a thousand pound, a thousand pounds of bright red incendiaries, it would've covered him, it would've burnt him to death in seconds if it didn't blow him to bits, he kept firing. But firing, it's interesting,

25:30 flying into tracer fire, when it first leaves the gun, because the angle of movement slow it, it seems to come out very slowly, and in a fraction of a second it gets faster and as it gets close to you it goes like that. But the German gunners were, got very good by the end of the war, and they were very brave.

What, can, were you also shooting at the target with your machine gun or

No. I had no, no,

26:00 I wasn't concentrating on that, in fact, I didn't have any forward firing guns. All I did, the only, all I did was carry these thousand pound target indicators, I had a gun sight, and I had the target in my gun sight, and had a gun firing button, I pressed the gun firing button, and that released the target indicator. The procedure then was, you'd drop a target indicator, which say burnt red, the marking leader would then

26:30 fly around, if it was accurate, he'd order someone else to come and back it up with another red target, another red indicator, to make sure that there were a couple down there, because they could be blown out by bombs falling on them. But if it was inaccurate, and it could be, you then tell the main force, "Don't bomb the red target indicator," and you get someone else to come in with a green target indicator. And try and bomb more accurately. So it was precision the whole time, it was a very precise

27:00 business of destruction. I've tried to get the fire brigade to use a similar procedure in reverse, in putting out fires, but they won't listen to me, they've heard, tired of listening to all these old war birds telling them what to do, but they've never tried having anyone over the top when they were bombing fires, controlling what's going on, and telling people how accurately they are bombing and calling in more if they

27:30 needed more, but not putting water on a fire that's no more than necessary. But as I said I've

How did you take this new role, you'd left the command of a squadron to fly Pathfinder missions?

Well, it was a feather in my hat, it was the only squadron of its type. And the people who offered me the job, considered they were doing me a great favour and I accepted that they were doing me a great favour.

28:00 It was interesting, we were situated on the same field as the Dambuster squadron, 617 Squadron, this squadron was 627 Squadron. It was an RAF squadron but there were a few good Australians in there. There were some, I'd worked with them, they'd marked targets for me when I was flying 463, I knew how they operated. It was a lovely part of England, there was a lovely little pub just down the road. And there weren't many people

28:30 in the squadron, see, I'd been used to a squadron, 463, of 25 crews of seven in each crew and then some extras. When I went to the heavy bomber training unit, I had about seven or eight hundred people under my command. In the Mosquito squadron, when you've only got a crew of two, not a lot of ground staff, a much easier job, there wasn't as much administration.

29:00 And it was not such a big ground management task, it was sort of a rest, really.

You'd left an Australian squadron. Did you feel that, how did you feel about that?

Not, no, when I was in that squadron, we were fighting the same enemy as others. We were accustomed to mixing together, it's interesting there, it's the only time in history I know, modern history, where full, people from different country's forces, even

29:30 Commonwealth countries, all worked together in the same unit. You might get attached, one unit attached works alongside another unit, like the Australians might've worked alongside the, the Australian army works alongside the British army, we were the one squadron in my squadron. Nearly all the ground staff, all the, nearly all the mechanics were Brits, because they had plenty, we didn't have plenty here. About two in every,

30:00 really, in the beginning, when the squadron first started, about four in every crew were Brits. By the time the war finished, about two in every crew. And an awful lot of other people, my brother, for example, served in three squadrons, he served in RAF squadrons, where there were one or two Australians or some Canadians in the squadron, made no difference. In fact I, it enhanced morale, you were meeting

30:30 people and you judge them not on what colour uniform they had, on what sort of people they were. It gave the pay department a bit of a problem because different rates of pay. But I found it was, if anything, it enhanced morale in the squadron. I had Poms [English] working for me, I worked for a Pom, and I said, they were great people. People in the Royal Air Force where, when I served, were fantastic people.

31:00 Because if they weren't fantastic, they were kicked out, the war was too serious over there.

So did you have, what other Pathfinding missions did you do? Did you do any Pathfinding missions in Germany, over Berlin?

No, no, I got there too late, thank heavens. By the time I got there, and there were no operations for a while, I only did these two long trips. I did an awful lot of other flying around and I also

31:30 did a lot of training. That squadron was earmarked to be a Pathfinder squadron when the RAF sent a force to the Pacific. It was given a name, Tiger Force. The, by the last few months of the war, it was obvious Germany was going to be licked unless they got that nuclear bomb ready to drop on us. And it was going to be, take a while for Japan to be licked and Britain wanted to be at the

32:00 peace table when the Japanese were defeated. They wanted to have a British presence there, well anyway, the best way to do that was to have some English bomber forces attacking Japan, alongside the Americans. And they formed this force. Well I'd flown in the Pacific and I knew you didn't have a lot of equipment that you had in England. And where, if they were attacking other targets,

32:30 say, in the islands, there'd be no roads or railways, there's just jungle and coastline. So I gave them practice, a lot of pretend missions, down around Wales, where there's bloody rough country and mountains and coastline, and then out over the Atlantic and back, making a landfall in Wales. There weren't a lot to do in the last few weeks. And I was kept very busy.

33:00 And then I found that this type of force, when the war was over, and I bought a good few of them up, bomb command people back to England in my Byron [?] Lancaster, I found that the Tiger Force was not in fact going. I heard that there was, I heard from very good sources that there was about to be a nuclear weapon dropped on the Japanese, I knew that would finish

33:30 the war, and I started making plans to come back to Australia. I wanted to get back here and be in the war, back here while it was still on. We, it enhanced my future chances in the air force but, to have someone who hadn't flown against the Japanese, maybe diminished your chances. I was a career air force man at that time and I was thinking of my career. I was doing the job as well as I could but

34:00 also if I could and in addition to that, help my future career, and I thought, "If I can get into a squadron before the war is over, a squadron up in the islands somewhere, that, I'll have that on my record." But I tried to get home, but in the end I sneaked away, the Australian Air Force headquarters in England had me down to command a personnel holding base where

34:30 as air, Australian air crew were taken out of the squadron, the war was over, and they couldn't ship them all home at once, there weren't that many ships, they put them in this holding base and feed them and look after them until they could slowly put them on ships. Well I thought looking after all those fellows who, you couldn't, who I would never be able to discipline, was not for me, so I thought, my brother and other friends of mine who'd been prisoners

35:00 had priority to get home. I went down to the, to Brighton where the sea movement people were and saw them and I said, "I really need to keep an eye on my brother, he's distressed from the treatment the Gestapo gave him." So they put me on a ship coming home with him. And the air force headquarters in London didn't know I'd left the country until I'd left. If they'd known I wanted to leave

35:30 the country, they would've given me this job running this bloody holding base. So I came home, but by the time I came home, had my disembarkation leave and it was not a fast trip home by sea, the Americans had dropped the bomb and the war was over.

As a bomber pilot, did you, would you have considered

36:00 **or did you consider what might be going through the mind of the captain of the Enola Gay as he flew over Hiroshima?**

No, he would've been very conscious of the fact that if he made a big boo-boo, his name would've been Mud in the USAAF [United States Army Air Force]. He and his entire crew would've been making certain that they got, they found the right city. And I have no idea what, it was a fairly primitive nuclear weapon, what procedures they might have to go

36:30 through before they dropped the bloody thing, it was a big weapon. Hoping they wouldn't be shot down before they did it. And wanting to do it because the sooner you finish that war, the sooner people would stop losing their lives. And I had friends who were prisoners of the Japanese, you know, I would've bombed a lot of Japanese cities if it would've saved the lives of these

37:00 prisoners who had been killed by Japanese treatment. And so a nuclear weapon killed a lot of Japanese, and it helped finished the war. Had the Americans landed or the Allies landed an army force in Japan, millions killed.

Rollo, we're, it's now 20 past three, we've got a very limited time

Oh, crickey, yeah, okay.

We've got a few notes

37:30 **that you said things you wanted to go through. We've got to change the tape.**

I think I've done them.

Tape 8

00:30 **We're ready, Rollo.**

I mentioned earlier, that when we were attacking targets in the occupied countries, targets that were, had important military significance, and railway lines or factories or gun batteries, that our briefing was to attack at a low height, so that we could attack it accurately and not kill too many people in those countries. But as far as my squadron was concerned and I think every other bomber squadron,

01:00 would mind, particular, the French resistance, the French people and almost say we loved them. So many times, time and time again, they put their lives on the line to save us. If we were shot down, I knew enough of what was going on, I heard enough reports come back, I would've done anything not to killed a French civilian. And it was funny,

01:30 it was a different sort of war. The Germans had occupied France and all these other countries, they'd even put slave labour from Poland or wherever or even their own countries, in factories and they were making goods which they couldn't make in their country, because we were bombing them, and we had to destroy these targets. But we didn't want to damage the homes or the lives of the

02:00 people around them. And we, as I said, we were told not to and we were given our bombing heights but most were kept, went lower than the bombing heights we were told to even more accurate. It was a weird feeling, I don't think you've seen it in other wars, where we had a lot of people wanted to help us on the other side. That was all, worth putting down on record.

What could you see as you were flying over the occupied territories, could you see, a lot of people shooting at you, but was there any other signs

02:30 **of people being friendly down there?**

Yes, on a long flight, on some long flights to the south of France, you'd fly over a house, particularly a house with a courtyard, there'd be blokes there shining torches at you. If there wasn't a courtyard, they wouldn't be, because someone would've seen. You had a lot of, it was the only way they could communicate with you, shine a torch, you know, might shine Morse, but you, even I could read Morse, I couldn't read

03:00 French. So you'd see these, quite a lot of these torches blinking away at you, particularly the further south you went. Otherwise, you couldn't see much, it was dark, and you weren't looking down to the ground too much. They didn't have a lot of gun batteries, they had gun batteries along the coast, they had gun batteries around their targets. They had an aircraft factory at a place called Marignane in, near

03:30 Marseilles, now they had gun batteries all around it, but on the way, the last 300 miles towards, I got, towards Marseilles, there were no gun batteries and only Frenchmen shining torches at me on the coast. And then there were German air fields, fighter air fields, and particularly in the north, the further north you got, if you were flying towards the industrial heart of Germany and, which was in the north of Germany, there were

04:00 fighter air fields and fighters patrolling over the occupied territory. And they'd have a go at you on the way in and land and refuel and have a go at you on the way out, on the way back again. The fighter airfields weren't that, so numerous on the south, but if there was any target, no matter where it was, it was very well defended.

04:30 Well this target in Norway I attacked, it was terribly well defended.

Was there any targets that you particularly feared to go back to?

No, I think the word fear was mock fear. We hated going to Berlin. It was not a terribly good military target but it made the British feel good, they'd had shit bombed out of them. And Churchill said, "We'll bomb Berlin and we'll

05:00 teach Hitler a lesson," and also, there were legitimate sites there.

How did it make you feel, though, if you were bombing a civilian capital?

Well, I didn't, I, that's what we were doing and it was fair enough to try and destroy the administrative centre of the Nazi empire, but we hated going to Berlin. And one night, we were briefed to go to Berlin, and we were in our aircraft and we were strapped in, all ready to go, just about

05:30 ready to start the engines, and the mission was cancelled. And I've forgotten why, I think it was just going to be terribly bad weather when we got back, anyway, the mission was cancelled. And we couldn't

have been closer. I can tell you what it was like in the mess that night, everyone went mad with excitement. And it all put on, they really would rather have gone to bed, but they had to pretend they'd been dead scared, that was, the Australians behaved that

06:00 way, the English couldn't understand it, they'd keep a stiff upper lip, we would say "Jesus, we were frightened" and, "Thank Christ it was cancelled." And just to liven the place up some Veri cartridges were put in the fire, we always had a fire in the winter and they went off and then some things called thunder flashes were thrown in. Now a thunder flash filled a big room full of dense, dense

06:30 acrid smoke. Fortunately the guys had enough alcohol in them not to hurt them. It was the only time the station commander, he was quite a decent guy and a senior administrative officer on the station, came into the mess to tell me, "For Christ's sakes, quieten these fellows down." I was the mess president and I was just as excited as they were. But it was an excuse to let off steam. But I think, there where some things we hated doing. If you'd have attacked

07:00 Berlin say four or five times and you hated it, going back again, you knew what it was going to be like. It was the most beautifully defended city in the world. The German defences were out of this world. They had a million active men, not reservists defending Germany, almost 100% of all their gun ammunition, not small arms fire, gun ammunition, went to

07:30 the defence of Germany. Most of their air force was devoted to defending Germany, they had excellent radar, it was a bloody hard target to attack and that's why we had such losses. And so, you know, one that was very prickly, you would be dishonest with yourself if you didn't hate going there again and again.

You must've seen aircraft shot

08:00 **down in front of you and around you.**

Yes, I did.

What was that, what did that look like and what are you thinking when you see that?

When I looked at that, I told my crew not to look at it, to only look at aircraft who might be coming closer to us. Was, particularly one very disastrous raid, the worst of the lot. An attack on Nuremberg, and we lost over a hundred aircraft. And so we lost more aircraft on that one raid than we lost at,

08:30 in the whole of the Battle of Britain. It was a long, straight flight and there was moonlight, and I could see aircraft round me. And the German fighters, it was a long straight trip, and maybe the Germans knew something, the German fighters got amongst us very early, very, very early, and aircraft were being shot down all around us. And if they were shot down with a full bomb load, I mentioned earlier, the bombs go up first, it's a flash, and then the fuel

09:00 goes up and you see this great tremendous gout of red flame. That's another Lancaster, I didn't know it was a Lancaster at first and I thought, "What's that exploding?" and I realised it was a Lancaster. And an ill disciplined and inexperienced crew will be looking at it and feeling sorry for it, whereas they should be not looking at it, but looking at any, the next German fighters who are going to come up to them. And I remember several times on that trip I said, "For Christ's sake,

09:30 don't look at those exploding aeroplanes. Your job is to watch any aeroplane at all, friendly or foe, and gets close enough to us to harm us" and we weren't attacked once, because we saw them first. So you heard the answer, what are my feeling, my feeling was for Christ's sake, don't waste my time looking at it. I knew what it was, once I realised after the first second. When I saw the second one, I knew exactly what it was. I didn't waste my time looking at it.

10:00 I saw about 50 that night, I didn't see them all, but I, there were over 100, but I saw about 50. It made me very, very careful that I wasn't one.

Can you still see those in your mind's eye now?

Even, you can still see it and, but it's, it doesn't upset me like talking about, say, talking about the loss of my own men do. I don't lie awake thinking about, but now I've mentioned it to you, I can mention it now.

10:30 But it doesn't cause me any concern.

After the war, or when you were doing this, were you ever seeing any photos of the results of your bombing and close up photos of what was happening as you were bombing Berlin?

Not many for a while, there were, during the war I saw a few, but they were locked up in a massive intelligence system. They weren't letting stuff like

11:00 that out, they were still trying to examine, analyse, what happened, how it happened, and for all they knew there was going to be another war quite soon. And slowly started to leach out, by what time I'd lost interest. I had some photographs, which was enough for me.

How do you (UNCLEAR)

Just, I must, I correct myself.

11:30 About a week after the war was over I authorised myself a flight into Germany, into German industrial towns, which I'd knew had been attacked. On a nice fine day, it was in May, it was a lovely Spring day, and the German countryside looked lovely, but these towns were just shells. The, any buildings and the railway stations had, would been

12:00 destroyed by heavy gun fire and all the houses had been burnt. There were just the walls standing, or frames, there was nothing. And they've rebuilt it remarkably quickly, it just shows what a powerful people they are, but I didn't like fighting them.

Did you fly over any areas you think you might've bombed and can you tell us what

No, I didn't, I went, I wanted to look at a German fortified island,

12:30 I think, Heligoland, I think it's called, and I might need to be corrected. We'd attacked that and I wanted to see what it was like, I'd never seen it. And then I flew over, it was off the coast of Germany, I then flew over Germany, it was closer to it, and flew round a fair bit and it was a fair way away from my base, and I didn't want to continue the flight any further and I thought, well

13:00 "I still feel uneasy flying over Germany."

Was that the first time you'd seen Germany in daylight?

No, on VE [Victory in Europe] Day, when I went, when I flew to Germany to pick up the prisoners of war, that was daylight.

What did it feel like flying in daylight after doing so many night raids over this area?

Oh, it was easy to take off and land, but you flew by night just as easy by day. You were

13:30 accustomed to flying by night. You were accustomed to looking only at an instrument panel. It was hard for the navigator, and it was more comfortable when you come into land, because in the, low down on the circuit area you could see other aeroplanes in daylight, and night time you couldn't and sometimes you ran into them.

But did it feel somewhat strange for you as a night bomber pilot to be flying in daylight?

No, I've done an awful lot of flying in the day since then.

14:00 Fortunately I've been forced into flying in cloud since then, because I'd done all this flying at night, it never worried me.

Just one of the things I was going to ask you was, on those long missions, how did you deal with the, there must've been a lot of monotony, this just flying straight and level. How do you deal with that aloneness or that monotony?

14:30 There was no monotony flying over enemy territory, there was always a lot to do. There was some monotony flying one of the maritime jobs out of, off the New South Wales coast. You were going a long way and you saw nothing but sea. But surprisingly enough, there was nearly always something to see and, no I think I'd have monotony if I was flying airline, but I couldn't say. There was always a lot

15:00 to do when you're hurtling along at high speed, defying gravity.

Just after the war, you were very caught up in the, in this very major bombing offensive, and, how do you feel that was, that for your squadron and the Australian contribution made to that bombing offensive?

According to official British figures, particularly from the

15:30 RAF, we made quite a contribution. The government didn't think so at all, for example, when I went, pardon me, when we marched through England on the great victory parade commemorating the victory of the Allies over the, Germany, the order of march was the

16:00 British forces first, then the Allies. Now places like, dozens of tiny little countries you never heard of, you know, Cuba and various places in the Azores and Turkey and Malta and, you didn't know they, they marched next, then the Dominions who were only sort of

16:30 jumped up colonials, marched last. So as far as contribution to winning the war, we weren't regarded as highly, well, say as Mexico. Now don't ask me why, that's the mindset. But if you asked the Royal Air Force, and I've seen it in Royal Air Force documents what they thought of the Australians, they were full of praise. And

17:00 the Canadians, and the New Zealanders.

Was it worth the cost of all the, you know, you've lost, there were many Australians killed in your squadron, and other Australian squadrons, was it worth it do you think?

It was important to defeat the thousand year Reich that Hitler said he'd have. He had such an efficient fighting force

17:30 and such an efficient system of control with his Gestapo and SS [Schtzstaffel guards] units, that he could fairly easily have defeated all but America, and the Americans would've given in then, particularly if he could bomb America. So it was important to defeat them. I don't know how else it could've been done without those losses. The Germans

18:00 were ready for war and we weren't. England wasn't ready for war, Australia wasn't ready for war and when Chamberlain declared war on Germany, Germany had a massively powerful fighting organisation, army, air force and submarine force. And it was a toss up whether we would win, and most of the world thought we wouldn't. The Americans didn't think we would and the French government at the time, Marshal Petain

18:30 thought we wouldn't.

At the time, when you were in the control tower and you were waiting for planes that weren't calling in and you were sustaining fairly heavy losses, did you think it was at that time? How were you feeling about the strategic objectives versus the cost of

You're mind didn't go that far at that time, you had some immediate problems to deal with, you've got a missing bloody aeroplane, can you find him, what's happened to him. But I tell you what, my mind does wander now,

19:00 we lost over four thousand people in bomber command, more than were lost in the whole of the North African campaign, by all the Australian divisions. I lost more people in my squadron than we lost in the whole Korean campaign, and the present government refuses to recognise or remember the people who, the people that, the campaign of bomb command. They've put up a memorial to the air force,

19:30 and they're showing this "G for George" in the [Australian] War Memorial, opening up towards the end of this year, but they've got guns there and everything else. They recognise the air force, not often, there's only one memorial to the air force. We can put up a bomber, a memorial to bomber command in Canberra, we've been given the place, providing a few survivors find most of the money. Now it's the only force,

20:00 now, the citizen military force guys who flew on the Kokoda Track did a fantastic job. But they didn't, it only lasted a short time, we were at that war for years. It never finished, it went on for four years that bomber command war. Most of the land battles went on were pretty brief and they didn't lose many people. They had these disgusting conditions of mud and everything else.

20:30 There are memorials for them paid by the taxpayer, and I'm still having a go at the government because so many of my men are upset and their kids and grandkids are upset that father or grandfather isn't recognised. I don't know why the Australian government is doing that. I know that there are some feelings in the Department of Veteran's Affairs that we were terrorists and killing

21:00 poor innocent German civilians. Well, German civilians were not innocent, weren't poor, and we were fighting a total war. If you play by the rules, you lose in total war and you become occupied. If you went to a French town well after the Germans occupied France, you'd have a couple of German troops, ordinary troops walking down the street and they'd see a French male, they'd say "Here man, drop your

21:30 trousers," and he'd drop his trousers, and if he had a circumcised dick he was a Jew. And they'd laugh like mad. I had friends that had to put up with that. You know, it's unbelievable. Not only were they carted off, but they were degraded, before they were murdered. And it was a joke. So it's little things like that that

22:00 got under my skin. It was hard to believe that these things happened. Today you wouldn't think it was true, but I'm telling you, it's true. So, and I've got a, are we under five minutes?

I've got, looking back on it now, how do you feel about the war you fought in

22:30 **and the way it was fought?**

Well I thought that as civilian peace loving nations, Britain and Australia and Canada or whoever else, weren't ready for it. There were some English politicians and Winston Churchill, giving them due, was warning the British

I'm thinking more personally.

Personally?

Yeah.

23:00 Well, personally, I think we, that in democracy, that's the way you behave. You need an absolute dictatorship to become as powerful as Germany. We wouldn't tolerate a dictatorship, the only way we have absolute rule, and we had absolute rule in England, by an elected government though, they were fighting for their life and there were no such things as strikes.

23:30 People worked their butts off, they worked long hours, they did what they were supposed to do, unnecessary expenditure was just cut out, no houses, virtually no houses were built in Australia during the war, none were built in England. There was a hell of a shortage of houses in the war. When I was back as a civilian, I couldn't find anywhere to live, that hurt me, but I know why there were no houses built. Now, if we'd been preparing for war, all along the line, the way the dictatorships

24:00 would, the opposition and the press in Australia wouldn't tolerate it. That's one thing that, you know, stops George W being a real fool, the opposite, the other party in America and the free press in America keep an eye on him.

Does war solve problems?

Oh, that's a,

24:30 we're a war like species, you'll see war between two fellows having a punch up outside the pub tonight if you go into Moss Vale. People love power, Saddam Hussein had absolute power, the king of Saudi Arabia had absolute power, a lot of kingdoms have absolute power, and if you have absolute power, they get ambitious and want to conquer someone.

25:00 I don't, war, if we hadn't gone to war against Germany, we would've had a bigger problem. Would've been occupied by the Germans. Now, why did God make the Germans like they are, maybe he didn't. Maybe he only set up the world for us to live in and behave sensibly and we decided not to.

The war today, this long after it, what are the images

25:30 **that come into your mind?**

People, people, people have had a bigger impact on me than being shot at, an aircraft having an engine failure, people, and you know, it was a long time ago. The memory's getting dimmer, because there have been so many more vivid impressions since. Running a business in civilian life is sort of warfare,

26:00 you're competing against your competitors. It's not quite so lethal. Today's problems, even if there's a problem at home, are you married? Well, you got a girlfriend? Well if she let you down, goes off and hops into bed with someone else, that's a bigger problem than anything terrible that happened five years ago. Today's problems are bloody (UNCLEAR) important.

How did that experience in your youth,

26:30 **because you were very young back then, how did that experience change you and help you and set you up for your later life?**

The management experience helped me, I learned to manage, and I was very fortunate, I fairly quickly became a senior manager in an organisation where it was pretty tough business. It made me harder to cope with my children, because I was, expected a bit of air force discipline, when I came home, the poor little buggers,

27:00 gave them a terrible time. I think, you know, people who are returning from the bloody war, these days, get, need counselling on how to behave as civilians. I didn't know how to behave as a civilian, I, fortunately, I had a wonderful wife who gradually, gradually, gradually, changed my direction. I wasn't even used to coming home, I was still in the air force, and I was based

27:30 in the headquarters in Sydney, but when we knocked off, I'd go round to the mess and meet with my mates and drink, and I had a wife and child at home who hadn't seen me for three years during the war, and they were expecting to see me home at a reasonable time. She gradually altered my mindset, but adjusting to civil life is a challenge for some people. And a lot have never adjusted to it. The main

28:00 way to adjust to it, this is why I find it hard to answer your questions, is not to live in the past. I've been digging into the past all day today for you, but I've fortunately, it's never ever worried me, the past, I don't think of it. I've only been embarrassed by my friends to become the patron of this old air force association, I left them for dead for 40 years because I wouldn't want to live in the past.

28:30 I was never active in the RSL [Returned and Services League]. A lot of people think of it a lot, they can possibly remember much more than I can. But, you know, as an old fellow, let me tell you, living the, be more concerned about today and tomorrow than what happened 10 years ago.

Well, perhaps with that in mind, the archive will be around for 100 years, 50 years, 150 years, is there anything that you could say from your life experience

29:00 **that might be relevant to those people in the future?**

No, I can't. Look, it'll take me a bit of thought, and about an hour and I haven't got it, this girl, this dentist is coming especially to see me at bit short notice and I can't.

Well, no, we'll stop there.

Tape 9

NB. This transcript is of an interview filmed for the television series, Australians at War in 1999-2000. It was incorporated into the Archive in 2007.

01:00 **Well, we'll get going. I just wanted to start asking you by about what was life like in Australia in the 30s, in terms of what sense of national identity we had, where our loyalties were, what was life like for you then?**

Our sense of national identity was really developing. We'd

01:30 only been an independent dominion for less than forty years. We depended on; we hadn't severed the apron strings with England. And even the English Government didn't recognise that. I noticed, going through the archives where there were cables coming from the Prime Minister of His Majesty's Government of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of His Majesty's Government of Australia, saying we should do something, and a copy was

02:00 always sent to the Governor General. The Governor General had to make sure the Australian Colonial PM did as he was told. In my field, the air force, we, we had an air force. We were amateurs. All the democracies were amateurs, whereas the air forces of Germany and Japan were manned by professionals. The Germans had honed up their experience in the war in Spain,

02:30 the Japanese in Manchuria. But in Australia, our dependence on England meant that we, we had really obsolete aircraft; well that was our fault, not the fault of the English. But we had aircraft designed for the defence of Great Britain, which meant it wasn't necessarily suitable for the defence of Australia. It was obsolete. On top of all of that, we were just recovering from the Great Depression. And really, Australia's main

03:00 interest was getting over the Depression. We became aware that we were at risk, from my own, my own reading, in about 1937 we became concerned at the rise of Germany and the rise of power and nationalism in Japan. We were aware of what the Japanese were doing in Manchuria. And some far-sighted Australian businessmen warned the government, in fact they started an aircraft factory here,

03:30 and the government started to re-arm. But we were reassured, by well meaning English Government advisors that we needn't really fear the Japanese, because Singapore would stop any ambitions they had towards Australia. And of course they were, in England they were becoming concerned about the Germans too. So we were in a state of flux.

I'm wondering whether these

04:00 **are opinions that you got with hindsight or what you actually felt at the time, yourself? Where your own loyalties were and what you felt about what Australia's position was? If you can take yourself back to that period, in the late thirties.**

Well, my own concern came from my own family interests. I was fortunate or unfortunate to be related to Charles Kingsford Smith [famous Australian aviator] and he,

04:30 and he was, apart from being a pioneer, he knew a lot about aeroplanes. And when he decided that the best aeroplanes for civil work in the world were American, and they were, the reaction from England was quite severe. And even then, in the thirties, I became aware, as a boy, that our allegiance

05:00 to England was possibly not in our best interest in the aviation field, that's all I knew about. So I started to become aware of it then. I also became aware of it when I joined the air force as an officer cadet and where, we were first taught drill, rifle drill, rifle shooting and our chief ground instructor was an RAF [Royal Air Force] officer from the 'spit and

05:30 polish' English cadet School and we were taught to be English gentlemen. Not that I'm deriding English gentlemen, but some of it I thought was a bit over the odds. Finally, after a while, we learnt to drill well and behave ourselves. We learnt to fly. So you could see it, I guess I was a bit of an independent thinker. Not everybody else agreed with me.

I wonder where your

06:00 **loyalties were at that stage, given the kind of training you had and given the environment which you were being brought up, were you, first and foremost, loyal to Australia, or loyal to the British Empire?**

At that stage I was loyal to Australia. But I recollect when I was a small boy, about ten; my family had a flagpole in the garden. My brother and I used to put up the flag. And we always

06:30 put the Union Jack up first because that was much more important than the Australian ensign, which incidentally was the red Ensign, not the blue. And when I was at school, on one day a week, we saluted the flag, usually the Union Jack, sometimes the Australian ensign was flown, but always in an inferior position. Now I took that as being perfectly normal. We were British. Even when I joined the air force I

had to prove that I was British.

07:00 British, of course Australian meant British. But word was, I didn't have to show that I was an Australian citizen, I had to demonstrate I was a British subject. This was the way Australia, this is how we felt. We relied on England tremendously for all sorts of things. And it was just a gradual process of development. Of course the war hastened it.

How did you prove, or determine that you were a British subject?

07:30 I suppose being born in Australia proved that you were a British subject. But you know, you became one by, by birth. My first, when I first travelled overseas, I travelled in uniform. I didn't have a passport. But my first post war passport said I was a British subject. I don't want to give the impression I was anti-British.

08:00 I was pro-Australian. I was just interested in what was best for Australia. But we were British subjects I think till about 19, I don't know, about 1952 or '53, middle fifties. We were British subjects. Our passports said so.

Getting back to the business of Australia's preparedness or lack of preparedness, the war. At the time that you joined the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force],

08:30 **it was in its fledgling years really.**

Yes.

What did it consist of? What kind of aircraft did we have to prepare ourselves for the possible eventuality of war?

Well we had two main aircraft in our, we had fighter squadrons which had bi-plane Hawker Demon aircraft. Now

09:00 you've seen them. The Hawker Demon was the most beautiful aeroplane in the world to fly; it was one of my favourite aeroplanes to fly. It would have done well over the trenches in World War I. It was ideal for English use until about the middle thirties. But when we had the Hawker Demon, which was a bi-plane covered in fabric and a fixed undercarriage, the Germans and the Americans had all metal monoplanes with retractable undercarriages.

09:30 We also had a maritime aircraft, the air force and the government realised that in the event of war, the protection of our sea lanes was essential. Everything came and went by sea. And the maritime aircraft were things called Avro Anson , which was the first aeroplane we had in the air force with retractable undercarriage. You wound it up with about a hundred turns with a handle, with your right hand.

10:00 And so we had Avro Anson maritime aeroplanes. Our main bases were at Laverton out of Melbourne and Richmond out of Sydney. We had a training establishment at Point Cook, which was the home of the air force. The air force was founded there in 1913. We had plans to establish, when it was obvious there was going to be a war in 1937 or '38, maybe '38,

10:30 we had plans to establish an air base in Western Australia and one in Queensland. And I think the one in Western Australia was just about going by the time the war started. I wasn't there, I can't remember the date. But we were, we were great at air pageants. We could show that we, every year an air force station was open for an air pageant and we did very clever formation flying. We could burst

11:00 balloons that were full of hydrogen, rising up in the air, with a hook underneath the aircraft we could pick up messages from the army, because we didn't use radio. But if we were asked, the squadron commander was asked to take his squadron at night time some distance, find a target, attack it and find his way back to base, he couldn't. He lacked the equipment, he lacked the training and he didn't consider it was, it was something he should do.

11:30 And this gradually developed, I know by the time the war started I had flown at night time for three hours. Six months after the war had been going, and I'd been flying on maritime work and convoy patrol, I had accumulated another six hours flying at night time. Now war just doesn't stop when it gets dark.

Tell me about your experiences with the Hawker Demon. What was that going to be used for

12:00 **in the event of hostilities?**

I suppose when it was bought you didn't think of it that way. We were peace loving, we assumed there always would be peace. We had an air force because it was considered we should have an air force. And so we went to our mentors in England and said, "We need a new aeroplane, what shall we have?" and I'm simplifying it a bit, but that's more or less what happened. We did not

12:30 possess, in the air force, a department or a group or a directorate which worked out what our operational requirements were. We went to England and said, "We need a new aeroplane." And they said, "Well look at the Hawker Demon." There were a variety of these aeroplanes made by Hawker, single seater fighters and two seaters. Well, ours had to be general purpose, a fighter, a light bomber. Army co-operation, co-operating with the army in the field was quite a big thing, it still is.

13:00 So the Hawker Demon was a good general purpose aeroplane but in fact, was obsolete in design at the time this was coming out of the English factories. The Americans and the German factories were producing more modern aircraft.

Why did we get ourselves into that situation so close to the outbreak of hostilities and war? Why was it that Australia was so relatively unprepared?

13:30 Well it takes a time to change. We became aware I would say in about 1937, give or take twelve months, that we were exposed to risk from the north, that our air force was ill equipped. We set out to build a new, build a new aircraft factory in Australia because we realised, we were told by a wonderful guy called Essington Lewis, the

14:00 general manager of BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary Limited – mining company] who went overseas and visited Japan and Germany and England. And he said, "There's going to be a war. The English aircraft industry won't be able to cope, they'll be overloaded, if we want to have an air force we have to build our own." BHP and a number of other companies put up the money and we started building modern, all metal aeroplanes at Fisherman's Bend in Melbourne. The first one was a plane called the Wirraway.

14:30 We were aware of the threat from the north, and we did intend to arm, to equip Darwin and our advisors from the UK [United Kingdom] advised the government that wasn't necessary. That the fleet in Singapore would be strengthened in the event of, in the event of hostilities and of course the fleet was strengthened and as soon as the battleships arrived, in

15:00 early '42, they were sunk straight away by the Japanese Air Force. So we were aware, our military chiefs were aware, our government was aware but we were a tiny country, really, you know. Population of whatever it was, about six million people. We were desperately short of cash. We had few industries. We were building aeroplanes here before we built motor cars. We didn't have an automobile industry. We didn't have an electronics industry, not that electronics played a

15:30 big part. We didn't have an aero engine industry; we created all these during the war. In fact we got the message, we got off our tails very quickly.

Just to take you back a few years. Why did you choose to join the air force yourself? And I'm wondering what your sense of impending war was or was this just a professional choice?

It was a series

16:00 of events. I had always intended to study medicine and be a doctor. And the Great Depression stopped that. My father's income dried up because his business closed down. I then organised myself, then I got a job, because I needed one. I then found that I could take a position as a cadet engineer, and that's another profession, and get a Diploma in Engineering

16:30 by going to the Sydney Technical College at night time. And the firm that apprised me the job went broke. That had just happened when the air force started to expand. And the air force was very attractive. The pay was much higher than the pay I was getting as a clerk. At that time I was working during the day as a clerk, going to college at night time and to a local gymnasium one night a

17:00 week, boxing. There were a lot of boxing gymnasiums in George Street in those days. The air force looked after you, they paid you and they taught you. And they gave you a career. So it seemed attractive to me and also, I read the newspapers, I knew there was going to be a war. All these things added up. I applied, was knocked back on medical grounds.

17:30 Got a doctor to do a helpful medical report for me, which got me in.

What was your understanding of what war might be like, at that stage?

Ooh. What was your understanding when you were eighteen? I don't know. You didn't think, you didn't, you didn't think that far ahead. I thought of what

18:00 Point Cook Cadet College and the flying school there, meant to me. And indeed it meant a whole new life. But there was no war and there may not have been a war. It wasn't until I'd nearly finished my cadet training when Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, went to Czechoslovakia and signed an agreement with Hitler that the Germans could invade Czechoslovakia.

18:30 And Chamberlain came back to England and waved a piece of paper as he got off the aircraft and said, "This means peace in our time." And all my friends and I reckoned that that was phoney and there was going to be a war. And then nothing happened. Even for another twelve months because neither the Germans nor the British were ready for war. It wasn't until Germany invaded Poland that, Chamberlain had warned them that they had to stop, so when the

19:00 Germans invaded Poland in '39, the British said, "Well, we're at war with Germany." And I was listening to the radio that night and Bob Menzies, our Prime Minister, came on, on the radio and he said, "If England is at war with Germany, so are we." The Canadians might have done the same thing, but we and the Canadians would have been England's first allies. At that time we were getting ready for war. We had ordered a

19:30 squadron of very large four-engined flying boats for maritime work, made in England. We had all the personnel over there who were about to bring them out to Australia. And when the war started Menzies said to the British Government, "You keep them, you have them." So that was our first squadron there. And we straight away sent a squadron of fighters to the Middle East.

What was your

20:00 **response, when you heard Menzies give that speech?**

I had too much to drink in the mess that night. I thought, "Well, this is very exciting." You don't think, no. I, well we knew what was happening. We'd been in suspense for oh, I don't know, twelve or eighteen months, expecting like it would happen. And it seemed to me to clear the air and,

20:30 yes, I don't know whether I celebrated or I drowned my sorrow. But we sat up late and drank too much.

What happened, then, to the RAAF?

Two things. First of all, the Australian Government, having decided to send a second AIF [Australian Imperial Force], World War I

21:00 had the first AIF, the second AIF to the northern hemisphere, to the Middle East, to be under English command. The Menzies Government decided that it would be a balanced force and we'd send six RAAF squadrons. It was called the Expeditionary Air Force. And I volunteered for that, they were calling for volunteers. Well you didn't have to; I was permanent here so I had to go where I was sent.

21:30 And that didn't get far when the UK Government sent representatives to Australia and persuaded us not to do that. Instead that we should turn Australia into a vast training establishment, training pilots, navigators, gunners, wireless operators, air bombers and equip ourselves with training aircraft. And we did that very quickly. In no time we were churning out vast numbers of people to be

22:00 sent overseas to serve in squadrons under English control. We kept our maritime squadrons because that was very important, the protection of our sea routes. But it really meant that when the Japanese came in, we were pretty well into the war. We were fairly defenceless. When, as everybody knows they quickly, when they came into the war in our part of the world,

22:30 they quickly raced down Malaya, conquered Singapore and captured the 8th Division, raced across Indonesia destroying the few RAAF squadrons we had up there and started bombing Darwin. And Darwin, I think, was bombed as many times or more times than London. Not quite certain, a big place though. And we were, at one stage, expecting a Japanese task force to

23:00 come down the east coast of Australia, we had no fighter squadrons. We camouflaged Richmond Air Base. We laid explosive mines under the runways of our advance bases so that they could be destroyed, so that the Japanese couldn't occupy them. And fortunately the Japanese ran out of steam. But at that time we were completely defenceless, absolutely one hundred percent defenceless. Our air force was in, operational air force

23:30 was, had either been destroyed in Malaya, was in the Mediterranean or in London. Our army was in the Middle East and our navy was stretched out between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean and some of them had been sunk up in the Dutch East Indies. So, we were very lucky that the Japs ran out of steam.

What was the feeling at the time that the RAAF was absorbed, if you like, into the Royal Air Force, and the Empire Air

24:00 **Training Scheme was being established? Was there concern, from people like yourself about the possibility of Australia being left exposed?**

No. I think, I didn't have any concern, mainly because it was not a matter I thought about. I was too busy at what I was doing. I was either a pilot in a maritime squadron or an instructor or had a staff job for a while.

24:30 We were flat out once the war, the war was a phoney war for about twelve months, but once the Japanese came in it was a very serious war. You didn't think about, you didn't think about things like that, you got on with what you had to do. I didn't think at all.

So what was it that you were doing? Once the war broke out and there was a sense of a need for maritime surveillance and a threat to Australian shipping, what was your first and

25:00 **early role in the war?**

My first and early role in the war was a pilot, in the Maritime Squadron operating out of Richmond. I reported for duty there in October '39, a month after the war started. The first serious flight I made was in December, when a German merchant cruiser had laid mines and sunk some ships off the New Zealand coast. It had,

25:30 reports indicated it had sunk a ship off the Australian coast and we went out to look for survivors of the ship. In case we found the German Raider, we were equipped with bombs. First time that I'd ever carried them. They were World War I bombs. That showed, you know that's what we had, World War I bombs. And they each weighed a lovely imperial one hundred weight, one hundred and twelve pounds each. Unfortunately we saw no survivors of the ship, the

26:00 ship was sunk, and thank God we didn't strike the German. Then the following month, we escorted the 1st Brigade of the Second AIF overseas. They sailed out of Sydney in a convoy of three ships. I've forgotten their names now. They were three of the latest P&O [Pacific & Orient] ships, beautiful ships, steaming in at about twenty knots. Taking the, we escorted that, and we, and what you'd do, you'd search an area before

26:30 the ships entered it, to make sure there were no nasties skulking there. And then you did a close patrol close to it, looking for periscopes of enemy submarines. We did that sort of thing, we patrolled. Then I was doing staff work, I was Staff Officer at the time the Japanese submarines came into Sydney Harbour.

Just before we get onto that, what were the aircraft that you were flying when you went on that mission to?

Oh, the Anson, Anson aircraft, which had been equipped with long

27:00 range tanks. And but, its range was still modest. So we would fly out from Richmond to what we then called an advanced operational base, which might be at Coffs Harbour or Maruya or Nowra, where we would refuel there and then do our work off the coast from there. So we could escort

27:30 ships or patrol areas from the southernmost New South Wales border to the northern New South Wales border, which was six [(UNCLEAR)] patrol.

Once the war had been declared, there was a recruitment drive of course and, as I understand it, a large number of people indicated a preference for the air force. Why was that?

28:00 Oh, it was, aviation was attractive. It attracted a lot of the young men. There were a lot of potential Biggles [fictional pilot James Bigglesworth] about. A large number indicated preference for the air force, but a large number would have indicated a preference for the army and the navy. I don't know whether, I wouldn't say, look I've never seen the figures comparing one lot with the other

28:30 two, but the air force certainly couldn't take many, and was able to pick and choose. And we picked some, a lot of young men with a lot of ability and a lot of potential. That's what upset me so much later on in the war when I saw these people being killed who would have been doctors and dentists and scientists and politicians and God knows what. Australia never saw those men after the war.

29:00 The air crew were, in the main, fairly high calibre people. Only because the air force was able to pick and choose. There were a lot of, you know an air force needed about ten ground crew for every one air crew, so you know there weren't many air crew chosen, relative to the numbers who went into the ground staff.

What was the mood

29:30 **in Australia during that period, say of the phoney war. Was there a sense that Australia needed to prepare itself for war?**

No, there was a, there was bewilderment. Why we were at war and there was no, there was no war? I, when I left my squadron I went to Victoria to be instructing and I think we had a nice nine to five job and

30:00 worked five days a week. And I had sufficient petrol to live in a glamorous flat in Toorak and drive to Point Cook, down in Port Phillip Bay. And then after, you wouldn't know there was a war on. But after about a year, first thing I noticed, I couldn't get petrol and so I had to go and move closer, course I was married then, to a

30:30 scungy little apartment at Werribee, in amongst the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK [chicken] farms right next to the air base. And the hours of flying grew longer, the pressure on us to produce more and more people, because we had more and more aeroplanes. And after about a year the war started to become serious and then when Japan entered, of course it was deadly serious. It was no more; you know it was no more phoney war or fun.

Tape 10

00:30 **What was the**

01:00 **feeling at the time about the RAAF in a sense losing its independence and being absorbed through the Empire Air Training Scheme?**

I'm not aware of any feeling. When I went to fly in England, the badge on the uniform which said you're Canadian or Australian

01:30 or New Zealander or Pom [English], made no difference. It was an amazing experience actually. We, I had an Englishman and New Zealanders and Canadians serving under me. I answered to Englishmen. And dependent on the calibre and the competence of the people, not their race, it, I know there were disagreements

02:00 between the Churchill [Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom] Government, many disagreements between the Churchill Government and the Curtin [John Curtin, Prime Minister of Australia] Government. The Churchill Government really wanted the Australians completely integrated with the RAF. The Australians, for political reasons, said "We must have Australian squadrons." and Churchill feared that if that happened that he wouldn't, he would lose some of his control of them. But as an operating officer, it didn't matter much to me at all. I must admit that I,

02:30 no, I enjoyed flying in an Australian squadron, commanding an Australian squadron. I enjoyed commanding an RAF squadron and being chief instructor of a large RAF training establishment. Really it was the calibre of the officers, and one thing about England, by the time I got there in '43, they had been at war, and serious war, they thought they were going to be invaded.

03:00 Their senior officers in the RAF consisted of some good people and a fair number of duds, like we had. They had the motivation to get rid of their duds. All the senior officers I struck in the RAF were excellent men. And we weren't quite so highly motivated, here, to get rid of some of our donkeys. I'm not saying the air force had more idiots than the civil service or industry, but in war you notice if a senior person

03:30 isn't of the highest calibre, as I've said England got rid of theirs, and by the time they re-armed and sorted out what they were doing, by '43 or '44, they had an excellent air force.

What did the Empire Air Training Scheme do for Australia?

Well, in hindsight, bugger all. You know,

04:00 it meant that we might have defeated Germany because we gave priority to defeating Germany. Taking second place meant the defence of Australia. It could have meant that Australia was invaded. And my English friend said, "Don't worry about that Rollo, once we've licked the Germans we'll come back and keep the Japanese out." Well, having had a wife and baby in Australia and a sister and parents and many friends, that didn't excite me at all.

04:30 The Empire Air Scheme laid us open to that. On the other hand, if we hadn't had an Empire Air Scheme, and Germany hadn't been defeated, we might have, we might have been worse off. There was no doubt, from my knowledge of what these occupied countries went through, that occupation by the military forces of Germany or Japan were unbelievably horrid. I had a brother who was engaged solely

05:00 in a squadron supporting the resistance forces in Poland and France. And the night he was shot down he was taking four resistance fighters to France and dropping them by parachute, plus some radio equipment. And through his squadron, I learnt what it was like, with the German occupation of France, with the Gestapo and the SS units.

05:30 They even used to frighten their own people, they were so ruthless. Had Germany won, we might have been occupied by German forces, I don't know, you never can tell. But the Empire Air Scheme was a helluva gamble. But we made the commitment before Japan was in the war and we made, we would not have made the commitment, without a doubt, I don't know what went on in Menzies' mind, but I know he would not have made that commitment

06:00 had he realised that so soon, the Japanese would suddenly decide we'll attack Pearl Harbor and attack our forces in Malaya. We were terribly exposed. It worked out, thank God.

What kind of pressure do you think Menzies was under from the British?

Under great pressure. Under very great pressure.

06:30 And he admired them. He was a lawyer. He admired their sense of justice, the British legal system. He, I think that impressed him as much as anything else. He wasn't a military man. He could show the common touch but in the main he didn't have it. He looked at everything from a legal point of view. Yes he was under terrific pressure, absolutely terrific

07:00 pressure. Every Australian Prime Minister was. At least he didn't have the pressure, pressure from MacArthur [United States General Douglas MacArthur] that John Curtin had. The Americans weren't involved in the war then. He was under terrific pressure from his own party, you see. He headed the United Australia Party, which later became the Liberals. And there was the Country Party. And the Country Party and the United Australia Party were at each others throats. He

07:30 was, in the end he was in a position where he couldn't provide sound government because his own, his own governing party were putting pressure on him.

What do you see as the difference in approach between Australian Prime Ministers during the war?

Well, I s'pose it depends on timing but Curtin, when

08:00 Curtin became Prime Minister, in my mind he was one of our finest Prime Ministers. He wasn't of a political party that my family had supported but I certainly voted for him. It was interesting you know, the Australian electoral system used to bewilder the English, the idea of us actually having the, the right to vote when we were in England, that surprised them.

08:30 And we voted for the 1943 election. In fact I had an interesting experience in 1945 when I was commanding an RAF unit and Britain called an election. The war wasn't quite yet over. And I said to the Transport Officer, "Well you'll need to lay on vehicles to take the troops to the polling station to vote." And he said, "Why?" I said, "Well, to go to vote." He said, "They won't vote, they

09:00 wouldn't be interested." And I doubt if more than one in fifty of the five or six hundred Royal Air Force troops I had under my command, bothered to vote. So they couldn't understand us taking it so seriously. Well we did, because it had been compulsory in Australia. But anyway, Curtin had a fantastic load. He had MacArthur to

09:30 cope with. He had Churchill. He had to build up defence industries in Australia. He had to cope with Australians being taken prisoner of war in Singapore. He had to cope with the threat to Australia from the Japanese. He had to cope with the problems of our forces overseas. Even silly things, which I think were silly, Menzies had put the, the

10:00 Australian Navy under the command of the Royal Navy. Soon Australian Navy ships in Australian ports, the sailors were subject to Royal Navy disciplinary terms. You got problems with that. I don't know how he coped. No wonder he died in harness, he was never a physically strong man. But he got by. And he must have had some; he had a few strong men in his cabinet and some bloody troublemakers.

10:30 But he did a fabulous job. And it's a pity he wasn't there after the war to enjoy the fruits of victory.

During those early years of the war, before you left Australia, what was the mood in the civilian population? Was it, did people talk about business as usual, not being directly affected apart from some rationing, what

11:00 **mood did you detect in the population at the time?**

I don't think I can answer that. There must have been a mood, but I think people went about their daily lives. You see, when they thought war was get, when war didn't turn out as we expected it would, we were reading of massive air raids in England and thousands of English being killed by the German bombers in the first week of

11:30 the war, when that didn't happen, people went back to what they were doing. We were recruiting the second AIF. We weren't recruiting a lot for the air force in the beginning, because we had no aeroplanes. When we started to get aircraft, we, the mood changed when we were threatened ourselves. Once the first bombs fell on Darwin, we knew that there was a war. And once our, the feeling in

12:00 Australia, when Singapore fell, was absolutely ghastly. To think that so quickly that massive arsenal there was captured, a whole division of ours, not properly trained either, were in a prison camp. We didn't know what was happening to them. Yet we all thought it was pretty terrible. I felt awful, myself. There was nothing we could do.

12:30 **What was your feeling when Darwin was attacked?**

One of interest, I suppose. Disappointment that the RAAF could do nothing. From what I knew it wasn't a terribly serious attack. It looked as though it could have been a forerunner of an invasion. The usual thing is you bomb a place and you

13:00 bomb the defences and then you land troops there. And I knew what we were doing in case that happened. No it's, I s'pose I felt, obviously I felt concerned and worried. But there were so many other things to worry about, too. You know war is total on all, usually on, a real grown up war, on all fronts.

13:30 You may as well sleep at night.

What's your recollection of the Japanese midget submarine raid on Sydney Harbour?

Having a row with the navy and making a boo boo myself. I was the operations officer at Richmond Base and it became apparent, now Sydney Harbour was

14:00 protected from this. There was a boom across the entrance to the Harbour just south of when you came in from the Heads. And ships had to be identified before the boom was opened and ships could come in. Now the first midget submarines, or the first two midget submarines, followed a merchant ship coming in and got into this area. No one knew that they were there until they fired a torpedo, a couple of torpedoes, and they sank an old ferry boat,

14:30 a very large ferry boat, which was used as a dormitory. And I received a message at Richmond from the Navy Operations Office, Navy Operations Room in Garden Island that this had happened. Then I received an order. The admiral ordered us to send out aircraft to look for another submarine. Well at that time we had the new Hudson aircraft,

15:00 but they had no, but as yet they had no surface to, they had no air to surface radar, later on they did. So looking for a submarine at night without radar was useless. So, we weren't terribly happy to receive that order from the navy, telling us what to do. So I, my job was to, to lay out the tracks for the ships to fly, for the aircraft to fly.

15:30 And I laid something on and advised the squadron to take off in the dark over the search area where another submarine might be at first light. Well, we'd also been told by Air Force Headquarters that we had to protect the airfield from a landing of enemy aircraft, or enemy troops, when we weren't using it.

16:00 And we were originally told, do what they did in England, when they thought England was going to be invaded. Every night, when flying had finished, we'd put all our motor vehicles out on Richmond Airfield, now there were no runways, it was a big grass field, and I remember the first night we put about sixty or seventy vehicles all over the field, so you couldn't land, or you'd run into these vehicles. And then it was obvious, someone said, "Well if you leave all the keys in them someone could steal them." So

16:30 the drivers got all the keys and put them on the desk in the duty pilot's office. And there were about sixty or seventy vehicles and there were sixty or seventy keys. The next morning when we had to clear the airfield, it took us about four hours to find the right key. So we, still being told we had to do this, we sunk some earthenware pipes into the ground and got some light railway line lengths from a

17:00 quarry nearby, stuck these lengths of railway line in, at night time and took them out in the morning. On this night the submarines came into the Harbour. We were taking off at night time, so we sent out a tractor trailer, low vehicle, to go up and down these lines of pipes and take them all out. Well they missed a couple in the dark, and of course

17:30 a couple of our Hudsons taxiing to takeoff ran into them. Fortunately they weren't going very fast, but they damaged them. So I had to keep well away from the Op [operations] of the Hudson squadron for about a week, otherwise they would have shot me. But that's my recollection of the night the submarines attacked us.

What was the sense then of the danger to Australia, and Sydney in particular?

Well, it

18:00 was, it was felt very strongly by a lot of residents of the Eastern Suburbs. You could pick up a house at Bellevue Hill, very cheaply. But once again, being in the air force with things to do, you got on with the war. This was what you expected and you, you were too busy trying to work out where the mother ship might be, mother submarine, and it was obvious that they'd been at war. The navy decided, and quite rightly, that there'd been a mother submarine.

18:30 And we were looking for it and we were looking for other things. But the sense of danger was felt very strongly in the Eastern Suburbs, I can tell you.

Now, at what stage did you then leave Australia to go to England?

I left Australia in about the middle of '43. And I was

19:00 rather pleased in a way, just before I left I'd been in a Hudson taking some VIPs [Very Important People] on a tour of the North. And we'd been to Port Moresby, then to Milne Bay, and the conditions under which the air force lived, at Milne Bay, were no doubt much better than the army, but to me they weren't appropriate for air force. Living in tents and showering under a bucket,

19:30 walking in mud all the time, you know. And then bad food, getting dysentery and flying when you've got dysentery's a nasty, smelly, messy business. And I was told I was to be posted to the squadron at Milne Bay. And when I got back, there was a posting signal but it was to England to fly Sunderland flying boats, which was operations I was familiar with and knew.

20:00 And I wandered off to England to fly Sunderlands in the, in Coastal Command in the Battle of the Atlantic. And when I got there I was told no, I wasn't to fly Sunderlands, I'd be flying bombers because, quote, "There was a temporary shortage of flight commanders." by that time I was a squadron leader, "There's a temporary shortage of flight commanders and bomber commanders." of course there never was a temporary shortage, they were permanently short. So I went to a Lancaster squadron and

20:30 stayed there and then a new Lancaster Squadron was formed and I was given the command of it and formed it. And when I'd done my tour of duty, I went to a training unit and then I was offered the command of an RAF Mosquito Pathfinder Squadron. I think the reason why they gave that to me, the war was drawing to an end. The British government had plans to send a,

21:00 a task force to the Pacific. The air force was to be called Tiger Force. I think as much as anything else they needed to have a force in the final stages of the war, so they'd have some presence around the

negotiating table when it was all over. Because of my experience in the Pacific, and also because I was a navigator as well as a pilot, I had this most exciting position.

21:30 It was in the, it was the most beautiful aeroplane to fly over Germany. You could fly at twenty eight thousand feet, whereas the Lancasters were pushed to get to twenty four thousand feet. You were a small aircraft; you were made of wood so that the radar didn't pick you up. Anyway then it became apparent for this Tiger Force wouldn't go and I came home. But my, most of my operational

22:00 experience was in Lancasters.

At the time that you received this posting to England, what was your personal situation, your family situation?

I was married to my wife, Grace, who you've met. I had a baby daughter. And I could leave them safely. She lived in Mosman and she, an aunt who had a

22:30 giant house, converted the upper floor into a delightful apartment. She had parents and aunts just living round the corner. She had friends everywhere. When she married me I was in the air force. She knew what to expect. I knew what to expect. I knew it was going to happen sooner or later. I know when she, when I left Sydney by train to go to Melbourne to board a ship,

23:00 it was a sad parting. But I thought I was going to fly Sunderlands, I thought, 'That's pretty safe. I'll see her again.' Well it was two and half years before I did. But, had I known I was going to Bomber Command, I think I would have been a bit nervous.

Why?

Well, the Bomber Command casualties, even in the early stage of the war, were quite horrendous. In the early stages of the war, the bomber aircraft

23:30 were ill equipped. The defensive arms were a couple of three, sometimes one, sometimes two .303 guns, whereas the German fighters might have four twenty millimetre cannons. When they flew by day they were wiped out of the sky and when they flew by night they couldn't find the target. It took some years to develop the skills and the equipment to make them an effective night fighter force. They did do it, but it took them a couple of years.

24:00 **What, not withstanding the fact that you thought you were going to fly the Sunderlands in the 10th Squadron, what were your feelings about leaving your wife and daughter behind?**

Well, I suppose the feelings that anyone would have. I,

24:30 they were strong feelings, but not as strong as you might think. First of all I wasn't aware that I'd be away for so long. I wasn't aware the war was going to become so serious and so many people were going to be killed. I felt at that time, in '43, that the immediate threat to Australia had lifted. The Japanese move southwards had been halted. You know, it could start again and you never underestimate the enemy. But what I thought

25:00 it was, I don't think I could have left early in '41 or '42. I might have refused, I don't know. I was a good officer. I did as I was told. But by the middle of '43 I didn't feel that she was in any great personal danger. I was a permanent officer in the air force. There was a war to be fought and I did as I was told. And I was excited at the thought of flying. The Sunderland was a very exciting,

25:30 large aircraft.

Once you were in England, and you realised that you were going to be reassigned to Bomber Command, what did you know at that stage about the casualty rates in Bomber Command?

At that time I knew very little. And I was surprised when I found out that they were so high. I was

26:00 a little bit wary of my posting to Bomber Command when I was told that, by our senior air vice marshall in England, a chap called Air Vice Marshall Rigley. When I asked him what I'd be flying, he said "Lancasters." I was quite happy. I'd never seen a Lancaster. I'd never seen a picture of a Lancaster. I'd heard about the Lancaster, which was the newest, fastest aircraft, most manoeuvrable,

26:30 fly the highest. It had the reputation as being a wonderful large aircraft, indeed it was, although it was very poorly defended with its defensive armament. And I thought, 'Well, this'll be quite good.' You know the government and the air force didn't put headlines in the paper about our losses. I wasn't aware of it at the time.

27:00 I became well aware of it when I was, when I was flying and I had men under my command lost. And when you're flying yourself, it didn't concern me too much, but I was an experienced pilot. But what was terrible, because of the pressure on us to produce crews, young men with less than four hundred hours flying, which today in civil flying meant they were

27:30 still beginners, were setting off in command on aircraft to fly in all weather, sometimes the most shocking weather, to find a well defended target deep in Germany. Fend off attacks all the way. Make decisions. Come back to England, possibly short of fuel. Find his air field, where the weather might be

bad, and be diverted to another air field.

28:00 And they were coming up against German fighter pilots, who had no casualties, who were highly experienced, may or may have shot down five, ten, twenty bombers already. They knew their job. And these youngsters really didn't, didn't have a chance. Now I felt I did, because over the target, I faced the same risk as everybody else, but en route to the target I felt that in my greater all weather flying experience,

28:30 and I had made a point of getting all weather flying experience, and the fact that I knew I had a very, very well disciplined crew who understood from me that every second in the air they had to be vigilant. Inexperienced people thought you could relax for a while. But of course, eighty to ninety percent of our flying time was in German air space. In fact

29:00 my own squadron, 463 Squadron, flew over four, four million kilometres on operations in a period of about less than two years, of which eighty percent was over German air space. All that time you had to be vigilant. Well experience helped you there. Many young, many crews went together as friends. You'd have seven

29:30 sergeants, they were all mates. The captain found it rather hard to discipline his drinking mates if they were slacking a bit. I never found it hard to discipline. I used my rank. And this was no, due to no weakness of theirs, and they were often highly educated, capable men. The sort of men I would have said would have been doctors and scientists or professional people

30:00 of distinction. But they were terribly inexperienced, both as pilots and as commanders of aircraft. And Germany was defended with the most capable air defence system you could possibly imagine. About twenty percent of all the ammunition

30:30 Germany produced while they were having land war, twenty percent of all the ammunition they produced, was shot at us. About more than half their heavy guns and light guns were kept in Germany to shoot at the bombers. They had over a million men in uniform manning their anti aircraft defences. They had superb radar, before we even crossed the coast they knew how

31:00 we were on our way. As soon as they picked the force coming in, they would alert the entire defence system, which was very, very practiced and very, very competent. And if they, would try to get some inkling of what our target would be, and if they did have some inkling they were ready for us. Well, we were wiped out. Also the Germans

31:30 and the British had spies in each camp, there were German spies in England. A lot of English spies and American spies on the continent. For example, if our, if we knew we were operate, we'd operate on Germany if the weather permitted, usually no more than two nights running. Usually by the second, end of the second night, we had so many, so much

32:00 damage to our aircraft and lost so many crews, we'd need a break but we night run three nights running. So you might, operations might be laid on. My procedure was, first thing in the morning, was check the weather and hope that it'd be lousy. If the weather was acceptable to fly, particularly the weather had to be good, good enough to permit you to land and then [(UNCLEAR)] operating was mainly in the winter of '43 and '44.

32:30 We had very bad weather. And you couldn't get back to your air field if you were running short of fuel and possibly injured crew members. And it was very difficult, so we had to have good weather when we got back. We still came back in terrible weather, but if the weather looked as though operations were on, I would expect that as squadron commander I would be told that it would be operating that night. You then

33:00 checked out what aircraft you had serviceable. If some of them had only returned at say four am or five am in the morning and they were damaged, you know you didn't know how many aircraft you'd have. You might have lost some crews. Then once the target was decided, all communications in and out of the air force base stopped. All telephone lines were cut.

33:30 All movements by vehicles were stopped. We knew where we were going. No one else outside the station could find out.

Tape 11

00:30 **Rollo, what were the consequences, do you think, of people with relative inexperience, young men with relative inexperience, having to fly these large aircraft under those**

01:00 **pretty arduous conditions?**

Well, you combine that with the weather, and that's God awful weather. Some tired aircraft with a bit of unreliability, and the best air defence system the world has ever seen, and it meant that our losses were horrendous. I've, at the time I didn't bother to count but I've since checked up.

01:30 Within seven months of forming my squadron, I'd lost the numbers equivalent of a full complement. In other words I had an average of between twenty and twenty five crews, depending on how many had been shot down, I lost those. That's about a hundred and seventy men in seven months. In one month I lost a third of the squadron. In one night when we sent just fourteen aircraft to

02:00 Berlin, I lost four. That night we, were the first squadron to be equipped with a new air to air radar to enable us to detect enemy fighters. Well the Germans obviously were aware of the frequency, and they homed in, their radar picked up our transmissions and they homed in on us. And this was a most appalling night for the war for me, when I was waiting for the, I wasn't flying; I'd been flying the night before. I couldn't believe it when

02:30 out of the fourteen that went out only ten returned. And I remember, I was just checking up some notes I made at the time, only today, It was so obvious that I was so badly affected that the station commander came and counselled me. And his senior, senior air commodore, a man of great age and wisdom, he must have been in his fifties, came and counselled me. The next day

03:00 the air marshall commanding the group, because you know to lose people was hard to take. I could take everything but that. Particularly losing, put it this way, I made a point of writing a letter to the next of kin of every man who'd lost his life in my squadron. If I knew them, I could say something about them. Sometimes they'd arrive, but they'd report to me,

03:30 I'd check their training, their training records, if they were ready for operations, I'd put on ops. If they'd need a bit more training I'd give it to them. But they'd report to me. You'd see them in the mess, the next night they'd be killed. Writing about, to the next of kin, of a man you don't even know was very hard. But it was, you know people have likened it to the Charge of the Light Brigade, except with

04:00 the Charge of the Light Brigade only had to do it once. We had to do it thirty times in our first tour of operations. In the worst part of the war, when I was, and there may have been worse times, but in my experience the air crew had an average life of thirteen trips. Well if you have to do thirty to get an average of thirteen, for those that do the thirty, a lot were killed in their first, second, third or fourth.

04:30 And I've lost my thread on that one. You'd better cut that out.

What, how would you learn about the losses?

When they, you learnt about the losses when they didn't turn up. Now, what'd you'd do, let's assume they were landing back at our, my base, which was an air field called Waddington,

05:00 near Lincoln. If Wadding was open for them, now if Wadding was going to be closed, they'd be sent a radio message, they'd be diverted somewhere else, where the weather was good. You knew what time they were due back. You knew what time at which they would have to have landed because they would be run out of fuel. And as they came back they'd call up. It was always the most wonderful thing in the world for me, when I'd call up and you'd hear an English girl's voice, the first thing that I,

05:30 you know, I heard was a woman's voice, you usually knew her on, in the control tower, who'd acknowledge your call. Well, some would drag, some would drag in late in dribs and drabs and when you realised that some were very late, you would get on the phone to emergency air fields near the coast, where sometimes some aircraft would land there if they were badly shot up. And you'd find that one of your aircraft was there.

06:00 Otherwise they just disappeared and in many cases they're still disappeared. Some of them were, blew up in the air. Quite a lot did. And the bombs and the fuel and everything went up in the most God-awful terrific explosion, great gout of red flame. There was really nothing much left to identify. Sometimes they crashed into the ground, diving vertically, and those made a hole in the ground.

06:30 Sometimes they crashed into the sea. And my brother, who was finally shot down over France, was also shot down over the North Sea. He was lucky, his aeroplane went in the sea and he got picked up by a British, British patrol boat. Sometimes the aircraft was shot down and you parachuted down. Now

07:00 to land in the German city that you'd been bombing was a very dangerous thing. Civilians did what any civilians would do. The air crew were usually strung up on their own parachute shrouds or whatever and quietly buried. If you could find a policeman or a man in uniform you rushed up to him and put your arms around him. He protected you. On the other hand, if you were shot down over, if you parachuted down over

07:30 one of the occupied countries, France, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, you usually tried to find the resistance forces in that country. And in France they were very strong and very, very brave. Many, many Frenchmen lost their lives under interrogation by the Gestapo [German secret police] because they, it was known they'd been helping air

08:00 crew escape. And some of us did evade, it was called evading, we were practiced at it. I could cross miles and miles of Lincolnshire country without anyone seeing me. Because you could expect to be shot down, because there was a chance if you got to the ground alive, we all carried what was called an escape kit.

08:30 And I suppose the most important item in it was money in the denominations of the country over which you were flying, in used notes, not forged. Because if you met up with the underground, they needed money, they might have to bribe someone or buy you some clothing. I carried a passport photograph of myself as a railway worker because the underground had lots of good forgers. They could forge you

09:00 false identity papers but they couldn't get a photograph because the Germans controlled all the photographic paper. So you took your passport photo. I took, we took forged food coupons. All food was rationed. You had to be fed. So, I've still got some outside, I'll show them to you later. You took some benzidine tablets so when you got to the ground a bit tired and shaken you'd,

09:30 you'd swallowed some of these and you went up and 'went'. A compass. You took maps, silk maps which could pack in. So one always had a chance of, if you were shot down, of not being captured and, or being taken a prisoner of war.

Describe to me the feeling that

10:00 **you would have as you'd sit at the end of that runway waiting to take off on an op.**

Is it going to be very cold? The cold was one of our greatest enemies. Flying at, say, minus forty three degrees Celsius in an aircraft which has no real insulation in it and you've got a cold draft of air coming through from the

10:30 front gun turret, was agonising. What was the weather like? As squadron commander, I was keeping an eye on the other aircraft to make sure they were doing as they should do. You'd check with your crew, all the crew were okay, and you'd wait for a green signal. There was complete radio silence. You didn't wait for a tower to tell you it was

11:00 okay to take off, because a lot of activity like that would have been picked up by the Germans. It's interesting having an enemy only just across the [English] Channel. You'd get a green light and off you'd go. Your heart was in your mouth for a short period because the aircraft were always overloaded, loaded so much that you could just get off the ground. So until you'd retracted your undercarriage and the flaps were in take off position,

11:30 you would not have held height had you lost one engine, you would have just gone in straight ahead, but once you'd picked up enough speed and you'd got your wheels up and the flaps up and the aeroplane was clean. Lancaster was such a great aircraft, even with a full fuel load, a full fuel and bomb load, if you had an engine failure you'd get by. Lightly loaded, you could lose two engines on the same side and you could still get by. But,

12:00 you were concerned until, yes you were very concerned until you had the wheels up. This is my point, what happened to that poor fellow in the Concorde.

So, then describe what it's like flying into enemy territory.

Well you got ready for them.

12:30 **Rollo, just picking up where we left a moment ago, just describe to me, now, once you've taken off, what's going through your mind?**

Well, with radar, there are no surprises in air warfare. And it was an

13:00 electronic war even then, it was a high technology war, the radar was pretty, was fairly basic compared with what we have now. But we knew as we were approaching the enemy coast, and it was all enemy coast whether it was Denmark or Holland or Belgium or France, we knew that the enemy radar would have picked us up and would be alerting the system. Now you made sure that everything in the

13:30 air craft worked properly. The gunners would check their guns. The navigator made certain that he had all the equipment that he wanted. The air bomber, at the right time, would start to chuck out an anti radar device we had, which was called 'window', which were strips of aluminium foil which would make it difficult for the enemy radar to actually decide, to decide on the exact size of the force.

14:00 But they'd pick up this 'window' and they'd know there was something coming. And you were busy climbing for height. I liked to be as high as I could because as you crossed the enemy coast, the first batteries, which were heavy batteries, would fire at you. They would be four or five guns would fire at once. They were heavy anti air craft guns and so their shells would explode at your height, which might be twenty thousand feet, give or take some thousand

14:30 feet. And by the time you were close to them they had a different radar onto you which would [(UNCLEAR)] picking you out as an individual, predicting where you would be when the shells would burst. And their aim was to burst four or five shells right around you. Well, when a gun fires at night time, muzzle flash is reflected

15:00 on the ground, and you just see out of the corner of my eye I'd see a little, little, quickest lightning, lightning flash. Four or five little flashes on the ground. And I'd know they had fired. And on the assumption they were firing at me, and they may not have been, I would alter course or height or speed, so by the time the shells had burst, I wouldn't be were they'd predicted I'd be. Now sometimes they hit

you, sometimes mainly they missed you.

15:30 And it was interesting, the first time that, shells burst just in front of me, I learned what cordite smelled like, which is a very distinctive smell, a cloud of cordite smoke. Once you'd crossed that, and providing you avoided German defend, defended German areas, the threat was from the German

16:00 night fighters and they were the biggest threat of the lot. And you'd come across the first lot of night fighters and of course you couldn't see them until they became very close. They could see you because you had four engines with hot exhaust. And it was essential that you saw them before they started shooting at you. And you might

16:30 encounter a number and you may not encounter any. You could be shot down. And when you reached the target area, of course, there were barrages of fire. You wouldn't, and also it was necessary to do a straight run. We didn't drop guided bombs, so you had to be pointing the aircraft in the right direction and drop the bomb in exactly the right place so that forward

17:00 movement of the aircraft would guide the bomb. And if you did it properly, the bomb would hit the target. So you'd make a very long, straight run at a constant speed through an area that was alive with bursting flack and with searchlights and it was sheer luck whether you survived or not. The first couple of times I did it, I, I surprised myself. I actually found myself praying. I never thought

17:30 I'd do that. But after about three times I realised the people on the ground would be praying to the same deity as I was and they might be praying harder. So I gave up. And once you had dropped your bombs, you then kept flying the same straight and level course. We took a photograph of every target we dropped our bombs on. As you dropped the bombs, you dropped

18:00 a photoflash at, oh about, I don't know the height now, some height above the ground, it went off and it was brilliant. Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant magnesium flare and it would illuminate the area that your bombs were going to hit and at the same time a, a lens on a camera opened, some film was

18:30 exposed. So if at the moment you dropped the bombs you went screaming off in all directions, you wouldn't have photograph where you'd bombed. This meant that the, when the bombing raid was over and the photographs were examined, the intelligence staff back at base would know fairly quickly whether the target was attacked properly. See we all said we hit the target. We all felt we had, but we hadn't all hit

19:00 it. And getting this information quickly was fairly important. It was usually confirmed the next day. Weather permitting, the day after a raid, a high flying Spitfire aeroplane, which would go to about forty thousand feet, would fly over and photograph it. You know, there were no secrets and no privacy in war at all.

How vulnerable did you feel, personally, through all of this?

19:30 Over the target I felt vulnerable. On the way to and from the target, I had absolute confidence in the rear gunner I had, who never, never relaxed. He had taken the Perspex out of his turret so he was, 'cause your night vision can be impaired by looking through plastic

20:00 material, and he constantly rotated his target from side to side and he looked up and down. He saw everything there was to see. He never let me be surprised by a fighter that, see most people were shot down by, the first time they knew there was a fighter there, there were cannon shells pouring into the aircraft and a Lancaster would burst into flames and explode very quickly.

20:30 Only one night I was concerned, when his, his heating didn't work. He, because he was exposed, as I've said, for hour after hour in temperatures of minus thirty to minus forty five Celsius, in wind, he had electrically heated boots and suit and gloves. And if it didn't work, particularly your extremities, your fingers and your toes would get, be frostbitten and if they were badly

21:00 frostbitten you'd lose them. And also if you're freezing cold after a couple of hours you didn't work very well, you were inefficient. One night his heating failed and we had the option of continuing with an inefficient gunner who was going to be frostbitten, and he planned to be a dentist after the war, well a dentist without any fingers wouldn't be any good, or we would have pulled him

21:30 out of the turret and he would have been okay but then we would have had no one watching our rear. So I, it was the one night that I cancelled the, cancelled the operation at about twenty thousand feet over France and returned. It wasn't the, it wasn't the thing to do, but, and I did it very reluctantly, but that's what I did.

What were your feelings about the people who were the targets of your bombs,

22:00 **or the inadvertent target of your bombs, in those German cities?**

I'd no feeling for them at all. I had the utmost admiration for the German Air Force. They were, they were beautifully equipped and extremely efficient. The civilians, I had no feeling for. I was conscious of the

22:30 fact that they had been hysterical in the support they'd given Hitler and his government when it occupied Austria and Czechoslovakia and France and peaceful Denmark, that many of them had had their homes looted, that had been brought back. They had stood by while their, the members of their, their country, who were Jews, had been carted off

23:00 to degrading life and possibly a degrading death in concentration camps. I didn't hate them but I certainly didn't feel sorry for them. They were busy, busy, all these cities we attacked were industrial cities, they were busy producing guns, air craft, ammunition. And our attacks were successful in cutting

23:30 back their output of guns, ammunition, air craft, tanks, trucks, by quite a fantastic amount.

24:00 **I am just going to, just ask you that question again... how did you feel about people in those cities who were copping the bombing?**

Well I had no time to feel about them or for them. I might have felt sorry or sympathetic or angry. My feeling first of all was for the German forces, and it was one of

24:30 admiration for their air force. I never believed in underestimating my enemy and they were very, very good and, and I had to admire them. Their defence, their anti air craft defence systems were very good. But my job as a squadron commander was to see that my squadron attacked and destroyed enemy targets, and that the aircraft got back to base. I was also aware

25:00 that a vast proportion of the population of Germany, and I don't know how many, but it's an awful lot, had been almost hysterical in their support and love of Adolf Hitler as he proved the German superiority by marching in and conquering little countries like Czechoslovakia and Holland and Belgium and Denmark and even poor, demoralised France. Many of them

25:30 had loot at home that had been taken from these conquered countries and they'd stood by while their fellow citizens of the Jewish faith were carted off to a degrading death in concentration camps. Now that didn't make me hate them or not but I had a job to do and I felt if we did that we'd, we'd go on our way of winning the war. It's funny,

26:00 personal feeling doesn't come into it at all. You've got so many other things to do. A four engine bomber, even in those days, was a complicated piece of machinery. There were a lot of things to worry about. Then there was the weather. And the enemy defences. You didn't think about the people on the ground.

What about any sense of responsibility for the men under your command?

Oh a vast sense of

26:30 responsibility. I think like any, any CO [Commanding Officer], I was concerned about their health, that they had the best medical attention that they could, if they picked up something like a cold. That their equipment was the best that you could get. That they were trained, thoroughly, because in the air war you need constant training because tactics were

27:00 constantly changing and new equipment was constantly coming in and you had to learn to use it. Also concerned about their, their physical wellbeing, their quarters. Their morale, now never had any trouble with the morale with my people. I think morale depends on the, on the character of the person. Well the character of all the Australians in my squadron

27:30 was perfect.

What kind of characters were they? Tell me about them. Just give me a thumb-nail sketch of the kind of typical.

Wild bastards, some of them. They misbehaved on the ground. They lived wildly. Some of them loved foolishly. Some of them got into scrapes. In the air,

28:00 every time they took off, they were determined to, and seriously determined, to attack the target they'd been told to attack. Due to their inexperience, some of them didn't do as well as they could have. A few of them let their ill discipline on the ground permeate into the air, but there were only a few.

28:30 And I wasn't popular when I smartened some of them up. But in the main they were an absolute delight to command. I was also fortunate that, you see a squadron isn't just the commanding officer, there are flight commanders, there's an adjutant. Each group of, of air crew, the gunners, the navigators, the bombers, had a gunnery leader or a navigation leader, all these people were professionals.

29:00 They did their job properly. The whole system worked remarkably well. In fact the whole RAF system worked remarkably well. Our ground organisation plus the organisation in my aircraft could, within six hours notice, have a whole squadron bombed up, attacking a target anywhere from the north of Norway

29:30 to the Mediterranean coast of France, east as far as Poland. And in that six hours we of course could have changed the target at least once and changed the bomb load and changed the fuel load at a given time at all, take off and gone about their job. Now that, that took terrific organising ability, just plain, good organising and of course it was developed as time went on. People in the squadron were good. The

people supporting us were good.

30:00 It was very good management training for me.

How close did you get to some of these characters?

The air crew? Any, any crew member became very, very close to their crew members. Once you've shared a lot of frightening experiences with someone else, you have a feeling that's, a bonding that's very, very strong.

30:30 When you know your life depends on another person doing his job, and it's entirely up to him. You know I said the bonding is strong, when you'd finished your tour of operations you went off somewhere else, so you couldn't maintain the friendship, except with a few. Some of my oldest friends that I, that I remain closest to are people that had gone through the twelve months officers training school

31:00 at Point Cook before the war. But most of, some of the people I was closest to were killed. And, I've seen more of some of my squadron comrades in the recent years than I did during the war. But most of the people who served with me, when I was commanding the squadron, were killed.

31:30 When I say most, more than fifty percent, I haven't counted as a percentage. And most of the people that I know who still served in the squadron arrived well after me in the latter days of the war.

Tape 12

00:30 **Okay... Rollo, tell me how you,**

01:00 **you got very close to these, these men in your command, how did you feel about the? I mean when you were flying together and you were in a squadron, how much control did you have over their destiny?**

Well, you did your best to have some control over their destiny. But in fact you didn't have a lot of control over their

01:30 destiny. But as far as my own crew was concerned, my job in controlling their destiny was to see that the aircraft was operationally fit, that they were well trained, that they were, weren't overworked. And this was a problem. I used to look at some of my crews and if I could see a crew were suffering from fatigue.

02:00 You know some had some most terrible experiences, I'd take them off operations for a few days and you could only do that if you had some spare crews, if you had no spare crews, you would have to fly crews who really you should have grounded, which was another responsibility I hated. But control of their destiny, yes, you did your job as captain of an aircraft or CO of a squadron to, to do your best but

02:30 in a war, no one has much control over their destiny.

How did you cope mentally through this, as men were lost you were close to and responsible for?

Well, propping up the bar in the mess helped. The alcohol was weak as pee. It was affectionately known as 'love in a boat', sometimes, the beer.

03:00 But it enabled you to relax, whereas you couldn't relax if you went to your room and brooded over it. And if you took a girlfriend out, I think that sex sometimes wasn't strong enough. I found that forgetting about the war, over a few pints of

03:30 very weak beer, kept me sane. Now other people might be different. After the war was over, I had to learn not to do it.

Was or is there a point where everyone finally cracks?

I suppose there is but it's an overrated thing. Well led, well trained people

04:00 and people of good basic calibre who believe in what they're doing, don't crack. I think if you were forced to fight in a force that you didn't, for a country you didn't believe in or whatever, but I think I, I think you keep going.

04:30 I think the, our AIF people were the same, people in the navy. We at least could look forward to a target in, no matter how bad it was, if we survived thirty trips we could come off operations. The thing was to try and survive thirty trips. And you still were flying on flying training or something else, which still

05:00 it was hazardous, because the training aircraft were pretty decrepit and we lost a lot of training aircraft through mechanical failures. But to answer your question, there is, there is no point, there is no cracking point in, in a sound military organisation.

Can you remember, can you recollect what feelings you've had when you landed after that thirtieth op?

No, I can't at all, actually.

05:30 I was disappointed. I was going to a place that I didn't want to go to. The thirtieth op was an easy one. It was after D-Day, after the Allied Forces had landed in France, and the Germans were trying to rush their armoured divisions, their Panzer divisions to the area where the Allied troops were, because their Panzer divisions, had they got there in time,

06:00 could have driven us back into the sea. By day they were busy and they hid up at night time. We received advice from French underground that part of a Panzer division was located in a French wood and they were hidden. We knew exactly where they were, and went and we obliterated the wood and hopefully all the tanks. That was my last trip. It was a nice short, easy trip. And I don't think there was a shot fired at me, except

06:30 possibly by one of the navy ships in the Channel. They kept firing at our aircraft as we flew over the top. But their gunnery was lousy, so.

And at what stage did you come back to Australia?

After the war in England, I came back to Australia. I left in June '45, if I remember correctly, June or July '45. I left my squadron

07:00 in June. I was in the RAF Mosquito Pathfinder Squadron, which was supposed to go to the Far East. But I learnt in London, squadron commanders had a fair amount of freedom. They could, you could move around, I went to London and talked to people and I received information which convinced me it would never leave. In other words there was going to be a nasty bomb dropped on the Japs.

07:30 And as my, I was determined then that my future career would be in the air force and I received advice from other friends that I should be back in Australia and be seen to be doing something. So I managed to get on a ship in June with some, with my brother and some friends who, as ex POWs [Prisoners of War] had priority. I jumped the queue and came home in a ship called the Andes and arrived back in Sydney in July, I think.

08:00 And went on leave with my wife. I found I was posted up to a place called Morotai in the Halmahera Group that's been in the paper recently. While I was on leave, disembarkation leave with Grace, the Americans dropped the nuclear bomb and the war was over. So I never went to Morotai.

08:30 **After VE [Victory in Europe] Day, you did spend some time looking for your brother, is that right?**

Yes. Most of the air crew prisoners of war, there were a lot of air crew prisoners of war, because if we were shot down and survived and the Germans picked us up they put us in a prison camp. They were originally located in the eastern side of Germany, on the Polish side, and I can show you some

09:00 material from my brother's prisoner of war camp later. As the Russian forces advanced into the Polish areas in the east of Germany, these prison camps were closed down and the prisoners were moved, to the west. Now as Germany was progressively destroyed in the last few months of the war, the organisation of moving these prisoners broke up. You know,

09:30 they were surviving the best way they could. They were sleeping in barns. They were picking up every kind of infection from typhus to tuberculosis to malnutrition. And we learnt on, and some of them got to areas, locations where the Allied armies were, had command, and they were picked up by their own Forces. But I learnt on the day before VE Day that there were a lot of

10:00 ex POWs, including my brother and one of my oldest friends, were at a German airfield on the western side of Germany, just near Holland, called Rhein. And I, although I was head of the Mosquito Squadron, I borrowed a Lancaster. You could get away with that in those days. And filled it full of Mosquito pilots and navigators as a crew and I went to this place, Rhein, where there some other Lancasters,

10:30 to look for my brother and my friends. Well I didn't find them. There was a bit of a shambles, you can imagine. And I found a lot of desperately ill and, ex POWs, or POWs in a poor state, including one poor guy who'd been shot down in September 1939. And we had a place to take them to in the south of England, where there were medical facilities, a whole lot. So I loaded the aeroplane with them and took them

11:00 to this place. By this time the aeroplane wasn't performing well, it was only flying on three engines, so I couldn't go back again. I went back to the Mosquito base. Then I learnt that my brother had turned up and my friend had turned up, on different aircraft. It was a shambles. They got back to England. Air force people find ways of moving around. And I was then in hospital for about four or five days with some bug I'd picked up from these POWs I'd

11:30 had in the aircraft. I had them sitting on top of each other on the floor. And when I got out of hospital I managed to get my brother and my friend to come and stay with me because I heard what they were doing in London. They were drinking and eating too much and they'd been, had empty bellies for some

years, and it wasn't good for them. So I controlled their intake of food and alcohol while they stayed with me in my mess.

Describe

12:00 **to me the feeling on returning to Australia.**

Well, there was, there was a feeling of, being back with my wife and child, which was, and my family, I'd been looking forward to it for so long. It was wonderful but in a way it was an anti climax. There was a feeling of, what the hell am I going to do? I had a child,

12:30 that's a new responsibility. What does the future hold for me? And also, the war was still on with the Japanese and I didn't know what that held. And I made a, made a point of finding out where they were going to send me, once I'd had my leave. And I mentioned that I, I was to be sent to Morotai. And then when the war, when the Japanese War was over, when VJ [Victory in Japan] Day

13:00 had occurred, the air force quickly made up my mind for me. They posted me to a place in Sydney which, I was living in Sydney, to Headquarters and then to Victoria and then various places. And finally the air force bureaucracy became so powerful, and the air force started to be run by regulation instead of by common sense,

13:30 I left and went into industry in 1949.

How hard was it for your wife to re establish that relationship, after all you'd been through?

You'd better ask her. But I'm sure now; it must have been terribly hard. She must have put up with a helluva lot. Even in my first, in my first posting after I'd had my leave, I was posted

14:00 to the Air Force Headquarters, was then in Sydney. I had a nice nine to five job, pushing paper around. But when I not, when it was over, I wasn't used to going home. You went to the mess and had a few beers. And I had a wife and child waiting for me, who hadn't seen me for years. And it took a bit of clever work, on her behalf, to get me accustomed to the fact that I had a wife and child.

14:30 And working irregular hours in a force that flies at night, you work and sleep and eat and play at any hour of the day or night. Back in Australia, I found that you went to bed at night and worked during the day. This was, had to take, took some getting used to. I s'pose, I didn't notice it. I'm sure Grace found it very hard. I suppose some people, a lot of people

15:00 lived in the past, which I think was a stupid thing to do, and they kept thinking of what they had been doing. Well, I had too many exciting things to do to, to worry about that, fortunately. And you could curse the government. You could curse the fact that there was still, petrol was still short. That there were regulations covering every bloody thing you did. During the war the government performed magnificently

15:30 in getting us geared up for a war footing. And also the ministers had absolute power. They did things that would normally take years. But after the war, the regulations took over. Everything you wanted to do was impossible or illegal or unpleasant. So you grouched about that.

How did you feel, given the kind of sacrifices that had been

16:00 **made, the men who didn't return, was there a sense of asking whether it was worth it?**

No. I don't think I've ever asked myself that. That's life. Lots of things happen in everybody's lives. The only thing I've asked myself, and it's been in more recent years, that the Australian people, the Australian Government, the Australian media have forgotten about

16:30 the people in Bomber Command who lost their lives. Without seeking to belittle anyone, where what went on in Korea for example, they had awful conditions before there, in our whole Korean conflict; we lost about the same number of people as I lost in one squadron. Now there's a great memorial to the Korean veterans. There's none to Bomber Command dead. We're honouring

17:00 the people who fought in Vietnam, and that was a terrible war. They had, the casualties, were about the same as we had in our two squadrons, just two squadrons, a couple of hundred men. Our casualty rate and our kill rate and our death rate was far, far higher than the Anzacs suffered at Gallipoli but the average person doesn't know, doesn't know that over four thousand

17:30 of a small force of air crew lost their lives. Now there were very few wounded in air war, you mainly, you get killed in action or you disappear, which means you've been killed in action but no one knows where the hell you are. Or you're a prisoner of war. We had a few wounded, I recollect. One died in, a gunner, when his oxygen supply was cut off at twenty two thousand feet and you don't know

18:00 your oxygen's cut off, you go a bit gaga and then you go unconscious and then you die. So the only feeling I've had has been in more recent years is that this is a campaign that's forgotten. It, I feel for a while it was politically unacceptable to talk about bombing the Germans, well we did. But the thing is, whether it was

18:30 right or wrong, young Australians were killed. And we, as a nation, don't want to honour them. And that does, mind you, I am working on getting a memorial, but at the rate it's going I'll be dead before it ever appears. But the people in Bomber Command suffered the highest casualty rates of any Australians in the last war.

19:00 And they did a good job. But, you know you're about the first person I've talked to about it.

Why do you think that is?

I think I've told you. Well, there are a number of reasons. First of all, there are not enough survivors to create a fuss. An awful lot of Korean and Vietnam veterans around. There are a very few

19:30 survivors. It was, it was considered politically inadvisable to make an issue of it. It was on the other side of the world. A whole lot of reasons. It was considered a British operation, although there were Australians there, there were Australian squadrons. I remember one day on the

20:00 fortieth anniversary of D–Day, the invasion of Europe, the defence correspondent of an Australian newspaper wrote about it. He said, "Of course there were no Australian forces involved in the D–Day invasion." Now what he meant was really, there were no army forces. But in fact on D–Day there were Australian squadrons, mine, others, with, led by Australians, crewed by Australians,

20:30 attacking the German gun batteries, the radar installations, the German army movements. Now the Australian defence experts said we weren't there.

Do you sometimes question why you were there and not back here?

No. It's in the hands of fate. You know, really.

21:00 Fate plays a very big part, if you're in war. You know, you might be lucky. Although I've said a lot depends on your own skills and your vigilance. I suppose most depends on luck. You take it as it comes. Besides, it's not worthwhile getting your knickers in a knot over it. It's all gone and done. It's passed us.

21:30 it's much healthier to think of what's going to happen tomorrow. When you're finished, I'll get a drink.

All right ... you win. Let's have a drink...

21:46 **INTERVIEW ENDS. Tape continues with memorabilia.**

22:00 **(Memorabilia)**

22:30 **(Memorabilia)**

23:00 **(Memorabilia)**

23:30 **(Memorabilia)**

24:00 **(Memorabilia)**

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31:30 **(Memorabilia)**

32:00 **(Memorabilia)**

32:28 **Tape ends**