Australians at War Film Archive

Frank Austin (Pop) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 **Okay. We're on.**

I think one of the first vivid memories as a small boy my father and my mother took me down here to the heads to see the American Fleet come in. And I think that's about 1921 or I mightn't be quite right with the date. But it came in in the early hours of the morning, All their old

01:00 type warships with those lattice type towers. All lit up with lights with the dawn light coming through the heads. I never would have thought then some twenty-three years later I'd be coming back through those same heads, back from the war in 1944. Things change a lot. Then

01:30 I s'pose at a young age I was always probably interested in motorcars. Even though my family lived across the other side of the bay on a family property which was taken up by my great grandfather in 1837. Known as Avalon and the Avalon Airport is now a large part of it . It was taken over during the war. They were

02:00 essentially sheep people with a little bit of farming but as I grew up as a young fellow and I had the ponies and animals about I was never very interested in animals. As a young chap I was more interested in helping or annoying the tradesman who came out to do odd jobs like a plumber or as a carpenter. And in those days they were

02:30 individualists. They'd come out as a tradesman. He wasn't segregated into a carpenter or a plumber or a section of these industries, he just did everything and there were no rules and regulations really covering what he did, not like there are today. But I learned a lot to use my hands and my nous and I think

03:00 the next sort of memory was my mother and father went off to England in 1925 for a trip. And we were, my younger brother and I were sent off up to the Riverina to stay with Mum's parents, my grandparents. And we had a great six months. I don't think we really worried that my Dad and Mum were away.

03:30 During that time I think my grandfather really wanted me to learn chess. And he was quite good at it but I wasn't. And when the family came back in 1926 after six months away the next memory was probably

04:00 their visit to Geelong to the Duke and Duchess of York when they came out to open the federal parliament. And I was…as the motorcade travelled through the streets of Geelong, some of the quieter streets I was close enough to put my hand on the royal car. In fact I nearly got run over. I was about eleven at that stage. But I was

04:30 like a lot of kids, wildly excited. We were all lined up to wave flags and things. I can't remember whether I had a flag or not. And I suppose at that stage I was becoming aware of what was going on in Australia, realising that the opening of the Federal Parliament in Australia. In Canberra with the new Parliament house was quite something. But there wasn't much

05:00 sort of media-wise those days. We didn't have television cameras everywhere. We had to sort of rely on the radio. And back tracking a little bit on radio. I remember an uncle, a much younger brother of Dad's lived with his mother over at North Shore in Geelong just where the Pivot super works are now. She was eventually moved out or was bought out. He, at a very young age in about twenty-two or

05:30 twenty-four was fiddling around with very early radio. And he had a radio set which I was very intrigued with. If you went around there about midday you could tune in with a crystal and you could get a time signal. That was all you could get, from Melbourne. No voice. It wasn't until about two years later that voice started to appear on radio.

06:00 And I think the first voice I ever heard on radio was when I went to boarding school, that was Geelong

Grammar School. Some fella had put together a radio set sufficiently powerful just to make a noise out of a reasonable speaker. And that's the first time we ever heard radio. And of course radio was only just coming in those days and soon after. My father had a crystal set and he used to listen to the races or the football or whatever. But woe betide any children

06:30 who stamped on the floor and bumped the cat's whisker off the crystal. He used to get very annoyed. Then in another year or so radio had gone ahead sufficiently to get a valve set which wasn't.…It took hours to tune in. Turn this, turn that and it squealed and squawked but you eventually you got a program. It was much different from today where you sort of just press a button all the time.

07:00 And about that time, 1927, it was just a year or two after the Ford Motor Company had started manufacturing in Geelong my family bought a Ford truck. You would call it a utility today because it was only a half-ton truck. A T Model Ford, you know, with three pedals on the floor and a lever at the side and an accelerator on the

07:30 steering wheel. No gauges, no nothing but it went. I was intrigued with this. I was not allowed to drive it but I was intrigued with it and the car. The family had a car also at this stage. It was an American Hupmobile, which was the in car in those days. It was not a sedan car it was a canvas covered car with side curtains, which was the norm. And

08:00 from twenty-seven, twenty-eight, I wasn't really aware of it at as a small school but the economy must have been sort of recovered from World War I and was booming . The family must have been sufficiently affable to be encouraged by the bank manager to buy

08:30 property in the Riverina. Goonambil Station which I eventually went and worked at and managed and owned and finally when I retired down to Barwon Heads I left it to my youngest son. But unfortunately that time 1929 when things were booming and they were going to have it paid off in a few years within six months the crash came and the depression years.

09:00 and suddenly instead of getting twenty-five pence for wool they got about six or seven pence. I am talking in old stages. I think through this interview I will continue to talk in weights and measures as I saw them at the time. If that doesn't fit well you can alter it later. Yes.

09:30 And naturally as the wool market had fallen and the stock market had fallen, everything had fallen by the end of 1930 the family realised that money was going to be a great problem. So myself, I was still at boarding school. In 1930 I was joined by two younger brothers, John and Jim.

10:00 As very junior schoolboys. And I was the elder brother and I could look after them. But that only went on for another year and I suddenly realised that there just wasn't the funds to keep me at school. I just got through the intermediate certificate, which I suppose is about equivalent to year 10 today, not well but I passed. My form master didn't think I was particularly brilliant and

10:30 I remember his remark at the end of the year. "Well Austin, you haven't had a good year but we've just had a general knowledge skill for the whole year and you've won it. You must know something." So it came to the beginning of 1933, Dad was very upset. He said, "I'm afraid you'll have to leave school. I can't afford to keep you there any longer." Well

11:00 my own mind was particularly made up at sixteen years of age or maybe seventeen, I didn't want to go on the land. Animals and that sort of thing didn't interest me greatly. I rather wanted to do engineering. I had ideas of perhaps working my way up through the Ford Motor Company. But anyway that was hit on the head very quickly and Dad said, "I'm sorry but you can't think about

11:30 that. You'll have to go up and help at Goonambil Station in the Riverina. There's a manager up there and he'll teach you the trade of running a sheep station." So up I went reluctantly. Left most of my sort of friends and mates behind. I didn't know anyone up there. It was a little bit…I became a loner for a while because

12:00 the people were older. There weren't too many jackaroos about at that time. And going back a little bit, by this time the family were five boys in the family and no girls, which Mum was very disappointed with and she always wanted a daughter. And I s'pose thinking back it would have been better for me, as the eldest, to have had a sister.

12:30 I'd have got used to girls. As it was I was terrified of them. And Mum kept, any holiday time, introducing daughters of friends because she thought it was a good idea. And it always upset my program. I wanted to fix my bike. I wanted to do the other thing. I didn't want to be talking to girls or playing games with girls. And I think really to some extent that followed me all through my life. It's funny the

13:00 way you are sort of brought up originally sticks to you in many ways. My family were fairly strict on how we were brought up, how we behaved ourselves, and we were I suppose always well dressed and never really short of a bob but we had to be careful. I, being the eldest of the family,

13:30 with growing younger brothers was, I suppose, the butt of all the problems. Whenever something wrong they would say, "Oh Frank did that." And Frank would get blamed for it and Johnnie and Jimmy would go off laughing you see. I think that tends to happen all through life.

14:00 Anyway to…getting up to the Riverina and living up there as a retired schoolboy at early seventeen years of age. In New South Wales by that time politics were becoming a very hot issue. Not that I was greatly worried but the older people, an uncle I knew and one or two others, were

14:30 very perturbed about Jack Lang, the Premier of New South Wales and the closing of the State Bank, and the episode about Francis de Groot cutting the ribbon on the Sydney Harbour Bridge. In fact I think some of the older men, who especially had been in World War I and were half looking for a fight or a scrap of some sort, seemed to be prepared for

15:00 anarchy of some sort in New South Wales. They seemed to have their guns out under the bed ready in case it was needed. I was aware of this but not greatly perturbed at that time. But what was starting to worry me, and it did start to come out in my last year at school. At school in those days they dropped

15:30 very much on past history, present history and what have you and I think it was drawn to our attention, and often drawn to us in class about the emergence of Hitler and his fascists in Germany. And the one of two masters there who had served in World War I said, “It is going to be on again.” And at the same time the

16:00 Germans were arming. They weren’t supposed to under the [Treaty of Versaille] but they were. The French were building the Maginot Line and the Germans were building the Siegfried Line at this time and then on the top of this Mussolini had got into Abyssinia and was proceeding to take that over. This started into my mind that the world wasn’t a very peaceful

16:30 place. On top of this again we had the Spanish Civil War. Not that we heard much about it out here but what I read and I heard it seemed to be that the Italians and the Germans were using it as a theatre of action to get some practise in. Try out their new types of aircraft and armaments. Britain and France

17:00 were supposedly stalwarts of the League of Nations at that time didn’t participate. And of course America was staunchly isolationist. They didn’t want a bar of it. I think at that time they were too much worried about controlling their own prohibition and gun runners and that sort of thing over there. When

17:30 it was obviously becoming a crisis in Europe and things were getting tighter. Chamberlain went to Munich to try and sort of buy Hitler off and he came back waving a bit of paper and saying , “Well we have an agreement for peace in our time.” There was a sort of sigh of relief but what you

18:00 read from journalists and people in the papers saying well they didn’t think that would happen. They didn’t think Hitler would stick to the agreement. And sure enough he didn’t. Now of the younger generation of which there were a number of us around the district, sort of friends of mine or jackaroos on stations and what have you. In about that time we realised, look something’s going to happen.

18:30 Most of us were still very pro-British, Empire-minded and there’s going to be a war and Australia will naturally be in it. So the, in our particular area of Southern New South Wales and Eastern Victoria the 8th Light Horse had been sort of carrying on in a quiet sort of a way

19:00 since World War I but they started to look to increase the numbers. So we all joined up with Light Horse units which met I think one Sunday a month. You’d take your horses over to somebody’s property and usually the property is owned by an old soldier and gallop round the paddocks with World War I equipment. Old

19:30 303 rifles, and old Hotchkiss guns and saddlery and all that was sort of relics of World War I. It was fun. And then once a year, it was only once, I think in January 1939 they gathered the whole Light Horse regiments together. Put us on trains and we all got down to Broadmeadows and were in a ten-day camp.

20:00 And Broadmeadows, which was then still an army base. It was well out of Melbourne in those days. Melbourne hadn’t stretched out that far. And we galloped these horses around and did manoeuvres and what have you. All round the area where Tullamarine airport is today. And we had fun. We

20:30 thought it was…we were doing some good and still thought well…Well I don’t know what we thought really but maybe we were doing some good. Maybe we were doing some good for the country. Anyway we got home in early February to downpours of rain. It had been a very dry time and we had inches of rain.

21:00 The night our train got back at far as Yarrawonga. We were supposed to go on to Oaklands to unload our horses but there had been so much rain overnight that the bridges on the railway line were washed away. So we had to ride the horses back from Yarrawonga to home, some fifty miles through much water. Anyway back to work on the property and the rain was well received.

21:30 Even though not too much because we’d had a pretty dry time. When we talk about dry times, up in the country and it seems fairly general. It seems to run on roughly a five to seven year cycle. We’d been building up dry and then we got wet. And then thirty-nine was a very wet year and then at the end of that

22:00 things were looking bad again in Europe and in fact we were expecting a war any day. And Hitler was making demands on countries like Czechoslovakia and Austria and had reoccupied the Ruhr Valley, which was taken from Germany after World War I. And

22:30 he, I remember very clearly on Sunday night there was six of us playing bridge over at an uncle of mine's place, not bridge, cards. Some of us played bridge in those days but some of us didn't. There were three girls and three boys. And we were expecting war to be announced and suddenly at about nine o'clock

23:00 that night Menzies came on the radio and said, "It is my melancholy duty to inform you that we are in a state of war with Germany." All the cards stopped and we all looked at each other. And all three of us boys had been all involved in the Light Horse so…and the girls were at that stage, one of them was starting to become a nurse. The other

23:30 two were at home at their parents' home. Not doing anything particular but doing the usual things on a station property. Helping with the chores around the house as the women were expected to do in those days. That's all I thought they ever did and it was a complete surprise to me when some

24:00 years later I came back from the war and found that girls were more or less running all the properties because there weren't any men but in those days…

Frank, Can I stop you there?

Yes.

I'd like to get a picture of what your life was like from 1933 when you went to work on a property in the Riverina as a jackaroo. Can you describe what that experience was lie, what you did?

24:30 **What you work was there.**

Well a jackaroo is really, is an apprentice farmer or sheep grower. He's got to start at the bottom and work up. You had to learn, if you didn't. I had some experience. I had been on a family property and I

25:00 knew how a property ran even though I wasn't greatly interested. But you had to know how to milk the cows, you had to know how to kill a sheep, you had to know how to shear a sheep, you had to know how to drench a sheep and if you didn't know your boss showed you or some of the other men on the property showed you. And you had to know all this because if you were going to eventually employ people or own a property yourself

25:30 you had to be able to explain it to other people. A jackaroo, at that stage you got a princely wage of ten shillings a week and your keep. I remember looking back some years later after the war in an old station ledger to F. Austin, twelve months salary was twenty-five pounds.

26:00 No tax of course. Then apart from learning how to do all the chores and the jobs on the place you had to learn to make fences and fix gates. The more you could do yourself the more, well in a way you save money. If you couldn't make a gate and you couldn't fix your car

26:30 and you had to take it into town or someone else to do you had to pay him to do it. It was money in his pocket but out of your pocket. So I, very quickly, and I think I had a natural aptitude to do it and I still have. I'm still the main fixer in this house some fifty years, sixty years later. In those days

27:00 the means and the wherefores to do these things were limited. We had tools but electric power tools were unheard of. Everything was manual. A few saws, a hammer, a few spanners and a cold chisel. A hammer and anvil and what have you down in the blacksmith's shop. You did your ironwork there. It wasn't really until after the war that things like oxyacetylene

27:30 welding became the norm on a property. That's everyone. You have to….Well you don't have to but you do do it.

How big was the property? How many head of sheep? How big was the property?

The property was six and a half thousand acres and we were running about five thousand sheep. That would be probably,

28:00 those would be probably thirty-five hundred grown sheep and after lambing time fifteen hundred lambs. We did a little farming, not ourselves. There were a number of small farming, nearby or joining that farmed their own properties. But the only farming we did or required was to grow

28:30 probably oats. And our share. When you lived on a share farm the usual arrangement was he did all the work, you provided feed and super and the land and you split the proceeds down the middle. So the crop would probably go into silos or stores to be stored for sheep feed later on. Then it wasn't until after the war years that

29:00 we started to do a bit more farming ourselves, still using share farmers. I'll mention that a bit later on. Now as a jackaroo you were expected to work five and a half days or even six days a week. Sunday you had off and on the properties in those days, for amusement,

29:30 most properties had a tennis court. And if the owner was so tennis minded you might have a few people

in to tennis on a Sunday. And they were only what they called ant-bed courts. They were just soil courts, not unlike the clay type courts that they use in Europe nowadays. But

30:00 the jackaroo was permitted to play tennis with the manager and his friends and so on provided he spent Sunday morning getting the court all levelled out and marking the lines on it. That also happened that we tended to have inter-district cricket matches. Teams, two or three properties over say fifty miles

30:30 and they'd play you and you'd go somewhere else the following months. And the jackaroo had to get the cricket field ready and put all the kit out but he was allowed to play cricket. People were fairly strict in those days but as far as friendships, yes, I gradually got to know other jackaroos or other younger people. And there were naturally properties with families. They

31:00 had boys and girls and you got to know them. But in the first year I was up there I didn't have a licence to drive a car, nor did I have a car. So I used to get around on a pushbike. I was quite used to riding bikes, we always rode them at school, but I would probably ride twenty miles over to the next door property and you would probably be allowed to go over there and stay the night if work wasn't too busy.

31:30 And in 1934, not because of any shortage of fuel but shortage of money the, at that stage the property was in pretty bad financial straits. My parents had bought the property, they had paid the deposit

32:00 they found they couldn't pay any of the principle off. They could pay the interest and they paid the interest off nearly religiously to the people we brought it from but we couldn't pay any principle. And the banks were sitting very very hard on my family. And they used to put out a schedule of expenses, what they would allow you to spend each year. In other words

32:30 you could use a drum of fuel a months on a motor vehicle. We only had an old A model Ford utility and limited petrol. We had a home generator, we generated out own electricity but that didn't matter very much. We didn't use very much.

33:00 As far as telephones in those days we only had a party line into a small exchange but it opened from eight to twelve in the morning and one till six o'clock in the evening. Not at the weekends or public holidays and if you wanted to ring Melbourne you had to book a call.

33:30 You had to book a call and if you got it within two hours you were considered lucky. It is very different from what today is. Our local call…it was instantaneous but there were only about three or four on the local exchange so that was only a matter of ringing your neighbour. The party line, it worked pretty well. You had a series of codes. In fact in the

34:00 cupboard here I've got as a curio the phone which we used to have in those days. It was installed in the property in 1901 and it still functions. I've done it up and I think they are worth quite a bit of money now. It looks well and it would work but not in the modern system. When thinking back that

34:30 phone was probably used to pass the news of the Boer War, World War I, World War II, and it wasn't until about 1950 that we got a more modern phone. It was only a ringing phone that you had to ring, not a dial phone. And it was about

35:00 1960 by the time the telephone line was laid underground and we got an automatic. Which was satisfactory and that was a bit more forward by whatever it was. The postal department then. Other…

So just a few more details about the property:

35:30 **Where, what was your nearest town? Where were you located?**

At a place called Urana. The population…It had a hospital, it had a doctor and it had a town population of probably two hundred and fifty. It was an old town in so much as it started, it was first gazetted in 1856

36:00 And it was a central point for Cobb & Co coaches. They would come through, pass through and then branch out in different ways. And even thought in my time and the younger time when I was up there the population was three-fifty. In the 1890s when it was rumoured that there was gold it had a population of twenty thousand.

36:30 And of that twenty thousand there were about fourteen thousand Chinese. And there was a rumour around that gold had been found out east of the town. But I think actually was that there was never any gold. I think the expression was "salted." But they got a whole lot of gold pellets, put them in a shotgun and fired them at the wall.

37:00 And therefore there was gold there. And of course the reason so many people came there so suddenly was that the goldfields at Bendigo seemed to be running out. There was always gold fever at Ballarat, Bendigo and what have you but it was running out. So they'd go anywhere where they thought there was a gold strike. Well Urana boomed for about three or four years so I'm told.

37:30 The history books say. And they had gold carpets and bell hops…that's paving. Bellhopper is an American expression I think. They had stewards in the local pubs and gold cups in the races. A boomtown. Anyway it soon faded away, back, very quickly apparently. And it's still there. It's a slightly

bigger population.

38:00 It's got a shopping centre but it's not our shopping town. Our main showing town was Corowa, down on the Murray River, which was about forty miles south of us, sixty kilometres as they say now. Early days I suppose it was a river port on the Murray.

38:30 It did have a customs office on the Victorian bank. And the main street in Corowa, Sagar Street, was named after my great grandfather on the mother's side because he was one of the pioneers in the district. And going back to Urana the railway line got down to Urana in about

39:00 I think just after World War I and the next town down, which got into the wheat area was a place called Oaklands. It was later joined up to the Victorian railway and was later and is now a big wheat receival centre.

39:30 Going back…I don't know whether early history …Goonambil was taken up by Tyson Brothers in eighteen forty-four. And they just arrived with their cattle and they took it. There was no permission in those days. But they didn't stay very long.

40:00 There was a tremendous shortage of water. They couldn't water their cattle. Billabong Creek which ran through the middle of their property was dry and does go dry. No water and it was taken over by someone else who paid the Lands Department something like five pounds I think over a hundred and ten thousand acres. That was the size of the area in those days.

40:30 **And so was water a problem for you when you were on the property?**

Still is. Water is a problem, has been in the last, until the last few weeks. My son's up there and the creek hadn't run for the last eighteen months and no rain at all. One of the driest periods ever. And much has been said about it in the media but all the surface tanks

41:00 had dried out and it was really down to the last. But it has rained now. But this was always an ongoing thing. After I came back from the war there were only two surface tanks and the creek rely on for water in seven thousand acres. I immediately got down, as soon as we could get the old horse teams to do it, and put down some extra excavated damns. So the rainfall

41:30 would run off and increased our water quite considerably. Even they, and you could make them a reasonable size but they would evaporate out. Evaporation really takes a foot of water out of a damn in the summer every month. Wind and hot weather.

42:00 They fill in with dust.

Tape 2

00:31 **But first of all what I would like to hear is a good description of what life was like for you personally. So for instance when you were working with the sheep what were your tasks? What did you have to do? And who were you working with? Who else was on the property, with you?**

Are you right to go now?

Yes. We're right to go.

The

01:00 property was run when I first went up there as a jackaroo. It had a manager and his wife who lived on the property, and it had what you called a married couple who lived in the house or part of the house. And she, the woman, was a cook and was responsible for vegetable gardening, gardening and milking the cow.

01:30 Of course I had to know how to do this too but it was these married couples…You didn't get them through a labour officer. You got them through a registry office in Melbourne. They would advertise jobs for people or organise jobs for them. It was an early form of what we have today.

02:00 They'd come up and some would be good and some would be absolutely hopeless. And even in those days often the man who came to that sort of job, if he was putting in for it his probably had a problem with the grog. Anyway you didn't keep them and you just put them on the next train or the mail coach and sent them back. Gave them a weeks pay and off they'd go. They

02:30 helped with the house and did that. The managers wife, she looked after things and they had a couple of small children. I was looked after by the manager and his wife. The day to day chores on the sheep station varied with different times of the years. During the winter time

03:00 not a lot to do. Except if you had foot rot you would be clipping feet. The toes. You had to clip them and treat them. In a lush year the sheep always got worms so you had to drench them on a certain cycle.

And when shearing came round once a year that was always a busy time. It probably took

03:30 the best part of ten days.

Did you do the shearing yourself?

No. No. A team came in. They were contracted. A complete team. And our particular shed had four shearers and there would be four other men working in the shed. There would be a wool classer, a fleece picker, a presser and another man picking the pieces off the floor.

04:00 Me and the manager, our responsibility was to bring the sheep to the shed and take them away after they were shorn. After they were shorn they were usually, a tar brand was put on the sheep just to… everyone had their own individual brand. You just stuck it on the back of the sheep. That was abandoned in latter years because the tar brand used to upset

04:30 the wool. It would stick on the tips of the wool and the manufacture didn't like it. So that was that. Then there were always rabbits to keep under control. And I used to curse my great great uncle, Thomas Austin, Barwon Park. He brought the damn things out here originally. And they spread. He brought them out in about

05:00 1858. And in no time at all they were all over Australia. They were a tremendous problem and the way we used to…They'd live in warrens or in their own burrows and we'd have to dig them out or the dogs chased…And even back a long time before when I was a child at Avalon we used to have ferrets and we'd put the ferrets down the burrows and

05:30 catch the rabbits. It was fun. Other problems, I think, especially at lambing time when newborn lambs were dropping round the paddocks the crows would attack them and their mother wasn't wary enough

06:00 the crows were a nuisance. The crows were very cunning animals. We used to trap them and shoot them but it never really made much difference. They were too good for us. Other things that we had problems with…dry years of course hand feeding these. That had to be done. In wet years the Billabong Creek used to flood out

06:30 and flood over. Up to about one half the property would have water over it. Mostly fairly shallow but in some areas sheep could get cut off and you had to make sure you got them out of the way before the creek rose and came up. You had fair warning. After heavy rains you used to expect a flood about five to seven days afterwards the creek would rise and flow over its banks.

07:00 Our country is very very flat and it used to spread for miles. We didn't have many cattle on the property but if you had any cattle you had to know how to handle them and drove them and brand them. And later on, because I knew how to do this, when it got into the war I got highly involved.

07:30 Perhaps later on we will refer to it. In those days in the mid thirties because of the depression and the out of work people we used to get a lot of swagmen. And they would be walking, some, the more affluent ones might have a bicycle. They would call into your property and offer to

08:00 do something or cut some wood for a fee. Which we always tried to give them something. I think some people just chased them away and sent them home. Because there was no risk in those days if they were chopping wood or something and they hit themselves over the head with a piece of wood and they'd sue you for damages like there is now. Today if someone came in and worked for you and was not covered it would be terrible.

08:30 Anyway the swaggies had a bush telegraph. It worked. When they'd be walking down the road past your gate. We were about half a mile in from the road. If it was known that you wouldn't give them a feed they'd leave a stone on the gatepost for the next lot who came along to see.

09:00 They'd know they wouldn't get anything. There was definitely a bush telegraph about then.

So how frequently would you get them?

Oh one or two a week. And some of them almost became regulars. They'd be back in six months time… They were walking up. They were actually, a lot of them were actually

09:30 looking for work but when, as I mentioned earlier we had a very tight budget as I said and we just couldn't put anyone else on. So it was a difficult time and many of these chaps had a very sad story to tell and they just had nowhere to go and nothing to do and they just walked.

10:00 And lived on what they could get from people who were kind enough to give them something. I don't think there was much charity from the government in those days, no pensions or anything like that or unemployed benefits. They just didn't get it. Other things that happened on the property, there was always

10:30 weeds and things, weed growing like Bathurst burr, that had to be…any burr seed used to get stuck in the wool, which was a bad thing. It would downgrade the value of the wool, apart from downgrading the property. And that usually grow…Bathurst burr usually came after any summer rain we got. And you had to go round with a hoe and cut these.

11:00 In those early days we travelled…If we were going out on the property we rode a horse and you took a sheepdog with you if you had to round up the sheep. There may be a few sheep fly struck. That always happened. They'd get a stained behind and the flies struck them. Then you've got to get them in a corner and then you rush in and grab the sheep that it struck.

11:30 And you'd got shears and fly dressing with you and you clip this off and dress the sheep and off he goes. Some, one of the things we had to do, you had your own personal sheep dog. He was attached to you and he worked with you. You might have had two or three of them perhaps. And these dogs are very attached to you, they work very hard and they,

12:00 some of the, none of mine ever did but some chaps used to train the dogs to go in and single out the sheep and catch the fly struck one for you. They could know by smell that they really stank. The dog would catch it and hold it and you would come up and he would keep the mob together while you were dressing this one. It was all interesting work.

12:30 It wasn't until probably until just a few years before the war that we started to spread superphosphate on some country. They said you should do it. It will get better growth. I doubt that it did very much good. The country was actually better pre-farmed, and then sown down and then put super on at a later date.

13:00 But just putting super out I think was a waste of time and effort. There was always the danger in summer time of long dry grass and bushfires. In those early days fire-fighting equipment was very primitive. We did have a small, I think a hundred gallon

13:30 tank on the back of the little truck we had. No engine-driven pumps. We had a rotary pump and you had to do this. One pump probably and another would be on the end of the hose. And tremendous. At that time a lot of wet bags were used. In the earlier time before bags were available they had a long stick with a

14:00 leather flap on the end of it. It was not very satisfactory for putting fire out but it was used. And mainly in those days because you didn't have the equipment you couldn't hope to put the fire out. All yo could to was hope to control it and control which was it went. And it wasn't until probably the mid thirties when ploughs were coming

14:30 fairly well available that you started to plough firebreaks, which had an effect on controlling fire. In other words it was something you could burn a fire back from. We tried to hold it. We had one or two fires in those years before the war and they were quite serious. Going a way back into early times when a bad fire started and there was no water tanks or anything they

15:00 just went and went and went and would burn hundreds of thousands of acres. They just burned themselves out or a shower of rain. One of the main causes of fire in summer time up there are lightning strikes. A thunderstorm…If you were lucky enough you got your thunderstorm and lightning and rain straight afterwards so you mightn't even have known you had a fire until you're riding round the paddocks a week later and you see a few black acres where

15:30 a fire had started and been put out by the rain. Transport was difficult in those days. The first motor trucks didn't carry very much and when I first went up there the wool had to be carried away on horse and wagons. We carted it to the nearest railhead. About 1938, I suppose, were the first attempts at

16:00 big motor truck carrying your wool away. And in fact one motor truck of sufficient capacity, in other words about five ton, would get a contract to take that all the way to Melbourne. In competition with the railways. And I remember that one of the early truck drivers…He ran a Melbourne to Oaklands

16:30 service. He had what was an International truck in those days but it used to take him twelve hours to drive to Melbourne and twelve hours to drive back again. Because the trucks were slow and the roads weren't good. And of curse round our parts we had no bitumen roads, they were all gravel. Gravel if you were lucky. If you were unlucky they were just formed with local soil. In wintertime they became very boggy and very slippery.

17:00 But that was all accepted as the norm. We didn't worry about it. The shire council were supposed to keep the roads in order, all they had to keep the roads in our area, the gravel and the dirt roads was a horse-drawn grader. No power grader like now. No heavy earth moving equipment,

17:30 which they have these days.

So horses were a very, extremely important part of life, working life and…So you were quite a good rider? You did a lot of riding?

I…Yes, I did a lot of riding. I had to do it. I can't say that I was an enthusiastic horse rider but it was part of the job. You had to ride.

18:00 **What about with the…When you were involved with the Light Horse brigade what were you doing with them?**

When we were having our monthly gatherings there were about twenty of us and we'd form up into a troop. We had to form up into lines and we did our drills and so forth. There was a certain amount of discipline. We were learning

18:30 how horses were used in warfare. And this was all based on what they had done in the Middle East in World War I. And we were taught and trained by people who had been thee and done that. And they were very enthusiastic, they lived their horses. And when we actually got into camp in Corowa, after war broke out, for a month, we assembled.

19:00 War broke out in September we were there in October for a month and we got the whole regiment together. We were galloping around the local paddocks. I, unfortunately was saddled with leading another horse that was carrying a Hotchkiss gun. It was a machinegun that had a whole lot of equipment. A water cooler and God knows what. I had to lead this damn thing, which annoyed me.

19:30 Anyway there was a colonel of the regiment, honorary colonel I suppose because he'd been a colonel in the World War I Light Horse. I won't mention his name because it might come out later. And he was a great enthusiast for Light Horse. He was addressing us, the whole mob one day, and he said, "Look, you fellows are lucky. You are on horses and a horse would

20:00 be able to outflank a tank any day." Well that was the day I lost interest in Light Horse. And a number of others did. We went straight into other parts of the army. And about five of us all put our names down to join the air force.

So that turned you off the Light Horse, that statement?

Well I couldn't imagine me sitting on a horse attacking a modern tank. I couldn't imagine it. It was just not on. The thinking was

20:30 just way out of date. It might have been…If you were in a mountain area where a tank couldn't go maybe you could gallop away quick enough to get out of the way but it was…And the early…the thinking at that stage for the war or the people who were supposed to be getting us organised was just way back. So out of date. And why,

21:00 you might ask why I went to the air force. You've got to go back a long time to when I was a small boy in down at Avalon, which is on Corio Bay, a part of Port Phillip Bay. The only major air force place in Australia was Point Cook. But they were all seaplanes and flying boats, the early type in those days. They used to fly up and down the bay. When I was a small child I used to see these

21:30 flying overhead and I was very interested, I suppose. They made a lot of noise and they flew past and I waved my hand at them I suppose. I sort of got a edge…I suppose it sunk in that that might be a good thing to do sometime. But then following on from that, a year or two older when I was about

22:00 twelve, I was absolutely wrapped up in Kingsford Smith's flight across the Pacific. Every little bit of knowledge. I was following what they were doing on the radio and I was following Hinkler and Amy Johnson and all those heroes who got written up in the paper I suppose. I became interested in aviation but I couldn't do anything about it.

22:30 And uncle of mine flew but he never volunteered to take me flying. I saw him flying once in a paddock and he bounced so much that I didn't want to go anyway. But that was the groundwork of why I eventually went to the air force. No, horses didn't have any place in World War II, in my view, no matter what. There were the odd occasions when they were used for something but…

23:00 **But at that stage, this is 1938 and you were doing, you were with the Light Horse Brigade in Corowa.**

Only monthly. I was an auxiliary I suppose. We went to training once a month and every year we went to camp.

So what did you, what did you think seriously about joining up at that stage or what were your feelings about it?

No.

23:30 I was not warlike. I think some of the older fellows that were survivors, some older friends and relations and that that survived World War I, had the bug a bit. They, a lot of them did go back into it. If they weren't too old they got back, properly, they had to get into uniform. They had the urge

24:00 to do it. But they didn't really engender any great interest in me. I was not a pacifist. But I realised war was coming and I realised that we were British. My family had come from England and we still had our roots there in distant relatives. I

24:30 was fond of the idea of having a king and queen. A monarch, I suppose. It war part and parcel of the whole thing. If a war came, Australia, I thought obviously would be in it and if Australia is in it then I thought I would be in it to. But I never wanted to and when, after the

25:00 I came to Corowa in the first months of the war there was that sort of phoney war for about six months.

Germany ran over Poland but after that nothing happened until the fall of France, Dunkirk and all that and that was the stage that I put my name down to join the air force. The war had been a good six months and

25:30 we had been told that anyone in a managerial or boss sort of position would be in a reserved occupation. And I was running a sheep property and I was called a reserved occupation so I didn't really have to go to war if I didn't want to. Not at that stage anyway. But I realised once France fell

26:00 and Dunkirk was on and I escaped from there and I said I have to be in this so I wanted to join the air force then. But it took eight or nine months before I actually got called up because there was the…I think in Quebec in about 1940 the various air ministers of the various empire countries met in Quebec and they formed this

26:30 Empire Air Training Scheme, which turned out to be a magnificent organisation and really well run. But it had to start and of course Australia was in it. We were in it to train people but we had no equipment, no people, no huts, no aeroplanes and no nothing. And but the air force of that day had a few training plans of their own, a few Hudson aircraft,

27:00 one of them crashed and killed most of the important people in Parliament in Canberra in 1940. There were a lot of questions about how that happened. Well, flying one of those aircraft later myself I can visualise exactly what happened and what caused that crash.

What do you think it was?

Ay?

What do you think it was that caused that crash?

Well there was of course an enquiry, there's always an enquiry and it was an air force enquiry.

27:30 And if you have an enquiry into yourself you look after yourself. It still happens. But knowing that plane was overloaded, it was full of fuel when it left Melbourne. It had a number of people on it. It had ministers. Jim Fairbairn who was the Minister for Air at that time. And he still had his…he flew in World War I and he had a private

28:00 aeroplane of his own. Someone suggested he might have been trying to fly it but I don't think that might have been right. I think the pilot flying it didn't have a lot of experience in that particular aeroplane. And the landing mode or takeoff mode was very difficult to fly. You had to have plenty of speed and plenty of height. And I rather think coming into Canberra on a fairly windy day he didn't have enough speed

28:30 and he wasn't properly lined up. And he had to make rather a steep turn to come into the airport. And he stalled and went in. That's what I think would have happened. But that didn't actually come out in the…There were no survivors. Only a few people observing from the ground. But after my experience in the future I thought that. And a lot of people thought that probably happened too.

That was a Hudson?

A Hudson.

29:00 The Australian air force had them. They had about twenty or thirty of them. They'd been getting them in for the previous twelve months. But the chap who was flying it hadn't been flying for long and it was thought he wasn't one of their best pilots anyway.

But there weren't many people around who were very experienced at flying them anyway at that stage?

No. And

29:30 flying a lightly loaded aircraft is different to flying a heavily loaded one. You've got to be careful. Of course.

Can I just ask you. The war had been going on and the fall of France and you realised that it was serious. What actually was your motivation for joining up? Can you explain what that was?

I had to be in it.

30:00 It helped a little bit that the next brother to me, my next younger brother John. He was two years younger than I was. He wasn't involved in anything particular when the war broke out. He was working for a stock firm, Denis Lasols. He was up in their stock department up in Ararat or somewhere at that time. He had been working for them for about two years.

30:30 And he wasn't tied to them and he was a more adventurous type. He drove motorcars faster than I did and enjoyed life. He joined the air force, oh, probably about three months after it started but there was still…He got in and started training six months before I did.

31:00 And his initial training was done on Tiger Moths up in Narrandera which wasn't very far from where we were…from where I was running the property. So naturally I went up to the station and saw him. "Oh

Frank, look, I'm having a ball. It's just tremendous. You've got to be in it." And I'd already put my name down by this time so I was waiting to be called but that encouraged me quite considerably.

31:30 And then he finished the training and he went to Canada for the next stage of the Empire Air Training Scheme. While I was waiting to be called up and while they were getting ready to take us in we had a whole series of mail out lessons on flying generally and everything about an aircraft. Pretty simply put. And a lesson you were asked to

32:00 read this thing through, fill in the thing at the end and send it back to them at the end of the month. And I suppose I had five or six lots of these. They were informative and I had no trouble learning them and I eventually got called up in April 1941. It took me eight months to get in. I thought I'd never get in but

32:30 and I couldn't really understand why. Because living up in the bush I didn't realise that they didn't have any aeroplanes, they didn't have any accommodation, they didn't have any staff, and they didn't have anything. In fact a lot of the early instructors on Tiger Moths were private people that had been flying their own light aircraft before the war. They took a crash course for instructors and I had an instructor

33:00 who came from down here in the western district. One of the known families and he was a pretty crusty instructor but he was a good one. He got a lot of fellows scrubbed because he was a bit hard on people. But I think I gave what I got from him and being older I had an advantage. A lot of these young fellows dashed into the air force

33:30 and they were just out of school, only eighteen or nineteen. I was twenty-five by this stage and I was almost a man of the world. And I could give what I got. Accept when eventually I got up and got down to ground school where I was at an extreme disadvantage because going back to school

34:00 after being out of school for eight years the old mind was pretty slow. These young fellows were all boned up on mathematics and that sort of thing and on general knowledge of weather and what have you. What they had been learning at school. They were fresh in the mind. It was like them going on to a university course. I was going back to school after I had been out of it for eight years and

34:30 there were two or three of us there like this, all farm people. Farm knowledge is a bit different to city knowledge I think. We were at an extreme disadvantage and we had to work like mad to try and catch up and keep up because back in my mind it was, "I'm in this. I want to do well. I must do as well as these young fellows."

35:00 Probably one third of the intake under the scheme would be commission. And it was set in my mind, "I must get a commission. I must do things right. I must mail it. If I'm dumb I won't get a commission." So I had to work hard. It was hard work but I enjoyed it. And another advantage I had over these young fellows was

35:30 that I'd had prior military training, both in the cadet corps and the Light Horse. I was disciplined with the use of arms and things. That was no problem for me at all. Where as a young fellow that sort of…I suppose he was certainly restricted a certain amount at school but nothing like the armed service where you had to do exactly as they say

36:00 all the time. That didn't worry me.

The lessons that you had to do, the technical lessons, how did you go?

Oh I must have been sort of deep inside air minded and I think a lot of people were not, in the early stages of their flying, they were not exactly happy in

36:30 an aeroplane. They were unbalanced. I suppose having ridden horses for years I was balanced. When it went over I automatically corrected. When the horse went this way I went that way. So when I was in a plane I corrected. When I started to learn to fly at Essendon, old Essendon was only a grass paddock in those days. No strips. A few hangers. And the headquarters

37:00 of the Royal Victorian Aero Club. And many of the instructors had either moved form the aero club or belonged to it but they have them a uniform and the stripes and things and they were off. So we…The first time

37:30 I was in the aeroplane with my instructor we took off and I suddenly realised the ground was slipping a way, and a little bit of wind so there was some bumpiness and we crawled on up and a lot of noise and in those days we didn't have any electronic communication at all

38:00 by what they call Gosports. He spoke into a tube and I had two tubes like this. That's the way they did it. He had one and I had one. We communicated.…We had no ground communication except signals. If they didn't want you to land they fired a red light at you and if they did want you to land they fired a green light at you. That sort of a thing. Or they had other ground signals but there was no electronics.

Okay, so

38:30 **lets just go back a little bit. So you enlisted and did the training. This was a sort of correspondence training.**

Yeah.

Yeah. So what happened after that, after you had completed the lessons? When did you actually go off for practical training and where did you go to?

When they called me up, as I said I went to Essendon. I had already been down to what they call

39:00 initial training college, down here at Somers on Western Port Bay. It was old Lord Somers camp originally.

So that was the initial training?

That was all ground. That was marching, shouldering arms and quite a bit of work with, we had to learn Morse code and I and a number of others could never cope with Morse code. Some people, perhaps if you had a sense of rhythm and could play the piano or something,

39:30 or you were good on a typewriter you could tap out messages. I was, one the speed got up a bit I was always getting behind. And you can't do catch up Morse, if you miss a word or a symbol and you think, "Oh my God. What was that?" You missed the others coming and you have to be on the ball all the time. I think

40:00 if you were very musical and you could understand music it would be very much like, you could follow all the notes and put it together and make a tune. Now Morse is always sent in sort of five letter brackets. In Morse code and those five letters put together sort of made a tune. But if you missed one element of that tune you missed and I was no good and it worried me

40:30 to…anyone who was having trouble they used to give you a little buzzer to take home when you had a spot of leave and practise on the weekend. That drove me mad. Dit, dit, dar dit…l never learned but it didn't matter because I didn't ever have to use it. But maybe it was very important to that intake

41:00 because they were to be wireless operators. See, on an intake of say fifty men probably about one third might become pilots, one third might become navigators, and one third probably might be wireless operator or air gunners. They would eventually get together again in a different area

41:30 to make up a crew. And they, your instructors, after initial training school, assessed what you should be. Weather you should be a pilot, weather you should be a navigator, what? Of course everyone always wanted to be a pilot. And that was the glamour part of it I suppose. I certainly wanted to be a pilot.

42:00 When you

Tape 3

00:31 **Let's go.**

Yes. Well the sighs of relief amongst those who wished to be pilots. They were going to be and they eventually left Somers. We were given three or four days leave and in my case I got four days leave but on leave I developed pneumonia, which was a bit of a

01:00 I was back at home at my property in the Riverina. I went up home to see how things were going on and I suddenly developed pneumonia. I think the cause of that was that I got a severe cold in my last few days at Somers because trying to keep up I was very active and we had a surf carnival

01:30 in Western Port Bay and we had to swim out to the boy and it seemed to be half way to Tasmania to me. I was quite a good swimmer in my young days but all these fellows…And it was bitterly cold. The water is cold and the wind is cold. Cold on the beach and I got a cold out of that which I more or less ignored in the last few days. And by the time I got home it had developed into pneumonia. So I went to the local Corowa hospital and they told the air force

02:00 that, "We're sorry but Austin's in hospital." So they delayed my entry into Essendon for a month. Instead of going in after four days I was a month and four days. So I joined another course. And in the meantime, by doing that, I lost contact with people I knew. There were one or two I did know on the course. Anyway we got to Essendon towards the end of June

02:30 1941, cold, windy. Everyone knows Essendon's windy. And we proceeded to do flying training. Flying training there was essentially flying but we had to do a certain amount of ground school too. Keeping up with and a link trainer came in. A link trainer being a thing you sit in and copy what you do in an aircraft and it is printed out

03:00 by a think called a crabs that goes round the desk and tracks what you've been doing. I suppose it is a forerunner to the modern type computer. It was quite effective. It taught you to fly on instruments and how to keep a plane balanced. Getting round to the first flight, well, I went up with my instructor and he said as usual we'll

03:30 just follow me. Put your feet on the rudder bars and your hand on the joystick. They had a joystick then, not a wheel. Just follow what I do. So I did that and we got up and we got to a certain amount of height. And he said, “You take over.” So immediately the plane started to wobble a bit and the controls are very sensitive.

04:00 I (UNCLEAR) trying to run the controls like driving a car on boggy road. I was too abrupt too heavy and the plane just went like this. “No,” he said, “You’ve got to be very sensitive. It’s more or less a thumb and finger job.” Of course conditions are very rough and the plane is very sensitive. Anyway I…he let me sort of feel my way round for a bit and

04:30 he came back and he said, “I think you are having me on.” I had pointed out earlier that this fellow was a little bit abrupt with his pupils. He said, “I think you’re having me on. You’ve obviously flown before. You told me you hadn’t.” I said, “No. That’s correct sir, I haven’t flown before.” “Oh.” So he immediately

05:00 turned the plane upside down, without warning, which was very naughty of him really. Having been told to have my harness in tight. You put the thing over and button yourself up tight. Well I made sure it was comfortable. When he turned upside down it was obviously too loose because I fell about three inches into the harness. And all I could see was the ground.

05:30 And I thought I had fallen out. And that really gave me a fright. He heard my shriek or yell through this Goss port thing and he said, “That gave you a fright, Austin, didn’t it.” And I said, “Oh yes. It certainly did.” He said, “That’ll teach you to make sure your harness is tight.” It did frighten me. We got on pretty well.

06:00 I was learning. A lot of early pilot was just learning, basic flying around and doing basic turns and climbing to height. But a lot of circuits and landings. Going round and round and getting down and landing and taking off again. Finally it come the time that it’s always sort of

06:30 …the instructor hops out of the front cockpit and takes his joystick with him. “Well, you’re it.” That didn’t. Well he didn’t.…He would have taken his joystick out because a loose control flapping around in the front cockpit is not a good idea, anyway. It clipped in and clipped out and he took it out and said, “All right.” So I did three circuits then and did them well and made good landings. And she said to me, “That wasn’t too bad Austin.

07:00 You’ll learn in time.” He was never very complimentary so I said thank you. So flying went on. The learning process. Then after I was about half way through the course. I don’t remember why but I think my instructor might have been away for the day and my lesson was due. I was given another instructor, the venerable Doc Fenton of the flying doctor thing in the Northern

07:30 Territory who had been flying round as a doctor in the Territory for years and broke every rule in the book according to the department of civil aviation. They always had him doing this and that and he did his own work and he was a tremendous flier. “Austin,” he said, “How are you getting on?” And I said, “All right thanks sir.” He was an instructor of course. I said,

08:00 “Thank you very much.” He said, “You’ll be bored to tears with your circuit and bumps and what have you. Have you ever been low flying?” And I said, “No.” “Well let’s go low flying.” So we flew out towards what is North West Melbourne, really the gully near Rosedale. Pretty steep sides. And he said…He got down in the bottom of this and

08:30 he was going round at ground level, river level and it was going up on either side and I was goggle-eyed. And he went.…We finished up by nearly running into a telephone line that was across there and he said. “Oh I didn’t see that.” So we eventually got back and I enjoyed it. It didn’t frighten me at all. And it was really…it was the only low flying I did at Essendon. We weren’t supposed to do any at all of course. I eventually finished the course

09:00 and had a final wings test and unofficially we weren’t told and it wasn’t even written in our logbook but pupils got a way of finding out what was written about you and we found out what our ratings were. And I had been…despite all my instructors derogatory remarks, I’d been passed out above average. Which pleased me.

09:30 Again we left there and off to four days’ leave.

Sorry Frank, what plane were you flying at Essendon?

Tiger Moth. They were the …well they were the only training plane they had there at that time. At the time one of the instructors they had there was called.…He was a Chinaman called Charley Goon. He had been a member of the aero club for a year and an instructor and a

10:00 good pilot. I never flew with him but just before we were leaving Essendon a very early part of the Australian aircraft industry manufactured probably for approval by the air force, a Wackett trainer. Wackett. And one was brought out

10:30 to Essendon one day. Not for us to fly but for an assessment. Anyway they all wanted to get in and fly it. Well it was…A Tiger Moth is a biplane, double winged, a Wackett was a monoplane with a radial engine instead of an in-line engine. And I think for the size of it it appeared to be a bit under powered.

11:00 The motor was pretty small. Well the instructors… until it came to Charley Goon's time and he was asked to go and he got on. Somehow he misjudged it and hooked the wheels onto the fence coming in to the aerodrome and tipped over on his nose. And of course all the pupils think, "Oh they can make mistakes too." It was immediately taken away. Eventually they used them but it was under powered and I had nothing to do with them.

11:30 I went home for four days and down for one day to see my family at Avalon, Mum and Dad at the old family home. Then I went back up to my property to sort of tee up things because we were going overseas then. I wanted to see my girlfriend, who gave you tea this morning. Not that she thought she was then but I did. See there were too many other jackaroos.

12:00 The competition was very severe in those days. Anyhow, said goodbye, arranged with the chap who had managed the property before I took it over…I took over managing the property in 1938 and he taught me a lot of things. He had retired to Corowa and I arranged with him to come out once a month and have a look round and I left an old chap and his wife

12:30 and that's about all to look after the property. And he was going to come out and help and make sure the essentials were carried out. So he had been an army man himself so he knew what the thing was. Anyway. So I eventually got away, got a mail coach and the cheap train was leaving Spencer Street but I had arranged to pick it up in Albury at about ten o'clock at night.

13:00 I picked it up, got to the train. The train was packed. That particular train it wasn't corridor. It was a compartment train and sat about eight people and in the compartment there was another seat but the seat was on top of the toilet. It was the only seat left so I sat on top of this toilet. It had a soft cover over the top of it, all the way to Sydney. But a very disturbed night because most of the fellows had been drinking

13:30 on the way up so I was up and down all night whether I wanted to be or not. Got to Sydney and was taken by train out to Bradfield Park on the north side of Sydney where there was an embarkation depot. And there I had to wait for the day when we were put on a ship. Well we had a fair amount of free time to go into Sydney

14:00 most afternoons. In the mornings we were supposed to do some chore or to keep us fit do a route march around the North Sydney area, Bradfield Park and beyond. Two hours. Another fellow and I volunteered to peel potatoes instead. So we got kitchen fatigue and we didn't get route march. So anyway….Anyhow…

14:30 **Did you know what plans they had for you at this stage? When did you…Did you know what they had planned for you even in Victoria?**

To go to Canada. We were just waiting for a ship to go. I assume they didn't know then, until we got to Canada weather I would be a single-engine pilot or a multi-engine. They didn't know but they had both courses in Canada. So we had a lot of

15:00 fun in Sydney. Down at the pub I suppose. I had a few friends, or friends of family, saw a bit of them. There was only one day I remember that the army had arranged that the air force was going to play rugby at the Sydney Cricket Ground. Well I being an Australian Rules player, being from Victoria, wasn't the least bit interested.

15:30 A number of us weren't either. So anyway a number of us were marched onto a train, put on a train at Lindfield, Bradfield Park and we went into Sydney. And all the time we were thinking, now how can we escape this rugby match. We're not interested. So we cut across the harbour bridge and as we were approaching Sydney Central as they call it two trains were running parallel to each other. Doors were open so three of us jumped across.

16:00 They were not going very fast. Maybe ten or fifteen miles and hour. And as we started to arrive on the platform the military police there would hound us and so on. And we were giving the thumbs up. "Up you George." We were…goodbye. We both pulled into the same platform at the same time so we went to the football match whether we liked it or not. But these sort of lurks were on. That was

16:30 …Then when our time finished in Sydney we suddenly they said you are leaving tomorrow morning. You mustn't….They were very strict on censorship and security in Australia and you mustn't tell people that you are going or when or where or on what ship. So

17:00 I think most of us observed that. So we didn't know what ship we were going on although we knew that the Queen Mary and the Mauritania were both in the harbour all in their battle ship grey. And they were anchored there and ready to take troops to the Middle East. But they were there for all to see. Anyway come

17:30 time to go down to the train and low and behold we are going onboard the Mariposa. An American normal passenger line. The Americans were two and a half months off being in the war at this time so it was a neutral ship. They were being particularly hush-hush about belligerent troops on a neutral ship. Even though we wore our uniforms we were not put down on the passenger

18:00 deck with any rank. It was just a name and it was alphabetical. Austin to Wood. Likewise we were

allotted sleeping accommodation in that order. So the As got all the best accommodation and the Woods went steerage. That was fine. And the ship was crewed by Mexicans.

18:30 All the stewards. Not the staff running the ship but all the stewards on the ship were all Mexican. Cheap labour I suppose. Naturally they spoke English. We were only what they called leading aircraftsmen at that time. We'd been promoted one from aircraftsmen to leading aircraftsmen when we left Somers. This entitled us to nine shillings a day

19:00 overseas pay. Which was actually more than I was earning at home as a manager. But shipboard life, well, every morning we had to do some sort of, or listen to some sort of instruction or do exercises on the deck. We were encouraged to play deck sports. There were about two hundred civilian passengers on.

19:30 Mostly they were American women and children. A few men who were working in the Middle East. And they had come to Australia and were going back to America. They wanted to get out of that area. So we met a few of them. We did our own thing largely. There were dances of night onboard but the chances of getting a partner were practically nil because there

20:00 were about ten to one men. And as I said earlier I was fairly shy with girls so it would take a big effort for me to go in and grab someone. Others would usually rush in and grab and when the dust settled I would be left with an old dowager. A bit rude I suppose. But anyway we had a wonderful trip. New Zealand. We had a day off there and picked up New Zealanders. We were very impressed and

20:30 struck as we left the New Zealand wharf. They sung in Maori. The people onboard and those on the wharf sung the Maori Farewell. It was a catchy song. It became a parade thing at that time I think. It was very moving really because when you think about it. It was the last farewell a lot of them ever had. It didn't really

21:00 effect me. I said my farewell in Sydney to no one because no one knew we were getting on the boat.

But you had said your farewells…?

Yeah. On a previous leave. Ten days before we went overseas I saw the family again. I saw them ten days before we went to Sydney. We were in embarkation. We were more or less sealed in. I could ring up but I couldn't see them. So we were just…We went onboard ship with no

21:30 fanfare what so ever. We went to Suva, I suppose my first observation was of most people being dark skinned. I had never really seen an Aboriginal in Australia. There weren't any in our part of the world

22:00 and I don't think I'd seen…I might have seen but I never saw them. But of course in Fiji with all the Fijians and the National Guard and whatever. That was the first time I realised I was a minority. So we had a pleasant day there. On to Pago Pago which is an American position in the South Pacific.

22:30 A small naval base. There seemed to be a big American naval presence there. And we unloaded some stuff which seemed to be mostly Australian tinned fruit. I didn't realise we exported it. I leaned something there…that we did export overseas. Then on up to Honolulu. And what I thought strange at the time but then I thought oh well it's normal

23:00 was that we were escorted on that leg, into Honolulu on HMS Achilles who some six months earlier had been in the Battle of the River Plate, when they sunk the German cruiser Grafspee. I thought it strange, a neutral ship and we had a British escort. But I thought oh well,

23:30 Its just Britain showing the flag. But thinking back years afterwards it was only two and a half months later that Pearl Harbor happened. The Brits or the Americans had ideas or inklings that the Japanese might have attacked an American neutral ship which they thought had belligerent troops on it. And

24:00 they might have had a submarine about so this ship was…Nothing happened. We never saw it after we left Honolulu because I suppose we didn't worry. He hit the American coast, up from Santiago to San Francisco.

So Frank are you suggesting that putting belligerent troops onto these supposedly neutral ships it was sort of a bait or something?

No. No. It wasn't

24:30 a bait. The way I read it and I think it was read was that if you were a neutral ship and if you were carrying belligerent troops you were a legal target. So weather the Brits, not necessarily to protect us, but they didn't want in incident. And obviously…see at that time

25:00 there was some pretty heavy talks going on in America between the Japanese and the Americans. They were still going on when Pearl Harbor happened. There was a promise between the Americans and… The Americans had an embargo on fuel going into Japan at that time and Japan didn't like it. And they were talking about it. And it could have been going on

25:30 two months before. So I think it was a precaution. Anyway we were up the American coast and got of

the ship at San Francisco. We were very sort of hush-hush. Belligerent troops in a neutral country. We were put on a ferry and taken across San Francisco Bay and put on a train, without being allowed to move around at all.

26:00 We were put on a train and that took us a week and a half to go up the American coast to Vancouver. That was the normal port of entry for airmen going in. We weren't allowed off the train at any time. The scenery was good. We didn't really get to meet any Americans. And the look of surprise of anyone on the platform that

26:30 there were uniformed people on the train. They were looking round and wondering what was going on, sort of thing. Anyway we got to Vancouver early in the morning and there were about four hundred of us all told, perhaps five hundred counting a New Zealander. And we were sorted out where we were going to go. We had pilots, navigators,

27:00 gunners and they all had to go to different stations. So we were sorted out onto different trains. There were two main trains going across Canada, as you probably know, Canadian National and Canadian Pacific. And some of us would be dropped off just through the Rockies [Rocky Mountains] and some of us would go through onto the Central Plains. And some would go right across Canada. Well after a lot of sorting out and a wet rainy day in Vancouver

27:30 It always rains in Vancouver. We saw a little bit of the town but in the late afternoon we were put on a Canadian National train. We chuffed off into the…We didn't see much of the Rockies because we went through there in the dark. Our particular accommodation was locally known as a Colonist Car.

28:00 It was a very uncomfortable carriage. Compartmentalised, with hard seats with a bit of lever over them or something. And you were supposed to sleep on those at night and they issued blankets and things like that. The trains were pulled by

28:30 steam locomotives in those days. We were tacked onto the back of the main express. And for some reason because the windows didn't work we copped all the soot and cinders and we had four days before we got across to Ontario where we were going, without a bath, very limited washing things. So we arrived very dirty, very smelly. Thank God it was getting

29:00 into winter so it wasn't too bad. The Canadian plains were very uninteresting. They had no trees or anything like that on it at all. Similar to our Nullarbor Plain here, I suppose. We went across there and then we got to Winnipeg. We got a bit of time off in Winnipeg just to stretch our legs,

29:30 walk round, and no one wanted to see us. We looked dirty, we were unkempt, probably unshaved. We then went on down there an arrived in Toronto at eight o'clock in the morning after three and a half days on the train. Our first thought was to sent of a cable home to say we'd got here so four of us jumped into a taxi outside the station and said, "Take us to the nearest cable station."

30:00 So he revved up the engine, did a complete turn like that, back to where we had come and said, "This is the cable station. Right here. Canadian Pacific." We didn't know that. Boys. Canadians were different to Americans. They didn't like to be said that they spoke the same. It was a different accent to us but it wasn't quite American.

30:30 He said, "Well boys when you send your cable come out to the cab. You've got three quarters of an hour before your next train leaves and I'll take you for a drive round the city." Which he did for nothing. Showed us the highlights and this and that, which was very kind of him. He…And so we hopped on the next train down to a place called Aylmer in southern Ontario, just north of Lake Erie.

31:00 Not far from the major city there which was a place called London. And we were…It was a fairly new station. It had never had Australians before. We were there about ten days before our course started so we had a bit of time to get oriented. Go into the local township called Aylmer.

31:30 We met one or two people, bought one of two things, went to a dance and made one or two mistakes you make language-wise. I remember the first dance I went to, dancing around with a girl and it was a pretty hectic busy dance and she said, "I think we've had enough of this." I said, "Yes. Let's go and sit down." I said, "You look knocked up." Of course knocked up in Canada was

32:00 pregnant and she was horrified. And so I explained what the situation was. They were very kind to us. They looked after us. When we started our course. Winter was just starting to come and it was getting very cold. And we'd been there a month and we'd got the first snow. And of course most Australians hadn't seen snow so in the first snowfall we were like idiots

32:30 according to the Canadians because they said you don't know what you're getting into. All right. We accepted that. But we learned to fly these Harvards. I had a Canadian instructor. I had five other pupils with me. Two Australians and three Canadians.

Sorry, you'd been told…You weren't sure when you were going there whether you would be a fighter pilot…?

Oh no, no. They told us…They drafted us into…We didn't

33:00 …We were drafted out of Vancouver, what I was going to be and I realised…They said, "Oh yes. You're

going to go over to number fourteen service flying training school which is flying Harvards. That's the first time I knew I was going to continue on single engine aircraft. Some of them went to McLeod which was where they flew twin-engine Ansons. And some had Oxfords and some had Cessnas, light types of twin aircraft. But our aircraft were all Harvards.

33:30 And they were a big step up from a Tiger Moth and I hadn't flown anything for about three months by that time. They were three times the horsepower and at least twice…or three times as fast. And a mass of instruments and I thought…I looked and I thought, "What am I going to make of this?" And incidentally to back -track

34:00 a bit the way you'd think in those days…Going right back to our time at Essendon. Wandering round, of course, I think it was ANA, Australian National Airlines, a passenger service. In the hangar there they had a DC2, which was slightly less power than a DC3, same aeroplane. So we asked weather we could have a look inside. And I looked inside and I saw this mass of

34:30 instruments, clocks and everything. And I thought, "My God, I'll never cope with that." So after Tiger Moths that really had no more instruments than an ordinary motorcar. They were very simple. But to get back to Harvards I enjoyed flying them. They were…I learned very quickly. I was one of the early ones. And doing

35:00 all sorts of things which lead up to combat flying. We learned aerobatics. We did some mild aerobatics in the Tiger Moths but you were limited. Harvards had far more power and what have you. And instructors used to like to show us how well they could fly while you were hanging on the back seat. But we had to learn to do this. And we got…About once a

35:30 fortnight we got a weekends leave, forty-eight hours and we could go somewhere. And the way we went was usually get into the local town that was on the main highway between Windsor, down on the American border and we'd hitchhike. People would always pull up and give you a lift. And not very often did you fail.

36:00 Sometimes coming back you would wonder weather you were going to get back on time. It worked well. They were very kind to us. They would buy you a meal on the way if you stopped. I think about…We had been there about six weeks and it had started to snow. The snow on the ground was very cold and another fellow, and Australian, and I decided we would go down to Windsor. Down and just across the American border.

36:30 See what things looked like down there. But it was very cold and miserable and we booked into a very low-grade pub, which wasn't very good and we wandered down the town in the snow with nothing much to do. And we came to some type of services club. It might have been kin to our RSL [Returned and Services League] clubs here so we were wondering past and a fellow said, "Come in." He was in civvies. He said, "Oh,

37:00 You are Australians I take it." We had an Australia thing on our shoulder. So we had a few beers and in fact a few beers lead to a few more beers. It was cold and snowy outside. So we were fairly abstemious in those days. We had a few beers but didn't over do it. But this fellow, he got himself

37:30 pretty full and then he sort of said, "Look, you fellows better come home to the wife and have dinner with us." So he said, "I'll ring up my wife and promptly told her." She realised on the phone that he was a bit full. No go. She didn't want us. So we had a meal in the club and we had a few more beers. By this time he was unable to drive

38:00 a motorcar. In the meantime somehow I must have been past his house because I recognised it. I had never driven an American left-hand drive car. We had to go back to our place at about ten o'clock at night and we had our host who was incapable of driving. It was too cold to just leave him in a car somewhere because he would just freeze to death so I said, "I'll drive this car and we'll take him home." So we take him home, knock on the front door,

38:30 and all the doors. And then there's dead silence. And by this time it's got very cold. It's below freezing and I thought, "I can't just leave him in the car. We'll have to get into the house somehow." We could hear footsteps inside. His wife wasn't going to let him in. So what are we going to do with him? We walked round the back into obviously what was the kitchen and found a door open.

39:00 Which was a wood box where they stacked the wood outside and take it inside. We took all the wood out and pushed this bloke in onto the kitchen floor and slammed the lid and left him and went back to the pub. I often wonder what happened to him. So shortly after that another weekend passed. I got down and

39:30 we'd heard that we were going to get four days off at Christmas time. I had…well my Mum had a very old friend whose husband was in the Royal Navy doing naval liaison work in New York. I knew her fairly well because she had stayed with us and she said, "If you are coming to New York then come and stay with us." Anyway I had to get a visa and get my

40:00 passport stamped and everything and get organised to go into the United States. So I went down about a week before, got this done and saw Niagara Falls at the same time. It was very cold and we were half frozen. And we caught a train down to New York. When we got down there this woman met me at the

station and took us out to a place

40:30 in Brooklyn where she had a flat. And she was very kind and showed us round all this time. And of course the Americans had been in the war a very short time. To digress a little bit, going back on one of these hitchhiking escapades on a Sunday afternoon. Sunday the 6th I think it was. And this was before the trip we took to New York. We were driving along with this chap in his car and he had the radio going. And just music with a few ads.

41:00 And suddenly the radio cut dead. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, which was equivalent to about eight o'clock in the morning. And a voice said, "We are interrupting this program with the compliments of Colgate Palmolive…the Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor." That's how it came across on the radio. Nothing like getting your ad in. Of course we were both thunderstruck.

41:30 He was a Canadian and I was an Australian and it was unexpected. The thoughts that really went through my mind and other Australians there was we will probably go home. They'll call us back. But no way. We were in a slot with the Empire Air Training Scheme. We were going in the avenue they'd already preselected us to go into. What was more that we didn't think of at the time but there was no point in us going home because we had nothing to operate.

42:00 End of tape

Tape 4

00:30 Yes. Well. I was already getting organised to go to New York. Getting visas and things like that. Our flying training…Flying a Harvard. Well it cruised at about a hundred and sixty, a hundred and seventy thousand knots we called it. Aeroplanes always talked about knots.

01:00 because maps were made out in nautical miles. It was a nice aeroplane to fly. It was powerful, very manoeuvrable. It was just short in general performance and what have you of a fighter aircraft. It had the same capabilities but it was a lot slower and it wasn't armed.

01:30 It was all metal. It was fairly cold to fly-in although it was heated. It's, you took it off the ground at about seventy knots and immediately sort of gained speed and got up to climbing speed, cruising speed and we did our navigation

02:00 exercises. Initially with an instructor we had to navigate around a two and a half hour course. I think the endurance of the plane was around about three hours so we had to allow enough to get back. It was usually a triangular course. You would have to map out, plan out your course beforehand and you had largely map-readers because

02:30 …Is that someone coming in?

We'll just stop for a second. You were talking about the triangular…

Yes. Well. We spent a total of…The normal course on the Harvards was supposed to be twelve weeks. The first eight weeks was learning all the basic principles. The last

03:00 four weeks was night flying, fighter tactics, and all that sort of thing. But when, because of the Americans entering into the war and there was a bit of a lot of personnel going to England they gave us an extra four weeks. It was all for the good. Now I never had any problems with the Harvard but some

03:30 people did in so much that with icy snowy runways and snowploughs had to keep moving the snow off to the side and they did have a tendency if you didn't watch them when they landed to do what they called a ground loop. You can…as the saying is no landing is a good landing until you've stopped and if you sort of relaxed

04:00 when you were still doing fifteen or twenty knows the plane would whip round in a circle and you'd end up in a snow bank or a ….Well a snow bank definitely because they were high beside the edge of the runway. No you had to be careful. The only time I really had a

04:30 real worry with the Harvards one night was with my first night solo flight. It was a pitch-black night. It had been snowing and there was snow everywhere with the result that when you get off the ground the ground everywhere is white. The sky is white and you don't really have a horizon. After…when you are flying an aeroplane, especially in daylight when you can see

05:00 you've got the horizon between the sky and the earth. When the sky is whitish and the ground is whitish the horizon is practically nil. You have to rely totally on your instruments to get the altitude of the aeroplane. Well this particular time my mistake a little bit was when I got in to do this solo flight we went through the normal cockpit drill.

05:30 But the cockpits weren't very well lit and I overlooked the fact that the chap who had been in it previously had left the flaps down. Now the flaps on the aeroplane are to slow your speed and give you

more lift and stability when you've got a slower speed. But when you go at speed the flaps will tend to drag

06:00 and throw the aircraft out of balance. Well I took off with these flaps down and once I was air born I realised that I couldn't get my speed up. The aircraft wanted to climb and I couldn't get the nose down and for quite some seconds, if felt like for ever I though, "My God, what's going on? Maybe I'm going to crash." With no horizon I though wow! Then I suddenly

06:30 thought…It ran through my mind what might be wrong. And I found the flap lever and pulled it forward and that straightened it out. It was a big worry. But I never ever failed again to do a 100% cockpit check. You had to. And I suppose it was just because I was unused to night flying, I suppose, that it happened.

07:00 That was all right. Another interesting…Well this is personal. It has nothing to do with flying. Because we were about the first lot of Australians in that area. Down at a town, not very far away, forty miles away, they had sort of an up-market girls' college. And the principal of that sent an invitation over. "We'd like to

07:30 have ten Australians come and visit us for late afternoon tea on Sunday. The girls would like to meet some Australians." So this was immediately…No one seemed to want to go. So they suddenly said, "You, you, you, you, you, you all. You'll go." So I was one of the volunteers. We were put into a small bus and taken down to this college and we met these girls who

08:00 were equally as probably shy as we were. Well I was anyway. The woman principal, she was acting as hostess and we went in and sat round like a mob of golliwogs and talked and this, that, and the other thing. And this girl, I suppose she was no more than seventeen. It was her last year of school I suppose. She was sitting beside me and she was trying to make conversation and

08:30 she saw my watch on my wrist which in those days they used to wear a leather cap over watches. Which I always did in the bush because it protected them. The glass got broken easily and it was a protection. "What's on your watch." I said, "We wear them like that. It protects the glass and what have you." And I said, "Incidentally it originated

09:00 in World War I because by having a cover on your glass you wouldn't get a glint in the sun and give your position away to the enemy. Especially in troop fighting. Which was probably reasonable." And she said, "Oh my my. You are a brave man going back to another war." And I thought, "My God. I must look old." But she didn't realise.

09:30 Anyway they gave us some afternoon tea. It was quite pleasant and we found out quite a lot about Australia. Because really Canadians, they were starting to get educated because there had been a stream of Australians going through. But as I said when we got down to New York the Americans were completely ignorant. They were very very insular people. I suppose the Canadians were to a certain extent too.

10:00 Anyway going back. I got on a train, got down to New York and met this friend of mothers. We were… she roughly showed me the sights of New York, which I was a bit goggle-eyed at the sky scrapers and masses of traffic and I'm walking down the streets.

10:30 I was conscious of the fact that I had uniform on and the Americans were in the war and anyone in uniform was a friend. Oh uniform, where? Australia. Where's that? They had no idea. A lot of them would learn later where it was but…it so happened that I was walking down the street, the radio was going and I heard

11:00 on the radio Winston Churchill was over at that time addressing both houses of the American Parliament. Welcoming the new Allies and telling them what the score was. And I stopped to listen. And there were a number of people standing around listening going, "Who's this old guy? What the hell's he talking about?" Typical Americans. And he, "Oh he doesn't

11:30 know what he's talking about. We've come into the war, they said, and we'll have this over in three or four weeks. They said, you won't have to worry." That was their attitude and of course they were as badly off for materiel and that for the war as we were. They were better but they had this huge ability to get stuck into things without

12:00 too much red tape. So I enjoyed that few days in New York. Everyone, because you were an ally wanted to buy you a drink. So it didn't cost me very much down there. One of the memorable things I went to…I went with a friend's Mum. She said, "I think you should try and get into a Christmas Eve performance of the Radio City Music Hall.

12:30 It is usually booked out. That's a huge music hall. I think it's four or five thousand and so we made enquiries and they said there's huge queues of people trying to get in. And someone in uniform said, "Oh are you waiting to get in there." He said, "I'm not going." But he said, "If you walk down into the basement of the RCA Centre, which is joining across the other side of the street,

13:00 and walk through a tunnel you'll come up in the foyer of the theatre." Which we did and we walked straight in. Instead of standing out in the cold. They were kind to you like that. And we both enjoyed it.

It was a huge show but I think one of the star attractions at that time was what they called the Radio City Rockettes.

13:30 A ballet of about forty girls who danced in unison. They did it very well. To give you an idea of the size of the stage was also as part of that performance they had twenty performing horses on it. So it was a big stage and we had good seats. And they finished up with a…Having got the variety part over they finished up with a film.

14:00 I can't remember. It might have been something like White Christmas. It might have been a Bing Crosby film I think. But yes it was an interesting time. But the Americans were fully sure that the war wasn't going to be a problem and they could fix that up. And I

14:30 …All I could say is, "We've been in it for twelve months or so now and I don't think I can see any end to it." "Oh Australia, you don't know what you are talking about." Anyway I got back to Canada and did my last four weeks. Then, having got my wings

15:00 then we had a party after that. It got pretty wild with the Canadian people. Met a few girls but not too many.

How serious was your relationship with your wife to be when you left Australia?

Well friendship I suppose. She wrote to me every fortnight during the war

15:30 about what was going on at home. I have just read through…I sent here, it must have been about ninety letters while I was away in answer. But I've still got the lot there…a great big pile. And I've read through and they are as boring as hell. You couldn't talk about anything war, security wise, because they'd cut it out or burn the letter. I could talk about what I did on any leave

16:00 which I didn't get much of or how long it's taking your letter to arrive. It usually took about three months, four months sometimes. Thank you very much for the last fruitcake, and this that and the other thing. That's all I've got and dates and places. It's pretty boring. Actually after having asked to be involved I thought I'd better check back and

16:30 see if there were things that I could add to what I could say or what I can remember. I thought I could straighten up on dates and things like that. But finally when we had our wings and finally we were getting our postings everywhere we were going to be….the Battle of Britain had taken place and we were going to be really hot fighter pilots. Twelve Australians,

17:00 including me, were called into the chief flying instructor's office one day and he said, "You fellows are not going to England. The powers that be have decided….we were all over twenty-five, that you are too old to be fighter pilots. Your reflexes will start to slow down." And we were shocked. We didn't think we were slowing

17:30 down at all. We thought we were top of the lot. He said, "No. They've found out in Europe that the younger pilot who is more harem scarem is less likely to get shot down than the old fellow who get up there and starts to think." So he thought I could think. So we accepted this and…He said, "No. I'm sorry.

18:00 But nothing to do with me. I've just been told to tell you." So we said, "What's going to happen?" "They are placing you at a place called Charlottetown in Prince Edward Island, which is right off the east coast of Canada to do a GR course." That's general reconnaissance. And that is a two months course and you will learn to be a navigator. And I said, "Does that mean we're going to be working

18:30 "No, no, no," he said, "you will be a pilot navigator." This is aiming you towards Coast Command in Britain where they used, in the early part of the war, two pilots. One was navigator and on long sea trips you could change over. One could navigate and you could change over. That was the scheme of things, the way they saw it. So we had to

19:00 go to this Prince Edward Island. We had seven days to get there so we travelled up. A night in Toronto, a night in Ottawa, a couple of days in Montreal, which was sort of the sin city of Canada I suppose. And of course by the time we got into Montreal we were into Quebec and my friend with me who'd worked for

19:30 British Australian Tobacco company here before the war. He had a contact in the tobacco company there. And he took us under his wing. Interestingly his name was Austin, strange to say, but no relation what so ever. "Oh I've heard that you boys want to see the lights of the town. My companies told me to take you round." So he said, "We'll call for you at the pub at about half past six

20:00 and we will go round the nightclubs." I'd never been to a nightclub in my life before. So he duly turned up and away we went. We went to some place that he had organised. He had obviously told them he was bringing two Australian airmen. By this time I had a commission. We were both commissioned. You know, we were very proud of ourselves, wings up, and there was a floorshow on. And of course it was a gorgeous floorshow. I'd only been to the old Tiv [Tivoli Theatre] in Melbourne

20:30 but anyway about half way through the floor show part there was a strip tease. And I thought, "Oh…I

was pretty straight laced I suppose. And this went on and I was goggle eyed. And the compere said, “Oh Australia. You are surprised but would you stop staring.” Of course everyone looked round and I felt about this high.

21:00 Then on top of that this wretched woman. Well she was beautiful I suppose. She came and sat on our table. And I’d hate that to be on film but anyhow I got over it. But that’s the way they lived. Later on too that night Steve and I lost this fellow. He got a bit too full I think and we thought, “Oh well we’ll go on without him.”

21:30 We got down into a downtown nightclub which was really run by Canadian Negroes. And there was a floorshow on there. There were floorshows on one after the other and they were all an hour apart so you could go to the lot. And a taxi driver, I suppose, took us to this one. We got in there and yes it was really run by Negroes or Canadian Negroes.

22:00 It was well done. Again there was a bubble dancer on the floor. Nothing on except two great big bubbles which she wheeled around. And Steve said to me, I did smoke a bit. But I’ve never taken it up. I don’t know why but I did smoke. He said, “I bet you’re not game to put a cigarette (UNCLEAR) when she comes past. And by this time I’d had a few beers so

22:30 I’ll just poke her. Bang. It ruined the floorshow. We went out on the street about two minutes later. We went home then. But then we went on to Quebec the next day to see the old city. I had been interested in early Canadian history, especially The Heights of Abraham where the French forces under Montcalm fought the British under General Wolfe..

23:00 So I wanted to see that. So we went to Quebec for a night. It was snow covered so…but we went about the streets with a horse and sleigh. Steve and I took a horse and sleigh and said, “Take us round to the old part of Quebec where all this old stuff went on.” And we were rather horrified to find that we weren’t welcome. We had bottles thrown at us. They were very much French-Canadian, very

23:30 They were anti-French, anti-Canadian, anti-war, anti-everyone. And they didn’t like us and we couldn’t get out of there quick enough. And that was the first thing during the war years that I felt very anti about. Although they were obviously anti-us anyway. But we didn’t get hit or hurt. They just told the sleigh driver…He spoke French and the French Quebecois, even though they could speak English they didn’t like

24:00 using it. They would prefer you speak French. They were very…and they still are that way. Later in the war I met many French Canadians but they were none of them like the Quebecois.

(UNCLEAR).

We still only spent a night there…Got on a train across the river. We had to go on a ferry across the river

24:30 to the South Bank, and picked up a train and went right down into what they call Nova Scotia. It was probably a days trip to a place called Moncton. And we were supposed to go by ferry across, I’ve forgotten the name of the sea, to Prince Edward Island but couldn’t do so because the ferry wasn’t running. The ice was too thick. It was all

25:00 iced over. So they flew us over. We arrived over at Prince…The 31st General Reconnaissance School they called it were run by the Royal Air Force and currently were all staffed by their people. Experienced in the war to date or what they were coastal command. And they were training us to take their places. So it was my first experience of meeting

25:30 sort of English people and yes, straight away you could feel a bit of reserve. But again you can break that down and you can get used to it. I don’t know weather they are shy or weather they just think we’re something a bit different. Anyway we did a large amount of navigation and a large amount of paper work on desks. About…I suppose about fifteen

26:00 exercises in aeroplanes. We had to go out to sea, way out to sea, out of sight of land. And you had to work out your course and everything else by taking the direction of the waves. You take a drift sight on an aeroplane and yo can see weather the plane is drifting this way or that way by looking at whatever you see out to sea. There’s waves of course and the crests of waves.

26:30 If they go across this way or that way you know that there’s a wind and from the amount of drift you can work out the strength of the wind and where it’s coming from and you’ve got to apply that to your course. And you go out and do two or three legs, which means changing every time, and you have to come back to where you started from. And mostly I seamed to. Well not necessarily where you started from but to another place. It was always a different area. So you were training to become a navigator. This was purely a navigator’s job.

27:00 And the only other thing the navigator had to do in a Avro Anson aircraft, which is a twin-engine aircraft made in Britain, roughly about the mid thirties. It was their bomber but it was very light and never used as a bomber because it was out of date before the war started. But it had a wind up undercarriage. No hydraulics. In other words when the pilot took off the undercart had to be

27:30 wound up with about thirty-five turns on a thing like this, which was hard work. And the navigator had to do that. He had to do the winding up. And the letting down wasn’t so bad because it would release

itself. But they were noisy, cold, drafty aeroplanes and I never flew it. I had to wait till after my period as navigator. Anyway the course went on and we didn't have much of a social life there.

28:00 We did pass one day in a car we'd hired out to the northern end of the island. There's a book, a story written about Anne of Green Gables. About this…She lived there at Green Gables and we actually saw the place. It was historical. Prince Edward Island was dry…or as dry as…Quite a few provinces in Canada were dry.

28:30 Prince Edward was definitely dry except we had grog in the mess. That was available. If you…our first experience of…We'd been there about a week and we went out one night. I mean into town to a café or something. Charlottetown was very sort of old fashioned I suppose. Nothing like Montreal.

29:00 We went down to some restaurant place for a feed. We no sooner sat down at the table and a girl came up with a tea and a coffee pot and said, "Tea or coffee, sir?" And I thought, "That's funny, right at the beginning of the meal, tea or coffee." She said, "No, well actually it's different." They had beer in the coffee pot

29:30 and whisky and water in the other pot. And she could pour that. We didn't know but that was getting around the law a bit. We were drinking tea and coffee all night. But also a civilian wasn't supposed to have liquor at all but if you had a medical ailment you had to go and see your local doctor and he would give you a certificate to enable you to go to the government liquor

30:00 store and buy a limited amount of grog. A case of beer or a bottle of whisky, roughly. Provided you presented this and paid for what you were buying. On Friday nights, this happened on Fridays. On Friday nights there was a queue so long in the street of people…The doctors must have made a fortune because they charged you a couple of dollars for the certificate. Everyone made money and everyone got their grog.

30:30 But no pubs. No clubs or pubs.

No floorshows?

No floor shows. No. It was a very quiet island. It was the end of winter, all snow covered and purely a learning curve is all. And I learned well because I passed out well in navigation. And having done that we were posted away from there about

31:00 oh mid May 1942 and we were posted to…Across on the mainland not very far away….About a hundred miles I suppose, to an RAF [Royal Air Force] station called an OTU, an operational training unit. 31 OTU, it was at a place called Albert it was at the head of the Bay of Thunder. Now the Bay of Thunder is renowned for its huge tidal swells. The tide really

31:30 bored up there at six feet high. And then it disappeared just as quickly. We arrived there, the eight of us, and no one wanted to see us. We'd only just arrived and the CFI [Chief Flying Instructor] called and said, "Oh chaps." He was another Englishman again. "Oh you fellows, you shouldn't be here."

32:00 "You've never flown a twin-engine aircraft. You're single-engine pilots. You don't belong here. You have to go away somewhere and learn to fly a twin. You can't possibly learn to fly these things. They are very complicated, difficult aeroplane to fly. We'll arrange a posting for you." So nothing happened for ten days and incidentally Hudsons in training because they were so they used to have a lot of accidents.

32:30 On the ground they had a habit of swinging on landing or take off and that was because…I don't know why. I think the reason being the Hudson was really a Lockheed aircraft, an American civil aircraft designed as a passenger carrier for about eighteen people. But the military type, they dumped, near the back of it,

33:00 a four-gun turret which is heavy in itself and it tended to make the back a little bit swing heavy. You had to be very careful in taking off and landing. If it started to swing it was very hard to stop it. And if you did actually swing it did invariably break off one or other leg of the over cart and the undercarriage, under-cart as we called it, and that used to go up through the fuel tank

33:30 and the whole thing would go up in flames. And if the crew were lucky they'd get out of it. If they were not they'd burn. Well for the fortnight we were not doing anything a number of these crash and burns happened on the aerodrome. And as we had nothing to do we had to act at pole bearers and it wasn't very impressive. We were sort of asking the CFI, "When are we going to get posted away. We don't want to stay

34:00 here." He finally called us back and said, "Look, we can't find anywhere for you to go. We're going to try an experiment and convert you to twins on these." And it had never been done before but we had no option. Away we went an in the meantime we'd studies the aeroplanes sitting on the ground. The layout of the cockpit is very important. You must know where everything is

34:30 blindfold. If you want to know where a petrol gauge is then that's there. If you want to know that this lever is there or that there and so or what. You must know where it is. Not suddenly say, "I want to look at this and start looking for it." You've got to know instantly where to look. So we did this. We had a lot of time to do it so by the time we got in the aeroplane we didn't have much trouble with them. And

incidentally most of the chaps

35:00 who came through there had already done their twin flying on Ansons which are a very simple aircraft, not many instruments, and easy to fly. But it was a twin. You know how to control two engines and how to fly on one. If one failed what to do. With a single engine aircraft if the engine failed you just landed. No problem. So we started off in these things and where we had an advantage

35:30 was the cockpit layout, instrumentation and the way of doing things was typical American. Very much better than the British. It was similar in a smaller way to the Hudson. The things were in the same place, the same sort of instruments, the same sort of…You didn't feel completely lost. So we had no trouble. In fact most of us eight went solo before our friends

36:00 flying Ansons did. We were good students and of course again I was the first one. I suppose I was a gifted pilot and it just came naturally. I went solo in one of these things in about seven and a half hours and they said, "Right oh, you're right." And when you went solo someone else who was on course usually went with you. You usually went two of you

36:30 and you didn't fly them by yourselves. If there wasn't another pilot to go with you, you took one of the ground crew. The ground crew, that was the maintenance fellows who looked after the aeroplanes. They knew how every pilot flew so, "Yes, I'll fly with Austin. I won't fly with Jones, no way. He's bouncing up and down the runway like this." So

37:00 I never had any trouble to get someone to go with me. They were all told to go with me but they didn't demur. They were quite happy. So we went through our course on them. We learned much longer-range navigation. In fact I made several trips back to Montreal, which was about four hours flying, and back to Toronto. Mainly because one of the staff officers had a girlfriend there and wanted to go for the weekend. I had the job of flying him down there on Friday evening and I had to go back and collect him

37:30 on Monday morning. I and my crew did it for a navigation exercise, practice. So I didn't get into Toronto. I just did the flying but I enjoyed that, anyway.

Were you piloting or navigating? You were doing both?

At this stage the RAF in England had started. Weather they were running short of pilots…You never knew what happened.

38:00 But in the early parts of the war, my brother John, he was already flying Hudsons in England. But they flew it with two pilots. Two pilot navigators and he was operating from Scotland or Norway or that area. He became quite a famous pilot, sunk a couple of ships and what have you. He used to occasionally write to me but not often. He was flying with two pilots but they decided for some reason, weather it was a shortage of pilots, and

38:30 too many navigators they would fly with a pilot and a navigator. So by the time we went to Albert I was the only pilot and there was a navigator and two wireless air gunners in my crew. Who appear on that mug I showed you were all Australians. And we learned to fly together and how to team in. It was very important that you each understood each other.

39:00 And knew each other's capabilities. And we got on pretty well. That's the reason I suppose that we survived for two years together as crew.

So that crewing up process had already taken place? That was in Nova Scotia?

At Nova Scotia I went over…no crew. When I'd learned to fly a Hudson and that was probably the first month there.

39:30 The last month was with navigators and wireless air gunners in the station. And you had to pick your man. I picked four Australians because the current rumour running around at that time was that they were taking Australian airmen down to Florida and teaching them to fly Catalina flying boats, and sending them back to Australia.

40:00 Well I've got to get all Australians and we just might get home. It didn't happen. And of course at this stage we start to get mixed crews, Canadians, Brits, and New Zealanders due to the Empire Air Training Scheme. It doesn't matter which country. Just if you were a navigator and you fitted that crew. So I specifically chose my crew as Australians because

40:30 I thought we might have got home. But it never happened. And I learned later on during the war that you never want to rely on a rumour.

But what was the thought…If you could get home was it to help defend Australia?

Well by this time, which was July 1942 and the war was

41:00 coming into Australia at this time. I think. I can't remember the date but I think they had already bombed Darwin and they were into New Guinea. And we wanted to get home. But again as luck would have it, I suppose for me, we didn't get down there, we didn't do it. We heard afterwards and we heard in a round about way that some of those early Catalinas that were crewed by Australians to fly home.

41:30 Somehow security must have broke down and the Japanese navy got wind of them and a lot of them got shot down over the Pacific. Whether from submarines or what have you. But they were very slow aircraft which wouldn't be flying very hard and probably on the trip out to Australia mightn't have even been armed. You know, just on a long trip across the Pacific.

42:00 So maybe we wouldn't have

Tape 5

00:31 **Okay.**

Well at OTU Albert it was totally English staff. All the instructors had been there done that in Europe already. They had been coastal command people. They were decorated and they were really having their rest period by being sent to Canada to teach us as replacements for them, eventually.

01:00 Again, like over in Prince Edward Island, you didn't become sort of buddies, to use the American term, with the English instructors. The other thing that stood out immediately with the English was the difference between an English officer

01:30 and an English other rank. Or an aircraft. There were different lines. And there was also a fairly wide margin between a squadron leader and a pilot officer even though you were both in the same mess and eating together. You had to know your place and of you got out of line you were very quickly put back there. Not in

02:00 all cases but in many cases. There were very decent fellows who you could get along with. But…and there was a tendency for the British, English, Scottish, anywhere from that area to look upon Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders as colonists or black troops

02:30 as they called us.

Why black troops?

I don't know. They thought we had Aborigines I suppose. I…a certain amount of jokingly derogatory I suppose but it was there all the time. Anyway on courses, by this time, once we had gone through the general navigation course in the OTU there were many English pilots there. They had come to Canada to

03:00 complete their training. And we became friends. Yes. We went out to the restaurant and went out together. We understood each other. And what really surprised me was I think probably a lot of English people generally and I think especially in the services, the younger ones, they'd never been anywhere. And many of them

03:30 hadn't been outside their local town. And maybe they'd lived a hundred miles from London but they'd never been there. They never travelled. Australians were so used to travelling far and wide, provided they had something to travel in. We met other people in different parts of the country and who did things in different ways. We learned. And the Brits, or the Scots or the Welsh were still clannish. But joined

04:00 clannishly together against outsiders. But anyway we broke it down. And later in the war it broke down all together. Now having finished our flying training at OTU, we crewed together and were passed as okay to move on. The general plan was, or had been, to send us

04:30 for a quick sort of gen course back to Montreal to a unit called Atlantic Ferry Command. Because these Hudsons we had learned to fly. We were going to take one to England which means fly across flying via Greenland, Iceland and into Scotland. That was the route they flew and we were to take an aircraft with us. That was part of the scheme of

05:00 things. That had fallen apart because the Americans wanted the Hudsons for themselves. They're own use, training, and what have you. There was a hiatus in supply and that went on for some time. So we had to go by ship. And we went down…We were posted down to Halifax, which was the main port from Nova Scotia. All the convoys warmed up in that part of the world.

05:30 And we had a few days leave before we went there and then we had a week waiting. While we were waiting we met a few people round there and did a few things. Nothing very exciting because they were very very conservative. And one family we stayed with, some, there'd be four or five

06:00 hundred feet above the harbour up on the hillside. And they said…I had remembered that apparently in World War I an ammunition ship blew up in Halifax Harbour. It caught fire and blew up. It caused terrific damage. And they said that the anchor of that ship landed up in the paddock just up above where their house was. I

06:30 had probably read about it but they were still conscious of ammunition ships loading in Halifax Harbour and going out to sea. Anyway that was one small point I learned there. But once we got to the day, yes,

you are sailing on such and such a day. I had visions of an … cabin and God knows what. I was horrified to arrive down

07:00 at the harbour and someone said, “That’s your ship.” It was a funny little boat down there with about five thousand tons at the most and with a straight up funnel and a couple of masts. The Baliano, which had been a banana boat from the West Indies to England in peacetime. It had been an armed merchant cruiser in World War I.

07:30 It was an old ship and very slow. Flat out at about nine knots. So we joined what they called a nine know convoy. Slow…Mostly slow ships. We were escorted. We formed up outside Halifax Harbour in daylight and we were onboard by this time. We had found our way down stairs and lunch was on. We were down below sea

08:00 level and for some reason, I don’t know what it was, out to see beyond us a destroyer or something let off a couple of depth charges. Which clanged against the side of the ship like this. It’s like hitting a tin tank with a sledgehammer. The noise was terrific. We thought we were sunk before we were started. One of the stewards said, “That’s nothing. Someone’s just fiddling round with a depth charge. Plenty of that goes on.” So that’s

08:30 a sight of relief. Well we had a limited passenger…The boat was loaded up with foodstuff I suppose. There were limited passengers, about forty. And they had selected about twenty-four officers, officers only on this boat. And to our delight or otherwise

09:00 sixteen girls, who had left England at the beginning of the war to complete their education in Canada. They were coming back. The war was nearly two years old by this stage and they were going back to do some useful war work. And they were on the ship with us. So that was pleasant. We travelled, even though we were in convoy conditions on this little boat were more or less like, I suppose, a

09:30 little passenger liner. We were well fed. There was limited fresh water. If you really wanted a shower you were welcome to have a salt shower. Food was good. We had a bar. We could dance a bit at night. If the boat stayed stationary. Because we were lucky going over. It was a particularly rough trip….

Winter?

No. The middle of summer. More or less central Atlantic and it was very very rough.

10:00 This boat was rolling like this. As far as dancing was concerned it was pretty difficult. It was pretty difficult doing anything. We attempted it. Various card games and other sorts of games. No good chess because the chessmen wouldn’t stay on the board. That was the good side. The bad side was it was very cold and wet outside. We were all supposed to take our turn to

10:30 do bridge watch, up on the bridge, rugged up in our great coats and what have you. Anti-submarine watch. At that stage there was no aircraft on that side of the thing. I suppose we did about four hours. Two hours on and then later in the day we did another two hours. Day or night. Watching for submarines. As far as luck would have it we never saw one. We never had a submarine attack, which was quite unusual,

11:00 because we were a bit apprehensive because at that stage of the war every convoy expected to lose about fifteen per cent of the ships. And the submarine warfare was at its height. Around us we had two or three corvettes, a couple of cruisers further out. And I think somewhere in the background but we never really saw much of it, a battle cruiser.

11:30 It was looking after the convoy. Now we set sail from Halifax and it took us fourteen days to get to Liverpool. We went all over the Atlantic. We were dodging…going this way, that way and the other way. Probably to a plan or on advice received. Where a sub pack had been sighted in a certain area we’d probably go off in the other direction. But we weren’t told.

12:00 But we all being pilot navigators, even though we didn’t see much sun or stars because it was cloudy all the time. The little bit we saw we could roughly work our from where we saw our stars or where the sun was and how high where…we could more or less see we think we’re going south-east now or now we’re going north…And I think we roughly worked it out. We went

12:30 eastwards towards the central Atlantic and then north, way up towards Iceland and then came down towards Scotland. And it took fourteen days but on the last…on the boats of a convoy there were about…from ten to a dozen

13:00 …there were thirty-eight of us. There were ten or a dozen fuel tankers. And the sea was so rough that it was washing right over their deck at times. They were ploughing right into it. And the other boats weren’t much better. And as for the corvettes around the outside, they were bobbing around like corks in the storm. They always say the corvette is rough and I can imagine. They never seem to be upright. This way, that way. It must have been a terrible life on them for the naval fellows.

13:30 Anyone that served there said it was exactly that way. In the last three days or four days before we got to England air attack was expected as a possibility. And one day the cloud was up a bit. It wasn’t a clear sky. It was cloudy. We saw flying round the convoy, at quite a

14:00 distance out one of the four engine German Aircraft. It was what they called a Focke Wulf Condor. It was out counting the convoy ships and it radioed back information. It would have contacted the submarines of course…the same as our side would be doing the same thing. It was too far out of range for anyone to shoot at it. I don't think I heard a shot fired but you could see it occasionally.

14:30 Or I'd imagine the…the corvette that tried to shoot it…It couldn't have got a bearing because it was rocking around too much. A big cruiser…if there had been one at that time, because it was stable in the water, could have used anti-aircraft fire if it had been near enough. But the Condor would be very careful not to get near that. Incidentally, or interestingly, next to us in the

15:00 convoy, one ship over, was a cargo vessel with a Hurricane attached to the front of the ship. It was to be there in case we had an air attack and it was supposed to go up and shoot the aeroplane down. And what happened to the pilot if he succeeded in shooting it…He couldn't land on the ship again. He had to land in the sea. We were close enough to North Ireland

15:30 or somewhere in Ireland he could fly there but otherwise he had to land in the sea and hope to be rescued. Not a job I'd be very keen to do. But it never happened. He never used it. Eventually we came round the north of Ireland into the Irish Sea. And we were very relieved to see the North Irish coast.

16:00 Because the submarine warfare had been so severe and we'd come through without loss, without incident really, we were very very lucky. And we went down into Liverpool and left our ship there. We were first aware of the war in England because of the number of sunken ships in the Liverpool bay. Not a lot but they were there. Wrecks. And as we got closer you could see a certain amount of

16:30 bomb damage in the port area. They didn't often come up as far as Liverpool but there was quite a bit of bomb damage. And incidentally our ship the Baliano was sunk on the way back. I heard that afterwards that it was lost…torpedoed. So onshore into Liverpool. We had a night there at a reception depot.

So

17:00 **What do you think…You said a bomber came out on reconnaissance. Obviously that German bomber was…**

We know it was a German one. We never saw any of our aircraft. Oh look we saw odd aircraft of our own. It was so cloudy and the cloud was so low…It probably wasn't…Anyone who came out probably came out to count how many of us were left. You know.

So why do you think there was no attack on a large convoy like that. They knew where you were. What would stop them?

17:30 Obviously they'd guide us away from where the submarines were. Sometimes that didn't happen but… And a slow convoy is easy meat. A submarine pack can get into them and make easy meat but they were sufficiently knowledgeable to keep us out of the way. And we were out of range of

18:00 …until about the last two days we were out of range of German bombers because they had to come from the north of France. They routed us so we were more or less out of their range. We went up past Ireland and round the north of Ireland. I mean up towards Iceland and round the north of Ireland. And that was out of range of German bombers. The range…aircraft didn't have a lot of range.

18:30 They had probably six or eight hundred miles out and then you've got to have enough fuel to come back again. That's like with the Hudson aircraft. We found out when we got to England that it was already obsolete there because it didn't have enough range. It had six or seven hours endurance but that gave it six or seven hundred miles out and a bit of time out there and then six or seven hundred miles back.

19:00 They had to…anyway I'll say a bit more about that later on. Anyway we were offloaded in Liverpool. A night there. We had some of the local girls, I suppose Red Cross to welcome us. There was a bit of a party, a bit of a dance. We caught a train early the next morning

19:30 down through England. And I had in the back of my mind they'd been in the war, they'd been bombed and everything was dreadful. But I was absolutely surprised. It looked like nothing had happened. All the farms. Everything looked quite normal except there were large areas of vegetable in. Brussels sprouts and all those sorts of things, potatoes. They had to grow their own food because they couldn't bring it in and it was

20:00 …..A lot of country was put under vegetables because they are easy to grow. With the rainfall there you can grow vegetables without having to water them. And it was very necessary to have them. In fact Brussels sprouts and herrings and kipper seemed to be the national diet. An egg was difficult to get and meat was very scarce. And plenty of bread. Pretty well fed

20:30 generally but our messes were quite good. But you had to have ration cards of course if you were on the town. They wouldn't ask for one if you just went into an ordinary little café but if you were sitting down for a meal you had to have something to give them anyway.

Okay Frank before we just digress….You've already crewed up. You've got your four crewmembers. Can you tell us who they were? Who these men were?

21:00 **Their names and what sort of men they were?**

My navigator was a fellow called John Bidon. He came from the Sydney area. He was about three years younger than I was at that time so he'd be about twenty-two. Religion didn't seem to come in

21:30 to the air force at all. I happened to be a Church of England and he was a Catholic. So I didn't seem….Yeah a practicing one during the war years. One of my gunners was a fellow called Ewan McLennan. He came from the north coast of New South Wales. Up Coffs Harbour way. Somewhere up there.

22:00 And I think before the war he had been an apprentice hairdresser. He was a very…he was commissioned. The other air gunner, Murray Todd. We called him Dick Todd after the singer. He was a singer around that time. You probably haven't heard of him but he was always known as Dick.

22:30 He was a young bloke. I don't know whether he had any particular occupation before the war because he was only about twenty at this stage. He wasn't commissioned, of course, he was a flight sergeant. So at that stage he was only non...Later on he got a commission. And that often happened, you got a commission in the field if you hadn't done anything wrong and you applied

23:00 for commission. And the netted up standards, they weren't very difficult. You could get a commission and he did. I think he did actually after I left the crew. But he was a nice bloke. John Bidon I think…He worked with an auto firm in Sydney. Something like Cramer and Rector.

23:30 Motor parts. That was his profession. He went back to it after the war apparently. Yes. They were good blokes to get on with. Mac, McLennan. We called him Mac because you always got a nickname. A lot of the irreverent

24:00 younger people training, because I was so old they used to call me Pop. Because I seemed to know everything. And fellows only five years younger than me would turn to me for advice sometimes. I gave it or couldn't give it but I didn't mind anyway. I also got the name of Bunny.

24:30 Not because the Austins bought the rabbits out here but pre-war, I got this in England. Because one of their tennis players had been Bunny Austin or Bunny. Likewise the same thing happened to my brother when he was in the RAF in England too. He was Bunny Austin too. They liked to use a nickname. Religion never came

25:00 into it anywhere that I can remember. We didn't often have a…On a training unit religious padres were there but on a squadron you may or may not, depending on availability I think. I don't think we had one from memory. Or if we did I didn't see him. Church parades

25:30 during training but not once you got onto fighting the war in Scotland, no. There might have been the odd funeral service if the body was available. But no that didn't happen often. Oh well after we left Liverpool we were put on a

26:00 train. It wasn't a troop train but it was a train, anyway. We were heading down to Bournemouth on the south coast of England where the normal reception area for Australian airmen is. A nice pleasant town. We arrived there and we were billeted out in well I suppose you'd call them disused boarding houses during the war years. Quite comfortable. Nice town, nice seaside. People happy to see us I think.

26:30 I can't quite remember weather the reception area was run by Australian personnel or British personnel. But anyway we were looked after. After the paper work and things and giving us various bits of paper and ration cards that were necessary for surviving in England and a little bit of advice on local knowledge, what to expect and what not to expect. We were given, I think, seven

27:00 days leave. Well one of the first things I did in Bournemouth was to go round the coast a little bit. A very old uncle of my fathers was living there. I rang up and they said, "Look, we're sorry but he's been very ill. You can go and see him but we don't think he'll know you." So anyway I went. And my great uncle John, who he was,

27:30 and he was ninety six. He was dying of pneumonia and he had just fallen off his bicycle in a blackout. He was a pretty tough old cookie apparently but I never spoke to him. So the next thing…my brother John, who had been in the air force six months previously to me and had finished a tour of operations…I managed to contact him. Found out where he was and found out that he had left

28:00 his squadron up in Scotland and he was actually down round the corner from Bournemouth at a place called Gosport. It was really the base quarters for that particular squadron. And I really hadn't seen him for a bit over twelve month. Since he went overseas. So we arranged to meet. I managed to get round by train and bus and walked to his mess in

28:30 Gosport. So we had a good old talk and what have you. And he informed me then that since he had finished here in England, temporarily anyway he would be sent back to Australia as a Hudson pilot as a replacement for many of the crews they lost in Singapore. The Australian air force lost nearly all their Hudsons stationed up in Malaya and he was going out. They were very

29:00 short of experienced Hudson pilots so John an one or two others were being recalled. He said, "I'm

leaving shortly but I don't know when." He actually…This was about the end of September. He didn't actually leave until early November but he got home for Christmas anyhow.

29:30 And he was able to give all the family the news. He thought I'd grown up a bit and so had he. I don't know why but anyway. We had a great old pallywal and stayed in London for a few days together. While at Bournemouth we had a few days one weekend soon after we got there with two New Zealand friends who were very keen yachtsman. "Oh Frank,

30:00 we've found out that we can hire a yacht here and go sailing on the Solent." I said, "Oh yes. I'm no yachtsman but I'll come with you." So away we got into this…only a small yacht but away we went. And we thought we were in the Fastnet yacht race. We were going along having great fun. They knew what they were doing and I was enjoying it. And suddenly over the horizon a naval ship arrived.

30:30 It was a destroyer winking a light at us like mad. And none of us seemed to be able to read the message they sent to us but anyway it got a bit closer and finally a boat was launched and came over to us and said with a loud hailer, maybe two hundred yards away, "What are you doing there? You are sailing in a minefield. It's high tide." We were sailing with mines but we didn't know and no maps sent out. So

31:00 we could have been blown up there and then. So we didn't know where to go but we got out of it anyway. But that one little incident, the things that happen to you. Then on leave in London, or well I suppose we went naturally to Australia House and the Australian air force headquarters and met a few Australians and met a few people. And did a fair bit of drinking, I suppose.

31:30 And we got back to Bournemouth.

What did London look like?

Well I didn't go down to the port area which had been the main area bombed. But it was (UNCLEAR) at that time. The first blitz was over. I think the most notable thing I saw was the destroyed church in the centre of London. St Clement

32:00 Danes. Which is in the middle of The Strand. It was just a shell. And why I mention this was after the war it was rebuilt. It was one of Wren's churches. It was rebuilt and dedicated as the head church of the Royal Air Force. And it's…I saw it again in 1980 when I was over there. I went and had a look and saw it rebuilt.

32:30 It was beautifully fitted out inside. And the whole floor is paved with the crests of many squadrons. Any squadron that served in Europe. Americans, British….It was paved with this and much decorations. And one reason I went there was that airmen who had lost their lives in Britain…they had great big tombs and all their names were in them. Which I'd seen in glass cases but they had a quick reference underneath.

33:00 And my younger brother Jim who was killed in Bomber Command. It would be there and it was there all right. It did surprise me a bit in amongst this huge list of names there were thirty-nine Austins. And I thought God, there's not that many Austins in the world. Every Austin except my brother was English. Which is a lot of Austins to lose their lives

33:30 in the European war. I was quite surprised really because I didn't think Austin was a very common name. It's not Smith or Jones or something. Or in the modern days that new Vietnamese number that's pages and pages and pages. No. And it's beautiful. Anyway as a long shot of that I became a sort of life member of it. I paid…they are all looking for money, these places.

34:00 They hold a number of services there a year…Special services for this, that and the other thing. And I still belong to it. I have done for many years. As far as…Britain was very congested traffic wise. Not as far as cars but buses and trucks and army vehicles. Especially in a blackout it was hard to get about. Especially if it was foggy conditions

34:30 …you more or less had to know your way about pretty well to find anything. People I met were very friendly. At that stage there weren't a great number of Americans there because they didn't start to come to England in droves as they did later on. The invasion of Europe but they were there.

35:00 And the food was sufficient but not exciting as is to be expected. Now after this week in London I went back to Bournemouth and found out that we didn't know

35:30 what was happening to us. They sent us off to an advance flying unit. What they mean by that is we who were quite experienced but we had no experience of flying in England in a blackout in night time and we had to go and do roughly a hundred-hour course there to get to know your way around England, how you could fly the blackout, what their rules and regulations were.

36:00 They did teach us much more than flying except that we did a fair bit of night flying there because it was important. But it was quite a fun spot as far as living and flying. It was there that I first came in contact with the Women's Royal Air Force. Now when I left Australia there were no women in the air force here.

36:30 They hadn't started. But they had been there for some time. And I had assumed, yes I knew they were

there but they would be doing the sort of menial sort of work. Helping out with office work, perhaps cooking. But they were largely parachute packers. That was a big business. And to my horror I went out early just after I got to England to fly an aeroplane.

37:00 I was told you go out and fly such and such a plane. And I went out there and a WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] was with what they called the maintenance release. Which, your first flight in the morning just shows that the aeroplane had been checked and serviced and can fly. She handed me this. She said, "Here's your maintenance list, sir. I've completed the examination." And I had a double

37:30 take. At home you never let a girl near a motorcar or anything because they didn't know anything about it. And I said, "You mean I'm to fly this aeroplane?" And she said, "Yes sir. It will be right." I had a few words. I said, "I suppose you've been in this thing for a long time?" She said, "No actually. I was a child's nurse and I joined the air force." Oh well. So I went and flew the aeroplane. It flew all right but I was very chauvinistic

38:00 I suppose. But the girls did everything. I found out later, not long later…We were at a pub drinking and there were a couple of girls in an odd sort of uniform and they were what they called ATAs. Air Transport Auxiliary. They delivered all the new aeroplanes, no matter what, to where they were needed. They knew Hurricanes, knew Spitfires, and knew Lancasters. They could fly anything.

38:30 They were very bright girls.

So did they get their training under the same scheme as you did?

No. They didn't have anything like that. I think probably a lot of them had flown before the war. Yeah. The ATA was an organisation that looked after delivery and retrieval of aeroplanes if they still could fly. To save busy pilots doing it. And they apparently had a wonderful record.

39:00 And I particularly remember, not because I had any feelings towards her but I talked to another girl called Diana Ramsey, which didn't mean a thing. I never saw her again until five years after the war. I saw a letter in the paper. A girl, late of the ATA Diana Ramsey was found dead in a motorcar somewhere in

39:30 …near Cooma in New South Wales. She had come out here apparently. Maybe she had a boyfriend who she followed out here. I never knew what happened to her but quite a strange coincidence. And of course these sort of things happened all the time.

So the women were involved in maintenance and delivery of the planes but no combat, were they?

No combat. No. They

40:00 …But they did everything else. And were very good at it and probably far less complaining than the men. Likewise those who didn't go into one or other of the services and do something there…there were massed in the Women's Land Army. Where they were growing all the vegetables and helping on the farms. The women were wonderful I think. So was everyone in England really.

40:30 They all tried to do something. They realised that they had their backs right up against a wall. And we had great admiration for them. What else.

No. Now we need to know a little more about

Tape 6

00:31 Well learning to fly-in a blackout. It's not much different from flying in the blackout in Canada where there are no lights about. The thing is you never quite knew what else is up there. I remember flying along quite happily and suddenly realised that right across the front of me had gone a large aircraft

01:00 with a glider. And there was glider training at that stage. And I just went between the cable, and we didn't have any lights on the aircraft at that stage. Because their might be an enemy night fighter about. If you have your lights on then you're a sitting duck maybe. Yes. And another part of the training there I was sent across for a week to a place called Mildenhall in

01:30 East Anglia where they specialised in teaching you to fly blind. They called it a bat flight which … approach and take off unit. In other words you had to learn to take off blind and then come round and land blind again without seeing the strip. Which was essential. That was done electronically and it is far better now but it was very primitive in those days. You did it by

02:00 flying round in a circle and coming in at a set direction over certain marker beacons. And once you passed these if you went that side of them you'd get an A and if you went that side of them you'd get an N. And if you got a constant signal you knew you were right on track. At the same time you are watching all your instruments. Your air speed, your height, and then you finally get into the…two of these beacons. One tells you that

02:30 you are a hundred feet above the ground and you are on track. If you go ahead at the same rate of incline you should land on the runway.

So where's the beacon? Where are the beacons located?

Just on the ground underneath and you've got a receiver in the aeroplane. It receives a signal and you hear it through your earphones and you just listen to it. It is telling you to go left, go right, or you're okay or what have you.

03:00 We did this in the daytime but in heavy fog. East Anglia is renowned for its fog. You'd go out in the fog and take off in the fog and come back and land in the fog. After about ten hours of this they said, "Okay, you've got your certificate. You are right to do it." So we did it. Everything was done so quickly in those days…You couldn't

03:30 do…If someone was learning flying today it would take weeks or months go be passed because it is so strict. But everything had to be done in a rush then.

Was it sufficient training? Were you ready, do you think for the operations you did?

I suppose I was. I was confident. Up to this stage I had had no accidents or mishaps in an aeroplane so I was pretty confident. I don't think I was overconfident. I always tended to be cautious.

04:00 But I knew my capabilities and I knew the capabilities of the aeroplane. I tried to stay within both so I'm still here.

So what happened next after Bournemouth and…?

Then we finished this bat flying at the advanced flying unit at Mildenhall. We thought we'll be put with a flying unit in England.

04:30 So we went to a personnel depot and they said, "Not England. You're going to India." That was fairly typical. You never quite knew what was going to happen. The reason we were pushed off to India was that the Japanese had started to invade Burma and they were pushing up there very very fast and the resources they had there to stop them were nil. Any air force they had there had been already

05:00 lost in Java and through the East Indies. The squadron I joined had been decimated in Java. And the remnant were largely ground crew. They managed to get a remnant back to Ceylon, back to India and the squadron had been reformed with new personnel. Of course they were still losing some in the India area and the Burma area. I went out with my crew and an aeroplane as a reinforcement for them.

05:30 They suddenly decided…because parts of the war change very quickly. The earliest thinking was that in Britain…oh well the Japs were in the war but oh no, Singapore, it will never fall. It is a bastion. No need to worry there. Of course it was gone in a matter of weeks. It really shook people and they started to think about it then. And then once Singapore had gone they

06:00 went up into Burma and they hadn't started building the infamous Thai-Burma Railway. That happened later. But they were coming by ship into the south of Burma and there was nothing to stop them because they controlled all the Dutch East Indies as they were then. They controlled the waterways. We had no navy. Our big battleships the HMS Hood and the HMS Renown was it, they were both sunk.

06:30 Our navy was nil. Our guns were pointing the wrong way. It was a shambles. So when I…as I say that's the way we were suddenly posted out. But other aircraft. Other aircraft went out too. But we didn't go in a group. We just went when aeroplanes were ready. Aeroplanes were, because America wanted so many themselves aeroplanes were hard to get. There were only a limited number. But they had set up a scheme whereby aircraft

07:00 that were available and going out to the Middle East and the Far East would go down through the southern part of the United States, through South America and fly across the south Atlantic. Through Sierra Leone, West Africa. They'd fly there. And then we would come

07:30 down from Britain by ship in a convoy. And we were there to pick them on and take them wherever they wanted. Either the Middle East or India, which we did. Another reason why I didn't stay in England too that we weren't told, didn't know was that they had decided that the Hudson aircraft had become obsolete in Britain. They didn't have enough range to get far enough out to sea for what they were supposed to do.

08:00 They did a pretty good job while my brother was flying over the North Sea and across to Norway and Denmark. Looking for German ships coming in and out from North Germany. The ships used to go out occasionally… German battleships like the Grafspee and things like that to attack especially convoys going to Russia. So they were looking out for them and trying to stop them. But anyway

08:30 that was more or less under control and they were trying to, when they could get them, convert the Hudson squadrons to Liberator squadrons. Now Liberator was another American aeroplane. It was a four engine, a bigger aeroplane and about twice the range. They did the same work. But they were very hard to get. There weren't many about. The American wanted them for themselves and just a few

09:00 came but so some crews were converted to Liberators. One of my friends in Canada who came across to England with me. He and his crew were converted to them and some months later he became the first coastal command VC [Victoria Cross]of the war. He sunk a German submarine while he was flying around on fire himself. And they eventually crashed and were all lost. But he did sink the submarine. He got his recommendation

09:30 for the Victoria Cross form the captain of the submarine. He thought he was such a brave man flying this flaming aeroplane around while dropping bombs on him. Silly thing, isn't it. But anyway when we… we had a reasonable convoy trip down to West Africa. We left from the English Channel. Up through the Irish Sea.

10:00 Down through the mid Atlantic. About twenty ships. A faster convoy this time. About eighteen knots because it had a lot of troops on. And an eighteen knot convoy is a bit harder for submarines to catch up with. A bit harder to hit. And we naturally had an escort. We got down to Freetown, Sierra Leone, on New Years Eve 1942.

10:30 We had New Years day on the ship and then got off the ship and then again the same procedure. Off the ship and onto a small train and chuffed out about fifteen miles to an aerodrome which was a staging camp. And of course we were right on the tropics. Just near the equator. Just north of the equator by this stage and it was hot. Didn't really worry me because I was used to a hot climate here. Not so much the humidity but

11:00 the English personnel who came out from Europe. It really knocked them about. They couldn't stand the heat. They all broke out in prickly heat. They were very uncomfortable and they had to put up with that for about a week until we were finally told there was an aeroplane available for us to go to India so one night before we

11:30 ….while we were still in this staging camp. What they called Waterloo. They seemed to call them after battles. Another place down there was Hastings. Two Englishmen and myself got a lift into Sierra Leone town and we had lunch. They had a bit of an army men's camp there. Pretty rough but it was there. We got a bit of a feed and a drink.

12:00 I said, "There's be a truck going back to camp at three o'clock. It leaves from such and such a place at three o'clock." So we got down there at about ten to three to make sure but no truck. Time went by. No truck. No one had ever even heard of a truck. We thought so what are we going to do now. We were twelve miles away from camp. I said look there's no taxis here. The phone is pretty indifferent. I think the best thing to do is we'll start to walk

12:30 and if the trucks very late it will pick us up. It was either so late or never was. We walked all that twelve miles back. It was quite dark. We were walking through this fairly narrow gravel road through the jungle and there were all these jungle noises going on either side. Animals, I didn't know what they were. A bit scary but anyway very hot and steamy. I suppose dehydration is the word now. We were all becoming terribly dehydrated.

13:00 There was no water to drink. And I really, these last couple of miles I had to really belt these Englishmen on. They wanted to just lay down and die. And I really had to pummel them to keep them going. And they thought I was a hard taskmaster but we made it. It was…I hadn't realised that climate made such a difference to people.

So what was there…Just to make it clearer for me…what was there in the way of military

13:30 **…What military installation were there in Sierra Leone.**

There? I suppose Sierra Leone was just a British colony. And because it was British controlled, British civil service. A few army people there just to keep control but wherever I went mostly during the war we staged hoped from one British colony

14:00 or protectorate or something and it was still run more or less on a peacetime system of silver service. They had a policeman and a judge and all that sort of thing. It was very peaceful. Anything compared to what is happening today. They all got their independence and then went berserk. It was very primitive, remote, and obviously because

14:30 there was a colony or a protectorate or whatever there was money coming out of it in some way. Either fruit or minerals or something. They weren't going to be there unless they were making money. No country ever is. They had cheap labour and it was one of the places that in the bad old days they used to catch the slaves and take them to America. It was a slave trading place. We left there and we had a six-hour flight around the south

15:00 of West Africa to a place called Takoradi in what was then called the Gold Coast. I think it is called Ghana now. And there was a peacetime British place. It did have an aerodrome and it did have some sort of air service so it was not entirely remote but again it was ninety per cent or ninety-five

15:30 per cent native people. But peaceful, easy to get on with. The only thing odd about Takoradi was it was one of the receiving places for aeroplanes coming across from South America. They were standing there being serviced and they were stripping out the long-range petrol tanks and that sort of thing before they went on to the Middle East. I noticed the place was full of American aircraft. I think they were

called

16:00 Marauders and I said to someone I said, “There are a lot of Marauders here. Why do they want so many?” “That’s simple.” He said, “They can fly an empty aeroplane in here and land it but when it’s full of fuel there’s no room to take it off. One of these little slip-ups you see.” The strip wasn’t long enough. When they filled it with fuel they couldn’t get off. So they cut a whole lot of jungle down and made the strip longer.

16:30 My aeroplane could get off.…only just. It was a short strip.

What were the landing strips like?

Well this one at Takoradi was quite good because it was a peacetime strip. But back at Waterloo where we had left it had just been cut out of the jungle and scraped clear with a grader.

So it was a dirt?

Yeah. In wet it would be hopeless in wet.

17:00 Then having done that we…as we came round the American coast we flew probably about fifteen miles out to sea. The idea was that as that was a shipping route between ports we were there in case we might see a lurking submarine. We were a submarine watch but we didn’t see anything. There was nothing there. Well there may have been but we didn’t see anything so I don’t know. Then next was Nigeria. We

17:30 called in at their aerodrome at Kedga, which was the aerodrome for Lagos. The reason we called in there was one we had to get fuel. Every time we stopped we had to get fuel but we also had to carry supplies inland to some of the other staging posts. We were due to land that night and take off the next morning with supplies. But next morning we were ready to go but they couldn’t find the supplies. Typical. So we had a day there doing nothing.

18:00 The interesting thing…somewhat amusing there was the British fire crew looked after the fire tender on the aerodrome, if any aeroplanes caught alight. They were attempting to train some Nigerians to be members of the fire crew. And they had…they heaped up a whole lot of rubbish on the edge of the aerodrome and set fire to it.

18:30 And they were trying to encourage one of these Nigerians, who was probably not long out of the treetops, to put on an asbestos suit and getting him to walk into the fire. And he didn’t get burned. Of course he didn’t want to go for a long time but finally he was eased into the edge of this fire and he found he wasn’t hot and he was jumping up and down with great excitement. And all the watchers on from round the edge they thought he was a God I think. They couldn’t get him out. He didn’t want

19:00 to come out. So these little things amuse you at times. It takes the monotony out of it. From Kedga we went on to…We were due to fly up to a place called Makurdi, sort of heading towards the northeast corner of Nigeria. And we loaded on a lot of fresh vegetables and food and supplies for them. They had no

19:30 means of…It was only a refuelling depot. And we had to take a bit of a detour there because the country is pretty…Our maps, as I say were not terribly good. Rather than fly direct over pretty rough country they suggested you follow as far as possible over any major towns and tracks or routs. We had to map read in other words. A bit like a fighter pilot does. So

20:00 we went over Benin City, which was a major city of the slave trade in the sixteen hundreds. We arrived at Makurdi to be told straight away, “What are you doing here? We are closed. We are leaving tomorrow.” And I said, “We’ve got all the food.” They said, “We don’t want it. We don’t want you either. There’s nowhere to stay. We’ve packed up everything and we’re leaving tomorrow.” I said, “Nice. thank you very much.” Again communication breaks down. “You’ll have to go

20:30 on up to Yola, a bit further up the line. Another two hundred miles up.” It was late and it was getting a bit dark. And we weren’t equipped, nothing’s equipped for night flying there and I …and they said, “If you get away quickly you’ll just about make it.” The only thing to worry about is a northwest desert wind that locals call the Harmatan. It blows in across the Sahara and puts up an awful dust cloud. Especially in the afternoon. It quietens down during the

21:00 morning but this time there was a lot of dust in there. And I though it’s dark and there’s dust and we are being hunted off. But we just made it. It was getting very dark and very dusty when we arrived at Yola, who got all the fresh vegetable and they were very happy to have them. So we had a few beers in the mess that night. And we passed the news on. I suppose we had some mail with us. Anyway they hadn’t had anyone through that area

21:30 for some weeks. The reason being that prior to the battle of El Alamein when the British started to take control of North Africa there were two routes across Africa. And most of them flew the southern route, which we were on. When Africa was secured they used to use the North African route which was more

22:00 direct. So no mail no nothing came across. So this is the reason they sent us across. We could have done twice the distance between stops but we had to stop every…just like a mail plane. When we saw these

people they were very happy to get letters and there was always someone wanting a lift somewhere…to another station or somewhere. And that's the way it worked. Another little thing…As we went across there was a recognised

22:30 procedure when you stopped in at a unknown mess at night you could go to the paymaster and ask for ten pounds. Overnight money, which in theory was debited to your pay book but it never was. I suppose on the flight to India I got something like fifty pounds and it was never debited to me. I suppose they got lost in the mail or people moved. Things were pretty haywire. We left.

So you

23:00 **went from Sierra Leone across to India? That's what this trip is? You're just hopping from one base to anther?**

One base to another. We actually…By the time we got to India we had travelled nine thousand miles. Our next step after we left Garoua was a midday stop in what they called French Equatorial Africa. It was equatorial but it was still desert and that was a place called

23:30 Arshimbolt. It's got a different name now but that's what it was called then. And it was still controlled by the French. I suppose the Free French. And their Legionnaires. And we approached this…We could see it out in the desert. You wouldn't know but people of our age in our great adventure books, the P.C. Wren books like

24:00 from the Beau Geste series and what have you and they always had an oasis in the desert with a fort and a few palm trees. Right in front of the aeroplane was exactly this. But a bit of a sand strip had been added since in front of it. But it was a bit of a staging post. And it was still manned by the, what do you call them, Kepis, I suppose you call the soldiers. They had blue and red uniforms and white caps.

24:30 And we saw them in pictures and they were how they always had been depicted, and Legionnaires. And we went into this fort. It was a hundred and ten degrees in the shade, mind you, when we got there. It was terribly hot. And these metal aeroplanes get very hot too. So it was hot and we had this rather very smelly meat for lunch. We were very glad to get back into the aeroplane and get on our way. Having been refilled.

25:00 We were a sight to see. On to a place called Nyala. Two hours flying. We stopped there the night. We put down some more letters and picked up some people. Took them on to El Obeid, another staging post. We didn't have to go there but someone wanted to go from A to B so we…did a passenger run at this stage. And then El Obeid for a night.

25:30 We did a hop next morning into the airport for Khartoum which was called Wadi Sidma. On the banks of the Nile. Where we…For a couple of days we lived in what used to be the American headquarters for Pan Am in peacetime. They had a very substantial quarters for their change crews and passengers. In those days Pan Am

26:00 used to use flying boats and land on the Nile.

In Cairo? Was this in Egypt?

Yes. This was outside Khartoum on the southern end of Egypt. In fact I'm not sure Khartoum isn't in Sudan. It's about twelve hundred miles south of Cairo. So…

So sorry…I just need to check this. Have you

26:30 **gone cross-country?**

Nearly across Africa. I have gone south and then north east and then due east and across and I'm on the Nile now.

It just helps if I can get that clear.

Expecting to fuel and head off next morning on towards India. Change of plans again. There was a message there for me to fly up to Cairo. Heliopolis

27:00 was the aerodrome outside Cairo. You take an aeroplane to Cairo in the morning and you have to have ASV fitted, which stands for anti-surface vessel and was an early form of radar. In other words if you are out at sea and it will give you an electronic signal before you can see it with your eyes, anyhow.

27:30 You'll have to have this fitted before you go to India. So up I went. A days flight up to Cairo. Well as usual people want to go with you so I knew I had to take full fuel and I had a lot of aircraft spares on so I had to watch you don't get overloaded. Anyway I was approached by about four army chaps who had been in Khartoum. They wanted to get back to Cairo. And I said,

28:00 "With the kit you've got I reckon it would nearly overload me." They said, "Oh no. We've got nothing sir, very little." So they arrived with more or less the kitchen sink. Everything. And I said. "Oh." I looked it over and I knew we were going to leave early in the morning when the air is cool and the aeroplane will take off better in the cool air than the hot air. I said, "All right. I'll take you." They piled in and it took for

28:30 ever to get off the ground. I thought I was going to fly along the ground all the way to Cairo. The plane just wouldn't lift. It was like a brick. And I just really couldn't understand it for a while and I didn't. It got better as we went on. We used up a bit of fuel and the plane was lighter and flew better. We eventually got to Cairo and checked the thing in and I said, "I don't think…there's something wrong with this aeroplane.

29:00 Whether it's lost power in its engines or something like that but it's not right." What I didn't know, and no one had told me, was when I left West Africa, in the bomb bay where they normally put the bomb they had a long-range petrol tank. It was roughly eight hundred pounds of petrol. It's supposed to have been taken out then but it wasn't taken out. And all the

29:30 caps and plumbing that connected it into the system had been removed. So there was nothing I could do about it. When I refuelled in Khartoum the airman came around and said how much fuel and I said full thanks. He found the gap…It had been empty all across and he just filled it up. I was lucky it didn't blow up. Lucky.

But it wasn't connected to the system.

Even if I had known about it I couldn't do anything about it. I couldn't have emptied it. I couldn't have used it. I couldn't do anything.

30:00 Anyway they removed that in Cairo.

So were you using your radar system at this stage?

Not then. Not across Africa. No. There was nothing to use it on. There was very little radio at all even… It was all very primitive in those days. My wireless operators could get a bit of high frequency Morse sometimes but basically

30:30 in the RAF you didn't use the radio unless you absolutely had to. We used it like we use a telephone today. You were transmitting a radio signal someone could pick it up and get a bearing on you. Not that it was likely to happen but especially in England silence was the word. Unless it was absolutely necessary. But anyway I left the aeroplane and

31:00 they said, "Yes sir, fine. We'll fix this overnight and you can be on your way in the morning." And so my crew and I went into Cairo for the night and had a feed, had a look around. We didn't se every much. Didn't have time. Came out to the aerodrome in the morning and gone. There was no aeroplane. And I said to Pip, "Where's my aeroplane?" "Oh it was commandeered. Someone came and took it overnight." I said, "Who'd take it?" He said,

31:30 "I think that the air office commander took it. He wanted to go somewhere out into the Western Desert." I said, "What's going to happen to me?" "I don't know sir. You'd better go and see the boss." Well I was well out of my own territory. I was only a pilot officer. I didn't carry any weight at all. No one could care less what happened to me. "You'd better find your way back to West Africa and get another one." And

32:00 so when I found a sympathetic engineer officer in the mess I said, "What does one do? How does one do. How does one get back to West Africa." I told him what had happened. He said, "Well out in the desert by the pyramids there's a Hudson out there. It's been sitting out there for a couple of weeks. You can have it if you want it." He said, "I think it's serviceable and I think it will fly. We'll go out and have a look at it."

32:30 They keep logbooks and engine logbooks and everything. He said, "Yes. It's been serviced but no one's come and collected it. It's an older model than yours but it's basically the same." So we went out there and cleaned the sand up from out of it and around it. I took it up for a fly around the pyramids and I had a look at the pyramids and the sphinx while doing this. And it seemed to fly all right. So I said, "Oh yes. Well I'll take it." So I took that to India.

33:00 Wrong aeroplane. No spares. A lot of out kit gone to somewhere else. But it was only about three years ago that I worked out what happened to that aeroplane. I'm told the AOC had taken it. In one way it was right. But why he took it I found out by reading the memoirs of what's his name, the superstar.

33:30 Alan Brooke. He was a chief of staff of the army in Britain and he wrote his diaries and he wrote a huge tome. His war diaries. Interesting if you knew what part he was talking about. He got around to Egypt at this time. He had been there. And where my aeroplane went…He didn't say

34:00 so but I surmise is the AOC, the headman in Egypt had to go to a major conference of all the leaders in Casablanca. And he didn't have an aeroplane and there wasn't one available in service. He had to get there in a hurry so he just took it and that's where it went. I think.

So you didn't want to stick around and see if it came back again?

No. It mightn't have come back. You never know. I was all for going on to India. I wanted to go.

34:30 Anyway I got this aeroplane, flew it back to Khartoum, refuelled, and set off the next morning and flew into land at Asmara in Abyssinia. High up in the mountains. I had lunch and a fuel stop. Quite simple. A

little bit surprised that all the refuelling and the servicing of the aeroplane was done

35:00 by Italian prisoners of war. Where as they had already been beaten in that area. I went on in the afternoon down the Red Sea, keeping well out of Yemen, and around the corner at the bottom into the Indian Ocean and round the corner into Aden which was a British port then. Part of one of the British protectorates. And they had a permanent RAF mess there and they looked after us pretty well.

35:30 The next day I went around the south Arabian coast with some of the most dreadful country I've ever seen in my life. Nothing but rocks and mountains. Called into a little place called Salala because we had fruit and vegetables and mail for another little staging place. We had to pick up fuel there too.

You were carrying fruit and vegetables and mail from somewhere else?

I picked it up in Ayden and they said you'll take it on and drop it in Salala and that's your stuff.

36:00 We had lunch there and went on to right up in the most easterly part of Arabia. There's a little island there called Masira Island. It's only a little island. Probably fifty miles long. Bare as a board. And there is an aerodrome there. A staging post. We stayed there for a night because we could only go in daylight. They had fuel facilities.

36:30 It has more flies than any place in the world. The place was crawling with flies. And no water accept what came in in cans. No baths. You had to just bathe in the Arabian Gulf if you wanted to wash in soap that supposedly lathered in salt water but it wasn't very good anyway. Then

37:00 we didn't stay long. We went straight across the gulf to what is now the most southerly coast or Iran. Then it was a separate native state. Now it is part of Iran. Gwadar. Again to drop something and pick up a bit of fuel.

37:30 Then on to Karachi and we were in India at last. We had to spend a night and the only thing I remember is that no sooner had we landed than after all this fly business on Masira Island the Indian people who were looking after the aerodrome insisted that the aeroplane be sprayed to kill

38:00 the flies. Well that's normal, that happens everywhere, doesn't it. And they said, "Sir, sir, quickly out. We spray for flies." I said, "How long?" They said, "Thirty minutes. Door closed. Then you may come back again." So in about thirty minutes or an hour we came back again and the flies had all gone but everything that wasn't nailed down had gone also like our watches, our pens. They pinched it all and that was our first big lesson for India.

38:30 They souvenired it I suppose. In India what's yours is mine also I think is a lot of their attitude about things. In Karachi we were directed to fly on to central India to a place called Allahabad. Which meant a lunch stop at Jodhpur. Which was noted for the Maharajah or Jodhpur. He had

39:00 the middle of his princely state there but he was a very air-minded bloke and he had set up a staging post with an aerodrome. We refuelled and had lunch and went on to Allahabad, where we delivered our aeroplane. And we were stationed there for a few days. Not doing very much. Waiting to hear what squadron

39:30 we were going to. It was very hot in central India. A communications chap who looked after the coming and going of aircraft. And there was an Australian fellow called Roy Williams. It was only a small unit. But all the time there were coming through

40:00 were at that stage mainly the hurricane fighters that were going east to the war area. They used to get to Allahabad and as I had pointed out earlier, maps, and that's what I call a wack chart. A map with all the details on it, which fighter pilots normally use to map read their way across the country. They are very scarce and hard to get hold of

40:30 so I did a number of flights from Allahabad to an aerodrome just outside Calcutta. Leading probably four or five Hurricanes. I had a navigator and they just used to… And I'd fly down and they'd fly like a flock of geese behind me. And we'd deliver them and turn back around. I did that twice, I think, filling in time.

41:00 And by that time I got a posting to 62 Squadron RAF who were stationed in what was then Bengal. It is now Bangladesh. They had been further down the coast on the west side of the Bay of Bengal but they'd been shifted back inland to a….because I think the

41:30 work required in the Bay of Bengal had fallen off a bit and we were going to become more interested in the night bombing work that we were closer to on the border. They had set up a tented camp which was reasonably comfortable. And they were RAF people, all ground crew were RAF. Probably

42:00 sixty per cent of the…

Tape 7

00:31 **Just pick up where you left off I think?**

Well I was posed to a squadron so I arrived there to a tented camp just before midday. And we went straight to the adjutant's officer to sort of report in and say that we are here. He was an Englishman. A nice bloke but he said, "Well the CO will want to meet you."

01:00 And there was one other Australian who didn't know us but he said, "Don't worry too much about the CO [Commanding Officer]. He doesn't like Australians or Canadians. He has a British prejudice against them. He says they cause too much trouble." I said, "Thank you very much." So we were ushered into Wing Commander Halliday's tent. And he looked up from his

01:30 work. "Oh. You're the new crew. Australians I see. Well welcome and see you behave ourselves." That was his welcome and that was about all he said. And we couldn't say anything back so we said, "Thank you very much sir" and walked out. The corollary to that, and I'm skipping ahead nearly eighteen months now, I can tell you about it later but it….

02:00 Eighteen months later I had gone through several tours. He had left the squadron. I never saw him again. I went down to Ceylon and I was a staff officer by this time. I had risen several ranks. And I had just got notice from Australia that I was to return home forthwith because I'd been overseas three years and that was the agreement apparently in the Empire Air Training Scheme. Three years and home.

02:30 Well I was enjoying the job I was doing but I was quite happy to go home because I knew the family weren't doing very well. So the boss of my particular section said, "Well Austin we're sorry to lose you. You've been a great help here but a replacement for you is coming in in the morning. And you'll show him the ropes before you go." And I said, "No trouble."

03:00 So next morning I was in the office fairly early cleaning up the desk, cleaning up the drawers and doing my final bit of work. And my replacement arrives in. I don't know who got the greater shock, him or me but it was Halliday. The fellow who told me not to be a nuisance eighteen months beforehand. And he said, "Good God Austin. What are you doing here?" And I said, "Well I've been doing a lot of work, sir." I said, "I'm now to show you how to do it."

03:30 He didn't quite know what to make of it. He just couldn't believe. He was a very straight necked, pre-war RAF man. And he just couldn't understand how someone could come in and almost catch up with him in the course of a few years. He just couldn't understand it.

Why did he regard the Canadians and Australians as trouble? What

04:00 **is your impression?**

I don't think that he thought there were as amenable to discipline as the British. The British were very obedient. "Jones, you do this and Jones did that." The Canadians are probably do it reluctantly and the Australians would find out some way not to do it. Well we are a bit like that. We are a bit of rebels I suppose.

04:30 Look when there was any serious job we'd do it and we'd probably do it better than another one. Again I won't remember it later on but there was a general consensus of opinion during the war that as far as aircrew were concerned that Australians made the best pilots, the Englishmen made the best navigators and the Canadians made the best wireless air gunners. It was generally accepted that they did these things.

05:00 Not in all cases but that was the general rule. That is the way they figured people out and they were probably right.

I thought the Americans were a bit behind with their navigation?

It didn't really have much to do with the Americans. If the Americans didn't have a railway line and a telephone they were lost.

That's right. Yeah.

But actually with wartime flying we really…Except later in Burma with the spy dropping we had a fair bit to do with them but before that we'd had

05:30 nothing to do with Americans whatsoever. They ran their own boat just as they wanted to run it. Of course there had to be cooperation at the top in some way so they didn't foul each other up but no they ran their show and we ran ours. Anyway, having left Wing Commander Halliday at his tent lunch was on. And lunch then was a pretty rough meal. We ate in the open air. We didn't

06:00 attend the mess. Just long tables and the cook handed over the…dealing out whatever. You came along with your plate. And of course by this time a lot of the crews that were there were sitting around at tables having their lunch and of course they are all eyeing off these newcomers. I wonder who…I wonder what that bloke. You could see what was going on. So we were aware of this of course and we trooped up

06:30 and put various things on our plate. And I was head of the queue, I was first, and as I moved away from

where the cook was serving under a bit of a roof all the chatter stopped all round the table. There was deadly silence. And I thought that's funny. Deadly silence. Ten yards outside the tent this sky hawk came down and took all the lunch off my plate and the gravy went all down the front of me. They all knew it was going to happen.

07:00 Of course I wasn't aware of these sky hawks. They'd grab food anywhere. And roars of laughter. They thought it was a huge joke. I wasn't greatly impressed but still. It just went. We didn't stay long at that tented camp. We were moved further east again onto an airstrip that had a solid base. In other words

07:30 it was made of bricks. We were only on a dirt one at this place. They didn't have any concrete or things like that. They had thousands upon thousands of bricks laid down. And they put it all down. They must have made the bricks. That was the only way they could do it. The soil was too soft and spongy for anything else. So we had brick runways. And the reason we were moving there is that we were going to be doing work down the Bay of Bengal from

08:00 time to time and we were going to be doing night bombing of central Burma to try and stop the Japanese from advancing further up. Mainly by attacking their aerodromes. By this time they were advanced enough to send a few planes out to bomb Calcutta and some places like that. Preparing for a full-scale invasion of India and that's what we were sent out to stop.

08:30 Anyway we did a bit of night flying practice again because a lot of them hadn't done much. I…And it was all useful. And then having done that we got geared up to bomb these enemy aerodromes, which was about a six-hour flight. Six hundred miles in and six hundred miles back.

Where they locate?

What?

Where were they? The…

In central Burma. It was Mandalay…

09:00 one place, or aerodromes. We didn't bomb the town but the aerodromes. The reason that we were bombing aerodromes was the Japanese had a system whereby they kept their bombers and most of their aircraft right down in southern Burma and when they were going to launch a raid on Calcutta to Chittagong or something like that late in the afternoon they'd fly them up to an aerodrome and then they'd take off at dust and come over during the night and bomb at night. We were attempting to go

09:30 bomb that aerodrome during the night and knock off as many of those aircraft as we could. How successful we were I never knew. We obviously killed some of them. We must have been doing some good because the Japanese eventually gave up. Weather they ran out of aeroplanes or not but that was the thinking behind it.

10:00 We did a number of trips like that. You might do one or two a week individually. It was on a rotational basis. Also from time to time it was necessary to fly right down the Burmese coast, as far as endurance and range would let us go, to try and

10:30 pick up any small Japanese shipping that was filtrating amongst the island along the coast and coming up to a place called Akyab. A main…this is getting pretty close to India but it was a main port of the Japanese. That is where they serviced their army from. We had to try and pick up. I went down there another time and picked up a small few…They might have been harmless sampan, I don't know, but we were told to knock them out because you never knew who was bringing what up the coast.

11:00 We'd drop a bomb on them or something or machine-gun them. Maybe they were innocent fishermen. I don't know. It didn't worry me very much but I thought about it. They weren't a ship of any size. Anyway we did that until about the end of May1942. Then there seemed to be an undeclared rule of war

11:30 or pattern of the scheme that by May the monsoon or the heavy rains had started and it was too dangerous to fly-in the cloud and over the mountains into Burma. It couldn't be done. So our squadron was retired right back to Rawalpindi, which is in now Pakistan. An airport called Chaklala.

12:00 We took the whole squadron flew back there. We took all our aeroplanes, which incidentally were nearly worn out anyway. And so warn out that they were burning a lot of oil. They were frightened you'd run out of oil. Not fuel. We always had enough fuel but they were frightened you'd run out of oil. I did one or two trips with an aeroplane that had an extra oil tank put in the fuselage. If you saw the oil pressure dropping

12:30 on an engine you could pump some more oil out to it. We hated flying like that but we had nothing else.

Were these still all Hudsons you had?

Yes. They were still all Hudsons. So we flew them all back to North West India. Very much a peacetime area. Heavily fortified up there to keep the Russians out. Not this war but from way back. They had all the good aerodromes. All the army lived up there. It was a big deal in those days

13:00 and nothing had ever been done down where we were fighting the war. It was very primitive. We went

back there. We fiddled around with these…They tried to modify them into planes for dropping paratroopers but they knew that was the next thing to be on. Totally unsuitable. What they wanted was a Dakota or a DC3. They were the ideal aeroplane at the time but the Americans wanted them or they were all

13:30 wanted in Europe or somewhere else, the Middle East. Eventually we did get enough aeroplanes to start training. We had to learn to fly them first. No one had flown one. It was a simple aeroplane to fly. Easier than the Hudson. Digressing for a moment. It would surprise me…I knew a number of people after the war was over, out here, who wanted to go into commercial

14:00 air transport. In those days, in the early 1950s a lot of these Dakotas or DC3s were converted back to airliners. And they did all the service between the capital cities. Now to be a captain of one of those you had to have spent seven thousand hours or something like that in the right hand seat. As a second pilot. And having done that amount of flight experience you became

14:30 a first pilot. Anyway at that time I learned to fly and became the captain of a DC3 in fifteen minutes. One circuit. I had flown a Hudson. I knew how to fly and no one knew how to fly this any more than I did. One fellow had done a couple of circuits and show you. Oh you'll be all right. Off you go.

15:00 So I was the captain of one of those in fifteen minutes.

Was it really that easy?

They were an easy aeroplane to fly. But they were a bigger aeroplane. A bigger aeroplane than a Hudson but no, I had no trouble. What again as I mentioned earlier I made absolutely certain that before I flew one I knew where everything was. It was most important.

15:30 They were designed to be flown with two pilots. We only flew them with one. You always had to have a second pilot commercially but no, one pilot was all right. We could fly them all right. No trouble. Except there was trouble if he got shot. So we became captain after no time at all. We did a few circuits and bumps and within

16:00 about ten hours we were dropping paratroops. Training them. This wasn't war. We were training paratroops. And they were mostly Indians and Ghurkas with British officers and NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and they were going to be used down in the war somewhere, sometime. I think they did a lot of ground training and then they had to do three drops out of an aeroplane into a ploughed field.

16:30 And then they were entitled to wear their paratroops wings. The Ghurkas were wonderful little people. The Indians…They weren't so hot. They didn't like it. They were doing it because they were told to. The Ghurkas loved to do it. They were really warlike little people. And pleasant to be with. So we did that for about three months and a bit of practise flying and then also

17:00 we had to learn to…Apart from dropping men out on parachutes how to drop materials and weapons etc out of parachutes. Or free drops. Thing that were loose like flour or rice and could be put in a solid bag would be dropped out free. You'd go fly low over the field and push out a dozen bags at a time. They mostly…a single bag was no good.

17:30 If they double bagged them the bag would never split twice in one place. It would split this side and that side but the rice would stay in it. And flour and sugar and all bulk items like that were all free dropped. And bottles and things like that were all parachute dropped.

So what were the special flying techniques you needed of you were dropping things out or paratroopers out?

Well

18:00 it was all done at low level. When you were dropping with a parachute you would probably drop at three hundred feet. A hundred metres above the ground. And that would give time for the parachute to open. And the parachute would have what they called a static chord. The food or whatever in a carton, probably weighing about two hundred pounds, with a parachute packed in on top of it. With a static cord like that.

18:30 So this would be pushed out in probably six or eight at a time, by your crew and the chords would be attached so immediately the parachute would pull out and the parachute opens. There weren't too many silk ones. That was expensive but they made a lot out of jute. That was quite successful. It was the same sort of stuff. Light baggy material like chaff bag. But at the pre-drop you used to come in

19:00 as slowly as possible and safely as possible and drop it from a hundred feet. So you didn't get a high drop you'd get more or less a sliding drop. You'd drop it down onto an area and the area you had to drop in was probably less….A lot of them were little squares on a riverbank or in the jungle.

19:30 And probably not as big as a cricket field. And what's hard is they were at very odd places in the jungle. Especially these long-range penetration troops. You never knew quite where they were. You'd get a signal and they'd probably have a bit of smoke or something but mostly they were way behind Japanese lines. And you had to find these places and then when you got there…and a lot of it was in

20:00 steep narrow valleys with high mountains, you'd call them. They were four or five thousand feet. And it would be down on a river bank or something you'd be dropping and you had to get right down there and then get out again. So you had to have a look at the place and plan your circuit. How to get into your place and how to get out of there without actually running into a mountain. You'd find a gap round there and you'd have your circuit. It probably took you six minutes to fly

20:30 around and with the load you had it used to take about six drops to get rid of your load. You'd fly around and while you were flying around the circuit your crew would get another bundle stacked in the door. And they went on my say so. I had parachute dropping lights. I had a red light and a green light. If I pushed the red light it was a warning that we were getting ready and as soon as I judged

21:00 it to be the right place to get the right trajectory into the field I would press the green light and they would shove it out. We got pretty accurate after a while. And we…the 81st West African Division, which our squadron looked after for the best part of five months. They went in behind the Japanese lines, down a narrow river, and all the communication they had with outside was what came in by air

21:30 and what went out by air. In the early stages it was too narrow to land so we had to drop everything. Virtually nothing came out. Except if they could get a small patch of ground they would get very light aircraft in like American L5. They would land the plane and take one casualty out. But when the valley got wider they managed to make a bit of a strip that we could land on. And we flew all sorts of things in. But they

22:00 had no land transport at all. And that leads up to how Farmer Austin got put in to do a job. It got written up in the paper. I think you saw a photo there of fellows flying cattle into Burma. When the CO heard that I was a farmer and knew something about cattle he said, "Austin. You have to go down to a place called Gariziri tomorrow, you and

22:30 another crew and another aeroplane and you've got to fly thirty head of pack bullocks into the West Africans. They have got a new strip down there. I said, "yes. That's interesting. How do we do it?" He said, "I don't know." And I said, "I don't know either." He said, "They will tell you when you get down there." So we flew down to this place and yes, they were there. And we had to do it at night because we didn't want interruption by Jap aircraft.

23:00 So they had about six of these pack bullocks. Each about a thousand pounds each.

Live Bullocks?

Live?

Did you say live?

Yeah. They were live with the horns. They were big animals. Maybe the army thought oh well we'll put six into a load. I said, "Look no. There's no way. What's, more there's

23:30 nothing to tie them to. You can't have bullocks riding around inside an aeroplane." "Oh, can't you?" "No way." The reason being you must have the bulk of your load up forward. The plane slopes backwards and when you fall anything that's not tied slips backwards and if your not careful you crash straight away. So I said, "No, there's no way. We can't tie them."

24:00 "Oh." They said, "We'll tie their legs. We'll throw one on the truck and we'll tie their legs and carry them in." Well that…We never even attempted that because I knew that a thousand pound bullocks and the width of the door to the aeroplane and the men to carry it. You'd need at least six or eight men to carry it. You can't possibly carry it

24:30 onto the aeroplane. And what's more I said the bullock won't like it anyway. So we compromised. I said the only way I can see about this is we lead the bullock onto the aeroplane and you talk about throwing cattle. We'll throw it and tie it's legs in there. And doing that in the dark on a hot tropical night the language is terrible.

25:00 Grunts and groans and anyway to throw a bullock with a rope you put a loop round it's neck and then put another bit round over the top of its shoulder and then underneath its belly. And then loop it back and have a rope behind and if you pull hard and get that rope to move properly you'll press hard on a nerve on the back of their spine you'll cause temporary paralysis and all their legs collapse.

25:30 And it will just fall over. But you've got to do it properly. It can be done. In fact we still do it in the cattle yards at home if we want to brand them. So we took a bullock in and I successfully did it. But unfortunately having thrown the animal in the effort of doing so it had got right to the back of the aircraft. So we tied it's legs and then we had to lump the thing up the front. We managed to do three at a time. And this went on for about three trips

26:00 per night. We flew them in. They jumped the bullocks out onto the ground. It wasn't very high and they jumped down.

Why did they need…?

Going back a bit this was a brain-wave of army headquarters in Delhi. They hadn't asked the West African people whether they wanted them. Some bloke sitting behind a desk thought a good idea

26:30 was to have the pack bullocks. They are tame. They are used to carrying the packs on their backs. They don't need fuel. They'll feed off the country and they'll help carry some of the heavy stuff. Fine…Good thinking, but the West Africans didn't want them. We eventually delivered about thirty and nothing more was said. I didn't hear how they got on with them until it must have been thirty-five years later. And a friend who had a house down

27:00 there had an English relative out from England staying with him. And this friend of mine said to me. My cousin. He served in Burma. He would probably be interested to talk to you. So he brought it up and he started to talk. I said, "What were you doing?" And he said he was in the army. He said, "I was in the 81st Division. I was a brigade major." And I said, "That's interesting. I've never met any of you people." We never saw them.

27:30 So I said, "Do you remember receiving some bullocks at one time." "Oh will I ever forget it?" He said, "They were a bloody nuisance but the fresh meat was marvellous." They ate them.

28:00 **We've got twelve minutes left. We'll just finish the tape. So…Hang on a minute…So the West Africans?**

The West Africans were all nearly Nigerians. Black as the ace of spades but they had English army officers and NCOs. The reason they were brought. They were jungle people and who better to deal with jungle war. And they would be used to living in

28:30 the jungle and getting through it and all that sort of thing. That's the reason they were brought there. I think they did a good job and they were used down in what was the extreme southern part of India and the extreme northwest parts of Burma called the Arakan. And the Japanese were pushing up there. Trying to get in up the coast and break in to India. The West Africans were used sort of

29:00 down the river about fifty miles from the coast as a flanking unit to keep the Japanese from coming in to the side while the British contained them front on. Yes. They did a fairly good job I think. They made their way further and further down the river. And we just continued to supply them

29:30 with everything they wanted.

How bigger army was that, the West African? How big…How many there were?

Oh I think there were seven or eight thousand of them. It was a full division. And they were jungle soldiers. Now apart from heeding these we had plenty of other things to do.

30:00 Other parts of the army were flying into and various squadrons looked after it. A chap called Wingate. I don't know whether you've heard of him. He was the fellow who started these long-range penetration groups into Burma in behind. In the early part they walked in through the lines. Through the mountains, through the rivers and got in behind the Japanese. And then

30:30 they were supplied by air with arms, ammunition and explosives and they were purely on foot or they had some mules or some horses these people. And then they'd come back in and where the main lines of communication ran North and South. That's rail and road. They'd attempt to blow bridges and things. They'd be saboteurs in other words. Which thy did a good job.

31:00 But it's a pretty dicey job. They had to be….If they didn't get fed from there they were history. But our particular squadron didn't really look after them at all except we helped at times. They were always getting to a crisis point. Either short of aeroplanes or short of food or short of something. And likewise they helped us at times.

31:30 Earlier on we'd been there about a month looking after these West Africans suddenly there was a Japanese infiltration into the Arakan. It was half expected. It had been fluid for twelve months almost. They were pushing up and the Brits would keep pushing them back, you see. And pretty rugged country. Anyways the Japs, round about the fourth of February 1944

32:00 had managed to send a penetration group up…not down the valley but along the top of the mountains. Which were from two to five thousand feet high. And at night they suddenly got in behind the British and cut their supply line. And you had, well down the bottom of the Arakan two British division with their supply lines

32:30 cut. Just typical way the Japs worked. They did it in Malaya, everywhere. And it looked as though it was going to be successful. They certainly thought it was going to be. And panic. And the usual thing that happened and hadn't happened before. Any troop that hadn't been encircled would fight their way out because they knew

33:00 they'd had their supplies cut off. By this time Mountbatten was the head man in the area and the head army man was William Slim. He became the Governor General here. Do you remember? They decided that the army will stay firm and everything will come in by air. By this time they thought they had nearly enough aircraft to do it. But

33:30 they had to bring some more in from outside. So for about seventeen days they called it the 7th Div Box. We flew day and night dropping supplies into these encircled troops. Everything, all their shells, their fuel, their food, and what have you. And they could resist the Japanese having infiltrated them

34:00 expecting to immediately capture all of the British equipment, heavier guns and what have you. Because they only had light arms. They didn't have anything heavy but they'd certainly cut a major pass and they'd cut it off all together. We had to go and fly around and around one of these boxes which is, you could equate it to about the same areas as a

34:30 perhaps an aerodrome, where aeroplanes come in to land. You know. Essendon or Tullamarine sort of thing. So the army is in the middle and the Japanese are round the outside and we had to drop the stuff in. Well…And what's more the Japanese being on the outside they were largely on higher ground. They could fire down and we had to fly between the Japanese and the army. Round and round like this. The same sort of thing,

35:00 Dropping what have you. Well one particular day I can remember very well. I was told to lead a flight of three Dakotas. I had tank shells, the other plane next to me had ammunition, and the third one had medical supplies and a certain amount of food. We went together and I had to lead and fly these particular aeroplanes through this particular circuit. Fly between the hills so that we could

35:30 fly around. And it took us about six minutes to fly a circuit. And the aeroplanes went in in two-minute intervals and we all dropped in the same place. At the same time the Japs up there were firing light arms, rifle bullets and whatever they had at us. The Brits with the ammo they had were firing under us, up the slope at the Japanese trying to keep them quiet. So there was plenty of stuff flying about.

36:00 We went round and round and on my second round these shells, they were very heavy and the crates were very heavy. I navigated. Pilots wore seat parachutes. Navigators because they'd move out they wore chest parachutes. They had a chest harness with two snap hooks here and their parachute was hooked up on a locker somewhere in the aeroplane. And when they jumped out they grabbed that and stuck

36:30 it on you see. So these snap hooks…no one had thought about it but they were dangerous. So somehow it happened, no one know how but how but when John was helping to push out one of these heaps of shells. The lashing around the shells got into the snap hook of his snap hook of his parachute. And as luck would have it he was on the backside of the aeroplane. They went out this way and then went back that way. He was very smartly

37:00 pulled down because these parachute harnesses were very strong. Eventually it broke but it had dislocated his shoulder and dislocated an arm and broke his leg and he was in great pain. But he didn't go out. He was lucky. Something broke. Of course I wasn't aware of this actually happening at the time. But one of the blokes came rushing along. John's badly injured, actually on this flight. Because he really wanted to know what was doing.

37:30 A major flew with me as a spectator to try and visualise what was happening from the air. So he was sitting up in my right hand seat. Anyway one of the chaps came rushing along. John's terribly injured and he is in great pain. Above my head we had a first aid kit so I was busy trying to grab this down. I said, "Look here is some morphine capsules in this.

38:00 Take one." And the major fellow said, "I know something about this. And so I said, "Well you go down and put a shot into him and put him out of his pain. And put him in a corner so he is out of the way so we can get him home." But he recovered about four months later. He never flew with me again. It took him about four months to recover. Eventually he went back to flying and became the head navigator on the squadron in the following year. But it's one of those things

38:30 that happened. But we didn't cop any shots from the Japanese firing at us because they weren't taught to…what shall I say, aim off. Aeroplanes moving at this speed and it takes so long to get the bullet to the plane. The problem was they were firing straight at the planes. But the aeroplane would move and aeroplane length by the time it got there and it would go straight through the tail. We used to get lots of bullet holes through the tail.

39:00 Some of them would skim the rear part of the thing and some of them would miss all together. Rarely did we ever get one near the front of the aeroplane. Where it really counted. Had they been a airport rear gunner or even an ack-ack [anti-aircraft] gunner they would have been sort of sighting things. They know how much to site ahead of the target. The bullet arrived at the right place at the right time. But the Japanese soldiers apparently didn't understand that.

So what effect did it have? These bullet holes

39:30 **in the tail?**

Well they could be serious if they cut a cable or something but otherwise they'd just make a hole and we'd put a patch on. But up in the front if it hit and engine perhaps or it hit the pilot or even the fuel tanks. That's the serious part.

So did this happen? Were there attacks like that every time you dropped?

Oh that was a more hazardous one. But I know that

40:00 at the time we were unloading the bullocks at night the Japanese were on a little strip down the river. And unloading the bullocks the strip was held but this little group and not very far away the Japanese were back in the hills. All the time there was gunfire and rifle fire going on around the perimeter in the dark. You could see the flashes. Because the Japanese realised that there was a plane trying to land in the dark and they were trying to get at it and shoot at it or lob mortar bombs.

40:30 Yes. They didn't actually get there anywhere. We were lucky maybe. Some aeroplanes got hit sometimes. I didn't.

Tape 8

00:31 **Okay. Lets go back and finish off with Burma. You were talking about Imphal and some other hairy moments there.**

Yeah. Kandy. Then Kandy. Well I didn't travel around much there I just worked the whole time. Very interesting work.

We're rolling now so lets go back to India and Burma.

01:00 Once the Arakan crisis had settled down the planners had been arranging for some months for a major fly-in to central and northern Burma with General Wingate. And that was planned to go in roughly about a fortnight

01:30 before the unexpected business in Arakan. Well the fly-in consisted of a little bit of extra training on our part. We had to learn to tow gliders though none of our squadron did tow a glider in the actual operation the experience was there in case we wanted it. While this was going on we still had our daily commitment

02:00 to the West Africans and any other jobs bringing up materials or ammo or taking out casualties. This was the build up to the broader Operation Thursday at a place called Arakan which is in more or less southern Assam and west

02:30 of Imphal. The Imphal area was a province of it's own really. But Imphal was the main town. We always called it Imphal but it had another native name. I just can't remember that at the moment. The big build up was masses of gliders, masses of ammunition. Everyone had been trained. Aeroplanes had been organised. The day before the operation or originally

03:00 Operation Thursday. That was when we were supposed to go. We assembled many many aeroplanes all ready on this open area. Open area, paddock, it was just an open field with a suitable airstrip. We were waiting to go and it had to be done at night and we were there, sort of they're the day before in case we wanted to do a last minute tow job. About

03:30 ten minutes before the first aeroplanes to leave and what was going in the gliders was troops, and small bulldozers and things to let them loose and land on this dry lake with. It did have rough areas in it so there were small picks and shovels and bulldozers. There weren't any big ones. So the ground could be smoothed out so the following night

04:00 they could land Dakotas and bring the main force of men in. But ten minutes before they were due to fly some fellow came rushing in across the strip towards where the headquarters were. There was a photograph and he wanted to show them. It was a photograph taken by a reconnaissance aircraft. The proposed landing strip seemed to have logs spread all over it. And the powers that be were all at sixes and sevens. They didn't know what to

04:30 do. "The secrecy's blown. The Japs know we're coming and they have obstructed the airport." The proposed airport, what are we going to do. So they ummed and aahed and there was an alternative one they had in the back of their mind. It wasn't as good. They knew that you could land an aeroplane there because they had rescued some casualties there. And they knew that. Anyway the finally decided well we can't use

05:00 Piccadilly because it's obstructed. We will use Broadway as an alternative sight. So there was an American called Cochrane. Colonel Cochrane who was in charge of the glider part of the operation. He planned the fly-in and…He was an air force construction engineer. In other words he wasn't in the fighting part but getting things ready to

05:30 go. So he came out to his men after everything. Of course the rumour flashed round the place that there was something wrong. "Are we flying into a trap?" He came out to his glider pilots and the people they were towing and he said, "Look. It's all right fellows. We just made a different decision. Broadway will be a better place to land on. Everything Okay there so away we go." So they left.

06:00 Not knowing that maybe they had an ambush around it. So off they went and through misjudging the

roughness of the weather over the mountains they lost a few gliders over the mountains. The cables broke and the gliders came down somewhere. Some came down…one came down in the Japanese headquarters which really caused a bigger diversion than was intended.

06:30 But I think seventy-five per cent of them got to Broadway. Because of the, not knowing what the ground was like. It was a bit rough in places. A number of them crashed and it is in the dark and because there were no lights there was a crashed glider and another one coming behind it would land on the crashed glider. So they lost quite a few men, quite a few gliders. Sufficient remained alive to

07:00 with some bulldozers and pick and shovel to get the ground ready. Anyway they worked all the next day. The Japanese in the meantime there had been no intervention what so ever.

Sorry Frank. What was your role in this?

I was still waiting. I didn't tow a glider in. I was to go in the next night. We were ready to go in the following night but still it got to five o'clock and there was no news from the ones that had gone the previous night.

07:30 And there was great apprehension. Finally a signal came through, "Ready to receive aeroplanes this evening." So away we went. We took off just at dusk and flew in…I suppose it was the best part of one and a half hours flight. Up over the mountains. Over out lines, Japanese lines. Over everything. We found this place and we went first

08:00 in and when I got there we were told we were supposed to have some sort of aerodrome control by lights and what have you. None was there. Lights and radio of some sort. They must have got lost in one of the crashed gliders. And when I arrived there my first impression was here's a lake and all I could see was a huge cloud of dust. It was dry. Because aeroplanes were already landing and taking off it stirred up the dust.

08:30 And they had a few dim lights stuck over the ground and we could see these. And it was so organised that we should and this way and take off home in the opposite direction. And so my first attempt at lining up to come in and land I figured out where. To my horror coming in underneath me was an aeroplane taking off. It appeared out of the dust. Immediately pulled around to the side and went around and came

09:00 back. This happened to a lot of chaps. Anyway after a period of five days I think I landed seven times in that place. Taking in anything from arms or ammunition to mules, donkeys, and horses. Anything you need for a long-range penetration group. Explosives, ammunition, food, casualties. I had bits and pieces of everything.

09:30 A the end of five days the invasion was accomplished. The army was set up. They had their perimeter guards. They even had a Spitfire squadron there to protect them. They had anti-aircraft guns before the Japanese even realised that they were there. Roughly two hundred miles in beyond what was the front line. The Japanese hadn't penetrated much into that part of Burma.

10:00 So there was no point in going there. They were concentrating on pushing into India so they had all their troops along up against the mountains and along the main lines of communication. So it wasn't surprising. At the same time there were numerous diversions caused by bomber type aircraft going to bomb in other areas. The Japs were obviously confused.

You were flying DC3s at that stage?

I was flying a DC3 and

10:30 they were a wonderful aircraft really. They were so trustworthy all the time. I flew them for nearly twelve month. Never did I ever have anything go wrong, either engine or airframe or anything. Our ground maintenance was good but they were maintained under very difficult conditions. Maintaining anything like an aeroplane on open paddocks is not easy but it was done. The

11:00 blokes were marvellous and I don't think they got enough thanks. When that…or just as that fly-into Broadway was complete and we were happy and things seemed to be going all right. Towards the end of the last flight someone had notices what they thought on the eastern edge of the

11:30 Imphal Plain a lot of activity in the jungle area. Lights at night and now where our army was…and the powers that be said there couldn't be but there was actually a very large Japanese penetration to cut off the Imphal plain from the rail head at Dimapur up over the mountains or the Imphal

12:00 road. It only had one access you could get in. There were a number of other bush tracks here and there. At the same time the Japanese had cut off these bush tracks. And in fact they suddenly found that the Japanese had arrived on the spot and had done exactly the same thing as they had done on the Arakan three weeks before. And this was to be their major push into India. I'm not sure myself. I haven't heard how many divisions they had but again they were

12:30 lightly armed. They didn't carry heavy machinery and guns through the jungle. They had to be able to capture the British stuff and live on their food and material. So again we were called in to a massive fly-in of all sorts of material. The Imphal Plain had three separate aerodromes and it also had two fighter

squadrons stationed. They had been stationed there before. And it was an administrative centre.

13:00 Our first job - because we were stationed down, well south down towards the Arakan area - was to pick up the boys who had been defending the Arakan and put them on our aeroplanes and fly them up and put them into Imphal. And we did many many trips flying troops from Chittagong up to Imphal and their equipment.

13:30 And of course they were also coming in from other directions too. When we flew people in there was estimated that there were about thirty thousand useless mouths in there so we used to take people out. But there was no good having people who can't fight. Administrative people mainly. Sikhs and Indians and Imphalese….I suppose that is what you call them. We flew them

14:00 out so we wouldn't have to feed them. That took time. I remember there was a very crusty old RAF group captain who was living in there at…the airport had a headquarters there. I don't know what they were doing and I don't know what he was doing there. But he was there and his wife and family. An he was allotted to fly out with me.

14:30 I brought in some troops. This group came up. His wife and family, much baggage and a birdcage with three parrots in it. He got most hostile when I said, "This is a war. I'm cramped for room. I can't take any parrots." He was really hostile but I was the boss. What I take in my aeroplane's up to me. He didn't understand at all. I suppose the parrots belonged to his wife and kids. But

15:00 we were terribly short of aircraft space in and out and we had to work very hard with what we had. So that went on for the best part of three weeks. They cut the road to Kohima, which was the main place up on the north-south railway line. No supplies came in accept what we brought in. But after

15:30 that period of time they finally gave up. They were short of ammo themselves. They were hungry. And the last stronghold was a place called Kohima. On a mountain pass on a road into Imphal. Which was very fierce fighting there right till the end. And many many lives were lost on both sides. And there

16:00 was apparently a while after the war a monument was made to all the troops who served there on the top of the mountain pass which said, "When you go home please tell them that…that for you …We gave our todays for your tomorrows."

16:30 Which is used as quite an epitaph now. They quote it sometimes and I think I've got the right wording in it. I think it was set up about 1950 by the Indian people. Probably after…certainly after the partition of India. And many Indians lost their lives there. Now having completed the Imphal flight I was tour expired by that time.

17:00 I was given a months leave to get over it. And I needed it. I had lost a lot of weight and I was pretty tired. And four of us, two Canadians, myself and an Englishman. We decided that we'd go right back up to the North West. Up to Kashmir. We'd been there before when we were in North India learning to fly. Six months

17:30 before we'd go for our leave there. It was a lovely spot Kashmir. A bit like…what shall I say, tropical Venice. It was very tropical with snow-capped mountains behind and the only way you could get about was by boat. In Venice they used gondolas and we used similar boats. They were paddled by one of the Kashmiri people. They called them shikaras and they were

18:00 paddle, pole you wherever you want from boat to boat. And we all had houseboats. And the houseboat had enough space equivalent to about three times a very large caravan. But it was a boat. It sat on the lake. It had a living room, dinning room, and a cook boat with staff attached that looked after you. And in Australian money we could have the whole thing

18:30 for at that stage thirty pounds a fortnight, which was quite cheep. But they looked after us well and it was a very pleasant, lovely climate. Way above the heat of the planes. And a lot of fun. We did a lot of swimming and diving but we didn't dare look too closely at the water because it was highly polluted. So up the over end of the lake was a huge botanical vegetable garden that was really just a heap of rubbish and we

19:00 used to know that they put all the towns night pour on all the vegetables we ate. That didn't seem to worry us. It didn't hurt me anyway. It was wide open for disease of various types. We had a good month up there and came back to the unit wondering where I was going to go next and the CO said, "Well Austin, your tour is expired.

19:30 Thank you for all your efforts." He was a very nice Englishman. One of the nicer Englishmen. "We'll try and find another job for you." I said, "Oh I'd prefer a job that flies. I don't really want to fly a desk." "I'll see what I can do." So he called me and he said, "I've got a small flying job. You can go up north west again to Peshawar and take control of a small RAF unit up there."

20:00 A few aeroplanes and some communication. I said, "Sir, that's a long way from the business end of the war. Do I have to go there?" He said, "No. Hang on today. I might be able to find something else for you." He called me in again. He said, "Austin, I've heard of something. Provided they accept you and your crew and you can stay together. Would you like to go down

20:30 and be Lord Mountbatten's personal crew. He's got his own Dakota and he flies all over the place all the time. And that means going to the Middle East or anywhere. They'll have to accept you and give their okay." I said, "That would be marvellous." And they checked back. And they said, "Yes. They'll accept you." So I said, "Oh well. That meant another stripe." I was a squadron leader then because you had to be a squadron leader to be

21:00 the chief's pilot. It didn't make you fly any better but still you were entitled to that rank so I got that. I was hustled off. "You must get down to Ceylon as quickly as possible. You catch the plane to Calcutta tomorrow and there's a normal sort of passenger service going down to Ceylon. You catch that and get down there as quickly

21:30 as possible because he'd got a trip going up to Tehran or somewhere. And his crew has just left." So wow. I shot down there and thought this is great. I got down there and two days after I got there an Avro York arrived in from England. Four engine aeroplane with an English crew to be

22:00 the supremo's private aircraft. It had been decided at high levels in Britain that because he was an Englishman he shouldn't be flying an American aeroplane. He should…And an Avro York, which is an adaptation of a Lancaster was a very efficient aeroplane but it was a cargo plane fitted out as a private transport. It was all right I think. Anyway that was his aeroplane.

22:30 So I was obsolescent. I was down there. No job. No job for the crew.

So you managed to bring your original crew with you? So you were able to bring your original crew?

My crew was going to fly. We had to have a crew of four. When I didn't get the job we had to split up. That's when we did split up. They went back onto non flying jobs somewhere. I don't know. I lost contact with them. See

23:00 you lose contact very quickly. So I naturally complained very bitterly and air command who was stationed up at Kandy sent for me. I was at Colombo at the airport. "Austin. Yes. We're sorry there's been some trouble and you lost your job. You come up and see us." So I caught a train up there. Up to Kandy, which is about four thousand feet up

23:30 I suppose. Nice and cool. Very pleasant. A very pleasant spot Kandy. And ushered in. "Yes Austin. We've heard your complaints. We'll see what we can do for you. While you are here AOC, that's air office commanding, Air Marshall Pierce would like to see you.

24:00 "Oh I've complained so much that I'm a bad boy. I'm going to get the cane." He was a New Zealander but he was a New Zealander in the permanent RAF. He was a very nice bloke and he caught me and he said, "Austin I'm terribly sorry about the mess up. While you are here we're all old people. We flew in the first war. You've just been through the mill and you've been operating down there for eighteen months.

24:30 You know what's going on from an aircrew's point of view. Organisation, flying conditions and what have you. Would you write me a report. Say what you like. Criticise who you like and there'll be no skin off your nose. You have a bundle of paper and a secretary, a desk and two days to get it to me. I dictated and I dictated

25:00 and went on and on and went through much of what we had gone through there and what I thought were the shortcomings. What could be better and what have you. When he got it back he read it and he said to me, "Austin I had no idea so much was going on and so much was not quite right. It could be better." He said, "You're an obvious man to be…He said, "I'm sending you over to the supremo's

25:30 headquarters as an air operations advisor to the planning staff. I said, "That's a big step up for me. I had no staff training what so ever. I'm not a desk man." He said, "No matter. You're obviously practical. You know what you're talking about. You go over there and join in." So I went over there. Fear and trembling, really.

John what were your main criticisms of the way things had been handled? This is what was happening in Burma was it?

26:00 Yes.

What were your main criticisms?

My main criticisms were that it happened in the army and the air force but not so much in the navy that the main pressure of war was Europe or North Africa, which was more or less finished then, by this time. But there is a great tendency that what couldn't be used to didn't have enough brains to be used in Europe was sent to India and Burma. In other words

26:30 there were quite a few pretty senior, or supposedly senior officers were promoted and sent out. They were no good in the other theatre. They had to get rid of them. You can't sack them. So likewise the double-dealing and double handling and I'm waiting around for hours and hours to get a load when it could have been done quicker. I'm wasting a lot of time I suppose during that campaign

27:00 apart from the normal resting time we got you'd go to an aerodrome waiting to be loaded with either goods or troops or something or other and you'd be there four hours before you'd get a load. And it would eventually turn up. In the mean time you've wasted four hours. This sort of thing. Another gripe then was that…I mentioned it several times. I mentioned it when I came home.

27:30 Americans, especially in all these fly-in jobs. The Broadway occupation, Imphal. They were working along beside us. The local newspapers through their…American issues to newspapers got all the glory. We got very little. We got very little mention in the newspaper. And the Americans could be in an operation and they would have an operational medal within

28:00 weeks. Now the only operational medal I got accept for various campaign stars was Mentioned in Despatches. And I didn't hear about that until a year later when I had left the air force. Which I said to him. I said, "Look. There is not enough recognition of what we are doing. We are doing the same as other people but no one knows about it."

28:30 "Yes. I understand. It's difficult. You've got to watch security." Security was the usual thing. It was difficult but I think there was a lack of liaison. From the Australian point of view we had, supposedly an RAAF liaison officer in Delhi who was supposed to look after the welfare of some between five and seven hundred Australians in the theatre.

29:00 But we rarely saw or heard of him and I don't…Well I think he had a good time in Delhi. It is a long way from the war front. He didn't do much for us. But that wasn't really a AOC thing because he was RAF. But our people here in Australia didn't look after us very well at all. We all felt pretty neglected, pretty hurt. But still we didn't let it worry us.

29:30 We just got on with the job.

You found out a year later that you got the MID [Mentioned in Despatches]. What?

Yes. I worked it back that perhaps this Mention in Despatches came from the major I took on this supply dropping thing when the navigator was injured. He was most

30:00 with it. And he couldn't say enough. And I think he might have made a mention. It had to go back through the armies and various things. It took a whole year to actually get mentioned in the papers. By that time I was at home here. I was still in the air force but I was on long retirement leave really and it came out a year after what I think it was awarded for.

30:30 It didn't come from the RAF side. We, as Australians, as far as any real decorations were concerned, because we belonged to the RAF squadron that was fine. We got on well with all of them. But there weren't too many decorations I don't think because there was nothing as bad as Bomber Command. The straight out sheer bravery of Bomber Command. There was nothing like it. Some

31:00 fellows did some very long term very good flying and very hard work and they should have got some mention I think. But any mentions came through an there weren't too many and they always went to RAF personnel. Never to Australians. No Australians to my knowledge in our unit got any mention for anything. The Canadians, seeing the Americans get it complained to a big-wig of theirs and he came out to look and

31:30 said they said, "Look. We're here and like the Australians we are not getting any mention." He apparently stirred the possum a bit and a few weeks later four or five of them, especially fellows who had been serving there for a long time, got a decoration, either DFC or something like that. And they were entitled to it I think.

32:00 **So is that to say that morale was not necessarily always that good?**

It was good in the squadron but we just felt neglected. But that didn't worry us. We were part of a unit and we were fighting a war and no, that didn't make any difference to our effort that we put into it. We were a bit disappointed that it wasn't recognised. And anyway I got down to

32:30 Kandy and walked in and arrived in, we had a little room. Not much bigger than this, which was known as the operations division. That's where the advisors were. We had six of us in there. Seven actually, with an American army colonel the boss man. He had been involved with Americans and Chinese but he

33:00 was on older man. He was the oldest in the room, anyway. The others were…There was a British naval commander, an Australian wing commander. Administration really but RAAF Australia. Myself. An English army colonel and an American. I suppose he was a transport

33:30 fellow. A bit like me. And we were a little group that whenever the planning staff…that's older people, probably older than us. They supposedly knew best how to run the war. They knew what was available in terms of men, troops, and ships, guns, aeroplanes. If they were planning a new major thrust it had to be planned and it probably took six months to do it. You had

34:00 built up. Now obviously in their planning, of course not knowing or by accident they would expect some aeroplane or some boat or some landing craft to do some group of men to do something which, to us, it was quite impossible for them to do. So we'd have to tell them. But we'd have to be sure of our facts

why they couldn't do it. Mostly because we just didn't have the things to do it with. We were terribly short.

34:30 But they had some…They keep getting. Whatever war was going on I could see anything. And likewise a lot of us could. And we had to know what was going on everywhere else. Why we couldn't have this or couldn't do that. And the way this was sort of passed around every morning you'd get a

35:00 security messenger would come around with a locked briefcase and unlike it and pull out a pile of paper signals that came in overnight. And there might be twenty or thirty. And there would be perhaps a few that could concern us or me. So I'd read anything that I might have to make a comment on or that and try and put it in here. And that was it. And it was pretty tight security but

35:30 what really shook me as an Australian farmer that got himself into the air force and then got himself into a staff job. Was that these top-secret, eyes-only documents came through and I was allowed to read them. A lot of them I didn't read because they didn't concern me. But many were stamped across the top in red. "Not to be seen by Si Cam Sheck."

36:00 He was one of the Tri Party. But they couldn't trust him. It shook me to the core to think, here's our ally and the Chinese army's with the Americans up there and we don't trust him. I found it very surprising. Anyway we did our job and it was very interesting. Every morning at about eight thirty there'd be an assembly in the war room and

36:30 the experts that knew everything was going on and Mountbatten and all his chief men would be there and they would listen to everything that was going to happen in the next twenty-four hours. And what might be going to happen. It was very interesting.

You say it's… It sounds very interesting. Can you just describe one of those days?

A day?

Yeah. You were saying the thing starts at eight thirty with Mountbatten. The presentations are made. Talk us through that.

When he came in

37:00 to the war room for the meeting early in the morning he allowed his unit staff officers to put forward what was happening. Do the briefing. He wouldn't say anything. He'd be there listening and commenting or something like that but he didn't interfere. And he was very well thought of by everyone.

37:30 The army were suspicious of him. The army just couldn't understand why the supremo should be a naval man. They said, "You can't put a man who'd just been driving a destroyer in charge of an army." They were distrustful. Especially in India. But he very soon disproved that because he used to get around. He used to

38:00 make every effort to get out. He came down at least once to visit us on the squadron. Stood up and gave us all a talk. He did that to most units. As much as time allowed. Occasionally if there was a bit of a party in the mess he'd sometimes put in an appearance. He'd have a drink with you, which was very un-British.

38:30 That didn't often happen but he liked us to know that he was with it I think. And I think most of his staff were like that because his staff.…He'd hand-pick them mostly. And the reason he went down to Kandy was that when the South East Asian line was first set up it was envisioned it would be in Delhi because that was the war centre in India. The interference of

39:00 the old British Indian army was so great he said, "There's no way I can run the war from Delhi. I'm going to Ceylon to set up camp down there with as few people as possible who know as much as possible." Army, navy, and air force. Americans, Chinese…The Chinese link was General Stilwell. And he used to come round.

39:30 Vinegar Jones and he was vinegar. He used to come round and blow hell out of everyone. And then go back to his Chinese. He might have been right in some places but apparently the highest staff, not me, found him a bit hard to get on with. Then.…

You were talking us through that day, the briefing and…?

The day

40:00 would start. We'd arrive in the office about eight o'clock in the morning.

Tape 9

00:31 Yes. I was surprised that I had been elevated into what was quite a responsible sort of job. Of course I could be overruled by anyone if I was making mistakes but what I was saying had to be correct. I had to

be sure of my facts. Otherwise I would have been out of a job very quickly. But I survived the three months on that staff job and I only left because the RAAF at home

01:00 said I had to come home. When they say you've got to come home you've got to go home. But what we did on…while I was there they were obviously starting to work out plans of what happens next. They still hadn't got onto the flat part of Burma. We were still on the fringes. We had beaten the Japanese there and we were all ready to roll in there. But how were we going to do it. Were we going to continue over the mountains with the air supply and keep pushing down

01:30 or some proponents said we should attack the south Burma coast and put in landing craft and come in and try and cut off the Japanese who were up in the north. Some said we should go and attack from the south and go into Rangoon. And then kept floating in a number of times and got rather laughed at….or Winston Churchill used to come into the act sometimes too and signal,

02:00 "Why don't you come in with a landing force and land in Sumatra." Well the answer to that was obvious. It was just too far away. We had no navy and no aeroplane could fly there but it was just out of the question. He thought we should land in that part of Sumatra. It's called Aceh now I think and attack the Japanese down through the island but that was just stupid thinking. And apparently he did at the time but he could carry it away. He was a great

02:30 ideas man. He was a great leader at that time of the war. I'm not criticising him that way but some of his ideas were way out. Anyway we were running through the early planning stages of how to carry on in Burma once we got past the Christmas stages or past the monsoon. And the monsoon…we were going out of the monsoon into the dry period. How we were going to do various things.

03:00 Landings, continuing on with the air transport. Well the landings were out because there were no landing craft or very very few because at this time they had been all congregated for the invasion of Germany. And even though that had started they were still being used in large quantities to bring stuff across the English Channel. So that was out.

03:30 There was…coming up through the bottom of Rangoon was far too difficult. There was too much enemy held country all around the bottom of the islands. It would have been too dangerous and probably disastrous. Filter the army in through some roads we had and air supply

04:00 shall be the major focus of supply until such time as we can get a better access. Well after…and that's the way it went.

So air supply was going to be big.

It was very big. After I went there was still a squadron and some of the fellows I was over with and some of them had joined later. And they gradually pushed down and got a foothold over the mountains on the ground in Burma. And not…the navy were able to take control of the port at Akyab, which

04:30 the Japanese had held for a long time. And Akyab is at the bottom or Arakan. And to get into Akyab there was some access to the central parts of Burma. And once this happened and the air force got established on various dromes, with fighter backups and Bomber Commands and everything else…and also had

05:00 come into the theatre at this time were a greater number of long-range bombers which could go back and hit the Japanese a long way behind where they were before. They'd go right back into Siam, even as far as Bangkok and hit their lines of communication there. And attack their shipping further down the coast. This all helped. And eventually they got back in early forty-four and I think by

05:30 the middle of 1945. By the middle of 1945 it was starting to roll and the Japanese were really feeling the pressure. They rolled on down and they were still rolling and they captured Rangoon and they were continuing to move at the time the atomic bomb went off.

Frank can I ask

06:00 **I don't want you to be too modest but what sort of input would you have had in those discussions?**

My input as a member of the operations group…None of us were ever in a major round table discussion amongst all the big-wigs. If something came up that they didn't understand or know they'd appeal to us to advise them

06:30 weather this idea they had would work or not in our view. With materiel and what have you…That was our… I think that was Mountbatten's way of doing things. There is no good making a major plan if it's got a flaw in it. And we had to pick the flaws.

Can you give us a specific example or two?

No. I can't in…while I was there because…

07:00 Well one particular flaw was they can't have a landing on the southern or the central southern coast because we didn't have the landing craft. And they didn't have the backup and it was a bit too far away from where we could give air cover. We didn't have any aircraft carriers. The navy would say that. I

would say you can't fly an aeroplane across from southern India to southern Burma. It's too far. You could fly it over but you wouldn't get it back again. This sort of thing.

07:30 Fairly elementary but it was important because I think in the past many wars had gone off with grandiose ideas of doing this then finding that they actually get into the operation and it's not going to work. We tried to ensure that both from the men's point of view and the materials point of view. Yeah. Another rather embarrassing morning

08:00 when I'd been there about a month. They were very security-conscious and a fellow arrived in at my desk late one afternoon and he said, "Squadron Leader Austin. I've got a job for you in the morning. Go to room such and such," I can't remember the number, fourteen, "and a group of people want to talk to you." He did tell me who they were but

08:30 I was very busy and I didn't take it in properly. He said, "Nine o'clock." I said, "Fine…that will be fine." Of course nine o'clock came the next morning and it slipped my memory. This fellow came back and he said, "Austin. They're all waiting for you." I said, "Oh my God. I'm sorry. Who are they again?" He said, "Oh there's a room full of Allied war correspondents to talk about the Burma war. You've just come up there. They think that you

09:00 might have some information for them." And I thought, what does one do about security with this mob? What can I tell them. What am I allowed to tell them. I had no security instructions what so ever. It was just assumed that I was trustworthy. So I arrived in this room and apologised for being late. And there they were…there must have been about thirty of them all sitting up there grinning like coal cats. And they were pleased to see me and they all clapped.

09:30 And I explained roughly what I have been doing and what have you. And I said, "I just can't tell you anything that might be happening. I've got to be very careful here." Earlier that morning at breakfast they brought a local area newspaper. Called Siack. They called it Siack. I read it all at breakfast and it had

10:00 all the latest news that was allowed to be given to the media or promulgated. I more or less quoted this whole newspaper and when I had finished they asked a few questions and I said, "I can't answer. I'm sorry." I think that was right. And then the fellow got up, the leading fellow, and he said, "Sir, that is one of the most informative

10:30 interviews we've ever had with anyone." And I told them nothing that they couldn't read in the paper. But I had to dodge it.

But you seemed to be given a fair bit of responsibility and as you say, trust.

When you think of today's wars and the media that they'd shoot you if you didn't tell it. I'm not criticising today's media.

11:00 It's got out of control. It is very difficult for those trying to run a war with any sort of element of surprise. Very difficult. We did have some sort of element of surprise there. Then finally as I related earlier about my fellow that took over from me. I won't repeat that.

11:30 On the day I was due to leave, I caught an aeroplane…run by 194 Squadron with internal routes. I caught the plane up to Bombay, which I was to leave from. We went to an embarkation depot called Wally. Bombay incidentally is called Mumbai for those people who don't understand.

12:00 And we had four or five days, quite pleasant time, waiting to find out what was happening and when a boat was going to come. And finally after a week they said, "You'll be going tomorrow." And not much secrecy about it. "You'll be going on the SS William Mitchell, which is an American troop boat. It's got a lot of Americans on and it will

12:30 take you from here to Melbourne and it will drop you off in Melbourne and about forty other Australians." Their tour expired. Some had already come in from the Middle East to Bombay and they congregated there. They'll drop you off. It's on the way back taking repatriated men, ill, wounded, back to America. Anyway it was a fairly big modern ship,

13:00 a twenty thousand tonner. It had been designed as a passenger boat but no lining, no comforts. Two meals a day, one at midday one at midnight. Iron decks, no chairs, nothing. Hammocks and very few cabins but because myself and I think five, six other

13:30 air force men some of whom I knew before…were all squadron leaders. We were all given a cabin with hammocks. And we were given a cabin which was designed for two berths. So we were jammed in there like sardines, like this. It was not very comfortable. The day after we left the ship was very hot, being all armour,

14:00 and the air conditioning broke down. And the cabin was so hot. And being wartime you couldn't open the porthole because they didn't want any light to expose. It was very much a troop ship. So I stood one night in this cabin and then I went down and got in with the troops in a hammock down in the hold. It was much more comfortable. And the sea wasn't rough. It was quite comfortable in a hammock.

14:30 And on the way home there was not much to do except two meals a day. So we'd round up a few good

card players and play a lot of bridge and poker and things like that. Two days or three days out something break down with the engines and we came to a halt. The day before we lost an escort. We were about two hundred miles south of Ceylon and we didn't want an escort after that.

15:00 The day after we lot the escort the engines broke down and we were dead still in the ocean for about three hours. And they are trying to repair the engine, banging away and you've never heard such noise. Submarines within a hundred miles could have heard it and we were thinking this is not so good. Are we going to attract a submarine and get torpedoed? And finish the war this way. Anyway they got the engines going and it was a very fast boat, about eighteen or twenty knots so it just took fourteen days from Bombay to Melbourne.

15:30 And we didn't see anything of Australia at all. My first view of Australia was the day we finally landed in Melbourne. We were coming down the coast here and we were not far off the heads, about early in the morning, six o'clock and just as dawn was coming with a fairly heavy sea fog, which extended just onto the land. You know. And you couldn't see the land. You didn't know it was through the fog.

16:00 But sticking out of the land were two things that I recognised. One was a clubhouse, here at Barwon Heads, which I'd been a member of for many years. That was sticking out of the fog. We couldn't have been very far away from the shore. And the other thing sticking out of the fog was the spire of St Mary's Cathedral in Geelong. And those were the only two things we could see. When we got up to the heads it was still foggy, got through the boom. I hadn't imagined there'd be a boom.

16:30 Of course there would be but there were no booms when I went overseas. Of course there would be but I hadn't imagined it. There were no bombs when I went overseas. Got back, paddled up the bay at a fairly leisurely rate. The fog had lifted by that time. We got into Williamstown at about eleven o'clock in the morning. Off loaded the Australians. And we were picked up by women in cars. I think they were mainly

17:00 Australian Red Cross drivers in a car. And they picked up three or four of us in a car and what baggage we had. We didn't have much baggage. We had to leave our heavy baggage. That had to be brought along. Not that we had very much. And they took us into the Melbourne Cricket Ground, which was a personnel depot for the air force in those days. Which we…there was nothing on the wharf to say we we're home. No welcome, no nothing. The only welcome was the driver of the car. The woman said

17:30 "Very pleased to see you home" but nothing. And of course no one knew we were coming home. We were just all dumped of an American ship and driven into Melbourne to a personnel depot and received what I thought was a disinterested reception.

18:00 All they were interested in….was saying, "Oh well you're home. You'll need some ration tickets, you'll need this, and you'll need that. We'll give you a leave pass and this that and the other." And then up to the head of the queue

18:30 in a room or a little office by himself was what we called a wingless wonder. He never had any wings. A youngish bloke. Only a flying officer, he gave no acknowledgement of my senior rank. He just ignored my seniority. He said, "Oh Austin, yes, you're papers.

19:00 Okay you're home here. You've been serving with the RAF but you're back in the Australian Air Force now. You are carrying Royal Air Force rank. You must lose that straight away and come back to our Australian way of ranking." So that was the greeting. And I thought, "Well that's a great welcome home." And I said, "Well that's the way it is." But he didn't want to see me.

19:30 He said, "I don't think we can find a job for you." He said, "You've got ten days leave, go home and see your family. You come back in ten days and we'll see what we can do for you." Years afterwards I heard, and I realised straight away that there was a jealousy between

20:00 the Australian air force that served in Australia and the Pacific and were trained here and the Empire Air Training Scheme people who were trained in Canada and served in Britain, Italy, the Middle East, Burma or wherever. There was a line drawn. They didn't like us. And my brother told me this in a letter incidentally when he came home about twelve months before.

20:30 Incidentally while I was up at pun-job I heard that he had died in Darwin at the end of 1943. He had finished his second tour and died of blood poisoning which was bad luck. There were no antibiotic apparently. He had an infected arm and it is rather a sad story really because he was engaged to a girl and he realised his tour was going to finish round about such and such a date and Mum had organised a sort of wedding:

21:00 "And when you come back you and Margaret get married." And John knew when he finished his tour he had this poisoned arm. So he went to go and see a medico. He said, "They won't let me go down. They want to put me into hospital." So he ignored the medico but it got worse. It got so bad he died of blood poisoning in a couple of days. One of those…whatever you call it now and he was dead. I was back in India at the time. I'd got a cable from

21:30 my mother saying, "John and Margaret will be married on such and such a date." I said, "Oh hurray." I wasn't even sure they were engaged. I was out of contact with them at this time. Or if I'd been told I'd

forgotten. And two days later I got another cable from Mum. “John died yesterday.” That was a big shock to me. But it was one of those accidents of war. He was a highly efficient airman, highly decorated, had done two

22:00 tours. Done a tremendous amount of work up in the islands. He took over a squadron here. It was just one of them…Of course it upset the family badly. Anyway I heard later that other people who had come back from overseas, pretty experienced people, the home air force didn’t want to know them. And even though they were probably

22:30 decorated, highly efficient, very successful airmen in some cases they were sent up to…Especially fighter pilots. They didn’t want any of them. They used to send them up to Mildura to do a rehabilitation course to Australian ways of flying fighter aeroplanes. But prior to this the instructors had been told to fail them.

23:00 So they were probably far better than the instructor. Far better pilots. So they became redundant. Then they naturally didn’t want to do a non-flying job so they applied to be demobbed [demobilised] I think, a lot of them. I know two or three fellows that happened to. So there was a great jealousy between the services.

23:30 **So what happened to you?**

What happened to me? Well I went…Are you still on? I went home on the ten days leave. I immediately went down to the family at Geelong, mother and father, and spent the weekend with them. Then I went back up to my property to see how things were and spent some time up there. And went to see my house and

24:00 and we weren’t engaged or anything but I wanted to go back and see how the land lies I suppose. In the meantime, before I went up there, I think I got home on a Friday, a Friday or a Saturday, I can’t remember. On Sunday Dad and Mum said to me well if you want to meet a few people who are still about and we’ve got enough petrol. We’ve got an old truck and we can go down to the Barwon Heads Golf Club.

24:30 Even though there is a war on there’s still a very good Sunday lunch and you’ll meet a few people. I said, “Well fine.” Of course we did meet a few people and they said, “My son, we are very proud of him.” Probably I was wined and dined too well at lunch, too many beers and by the time we got out of the lunch and retired to the lounge for coffee

25:00 I was pretty … And another couple walked out who I’d known before the war. And I’d known him as an eminent law person before the war and he was a great friend of Mum’s and Dad’s. I had known him but he was a lot older than I was. And Mum said, “Look, you know Frank.” “Yes of course I know Frank. What have you been doing?” Under the influence of plenty of priming I said, “I’ve

25:30 just come back from Sumatra. I’ve had a staff job there. “Oh that’s very interesting. Very interesting.” And what do you think of the war. And he asked me a whole lot of questions. Nice old man. And then I sort of told him what I thought was wrong. Some areas of the war weren’t doing very well and we had some poor commanders and Dad was standing on one foot and the other foot and Mum was goggle-eyed. And I kept

26:00 going and my father sort of shut me up. We were in mufti [civilian clothes]. I had a uniform on but this fellow didn’t have anything on. And when he eventually got me outside the room he said, “Do you know who you’re talking to?” I said, “A judge.” My father said, “He’s not a judge. He’s one of the lieutenant generals in charge of one of the Australian divisions. He’d just down here for a bit of leave.” And I said, “My God. I hope I never see him again. I’m so embarrassed.

26:30 Why didn’t you stop me?” “We couldn’t stop you. You went on and on and on.” It must be twenty five years later I was down here at summertime and a steward up there rang me up and said….He was a General. He wasn’t a general then but later on in the army. He was sir something or other. He would like a game of golf. He said, “He’s short of a four. Would you go and play with him?” I said, “Oh twenty-five years, of course he will have forgotten me. He won’t even remember.”

27:00 So I went up and we played six holes and it was very pleasant. We talked about all sorts of things and golf and we were driving down the seventh fairway and I was walking down with this fellow. And he said, “Frank, are you still studying military strategy?” and I fell through the ground. With a nice smile on his face. He was a hell of a nice bloke. But oh show me the door. That happens. Shooting your mouth off. But to get back to

27:30 …back up to the country. There was a drought on. Staff shortage, feed shortage, and we had grasshoppers, sheep dying, so at the end of my ten days leave I went back to report back. So I said, “Well things are so bad on my property.” And in the meantime, two days before, my second brother lost his

28:00 life in the Bomber Command. The family were absolutely shattered. Anyway I told them this and I said, “My family can’t stand much more of this. I think if you can release me I should go. I should get out and go back and work.” I didn’t really want to but I enjoyed the air force years. They said, “All right, we’ll give you extended leave. When we want you we’ll call you.” But they never did and finally they got to

call me in

28:30 on the first of April 1945. And they said the war has gone so far north. They don't want you. We'll demob you now. So they did. But I was six months with them out here, not doing anything. They paid me on full pay and they still paid me as a squadron leader.

29:00 I got full pay so I can't be too cruel. And I got back and things had changed. The shortage of fuel, old motorcars, no new cars. The tyres were very difficult to get. And of course the various types of rationing. There was a way around some of these things. I know I used to supplement

29:30 my fuel illegally by adding kerosene to it with the truck on the place. But if it got hot nothing would work. But if I wanted to go….There was no thought of driving a vehicle from home down to Melbourne. You didn't have the fuel. That went on another two years I suppose, until…I don't think rationing really finished until about 1949. It was after Menzies got back into power and then it was eased off.

30:00 There was a period in those years after the war when you were still finding out what happened in the war. Who was not coming back. You hadn't heard during the war, people didn't know or the messages were passed very quickly. In fact sort of how disconnected we were we Australians didn't know what was happening out here even though the Japs were virtually invading Australia. We didn't know about

30:30 the submarines in Sydney Harbour. We weren't told. It wasn't in the papers over there. It wasn't news. There's only been a brief mention that there had been some bombers over Darwin but they didn't mention any damage to speak of. There was a little bit about the New Guinea war but not much. We were very much in the dark and apart from the war the things that were going on at a civilian level

31:00 we knew practically nothing at all accept what we'd got in letters and they were very careful about what they wrote. If it had any leaning towards army work or war or anything it just wasn't mention.

What were your thoughts when the war ended? Your war in a way had ended before…

My war ended when I was given

31:30 a long leave to go home.

So Frank, Frank.

I never saw any major celebrations at the end of the war. We had one at the end when Japan surrendered. It just so happened that we were shearing at home and there was a bit of a celebration in the local town. And we knocked off shearing

32:00 and everyone went into town and everyone congratulated everyone. There weren't many people there. It was just a small country town but everyone was very relieved that it was over. And the immediate thought was how we were going to get everything going again. And I had plenty to do because in three years away and due to the war generally the property had run down

32:30 and there were plenty of fences that needed fixing for example. You couldn't get any material to speak of. You had to make do or improvise or do what you could with what you had. I don't think there was any great problem for labour. There was a tremendous problem with money owed in the property. I was still managing for family

33:00 and in mid 1945 after the war was over my mother, the property was really in her name, said to me, "This has been a tremendous drag on us ever since the depression years and now we've had enough. I think the only way we can get out of this is perhaps to hand the property back to the people we bought it from. We had paid an awful lot of interest in the meantime.

33:30 And I said, "No. I don't think so. I think we've seen the worst and things are going to come good." I'm always a bit optimistic. And then they said, "What do you suggest? If you'd like to take it over and the debt on it then it will be up to you." So I thought for a while and

34:00 decided I would give it a go. And as luck would have it the seasons came good and finally by the…We got a wool boom in 1950-52. And forced up a bit by the Korean War and things like that. Things had gone up. I had more or less got rid of the department. And in the meantime… And I got married in 1946 and

34:30 we had a few children by that time and we eventually finished off with five. And then from then on, from 1952 on it was pretty good going. I think most of Australia from that period on till the late sixties were in a boom period. Employment was….I suppose not being

35:00 political but I suppose from the time that Menzies came back into power and for all that period. Good government or better handling of finances perhaps. Anyway Australia was booming. The only thing that lead to trouble later on was people coming back from the war. We had all the baby boomers.

35:30 And the baby boomers, there is nothing really wrong with them but they were born into an affluent period and money didn't mean a thing. They never attempted to save. They could go and buy things on lay-by. Credit cards came in. A large amount of our troubles today go right back to that.

Can I…We've only got a couple of minutes left. We've only got a few minutes left. Can I ask just in summing up what

36:00 **those war years, your war experiences. Looking back what do they mean to you?**

Well we had…We had shaky times. We had bad times. We had good friendships. And I consider it I suppose, I survived. That's lucky. It was really my university course. I learned so much in those years.

36:30 The first thing I learned, the first time I went out of Australia. I had an impression as most Australians do that we had everything. As soon as I got to America and Canada I realised that we were ten years behind. Not war but just the way of living. Our ideas…and we've roughly stayed a lot behind America with many ideas. We've got some more brainy people. They are coming up now but those years were great learning years.

37:00 I have a feeling that if you spend a day in your life and you haven't learned something you've wasted it. It may only be some minor thing but you've got to be learning. But if you just sit back and say, she's right, you get nowhere. And that would be my sort of message. The war years were very very informative. You learned how to cope with all sorts of changes and you got plenty. You never knew quite what was going to happen next.

37:30 The high command never quite knew how you were going to be used today, tomorrow or the next day. They had to make changed due to circumstances. It wasn't their fault. They had different pushes by the enemy and different emergencies cropped up so they had move the force of the war this way or that way and we just went with it. And

38:00 I suppose I can look back on it as a very interesting time of my life. I don't approve of war but there you are. I was lucky. I must have been lucky because during all those war years I never heard a bomb drop. I wasn't conscious of being shot at. I didn't get hurt. I didn't crash and aeroplane.

38:30 I did get home. And that is purely I say luck. Being in the right place at the right time. Or being posted this way or that way. It's very…some people are lucky I suppose. I was lucky.

39:00 Some people are born unlucky I suppose. They get caught straight away. And I remember many of my friends didn't last three months in the war. They were gone. Either army navy or air force but they were gone. And that was it. Are you finished?

INTERVIEW ENDS