

Australians at War Film Archive

Francis Petch (Frankie) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:35 **Rolling. Okay, Frank can you give us that short introduction of your life story starting from where you were born?**

Well, I was born in Ballarat on the 24th , my mother claimed it was the 25th of December 1921. I was

01:00 educated at Queen Street Public School where I won a, well, I won two scholarships. I was a part scholarship to the Ballarat Grammar School and I won a first and second one. Won scholarships to the Ballarat High School. I came in third, and won a full scholarship to the Ballarat Technical

01:30 School. I gave my scholarship to the Ballarat Technical School to George Lugg and George Lugg was the major that invented Agent Orange the Vietnam War. I accepted the scholarship to the Ballarat Grammar, sat for one scholarship and then was recommended for scholarships

02:00 right through school, and I was dux in the school in 1938. Jobs were hard to get because it was Depression years. I was offered a couple of very good jobs in Melbourne but I wanted to stay in Ballarat. I was a home-loving boy and wanted to stay in Ballarat.

02:30 I went back to the Grammar School after getting my leaving certificate to do what was known as leaving honours but in March I accepted a position at the Ballarat Trustees and started really as a message boy. And because the war was on got rapid promotion and at the age of 17

03:00 I was made acting manager of the Liverpool London and Globe Insurance Company, which the trustees were agents of. More chappies went to the war so they placed the head of the mortgage department. He combined with the insurance

03:30 department and I went back onto the ledgers worked two sections. In fact I helped with a third where there was a girl that wasn't really up to it. I was all packed. I became 18 very quickly but with my work study and sport it all happened so quickly and

04:00 I was called up to join the Army. I was all packed up ready to go with a mate a mine to Balcombe when the previous day one of the trust officers at the Ballarat Trustees, he was also treasurer of the Ballarat Hospital, offered me the job

04:30 as accountant at the Ballarat Hospital. So I went to the hospital. I saw the recRuhring officer for the air force because I wanted to join the air force ever since I was eight years old when I flew with Bert Hinkler in Ballarat. I was

05:00 keen on flying and wanted to join the air force. I did studies with the ones that were training to go into Air Crew but in spite of that manpower wouldn't let me join up. I received a lot of white feathers which is a sign of cowardice.

05:30 But when the war was going badly for the allies...they, I was able to be accepted for the air force. There was about a hundred went down for an interview in the air force quarters in Russell

06:00 Street Melbourne. They were formerly the Preston Motors. First of all you had intelligence test, which was against a clock and about half the course failed in those.

06:30 Then came the medical tests where they examined every part of you. And you had a blow and hold mercury up for a couple of minutes. I failed the first time because I had a head cold and I failed the eyesight and hearing tests. But I

07:00 persuaded them to re-examine me later on and they examined me and I passed. To get into air crew quicker I went in first and did a rookies course up at Shepparton where we did rifle drill, learnt all about the air force and this was very helpful

- 07:30 for later on when I went to Somers. That's number 1, Initial Training School. From Shepparton we were posted up to Corowa to do guard duty and that was very helpful in later life in the air force because we worked shift
- 08:00 work and at night. It was also very enjoyable time because in the Murray we caught Murray cod nearly as big as myself and it was a lovely place to be. Somers, the first lot of exams I was
- 08:30 topping the course with administrative and hygiene and there were three of us interviewed and told if we proceeded like that we'd be made pilots and could get commissions. One of the main tests to be a pilot was a coordination
- 09:00 test where you had to follow a light around the wall and a pass I think was about 5 and I got 8. You were supposed to improve on the next one and I got another 8. But I don't think anyone in the course did any better. We also had
- 09:30 eye sight tests and I was told that I was long sighted and would find it hard to land a plane. But anyhow, at that particular time all they wanted was wireless air gunners because in a bomber there's a wireless operator and two air gunners and there's only one pilot. And
- 10:00 nearly all the course were made pilots. And myself and the other two chaps that were interviewed at the same time as me and told that they'd be pilots, they weren't made pilots, and we were all made wireless
- 10:30 air gunners. Some were posted to Canada and I wanted to go to Canada and I should've gone. I saw the chief instructor and said my marks were higher than most that were going. I had O4 blood group and I was single, had all the requirements
- 11:00 but he said all the ones that have been posted to Canada have accepted and I was posted to Parkes NSW. And I said, "Couldn't I go to Ballarat?" And he said, "Why do you want to go to Ballarat?" I said, "It's my home town and I think I could study better." So from at Ballarat, just before I went
- 11:30 out to the camp, there was a crash that killed the two occupants in the Wackett and it didn't look good going to a place like that. And the first thing they did, they took us up for a flight and did some aerobatics. Quite a number of the course were
- 12:00 sick and one or two pulled out. They said they didn't want to do any flying.

Frank that's wonderful detail but for the introduction we need to keep it a little bit more brief.

Right, sorry.

No, no you don't have to apologise at all. Actually, that kind of detail we can talk about in great depth after we've finished the introduction. Is it, could you give us just a shorter version please of your

12:30 **overall time?**

Right well, you'll have to start again.

No, no. Just go on from there. Okay, so where did you basically serve? If you can just give us a sort of point form, shortened version, of your service career in World War II after you got recruited?

Well, after I'd I went from Ballarat to Sale where I did my gunnery course

- 13:00 and from Sale down to do the showgrounds in Melbourne where stayed over night. And then by train up to Sydney to Bradfield Park, and then up by train to Brisbane where we caught the Matsonia
- 13:30 across to America. Crossed America by train to New York and from New York boarded the Queen Elizabeth where I did submarine watch. To Brighton in England and
- 14:00 at Brighton we did blackout patrol and manned a machine gun on a apartment house next door to the Metropole Hotel. From my next posting in England was to do a commando course at Whitley Bay.
- 14:30 From Whitley Bay went to an advanced flying school in North Wales. Then to the Operational Training Unit at Stafford. Then to a conversion course we...for four engine planes at a place called
- 15:00 Syford which was nicknamed. Sorry at Sandtoft which was nickname Prangtoft because of all the crashes of all the bombers. And there to
- 15:30 a short course on Lancasters [bombers] and then to the squadron flying with 550 Squadron for 17 Ops [Operations] and then to a new 4-engine bomber squadron 150 where we completed our tour of
- 16:00 30 Ops and then volunteered for five more which turned into being six more. And then I became an instructor at Lichfield operational training unit and an instructor at

16:30 the, I can't think of the name of the.

Can't remember the name?

Well, it was the satellite of Enstone.

17:00 Then to Brighton, waiting to come home. Home on the Stratheden. But I was in England during VE [Victory in Europe] Day and VJ [Victory over Japan] Day.

And post-war?

17:30 Post-war? Well, there was a new manager at the hospital. He didn't know that I existed. He told me I couldn't have my job back as accountant because I wasn't fully qualified. But he offered me the job as pay officer, which I accepted because I wanted a job. From the

18:00 hospital I went to the Ballarat orphanage as accountant, and from the Ballarat Orphanage I went to the Queen Elizabeth Geriatric Centre as accountant and finance officer. And I was there for 33-years. I was been made a life governor of the Ballarat orphanage, a life governor of the Queen Elizabeth Geriatric

18:30 Centre, and a life member of the Bomber Command Association in England. And just recently I won the Les Blackburn Award for services to sport throughout my years. Starting as a boy

19:00 and ending up at the present time.

Excellent. Well that's a good overview.

Pardon?

That's a good introduction. What we'll do is move back now towards your pre-war life and so when you were a young chap up until the war we'll talk about that era. You grew up in Ballarat to begin with can you start

19:30 **by telling us a bit about your mother and your father?**

Well, my father was secretary and sales director of Cowley's Eureka Ironworks which was just down the hill from my place. My father had no war experience because he had polio as a boy.

20:00 But my father was secretary of the Golden Point Football Club from 1919 to 1921 when they won the premiership and they were probably the, they claimed to be the best team in Victoria because they beat Collingwood in a game. As a boy I was taken babe in

20:30 arms, was taken to the football and I got to love football. At Queen Street School in the fifth grade I persuaded the headmaster for sport to let us play football and the boys from the fifth and sixth grade be divided into two teams,

21:00 light blue, and one light blue and dark blue which was the school colours and that went off pretty well. And then I persuaded the headmaster that I write to schools in Ballarat district and challenge them to a game of football. So we played against Eureka Street on the Sands, which is behind

21:30 the Ballarat East Town Hall. Orphanage and Brown Hill at Russell Square and Black Hill, on their oval up by the Black Hill School. What? Now you're asking about my mother. My mother ensured that I had a good religious education and

22:00 she told me that anything I did wrong my parents didn't like or my aunts and uncle and grandparents didn't like, so and so... also told me to be honest. My father did the same thing.

22:30 He said there's a lot a things in life that are allowable by law but if they're not ethical don't do them.

Did you have a close relationship to your father?

No, I had a closer relationship with my mother 'cause you were with your mother

23:00 for everyday of the week while your father was working and then at the weekend my father played sport. He was very good at lawn bowls. He won the club championship and the Ballarat pairs title. So I had a

23:30 better relationship with my mother. But my father was a very generous person but because of the Depression I didn't exploit his generosity. My father helped me with my accountancy studies. With

24:00 letter writing.

How did the Depression affect your family?

Well, our family was probably better off than most because my father had a good position. Depression,

24:30 it was hard to get jobs and I made it easier by winning a scholarship to school. I don't know, don't think they could've. Parents couldn't of afforded at that time to let me go to the Ballarat Grammar School and

when I was dux of the school the prize was

25:00 presented by the chancellor of the university and he wanted me to go to the university but I had a sister, that my sister was cleverer than I was but they wouldn't give her a scholarship to the girls grammar because they didn't...they wouldn't give two scholarships to the one family. And then I had a young brother that

25:30 I wanted to go to the grammar school and in a sense it was just as well he went there because he was so good at sport. He won the McNeal cup for tennis. Made 104 not-out out of a total of 140 against St Patrick's College and he and another chappie made 125

26:00 not out, retired against Ballarat College. He also won the 8-80 in the combined sports.

At school I mean, they must've really given you quite an education about history as well?

At the Ballarat Grammar School I was lucky I had some very good school

26:30 teachers. There was a Mr Carrington that taught accountancy and that was the first subject each morning and he'd come in and he'd first thing he'd do he'd read The Sun and read the comic strip of Mickey Mouse and Peg Leg Pete. And then he'd say Mickey Mouse and Peg Leg Pete have gone into partnership

27:00 and it'd all be...he taught in such a practical way and then you'd have the partnership dissolved and a company formed and he was very good. And then there was Hugh Montgomery that taught English and gave me the liking for Shakespeare...

27:30 for in poetry and he also taught economics. And he taught economics so well that it was the first examination I did for accountancy when I came back from the

28:00 war...was banking finance and foreign exchange and I got third in Victoria.

That's impressive.

But I owe a lot to Hugh Montgomery. Then another teacher was the Reverend McPherson that taught geography and he

28:30 gave me the ambition when I was older to go over to England. The beauty and the heritage of England and he spoke a lot about that.

With, was Empire a concept that you supported at the time how important was it?

29:00 **Empire?**

The Empire? Very important. We used to have a holiday for Empire Day and we were shown on the walled atlas all the pink bits around the country that was all part of the British Empire and that was one

29:30 beauty of flying with RAF [Royal Air Force] squadrons you had airmen from Canada, from New Zealand, India, all Africa, all over the Empire flying with you. And it was great to

30:00 feel that you were a member of the British Empire.

What did you know about the First World War?

I didn't know a lot about the First World War because, as I've said, my relatives, I had no relatives involved in it but

30:30 they used to take me to the Anzac Day services in Ballarat. And one thing at Queen Street State School, there was a painting of the Anzac's landing at Gallipoli and that. Seeing the painting showing them wading ashore against the

31:00 fire from the cliffs above. I don't think there's ever been any greater show of courage by any force at any time. And that played a big part in letting me know about the First World War. The other thing was that I knew about the terrible trench

31:30 warfare and that's one reason I didn't want to join the Army. I preferred another type of warfare.

Did you hear about the exploits of people like Pompey Elliot and Jacka?

No, not really. I've learnt about Pompey

32:00 Elliot since, because my boss at the Queen Elizabeth Home...he was in the First World War and when he retired he wrote a history of what his life in the Army. And I've done a 3,000 word story on it but his

32:30 daughter and her family don't want me to publish it. But I feel in one sense it should be published. And that's where I've learnt about Pompey Elliot.

Well how old were you when you actually left school?

33:00 no, it might've been only 16.

Tell us about your first job?

Well first job I started of as message boy. I'd go and get all the documents that had to be signed by

33:30 board members and then I was promoted to filing clerk. From filing clerk the next job was head of the despatch department

34:00 and you had...one of me jobs was a franking machine that you had to take to the post office and with a cheque...and they'd fill it up with stamps and then you'd put your letters through the franking machine but I had'a read through all the letters. Make sure that the enclosures were all attached and take them into the

34:30 manager for him to sign. And then when you went onto the ledgers, well that was just accounting of all the various estates. I was divided into three sections A to E, F to K, L to Q, and R to Z.

35:00 And I ended up on the, doing the A to E and the R to Z ledgers, and helping the girl that wasn't coping very well that was doing the L to

You're a nice chap aren't you?

She was a nice girl.

35:30 But different religions and in those days if you were a different religions you.

Yeah, why is that? Why did religion matter in those days? If you were protestant and someone else was catholic, how?

In those days particularly as well. Out in Ballarat East there was

36:00 quite a division between English and the Irish people.

Ballarat East?

Yeah.

And what was the other area?

Other area was the wealthy area Ballarat West.

So Ballarat West was Protestant?

Well no, Ballarat would've been a mixture but

36:30 **Mainly Protestant?**

Would think so. But with the war a lot of this is gone by the board. Which is very good.

37:00 **Can you tell us any stories about the religious differences at that time before the war?**

Well, I don't know what...I did something wrong in the me next door neighbour's

37:30 place and he just he was a hero in the First World War, and he could swear like a trooper, but the worst thing he could call me was a little protestant.

Why did he call

38:00 **you that?**

I dunno what I'd done, something wrong. I might've pulled something out of his garden or done something wrong. I can't remember what it was but, might've just kicked the football over the fence and it landed in his garden. I don't know what it was actually.

38:30 **The school you went to Ballarat Grammar was it predominantly protestant in composition?**

What do you mean?

By religion was it mostly a protestant school?

Ballarat Grammar was yes, mainly Church of England,

39:00 Anglican. In fact they didn't like it. I was a Methodist and I won the divinity prizes every year.

Why is that?

Pardon?

Why did you win the divinity prize?

Well, I topped the examinations.

39:30 **How did they treat you when you won these prizes?**

Well, alright. But in the later years...me last year there was the Reverend Frutril, who was headmaster, and he badly wanted his son to win it but I beat his son. But I think his son got

40:00 even with me because when I was waiting to go over, well, a posting from the showgrounds...I went to see the dentist and he was the dentist. And I thought all me teeth was alright but I think he filled most of the teeth I had.

40:30 **Gosh, that's a strange occurrence. We'll have to stop there and change the tape.**

Tape 2

00:30 **Okay. Did you know people friends relatives who had been to World War I and experienced what that was about?**

I knew some friends that had been to WW I. They never spoke all that much about it

01:00 and when WW II broke out I was sorry for the ones that in World War I, that had fought a war to end all wars. And in their lifetime there was another one.

Did you know of their experience or the experiences people had in World War I?

I knew about the terrible conditions with

01:30 trench warfare and the mud was something that I didn't want to experience.

At that time how did the general public perceive what World War I was about? Did they respect it or what were they thinking about it?

Well World War I,

02:00 it was they were fighting for the mother country. And one's that didn't go, or showed no desire to go, were given white feathers that...

Did you know people that had got those white feathers in World War I?

02:30 No, I didn't know any personally.

Was your father involved in the First World War?

No, my father had infantile paralysis as a boy and he had one leg that was shorter than the other. He wore a built up shoe or boot.

Growing up in those days where,

03:00 **especially during the Depression, was it a happy time for you?**

Well, I was always happy. Like as I said, we were better off than a lot of people because my father had a good position. But it wasn't

03:30 good to see all the unemployment and some people that were virtually starving.

Would you see a lot of that at school?

You'd see a little bit at school.

04:00 **Other kids with not enough food for lunch and so on, or what would you see?**

Well, I didn't have much time to see anything because I used to walk home. We had our main meal of a lunch time and by the time I had me meal and got back. I never saw much of what was happening to the other children

04:30 and most of them would've gone home too. Because state schools were in an area you know a small area with children from the houses in that area went to school. It was different at the Ballarat Grammar School where they came from all over the place

05:00 and all over Victoria to the school.

At that time you became dux of the school, were you very academically minded or were you just naturally bright?

I think I studied fairly hard.

05:30 I wouldn't say that I was...well, when I was dux of the school there were two boys that were much more much cleverer than I was. One of them, Mervin Kidd, ended up deputy director of education for Victoria and the other one that won a scholarship from Queen Street State School

06:00 too, Lloyd Uparker-Jones. He ended up teaching in a university over in Scotland.

And you beat them all?

Well, I happened to do easier subjects. Like with accounting you either you got to be...if

06:30 you're right you've got to get almost a hundred per cent. With commercial principles and law, if you know the law you've got to get very high marks. Admittedly, I topped English. French, I was one of the worst scholars in the class and my

07:00 parents got me special tuition and it was by an Englishman that served in the army in the First World War and spent a lot of time in France. So I won the French prize.

Did your tutor

07:30 **talk much about his experiences in the war?**

No. My tutor, all he only had a short time to teach me and he concentrated on his job of teaching me French.

And very successfully too.

And then when I was going over in the Queen Elizabeth I

08:00 got a book from the library it was one of Alexander Dumas' novels that was written in French. And Alexander Dumas was very idiomatic and he had a French language more or less his own. But I

08:30 read that so that if I happen to bail out over France I'd be able to make myself understood.

Can you still speak French today?

Not very well. I can still read it.

Growing up before the war, the social activities like dances, what

09:00 **were they like?**

Well, I was brought up a Methodist they concentrated a lot on sport. They won the senior tennis title, the cricket title. I played

09:30 tennis, and cricket, and football. Formed a football team, we were a lot younger than teams we played against to start with and first season we didn't win a game. Second season, I think we won one and we got into the four the next season. But

10:00 they had at the Methodist baby's home in Melbourne...they used to have competitive concerts and that. They were good social activity and they were very good. As a matter of fact, I was only about 10 or 11

10:30 and I wrote an operetta including all the popular songs at the time and it took place in Corsica. The Methodists weren't supposed to dance it was against

11:00 their religion. But they used to overcome that by having what they called socials. And they'd have the dancing in the socials.

They were a good time then?

Yes, but I never had a girlfriend before I went to war. Here was me

11:30 20, and off to war and not having had a girlfriend. And my sister who was at teachers training college in Melbourne, she arranged two platonic dates for me. One with a lass that was at teachers training college with her so we went to the pictures. And the other was with

12:00 another mate of hers that was in Australians Women's Army and she took me to a dance. It was at the back of St Paul's Church in Melbourne and they were nearly all the army chaps there and they gave me a pretty rough time. They were calling me, "Menzies' blue orchid and what do you do with blue orchids?

12:30 You trample on them." And...

Before we get to that, which we will very soon, what was it like actually growing up in Ballarat compared to someone who would've grown up in Melbourne?

Well, not having grown up in Melbourne or known people that grew up in Melbourne I

13:00 couldn't answer that question. But it was good growing up in Ballarat.

Where you rurally minded growing up? Were you planning to work on a farm or so on around here, or what was the plan?

Well, at the Ballarat grammar school I had three choices. To go in for accounting,

13:30 to go in for Journalism, or to be a minister in a church. Three different teachers were trying to persuade me in different ways.

And which did you choose? You chose the?

14:00 I chose the accounting. Mainly my fathers influence.

To me though it sounds like you would've preferred to choose journalism is that true? Become a writer?

Well, it's only in my later years that I've

14:30 entered writing competitions and written a book and...

Just on growing up in Ballarat. What was the go with guns and how were they in the community?

Guns?

Yeah?

Well I used to go of a

15:00 weekend up to my grandfather's home and they had apple trees, pear trees, plum trees, cherry bushes, with blackcurrants, red currants, loganberries, and the blackbirds were a menace. Well, when I was a boy to start with I had a bow and arrow and used to shoot at the blackbirds with

15:30 a bow and arrow. Then my uncle took me out rabbiting and he had a Winchester rifle, lovely rifle, and a very powerful BSA [British Small Arms] daisy air gun and he let me shoot at the rabbits with the daisy air gun. Well, in the backyard I used to shoot the blackbirds and I got so good at

16:00 shooting blackbirds that I used to give them a fighting chance by getting in the air before I shot at them. And actually, that helped me quite a lot when I became an air gunner in the air force. Uncle told me when you're shooting a rabbit you virtually shoot at it's head and you might hit it's body. You had to shoot in front of it when it was running.

16:30 **So it was excellent training for the future was it?**

Well, you didn't know at the time but it became good training for the future.

Were there many accidents with the gun in Ballarat?

Not at that time.

We've also heard, just to get a sense of life in Ballarat, about

17:00 **the toilets and so on, and the sewerage the living conditions at that time. Can you tell us about that?**

Well, used to have what was called the night man and he'd come and collect, dunno what you'd call it, a big tin of...and take it away and leave a new tin.

17:30 **And for entertainment around the house you didn't have radio or a fridge, or did you? What did you have?**

We had radio and used to listen to the serials. In fact I listened to the drama of Kingsford Smith making a flight from he was gonna take the mail to New Zealand and he got

18:00 part of the way and the plane gave trouble, and how he had a getting the plane back to Australia. It was very dramatic and then there'd be the radio serials and the cricket.

Back then were bushrangers heroes to you?

18:30 No, not really. My grandfather knew bushrangers. He knew about Ned Kelly and a friend of his in the railways was the one that stopped the train of troopers from getting running off the rails up Benalla way. And he said that

19:00 he didn't believe in anything, he believed in the law, and didn't like people breaking it. And the same applied, see there are relatives that were Turner. That was my grandfather's name. Well, there were relatives that were in... There was a Richard Turner in the first party,

19:30 Merricks' party, that they believed was the first party to discover gold at Golden Point. Although the

historians give it to Reagan and Dunlop on the other side of the mountain but they can prove that Merricks' party was there first.

20:00 And he didn't believe in the uprising at Eureka Stockade. He said that the miners' grievances would've been solved if they'd been a bit more patient and waited just a little while.

How big an issue is the Eureka Stockade to the people of Ballarat?

Well, it's a pretty big issue.

20:30 You've got the Irish people that have fixed ideas and all their sympathy is with the miners. And they think it was the start of democracy in Australia. But I think democracy went back further than then.

21:00 **You earlier mentioned that when you were 8 years old you wanted to become a pilot?**

Yeah.

Why was that and how did that dream eventuate?

Well, my uncle used to take me on rides on his bicycle, mainly out Sebastopol way, because he had

21:30 investments in some of the mines and he liked the machinery. And he went out to see how the things were going on. Used to sit me on the cross bar of his bicycle. Tie a cushion on it and sit me on that. One day he said, "We're going for another ride." And I thought, "Crikey, not another ride out the Napoleon's." And we ended up

22:00 at the miners' racecourse. I didn't know it was the miners' racecourse at the time. It just seemed open paddock and there was Bert Hinkler with his Avion aircraft. And he was taking people for...that would pay for a joy ride. And me uncle took me up for a joy ride and I really loved

22:30 it. And he couldn't peddle fast enough to take me back to my grandparents and aunts for me to tell them about it. And they admonished him for taking me up in an aircraft without me parents' permission. But when they saw how much I enjoyed it they didn't go on with their admonishments.

23:00 **What was that experience like being up there?**

Well, I thought it was great because you could look out of the aircraft, you could see the city of Ballarat and then you come up to the lake you could recognise View Point, St Patrick's Point, the gardens. I thought it was a wonderful experience. And the first thing I did was write an essay

23:30 for the school and that's how in my book I've got all the details. And so much that I'd remembered about him, what he told the people trying to get them to fly with him. And there was one lady said, "I wouldn't fly in that for all the tea in China." And...

24:00 **Did you get airsick or anything like that?**

No, no. In fact, matter of fact, I sat on my uncle's knee. I had an oversized helmet on and that's about all I can remember.

Through the years when you were at school, you started to go into accounting

24:30 **and journalism and so on. What happened to your dream of becoming a pilot or did you dream about being a pilot in your teenage years?**

No. You were concentrating on sort'a one thing at a time like...well, not quite one thing at a time. When I got my job at the Ballarat Trustees and

25:00 there was all the people were joining the services, and I was getting all the promotions, there was concentrating on the jobs. There was studying accountancy. There was playing football, cricket, and tennis. And you were thinking of the present.

25:30 You weren't thinking of flying at that particular time. But when war broke out we were the Regent Theatre. There was about 14 of us went of a Sat'day night and we sat in the just above the lounge where we could see all the girls come in. The ones that sat in the lounge and the ones

26:00 up further. Well, we went in this day and the usherette was astounded there were so many of us and she said, "All pee." And my mate, Frank Moremain said, "What here?" And that really embarrassed the usherette. And during that night at the pictures we saw...

26:30 they showed in the newsreel service a Wellington twin-engine bomber that was going over to bomb Germany and I said to me mates, "That will be what will win the war. If I've got a go to the war I want to be a bomber pilot."

Before, just a couple of questions before we get to that. During say 1935-36

27:00 **what did you know about the rise of Hitler at that time?**

Not a great deal because I was studying hard at school. I didn't listen to the radio. With the newspapers I usually turned to the back page and read the sport. I can remember

27:30 seeing at the Regent Theatre a rally, this is prior to the war, in Nuremberg. It showed the goose stepping soldiers and then the blonde headed youths. And then there was behind that, there was a tremendous lot of tanks and overhead

28:00 there was bombers and it was a display of awesome might. And you could really see that there was a war coming. But like an ostrich, you hid your head in the sand, and just concentrated on your sport and your lessons and forgot about it.

28:30 **That film you saw, was that the leading... I can't, I'll mispronounce her last name, but the Leni Riefenstahl?**

Pardon?

Leni Riefenstahl. A woman did a documentary about the rally of Nuremberg. Was that the film you saw?

No. It was a newsreel service. Fox Movietone or...

And what was the reception to what you saw? Not

29:00 **just with you but you and your friends. What were they thinking?**

Well, they probably never discussed it all that much. They probably discussed girls or sport or something like that rather than talking about this big rally at Nuremberg. That's why later on when I had to

29:30 **bomb the place it didn't worry me all that much. Because I thought anything that could end the war quicker was gonna be good.**

At that time when you were seeing the newsreel. Did what you were seeing in Europe seem far away?

Well, it was prior to the war but it wasn't long after that that

30:00 the Germans over run Czechoslovakia and bombed Poland. And a little bit prior to that they used bombers down in Spain.

At the time war was declared, what were you doing? Were you working, or what?

When the war was declared it

30:30 was in September '40, I think it was '39. Well, I'd only left, gone to the job at the Queen Elizabeth home in March that year and the war came very, very quickly. But,

31:00 as I said, I was concentrating on me job at work, accounting, and sport. And I didn't keep up very much with the war till I had to go for a medical exam at age 18 for the army. And that medical exam was a strange exam. I went in

31:30 and they said, "Have you ever had any serious illness?" I said, "Pneumonia." And they said, "That's a bit hard to spell." And I started to spell it, "Oh won't put that down. Anything else wrong with ya?" And I said, "Well, I hurt me ankle playing football. Got a sprained ankle." And they said, "How did you come in." I said, "I walked in from next door." "You can walk. You're alright." And I went to see Dr.

32:00 Spring, that was in his army uniform. He said, "Cough and say ahh." And I was in the army.

Just to backtrack slightly. What do you remember about the actual day war was declared?

I don't remember anything.

So it didn't have a great impact on you that day?

32:30 Well, Great Britain and Australia at that stage wasn't really ready for war.

How so?

Pardon?

How weren't they ready for war?

They never had the armament.

33:00 Their aeroplanes...They never had the aeroplanes and that.

When war was declared did it seem like it was taking place far away and what did you think it had to do with Australia?

Well, it had a lot to do with Australia. The Germans had

33:30 been able to capture Great Britain it would've changed all our tradition, probably religion, and the English people would've been more or less slaves. And it would've affected Australia as well. But without the support of Great Britain

34:00 the Japanese would've taken over Australia. It was only when the Americans came in a bit later that they were able to save Australia.

In 1939 when war was declared, did you think at the time that the war would actually come to Australia's

34:30 **shores?**

Not at that time because it was virtually Germany against Great Britain and it was just a bit far away. But when the Japanese entered it was a different kettle of fish.

35:00 **When war was declared did you feel as much English as Australian, or how did you feel?**

Well, I was all Australian but even with the Japanese in the war I felt that the war had to be won over in Europe

35:30 first and then all the might of the British and their Empire could be turned against the Japanese.

Empire?

Because Australia didn't have the planes to be able to do much about the...They were no match for Japanese Zero and...

36:00 **The Empire was very important to you personally?**

Yes.

And how did you feel about the connection between England and Australia?

Well, it seemed very good.

And how long after war

36:30 **was declared did you decide to join up and why did you decide to join up?**

Well, in a sense you were more or less forced into it because when you turned 18 you were conscripted in any case. And I didn't want to go into the army. Didn't like the idea of

37:00 trench warfare or anything like that and then when you saw the battle of Britain and the spitfires. And that if there's any way to fight a war it'd be exciting way, it'd be to fly in a spitfire and

37:30 that...Well that boosted the recruitment for the air force but I happened to get into a reserved occupation and the difficulty was to get out of it or to get released so that I could join. And I was

38:00 learning Morse navigation algebra, quite a lot of subjects, with the view of joining the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force].

At this time too I believe you were receiving white feathers in the mail?

That's right.

38:30 **How did that make you feel?**

Well, having seen people I, chaps that I knew get killed. It didn't worry me a great deal because me conscious was clear. I was doing me best to get into the services. But it upset me parents terribly.

39:00 **What did they say? What did they think about it?**

Well, actually they were disgusted it was happening. My own thoughts were that I felt that whoever was sending me the white feathers should have the courage to put their names to

39:30 a letter or something to show who sent the white feathers. But they just came anonymously.

Did any of your friends receive these as well or?

No, no. Most of me friends went straight into the services as soon as they were old enough.

So at this time you were training up to go into the

40:00 **RAAF?**

Yes.

Alright. That's enough.

Tape 3

00:30 **Yeah, so you did your rookie course at Shepparton? Can you tell us about that please?**

Well, I had two left feet and I was in a squad of boys from private schools that... Private schools had an army cadet corps and they were very good at rifle drill and I was always getting into trouble.

01:00 But one good thing about this course, I learnt rifle drill. I learnt about the air force. Got all me inoculations. You get an inoculation and you go straight out onto the parade ground and do drill. Bang, that rifle up to your shoulder and you'd

01:30 just had a needle in it. The only thing that I didn't think was very good at Shepparton was the fact that...start all over again?

No, no, no. Go on from there. It's alright.

Well, you wouldn't have the first bit.

No, no. We did.

What I just. We had'a go

02:00 into a gas chamber. Take our gas masks off and then get out and you had all your eyes watering and that. But I didn't think it was very good subjecting the trainees to gas. That's about all that you need to say about Shepparton.

How long were you there for?

02:30 I s'pose round about a month. And we passed out as the best drill squad that had gone through. We had a very good

03:00 corporal. He was a tall West Australian, bronzed, Australian. He was just like you'd like to depict all Australians. Tall and strong and he was very, very fair. If we did our drill properly he'd let us...We wouldn't drill for the full time. But if he wasn't satisfied he'd have us drilling

03:30 till we were good enough. He did arrange... He was always calling me to order for doing something that wasn't quite right in the drill and that. But he arranged a game of football and I did very well at football and

04:00 there was another corporal that had run in the Stawell Gift. They... the two corporals challenged one another with the ones from the squad to have a relay race and I was the first one

04:30 he picked. And I said, "You don't pick me. I'll tell ya who to pick. Pick Shorty Jackson." And Shorty Jackson was only a chap with very small legs but he was private school running champion in Melbourne. He'd run for Scott's College and won the hundred yards at Scott's College. So he picked him and we happened to...

05:00 He happened to win his bet against the other corporal that had won the same event up at Stawell.

What did you think of the instructors at Shepparton?

Well, I like the Corporal Bell. That was our instructor. I thought he was very good.

Were they harsh?

05:30 No, he used to kid to us. He'd say, "You're air crew. You're supposed to be better than the rest. Let's show them that you are." And encourage you that way.

What happened after Shepparton?

Well, Shepparton we were posted up. Well, the squad was divided and they were posted in different

06:00 directions but the majority of them went up to Corowa on the Murray River to act as guards. And I enjoyed the life up at Corowa very much.

Corowa? What did Corowa look like?

Well, there were a lotta hotels. The air force had commandeered most of them. Up there we

06:30 slept in the Salvation Army hut, on the floor on palliasses. There was a cold shower there or if we'd like to walk down a block to the hotel we could have a warm shower. But most of us settled for cold showers. Our job was to walk up and down the...in threes, up and down the street

- 07:00 of Corowa at night to guard the premises that the air force had taken over. And I think the Japanese would've given 2 bob for the lot. But you're in three different shifts and the last shift you had to make sure
- 07:30 that the... You had to stoke the fires of the hotels so that they could do the breakfasts for the recRuhrs. But a lot of funny things happened during shifts. I can
- 08:00 remember going on shift with a lad, he was even smaller than me. And we got to the main street and an army chap with decorations showing that he'd been to the Middle East, he was drunk as anything, and he said, "Coppers." And he went over to attack us menacingly. And I didn't know whether to hit him with the baton I had in me left hand
- 08:30 or me fist and before I did that three of the service police came on the scene and they got stuck into him and I felt sorry for the chap. One of the service police had a sandwich in one hand and was punching with the other and he knocked the sandwich out of his hand and the corporal lost his temper and
- 09:00 got stuck into the army chap and they ended up taking him to jail. But on another occasion we were going, there was a big ball on at night and I'd arranged to do two shifts. Got paid by a chappie to do his second shift, but we were going on duty, and this ground staff
- 09:30 guard that was as drunk as anything. And I said to the guard commander, "You can't let him go on duty he's drunk." And he said, "Oh no. It'll be alright." So we went down into the town and the disciplinarian warrant officer walked across the street without his cap on. He walked from where they were doing the suppers in one hotel to the
- 10:00 RSL [Returned and Services League] Memorial Hall where the ball was being held. And this chappie said, "I'm going to arrest the DWO [Disciplinarian Warrant Officer]." Well anyhow, we persuaded him not to and we walked down the length of the street. We came back and normally when you're on guard duty you go across to the hotel and you get some supper. Well, we went across to the hotel and there was this lovely ball supper. We had some of that. But they gave us some fRuhr
- 10:30 cup that was heavily laced with gin and whiskey and I don't know what. And he had some of this and said, "I'm going to arrest the DWO." And anyhow we got him walking down the street. This time was the time to clear out the pubs and make sure that 10 o'clock was close and that they'd all gone off. And he run into a mate of his and
- 11:00 said, "I'm going to arrest the DWO." And this mate said, "You wouldn't be game." And he hit his mate under the chin and dropped him cold. And the other chap that was on with me, he'd been a truck driver. He was as strong as anything. He lifted the chap up and threw him over his shoulder. We climbed the stairs of the hotel that he was living in and put him to bed and then went back.
- 11:30 And he took this other guard back to the Salvation Army hut and we stripped him off into his...He had his long johns on. And we got half way down the lane to go back to town and here's this chap running after us in his long johns,
- 12:00 baton in one hand, "I'm going to arrest the DWO!" So Ace dropped him cold and carried him back to the building and put him to bed.

You guys are having a good time?

There was another time we had a guard the petrol dump. Petrol was so rationed and

- 12:30 the SP's [Service Police] used to creep up on you, trying to catch you asleep because you... There was three of you and two on duty at one time, and one asleep in the bed. Well I saw them creeping up and so I sneaked around the back of the railway line, that was station, and came up behind them and went, "Boo!"
- 13:00 That frightened them. Well, they attempted it another night and I shouted out, "Who goes there?" And no answer I said, "Halt." And there was no answer and I fired a shot over the hotel. Over their heads and today I shudder at the thought that I wasn't a very good shot with a 303
- 13:30 rifle. I could've quite easily hit them. But when we reported it to the guard commander the next day, and knew that he was the culprit, it was hard to stop from laughing. But...

What took place

- 14:00 **after those incidents?**

Pardon?

Where was your next posting after that?

Next posting was down to Somers to do the initial training course.

It sounds like you had a pretty good time in Corowa?

Yes. In Corowa we caught Murray Cod that was as big as ourselves. We went out... Mate a mine got a ferret and we went out ferreting but got lost in a burrow and we had to

14:30 dig half the cliff away to get it. We used to be allowed to use rowing boats belonging to farmers that was along the river. Provided that we returned the rowing boat to the same place. And I went out with a chappie that couldn't swim and we got into a boat

15:00 the oars never fitted the boat. And it took us all our time to get it back to the bank. But going out rowing with him, he wasn't good. You'd do one pull of the oar and the boat'd swing around and you'd have to let him have about two pulls of the oar to straighten it up.

15:30 And more by good luck than good management that we were able to get the boats back to the bank because the river was flowing pretty quickly at that time. The snow had melted alps and came down into the river and. And one'a me first things that happened at Corowa.

16:00 I played cricket for the air crew guards against the station team and I went in as opening bat and I scored 29 off the first over from a bowler that bowled with Fitzroy firsts in the Melbourne district competition. And I went out second ball the next over... to a mediocre ball that I went out. I was gonna block

16:30 it to start with then I thought, "I'll hit it and I hit up with a very easy catch." But they tried all our fast bowlers against the station team and they hadn't had any success and then they gave the ball to me and I took 6 wickets for 10 with off-spin bowling. And my mate Alec Macintosh, that had made 50 in the first innings,

17:00 he got the other four wickets. So between us we beat the station team.

When you got to Somers how did you find the training there? That was more advanced level of training?

Well, it was just like going back to grammar school again. All the tutors, they were very good teachers.

17:30 And you had your periods and then you had periods for sport, periods for commando training, and after the first week or maybe second week, you had an exam. Well, I was topping the course. We'd had the administrative exams and health and

18:00 I was topping the course and they had three of us go before the chief instructor. There was myself, there was Alan Neil, who was in his second year of medicine course at the university, and Jack Brew, that went to Melbourne High School and they told us we'd all end up pilots or

18:30 get commissions. And none of us ended up pilots and none of us got commissions. And then one of the main features that said whether you'd be a good pilot or not was the coordination test where you had to follow a light around the wall by using a joystick.

19:00 Well, five was a pass and supposed to be very good. Well, I got 8 and you were supposed to improve the next time and I got 8 again. But I got very high marks and there was a chap, Stacey, that had been up at Corowa with us. He'd been a champion bike rider at the velodrome in Melbourne. He failed

19:30 in the coordination test yet he was still made a pilot.

How's that?

You tell? Well, they probably...He was a bit of a dare devil and I think they went more on personality than on anything else.

Did he end up being a good pilot?

I wouldn't know. See he'd be posted to different stations to what I was

20:00 posted.

So you wanted to be a pilot initially?

Yes. Not initially full stop. But they made me a wireless air gunner instead.

Were you upset that you were a wireless air gunner?

I was upset but you just had to accept what when you're in the air force you do what you're told.

20:30 **Didn't have any choice in the matter?**

No. I wanted to go to Canada when I was a wireless operator air gunner but they'd selected who they wanted to go to Canada. And although I'd had higher marks than the ones that were going, and

21:00 had O4 blood group, and was 20, and unmarried. Had all the qualifications. I wasn't selected and all the ones selected wanted to go. So I had no choice. I was posted to Parkes, the wireless school in NSW and I said, "Couldn't I go

21:30 to Ballarat?" And when one or two that were posted to Ballarat pulled out I was allowed to go to Ballarat.

What sort of training did you do at Ballarat?

Well, just before I went to Ballarat in December one of the Wirraway crashed and it killed the two that were in it. Just outside of Ballarat.

22:00 The Wirraways that they were flying in had the reputation of landing in paddocks all around Ballarat all the time. Wasn't happy in, you know what we might have to fly in, but when we first got to Ballarat the first thing they did was take us up in a Wirraway and do aerobatics. There were one or two

22:30 that were sick, you know. There were one or two pulled out because they didn't like the flying experience. And then we had certain time in doing lectures. Morse was one of the subjects and

23:00 I had a mate from West Australia and he used to read letters from his sisters from home. Or the newspaper that had all the naughty bits, what happened over in the west. And then he'd copy from me but he did quite well.

23:30 And then the later part...I was lucky in the sense. I got had a needle for scarlet fever, or something or other, and I played football and I got bronchitis. And I ended up in hospital and I had to go back a course. Went from 34 course to 35

24:00 course and all the Victorians in 34 course got posted up to the islands and the West Australians. And there was I, don't know of any of them that survived. In 35 course the Victorians and the West Australians from 34 course got posted over to England

24:30 and only 12 out of them. Twelve out of the hundred there survived. The loss in the air force was one in two. But unfortunately, with these postings they went to the different squadrons and they happened to end up being the one in two that were lost.

25:00 **When you joined the air crew, you were aware about the losses at that stage?**

Yes, and more so when you got over to England.

Did that worry you at all?

Well, I s'pose it worried you to a degree but you just went ahead and did your job.

But it must've been difficult to do that?

Well, not really. I was religious

25:30 and I thought whatever would happen would happen. And that if I died, I died and that'd be it.

Did you know the ratio was one to two?

Yes.

So you thought that you might die? Did that ever cross your mind?

It was a possibility but like everyone else I thought I'd be one of the one out of the two that would survive.

26:00 **Well you're lucky aren't you?**

Yes.

Do you think it's luck?

A combination of quite a few things. Ability, discipline, and luck.

Yes. It's something I'd like to explore a little

26:30 **bit more later on.**

Yes.

Now, when you were at Ballarat you would've been with your family of course?

That's right. We got the weekends off. I had a West Australian that used to come and stay at my place weekend by the name of Alec Barnett. Of a Friday night we used to go to Marge Morkham's dancing class

27:00 and surprisingly that was some of the best training I ever got for bomber command. Now, you might ask me, "Why do I make such a statement?" But learning to dance over in England when you went to dances you got your mind off flying on operations and it was

27:30 really one of the best things that happened to me.

When you were in Ballarat though, being in the air crew. Did they get a lot of social attention from women, girls at the time?

Before I went in, when I was at the hospital,

28:00 the air crew at Ballarat, they had all...a lot of the nurses. Like pretty nurses they were friendly with and I couldn't wait till I got some white in my cap to show that I was air crew. But back in Ballarat I s'pose the locals knew me and they preferred

28:30 someone from West Australia or something like that.

How did you sister react to you getting you know, accepted into air crew? Having all the insignia to show it?

Well, they seemed to like me

29:00 being able to pass the exams and progress. At that stage they wouldn't have been thinking of me killed later on. They'd be thinking more of the present.

Did your sister introduce her to her friends in Ballarat?

Not then. Only

29:30 when she was down in Melbourne and I was at the Ballarat showgrounds waiting for a posting somewhere or other either up north or over to England.

How long was your stay at Ballarat for?

30:00 Six months. I couldn't get a game to play for the air force in football, and the team that I played Golden Point and Ballarat had combined and they were the best team in it. But

30:30 I was offered a game with Ballarat East. Snowy McKenzie, who was vice captain of the Ballarat combined team that I played with when I was 17 years old, he persuaded me to play with East. And about the only good game I played was against the air force. The captain of the air force

31:00 was a 6-foot-6, bald headed, flight lieutenant with the navigational school. And he'd had a go at me early, missed me, and I went up behind him to punch the ball away for a mark and I hit him in the back of the, just touched him in the back of the neck, and dropped him cold. All the East supporters

31:30 cheered. I thought, "Well, I'll get reported." But the umpire never gave him a free kick and we were getting well beaten. And at half time our coach put me on to play against flight sergeant Williams from the air force. He was me Morse instructor but he had represented Ballarat at football, and by being able to hold onto his nicks or sleeve of his guernsey, and give a tug, I could get in front of him.

32:00 Or he'd be leading me to the ball and the ball'd bounce right back into me hands and I not only kept him quiet but beat him. But I couldn't have played a full four quarters on him 'cause I was absolutely done. But he...after the game he congratulated me but I was hoping that the flight lieutenant would never recognise me out at the air force camp. He'd probably see that I got into trouble for something or

32:30 other. At the air force camp at Ballarat there was a warrant officer Smyth, that disciplinary warrant officer that used to take us for parade first thing in the morning. He used to prance around like a prize peacock

33:00 and he was always putting someone on a charge and I said that one day I'd get even with him. Well. later on I'll explain about the chance where I had could've got even with him. He never put me on a charge or anything but used to make our lives a misery.

33:30 It was hard enough flying in the dicey Wacketts and doing all the study without that.

So what happened after Ballarat once you'd finished up there?

Went down to Sale in Gippsland to do the gunnery course and there we flew in Fairy Battles.

34:00 We did a week learning about the guns and everything and then went up flying in Fairy Battles. And I flew the first trip with a mate a mine, Bill Ray from Ballarat, he won the toss and decided to fire first. And I was down in the bowls of the Fairy Battle getting all the fumes

34:30 from the...And the job was to dive down and fire at a sand pit. They were numbered down below and he, me mate, fired off first and I got air sick. He fired my rounds off for me. When we got back he failed and had to go up again

35:00 and I got above average score. But the way they used to judge the firing the results of your firing I don't know. There was one day I went up and I thought I'd fired beautifully. I'd shot the whole tail of the drogue and me gun was just about poking through it, and you can see the bullet's gone

- 35:30 through it. Come back and I got a terrible score. Another time, when you had to fire off so many rounds to complete the course. And I was behind schedule, got a stoppage in the go gun. I threw most'a me rounds overboard and that day, when I got back, I got a good score. In the
- 36:00 finish I passed out as above average air gunner.
- And you threw most of your rounds overboard?**
- That was that particular flight but I got a good score.
- How does that work?**
- I don't know how it works. You tell me and we both know.
- You probably hit the guy on the head when you threw out your rounds?**
- I s'pose the few
- 36:30 rounds I did fire must've been marked well on the drogue. They used to paint your cartridges to show the colour that hit the drogue and that's how they used to score it. But I think they used to just guess.
- 37:00 **How long did that go on for?**
- Pardon?
- How long did the gunnery training go on for the course?**
- About 2 months.
- Were you proficient at it?**
- I passed out as above average gunner.
- You felt quite confident?**
- But I wasn't a bad gunner. It was all due to me training
- 37:30 with shooting at blackbirds when I was a boy with me uncle's daisy air rifle.
- Once you'd finished your gunnery training what happened then?**
- Well, we were given a week's leave and unfortunately having played football, again with having a needle for something
- 38:00 or other, I got bronchitis and spent the whole week in bed. My mother was going to arrange a big party with girls and everything for me but I spent the whole week in bed. And it was just, apart from getting well it was just a waste of a week.
- 38:30 And then from there we got posted down to the showgrounds in Melbourne waiting to see whether we'd be sent up north or over to England and that's when my sister arranged two platonic
- 39:00 dates with two of her mates. One that was going to teachers training college with her and I can remember taking her to the cinema in Melbourne and the envious glances I was getting from American's and air men for having such a pretty girl with me. And then next night it was arranged that I'd take another of her mates that was in the
- 39:30 army to a...we were gonna go to a big dance in Melbourne but instead of that she took me to an army dance at the back of upstairs at the back of St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne. And all the army chaps'd say to me, "You're a blue orchid. Blue orchid's should be crushed. You're one a Menzies' mannequin. What good will they be in a real war?"
- 40:00 And didn't get many opportunities to dance with May and then had to take her home to where she was staying in the army at a place out at Burwood. Got there just about a minute to 12. Just time for a quick kiss goodnight and she told me that I'd be able to catch a train back
- 40:30 to the city, and got to the station and found out the train wasn't going. So I had to catch trams to Elsternwick and ended up to St Kilda where I had a pie in a pie cart. And then tram into the city, and a tram all the way out to the showgrounds and
- 41:00 got in there at some ungodly hour, about 4 o'clock in the morning. And to be ribbed by all the chaps that woke up when I got there saying, "I must've had a very good time that night." And...
- We've got to actually stop 'cause we've run out of tape.**

00:30 **So when you were at the showgrounds, what was the mood of the guys around you at that time?**

Well, didn't see them because you got your days off, and all you went on your days off, and you didn't worry about anyone else. And at that time my sister had arranged a platonic date with a friend from teachers training

01:00 college and I took Marjorie to the cinema and got envious glances from Americans and air force personnel. But it was just a platonic friendship and she promised to write. The next night I took a friend, May Blackburn, who was in the AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service]. We...I was hoping

01:30 we'd end up at one of the big dances in Melbourne at the Palais or something like that and she took me to a little army dance at the back of St Paul's Cathedral and it was full of army chaps and they gave me a pretty rough time. They said, "Menzies' mannequins, what good are they

02:00 in a real war?" And "Blue orchids should be crushed." And they didn't allow me too many dances with May. Then I took May back to a billet in Burwood and got there about one minute's to 12. Just time for one kiss goodnight and she said you'll be able to catch a

02:30 train into Melbourne. But the last train had run. So I had to get a tram to Elsternwick and another tram to St Kilda where I had a pastie. And then a tram into the city, and a tram all the way out to the showgrounds. Got there about 4 o'clock in the morning and the chaps said, "You must've had a good time tonight."

03:00 And I got quite a ribbing there. And at the showgrounds I had to go and have a dental examination and me teeth had been looked at at Sale so I thought they're pretty good. And I strike a chap, Futril, who's the son of the headmaster

03:30 at the grammar school who I used to beat for the divinity prizes at school. And he filled nearly every tooth I had in me head. And that's about all I can say about the showgrounds except that we slept in the horse stables.

With the blue orchid thing.

04:00 **When they were giving you a bit of a ribbing what were you thinking at the time when they were saying all those things?**

Well, it was full of army chaps. You just had to take what they handed out and say nothing.

Were you upset about it or?

Not really.

Do you think they were saying it in good fun or genuine meanness

04:30 **or how did it come across?**

Well, they wouldn't have liked an airman there with a pretty girl in the AWAS and that would be about the strength of it.

What did you think about the term blue orchid yourself?

You didn't worry too much about those little things.

05:00 **Did you guys have names for the army blokes?**

No.

You should've thought of one. You could've got them back. Being in the air force was a... Did it feel special to be in that branch of the armed services?

It felt special to be a member of air crew yes.

05:30 **How so?**

Pardon?

How did it feel special?

Well, I s'poses they had a better uniform and it was a new way of fighting the war. And it was a way we believed would win it.

06:00 **Also to become to be in the air force and especially on an air crew you had to pass many more exams than the army and so on?**

Yes, everywhere you went to, had to pass exams. And in England not one station took the results of a previous station as gospel. They still had to test you before they started

06:30 their course.

So would it be fair to say that the air force guys and especially air crew were more educated than the army guys and the navy guys?

That's right. They were.

Of the guys in the aircrew that you met and dealt with, were a lot of them from a private education or a...?

A lot of them went to private schools

07:00 but they came from all walks of life. There was a, in my batch that I first went in with, there was a pharmacist, there were school teachers, there were some farmers, and they were a little bit behind the, re: the in the education and they did a very good job to

07:30 pass the examinations and qualify.

After the showgrounds, where did you go to from there?

Well, we travelled by train up to Bradfield Park in Sydney where we spent a night. You could've had but to go up to Sydney.

08:00 We had to sleep on the train and you either had to sleep sitting up. Some put blankets from one luggage rack to another and slept in them and all sorts of ways of sleeping. Didn't have very good sleep but when I got to Bradfield Park all I wanted to do

08:30 was have a good rest and...but the majority of them wanted to go into Kings Cross and live it up because they didn't know where they were going and it might be one of the last chances they had to live it up. And then we weren't sure where we were going. We'd been issued with summer uniforms which

09:00 pointed that we might be going up north but we got in to another train and they took us up to Brisbane. We were picked up in lorries and taken all around Brisbane. It was supposed to be to fool the Japanese in case there were Japanese spies looking. But all it did was fool us. And then down to the

09:30 wharf and onto the Matsonia.

Before we get onto the Matsonia. Back in Sydney what was the reputation of Kings Cross in the '40's?

It had a bad reputation.

What was known to go on there?

If you wanted a naughty that was the place to go.

And a lot of guys wanted a naughty

10:00 **before they went away?**

Yeah, and course a lot wanted a beer and that sort of thing. I was a teetotaler so that never worried me.

Was it a rough place? Could you get in fights easily down there at Kings Cross?

I dunno. I s'pose in that sort of

10:30 place it would be reasonably easy to get into a fight.

So you didn't actually go down there?

No.

Did you think you were missing out or you're happy to rest?

I had a good night's sleep which proved that it was something because then we had another night train journey up to Brisbane. And

11:00 although we changed, a lot of us changed our methods of sleeping, the new methods weren't any much better than the first. And you didn't have a good night's sleep.

Did any of the guys that came back from Kings Cross come back with any stories at all of what happened there or?

No not. Not that type.

Not that type.

11:30 **When you were in Sydney this time. Was that just like changing trains, was it, or you didn't do any more training there, did you?**

No, no. Just slept overnight.

Did you like Sydney? What did you like about?

I always liked Sydney but when you just went to an army camp that was a few miles out or air force camp a few miles out,

12:00 you didn't see Sydney.

Was that disappointing that you didn't?

Well, we weren't really worried because we were off to war. Our main worry was whether we were going to go to the islands or over to England and I was hoping it was going to be England but it was pointing to the islands

12:30 because we were going further north all the time.

And what year is this at this time?

Be about '42 or 3.

So Japan's heavily into the war and we're fighting?

Yeah, Japan was well into the war.

And you were hoping to go to England rather than the islands?

Yes. Well, I

13:00 felt that the war had a been won over in Europe first and then the might of the forces turned on Japan because Australia didn't have any planes that...Couldn't win a war against Japan with the planes that Australia had.

So what was the trip from Sydney to Brisbane like?

13:30 By the train? Just like all train journeys.

Was it a packed train or what type of train did you go on?

That's hard to remember. All I can remember is that all the airmen that were on it that were going wherever

14:00 they were sending us.

Do you recall on that trip if there were any ladies of the night, shall we say, on the train?

I don't think so.

It's just we've heard stories of another vet that we interviewed that says, not on that particular train but on some trains, there were. It was going on, on the train itself? You heard nothing about that?

No.

14:30 I was innocent young boy at that time. Or almost innocent.

At this point when you're on the train going to Brisbane, was there much trepidation or because you didn't know what was happening did you...?

No. Air crew were a peculiar lot. They just accepted what happened

15:00 and that's all. We'd accept we were going wherever we were sent and that was it.

And what did you think of Brisbane when you finally arrived there?

Well, you didn't see much of Brisbane except that you're put in lorries and taken all around the outskirts and

15:30 all you knew was that the wooden houses in Brisbane were built up on stilts that...to stop them from the white ants and give a cool space underneath where they could put things to cool down.

What were the conditions like, much hotter up there?

Yes, it was a lot hotter in

16:00 Brisbane.

When you arrived in Brisbane, are you part of a crew at this point?

No, we were all individuals. I was travelling with my mate, Bill Rowe, whose photograph's out on the wall in the dining room. But the first thing that

16:30 happened to me when I got on ship, I was given guard duty at night and I thought that was strange. The

air force usually started with the letter A or started in the reverse with the letter Y or Z. But they evidently picked out ones that had done

17:00 guard duty prior to joining air crew.

And what was that experience like?

Well, when we got on board we were told we weren't allowed to fraternise with the lady servicemen that were on board. But when we were going around

17:30 this ship on the upper deck there were American officers with the ladies so I said to a mate a mine, "We'll take a lot a time inspecting everything on the top deck and then when we go around the other decks we'll go around very, very quickly. And get back and we'll stop any hanky panky

18:00 going on."

How strange was it that the Americans could fraternise with them and you couldn't?

Well, first of all they were American officers and we were only other ranks.

But it shouldn't have...?

But they weren't supposed to

18:30 fraternise with them either but when you're high ranking officer it doesn't you can break the rules.

What dealings had you had with the WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] at this point time?

Pardon?

What dealings had you had with the WAAAF girls at this time?

19:00 **What?**

Absolutely none. Apart from when I was at Somers. My flight, my squad was drawn out of the hat to do weekend duty while the others went on leave and one a my jobs was to

19:30 paint the inside of the hospital. Well, I met some of the nurses and WAAAF's there. They were all lovely girls and apart from having a cup a tea with them that was all there was too it.

Did you feel like they were a real part of the air force?

Yes, they did

20:00 certain jobs that relieved the men to do more important fighting jobs.

How were they seen by the guys in the air force?

They were seen as ground sheets. But that's a bit tough on the

20:30 WAAAF's.

Probably, through the years has your opinion changed of the WAAAF's or do you realise their contribution more as time has passed or...?

I've always realised the contribution and not having anything to...

21:00 Well, almost nothing to do with WAAAF's. Only mention one occasion that's over in England. But that'll properly come out later.

So we're in Brisbane, was there any more training at this point?

No, we were getting on the ship to go over to America. And we sailed up the

21:30 Brisbane River not long before the Centaur hospital ship had been sunk by the Japanese in that area. And it was a bit nervous that we might suffer the same fate and then we saw the Glass House Mountains and waved them goodbye. And we'd left

22:00 Australia.

What precautions did the ship take on it's voyage?

Well, one of the first things you did, you had drill of lifeboat drill, they'd put lifeboats into the water and you'd have to, well, they'd sound the warning and you'd

22:30 have to get up onto the certain section that was allotted to you as quickly as possible. And the ones that were late in getting up to where they should be, they were the ones that were made to go down the ladder into the lifeboat.

Were these drills carried out seriously by

23:00 **you and the other fellas or?**

Yes. It was wartime. Everything was serious.

Had you heard around this time of Japanese submarines and boats actually being on the east coast of Australia and right down even to Melbourne?

Not there, but we knew that they were roaming around the Pacific.

23:30 And we got almost to Fiji when we were diverted down through Auckland and they said that was to escape Japanese submarines. But in Auckland we picked up a lot more American soldiers so I'm not sure what the correct reason for going to Auckland was.

24:00 **And what were these American soldiers like?**

Well, they were alright. I can remember they played a lot of dice. They didn't take to 2-up

24:30 or crown and anchor which was a game introduced by the British. But I never played the gambling games. Money was too hard to have to lose it.

Can you explain crown and anchor, what was that game?

Well, it was sort of a board game of description.

25:00 I never played it so I wouldn't. But I noticed the one that was the banker came out on top in all the games.

But it was a gambling game?

Yes.

Was there any friction at all between you and the Americans?

Not on board the ship. That friction was back in Ballarat

25:30 between the yanks and the airmen 'cause just after I left an airman got knocked from the top storey of the hostel, which is now Ludbrook House, onto the ground and killed, and it was on

26:00 well and truly. One yank that was stationed in Melbourne came up by train and soon as he got off the train he was knocked out by an airman. But things weren't so good at that particular time.

A lot of anger in the city?

Pardon?

A lot of anger in the city towards the Americans about what was happening?

Well, there was between the air force and Americans.

26:30 I don't think... The civilians liked them well enough because they had chocolates and they had nylon stockings for the girls.

Flowers?

Flowers, candy.

Would Australian blokes do any of that?

No, the yanks showed us up really.

27:00 **Alright, so we're back in New Zealand picking up the American troops?**

Well, we had leave in New Zealand. Went to a café with a couple of mates. We met a girl and she invited us to a 21st birthday party we went to that. She and her friends accompanied us back to the ship where we had to be on the ship by

27:30 about 11 o'clock or something like that and...

What was her party like?

You know, a dance.

Did they have the 21st keys like they do these days and so on?

Yes, yes, and cutting the cake and that sort of thing.

The parents' speeches and...?

But we got a wonderful welcome by the people of

28:00 Auckland. We were invited to a lot of their places for tea. They'd say we used to live in Fitzroy or Collingwood or somewhere in Melbourne and you're welcome to come home. They said we're sick of the yanks and like to see the Aussies and

Just an example with this girl and the 21st party and so

28:30 **on, was it easier to talk to girls with the uniform on?**

Yes. And then just before we sailed the next morning it was misty rain and I was talking to a Maori labourer on the wharf and he said the gods are crying because of all the people that won't come back from the war.

29:00 And I looked at him very stunned like. And he said, "But you will come back."

You think he was telling your future?

Pardon?

He was able to read your future?

I don't know. But I rather like the Maoris.

Why did you like them?

29:30 I thought they were a good race. You go back in their history, how they paddled a canoe all the way from Hawaii to New Zealand. And how they set themselves up in a country where there was pretty well no food for them to live on in a sense, apart from fish and.

A good strong race?

30:00 Yes.

So how long was your break in New Zealand for?

Only overnight.

Just in time for this 21st and then off you go?

Yes.

Just quickly, with the uniform thing that you said it's easier to talk to women with the uniform. Was it easier in certain uniforms, like did the air force guys get more women than the army, and the army than navy, or any uniform

30:30 **would do?**

I think so.

Any uniform would do?

Yeah. And then to entertain us on the ship they had boxing contests and a mate of mine, Ray Broad from Perth that was me mate at Number 1 WAGs [Wireless Air Gunner].

31:00 They introduced...They said, "The next boxer'll be Aussie West." And gave his weight and Ray Broad stepped into the ring and then into the ring stepped a big Negro about twice his weight. And I didn't like the look of that but Ray was too quick with him and

31:30 beat him easily. And later on Ray decided he'd have another go and he got into the ring and an Australian got into the ring with him, you know about the same weight and everything, and the Australian pilot was a bit too good. Bill Rowe and myself, that's me mate from Ballarat, we got very friendly with the

32:00 ship wireless crew and we used to go to their cabin and into their wireless section and we were able to take down the Morse that the messages that they were sending to the ship. And they operated at about 30 words a minute, which was 5 words a minute faster than

32:30 we'd got, but it was very good practice for us. And when Bill and I got to over to Brighton, England with that practice we were the best at Morse and the, you know, ones that were doing Morse.

How long did that trip take?

33:00 I could get me diary and tell you exactly.

Just weeks, months?

I suppose about 10-days. The Matsonia was a pretty quick ship. I s'pose it would've done about 25 knots which was fairly fast for a ship in those days.

33:30 It wasn't as fast as the Queen Elizabeth which could do 30.

And while you're on the ship you've been designated as a WAG, yes?

Pardon?

You've been designated as a WAG wireless air gunner?

Yeah.

But you haven't been designated to a crew or you had a crew?

Pardon?

Did you have a crew air crew?

No, no. We just went over in...I suppose

34:00 there'd be almost a thousand going over and didn't know what was going to happen to us in Great Britain but first of all we were going to America. And we landed at San Francisco. Sailed under the Bay Bridge, past Alcatraz. The Golden Gate Bridge past Alcatraz.

34:30 Past the Bay Bridge and pulled in and then we got off and we were taken in launches back past Alcatraz to an island that was known as Angel Island. And when we got off the launches there we heard a couple of Americans said

35:00 they must be toughing us up to go to the war. This is the worst camp we'd ever been in. And it was a marvellous camp. They had a PX [Post Exchange - American canteen unit] which was just like a small Myer Emporium. They had ten pin bowling. They had a big gymnasium, bigger than any gymnasium I'd seen in Australia playing

35:30 basketball. The sleeping quarters there were two wooden bunks one up above and one below and they were quite good. And they had movies and it was quite, that part was quite good. But they showed us a film on

36:00 what do? Syphilis.

Syphilis?

Syphilis and all that horrible. I reckon it'd put anyone off sex for life. But it didn't stop one or two when they got to

36:30 New York. And we were given divided into two groups and we were told you can have the day in San Francisco but if you're not back on time the next group won't be allowed to go. Well, I went in with me mate Bill Rowe, and a mate of his

37:00 by the name of Rowe that came from Sydney, and we had a good look around San Francisco. And me mate, Bill Rowe, decided he wanted something to do and the other Rowe and myself got on a tram to go across the long bay bridge and on the tram was

37:30 a gentleman in civilian clothes that invited us to his home for tea. He'd been in the Army up in the Islands had been blasted by a bomb and left unconscious and a Japanese chap came along with a rifle and hit him on the

38:00 top. Butt of the rifle on top of his head. Well, he recovered in a hospital down in Adelaide and he said that he'd been looked after so well by the Australians that he wanted to give back some of the hospitality. And his wife, well, he had a lovely home up on

38:30 the hills of Oakland and different things to what were in the homes in Australia at that time. He drove us in by car. Met his wife when the car met him at the tram stop and drove him into the garage. And then from the garage you went by steps up into the house.

39:00 In the house they had a lot of...They had the lamps that you could turn down low like you saw in the movies romantic scenes. You opened the bathroom cabinet and a light'd come on. They had a lot of little things that weren't in Australia at that time.

39:30 And his wife rustled up a lovely meal 'cause the meals on the Matsonia were American style. In fact, didn't like them at all. You had a lot of boiled chicken which the Americans plastered with strawberry jam and we weren't used to baked beans. And you had every type of baked bean that was possible and

40:00 so it was nice to sit down to a home cooked meal of chops and sweet corn and they invited the girl from across the road over. She was a school teacher and it was interesting to compare the education of the Americans and the Australians. The Americans knew all about American history and about America but

40:30 they didn't know much about the world generally and...

We'll just stop there 'cause that's.

Tape 5

- 00:30 Leaving the home that a mate'a mine and I had. Had our evening meal and we got back into the city and we got on a tram and it was going the wrong way, and we got off and got on a tram going the right way. And we just got to the wharf to see the launch,
- 01:00 about a hundred yards out to sea, going to Angel Island. So we got accommodation at the YMCA and had a restless night. You couldn't...San Francisco, everything closed down at 11-o'clock. They were frightened of the Japs and there
- 01:30 was... It wasn't the wild city of the Barbary Coast days. It was all very, very quiet. So we went to the YMCA overnight, we caught the tram going the right way and luckily on the tram there was the ship's barber. Sorry, the camp's barber and
- 02:00 he said, "I'll show you where to get off and get on the launch." And we're back at Angel Island at nine o'clock in the morning, before parade. The next day we went in by launch across to Oklahoma where we...
- 02:30 Not Oklahoma, Oaklands, where we'd caught the train and the trains were different. They were all very dusty from the outside but you had a...They didn't pull into a platform...You had to climb up the outside and there was a Negro porter that showed us where our carriage was and showed us how to
- 03:00 turn the seat into a bed, and pull another bed down from the roof. And that was very good. And for our meals we had to go up to the guards' van where they cooked the meals. But going from one carriage to the other and using paper plates, you had to be careful that the wind didn't blow the plate out a your
- 03:30 hand and one of our first... It was an interesting journey across America to know what America looked like. We stopped at one American town. I just can't think remember the name of it now. But went marching up the
- 04:00 town and it was right in the in Nevada in the sort a desert country and there were big night clubs and these big American cars that we never saw in Australia. And that was interesting. And then the best part
- 04:30 of the journey was when we the train took us through Royal Gorge alongside a river and mountains on both sides of the rail track going up about a mile high. And at one part the tallest suspension bridge in the world going from one peak to another.
- 05:00 It was somewhere that I always wanted to go and see again but none of the tourist places knew about it whether they'd closed that particular rail line down or not I don't know. But we went through a tremendous lot of American states. To Chicago, where they changed the train and they put another engine on
- 05:30 and we travelled at a hundred miles an hour, which was probably faster than we'd ever been in an aircraft at that stage, and to New York where we were taken out to Fort Hamilton to stay.
- Is that**
- 06:00 **in New York or outside New York?**
- In New York. We were so excited to be in the wonder city of the world that when we were given leave, we were given leave almost immediately, we went in and caught a train into the city. Got off at Brooklyn Bridge but we didn't
- 06:30 take any notice of the name of the station we left from assuming it was Fort Hamilton but actually it wasn't, it was another station. In New York we did shopping. I got separated from me mates. I was buying some photo albums. We'd already been issued with
- 07:00 diaries at Angel Island in San Francisco. You weren't supposed to keep a diary, not the Australians, but anyhow I kept one. That's how I been able to write a book. And in New York, around about lunchtime, I went
- 07:30 to the Pennsylvania Hotel where Tommy Dorsey's orchestra was playing. There was supposed to be a cover charge to go in but I just went in and stood up alongside one o' the walls and listened to Tommy Dorsey's magnificent orchestra. Time was getting on so I left there and went up to the
- 08:00 Empire State Building and went up on the top a that and had me photo taken on the top of the Empire State Building. And it would'a been good to be there at sunset but I left there and went into...then walked into the city again and I was going to the Stage
- 08:30 Door Canteen and in the queue was me mate, Bill Rowe. so we met up again. And Stage Door Canteen

was a bit of a disappointment. We didn't meet any movie stars. There was about three or four times as many servicemen as girls, and they were all very painted up. And the food, which of course was free,

- 09:00 but it wasn't anything special. And then from there we went to the Anzac club where there was a dance and the hostesses there would dance with anyone no matter how ugly they were or whether they were wounded or... There were Anzac club, there was a lot of American servicemen. A lot of youngsters that were going
- 09:30 off to war and were scared stiff. And just before the dance was ended we were told that if we wanted to, we could go and listen to the coast to coast hit parade program. And so I went with...Made sure I was with the prettiest hostess and
- 10:00 we got to see the coast to coast hit parade program. The top of the pops at that time was, well, Frank Sinatra had the first three records and this hostess told me that
- 10:30 they weren't allowed to get too friendly with anyone but anyhow I persuaded her to allow me to walk her to the bus where she was going over to New Jersey. And we corresponded right through the war. She looked like Hedy Lamarr.

What was your overall impression of America?

- 11:00 Well, New York was the wonder city of the world. It was then around about three, or four o'clock in the morning and the streets were busier then than Melbourne streets were during the day. And then we had a catch
- 11:30 the train back to Fort Hamilton. And we found out that the station, Fort Hamilton, was further on than the camp and we had to then catch a train half way back to New York to catch another one to get off at the correct station. And we arrived back at camp about 5 o'clock in the morning. Had about an hours sleep and
- 12:00 then got, had a good breakfast because you got a marvellous breakfast in the camp. Like bacon and eggs and hash browns and flapjacks. Lovely breakfast. But the rate of exchange was against the Australians and the Australian servicemen didn't get nearly as much money as the American.
- 12:30 So we could only, when we went into New York, we could only afford one meal per day. At lunchtime we just had a milk shake or something like that. Went into New York and went to the Anzac Club. My mate, Bill Rowe, decided to
- 13:00 go to some millionaire's home. A lot of them were invited on Long Island. We they could play tennis, there was gonna be a dance at night and all that, and I was hoping that I might meet... Crikey, can't think of girls name. Because there was a walking
- 13:30 tour of New York and I did the walking tour of New York. I went up to the as far as you could go on the Statue of Liberty. Went up as far as the eye. You couldn't go up to the top of the torch. That was closed. Then the afternoon,
- 14:00 I wanted accommodation for the night so they gave me an address of a millionaire that lived up near the Riverside Church. These big apartments right on the river, very, very expensive. I got accommodation there overnight but during the night for entertainment I
- 14:30 went to Madison Square Gardens where there was the radio on. And very interesting to see an American radio. And then on Sunday I promised to go with the owner of the apartment to Riverside Church.
- 15:00 During the day I was given the free time during the day, before I had to go to church with him, went to the NBC studios where I was shown television for the first time. I was taken into another room and
- 15:30 the group stood in front of the television where I was interviewed in the next room and then I was able to go around while someone interviewed the hostess in the next room and see how television worked properly. Went and had a cup of coffee with the...
- 16:00 They were supposed to be movie stars at a café, although they were painted up chorus girls mainly. Didn't fancy any of them so left and then went to church. To the Riverside Church where the preacher didn't give a sermon but showed the movie, The Human Comedy starring
- 16:30 Mickey Rooney. And he said that's the way you should lead your life. And after the service we were taken down into the basement where there was this tremendous basketball stadium much bigger than any stadiums I'd seen in Australia and
- 17:00 that's where we had supper. And then the next night in New York I had tea at Jack Dempsey's restaurant and I did a night club tour. And you'd go to a night club
- 17:30 and you'd stand up. You wouldn't have to pay an admission charge. You'd stand up at the bar, at the back, have a great... and although I was a teetotaler I had scotch and soda, and scotch and coca cola

and all sorts of things but

18:00 it didn't seem to affect me at all. And that...

So you didn't get drunk?

No, no. But the show where we ended up at, just think of the name of it. Very glamorous girls

18:30 and they appeared on the stage totally nude and that was different to anything you'd strike in Australia at that time.

What was your reaction when you first saw that?

Pardon?

19:00 No reaction.

You liar. Was it astonishment?

Pardon?

One of astonishment?

No, no.

Because you hadn't seen that in Australia?

No, you expected that sort of thing. You'd seen some of it on the movies.

19:30 Now we were seeing it in the flesh. It's all in me photo album there.

You've got photos of it? You can show us a bit later once the...

Well, it reminded me what...

How did you find the people in New York, generally

20:00 **speaking? Were they very friendly towards the Australians?**

Well, we didn't come across many people. We went up to one of the... the hotel, the Waldorf Hotel. We went there to have a look and some ladies coming out said, "Haven't the bell boys got a cute uniform these days?"

20:30 And then they had a look and they looked at their shoulder badge and they said, "You come from Austria?" And I said, "We come from Australia. Australia are an ally of America we're fighting against Austria." So...

What did she say to that?

Yeah. Well, didn't.

Did they know much about Australia?

No, no.

21:00 **Did you find the Americans ignorant?**

They knew all about America but they didn't know much about the world or Australia or... Didn't even know much about the war.

About the war?

Yeah, they didn't know much about the ones we struck. Well of course they were going over to

21:30 England. They didn't seem to know much about the Pacific.

Did you find that the same in San Francisco as well?

Yes.

The same mentality?

Yes.

How did you compare the life style of Americans

22:00 **to Australians generally and the way they thought? Were they similar in any way?**

Very similar. There was... They ate a little bit differently, like as far table manners were concerned. But I thought there was a lot of sense in the way they ate. With a fork,

22:30 they'd switch it into their right hand and use the fork to eat the food with. Whereas the English, you put it onto the fork in your left hand and... Much more sensible way of eating which I adopted from then on.

What did you think of Australian women and American women? What were the differences

23:00 **and similarities if there were any?**

They were very similar. The only girl that I met, I've got a photo of her there in me album, she was a lovely girl. Looked just like Hedy Lamarr, the movie star.

23:30 **What about in mentality? Were Australian girls better educated generally?**

Well, the time I spent with her would be insufficient to find that out. Just a few dances at the Anzac Club and then seeing the coast to coast hit parade program. Probably, talking

24:00 more about hits and singers and talking about Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby, and that sort of thing, Bob Hope, than anything else.

24:30 And then back in the... Well the first time in the camp before I... When I got back at 5 o'clock and got up again at 6 o'clock I went to the barber and I had a facial massage and hair cut.

25:00 And he then said, "Do you want a manicure?" And I thought, "Well, don't want that and." But the barbers in New York, they gave you all these things which when you're in Australia just got a short back and sides haircut. And

25:30 back in the camp the first thing we had, Fort Hamilton, we had a parade that no one missed because it was a pay parade that we got some money. Then there was a great big church service out in the open air and that was a very impressive ceremony where... Service where all the

26:00 Americans in their immaculate uniform and the Australians in another section. It was a very impressive service. And then they took us by launch past the Statue of Liberty to the wharf and pulled in alongside the Queen Elizabeth. And we boarded the

26:30 Queen Elizabeth, ready for our departure for England.

Tell us about the voyage?

Well, one there were about 10,000 servicemen on the ship. You were allotted certain areas and you

27:00 weren't allowed to move from that. You were allowed a little part of the deck to go on and the meals were much better. Only got two meals a day, breakfast and dinner, but they were English type meals and much more to our liking than

27:30 on the American ship over to America. The first thing that happened to me, I was given submarine watch for being AWL [Absent Without Leave] in San Francisco and it was the best punishment I could ever have. I was given a white badge with G for gunner on it. I could wander anywhere on the ship and

28:00 the queues for meals used to wind around about three decks. And I could go to the front of the queue and get me meal. As I said, it was wonderful punishment. And then when you're doing your two hour submarine watch or it might'a been three hour shift, you were...I was stationed in front of the captain's

28:30 bridge, on the outside and you got plenty of fresh air. In fact it was pretty cold at times and it was interesting seeing the Queen Elizabeth zigzag it's way across the Atlantic. At one time you'd be freezing cold, you'd be up near Greenland and another time you'd be down... It'd be pretty hot, you'd be down near the tropics of...

29:00 **Was it zigzag?**

Yeah. And I enjoyed that very much. And you had to keep a much better look out when Northern Ireland was sighted because Ireland, Southern Ireland used to allow the

29:30 German u-boats to dock there and replenish their supplies and that sort of thing which caused a lot of southern Irishmen that were in the merchant marine...Caused them to get killed when the submarines sunk

30:00 some of the merchant ships that they were on. And we then landed up at Greenock, which is the port for Glasgow, and we got off the ship there onto a train. We were given a pie for a meal and proceeded down

30:30 through Edinburgh, down to London. Got into London about five o'clock in the morning when there was an air raid on. So the train pulled into a siding and stopped. And then we bypassed London to a degree on the way down to Brighton. Brighton, we walked down the

31:00 street from the west street... From the station to the sea front and the sea front was just a mass of barbed wires and long range guns and anti aircraft guns. Both piers, amusement piers,

- 31:30 were cut in half and we were billeted at the Grand Hotel where all the carpets and furnishings were taken off. Just bare boards. But it was a good place to be billeted because in the bedrooms there was basins with hot and cold water. Much better than any camp that we'd been in, in Australia.
- 32:00 And one of the first jobs they gave us was blackout watch. We had to assemble in the foyer of the hotel and as we assembled the Germans dropped a bomb about 400-yards out to sea and the whole hotel shook.
- 32:30 Then our blackout patrol, if there was a little bit of a chink in the anyone's...showing from anyone's window we had to knock on the door and draw their curtains tighter. Anyone found on the seafront after ten o'clock, which was curfew, we had to ask them for their

- 33:00 identity card and take a note of it. If they didn't have an identity card, arrest them.

Did you ever come across that situation when you had to?

Yes. Yeah, and then another job we were given was to man Browning machine guns which we were taught in aircraft a...

- 33:30 Browning machine guns where I was allotted the top of the apartment, house apartment next door to the Metropole Hotel. Me mate, Bill Rowe, was allotted right on the top of the roof of the Metropole Hotel and when the German planes came over we were to shoot at them. On one occasion one of me mates
- 34:00 said, "You've hit a plane." But the plane flew on without any obvious disability and at tea that night he said, "You know that plane you hit? It crashed into a graveyard near a church." And I thought, "Well he's pulling my leg." I went looking to see if I could
- 34:30 find it but I couldn't find a plane crashed. But the next day it was written up in the paper that a German plane had crashed into a graveyard of a church and in Herrickton's book on the history of the RAAF in England they mention a plane
- 35:00 getting hit by an Australian gunner but didn't know who was the shooter. And they didn't actually give a date of when it happened.

At that stage, how frequent were the German bombing raids that you witnessed?

About every 2 or 3 days.

- 35:30 **Can you tell us what the feeling is like to be in that such a circumstance? You come from, you know, New York you're having all these interesting experiences. You come to England and it's suddenly, it's you know, totally different sort of situation?**

Well, Brighton was quite a good place to be. I dunno, it had about 20 or 30 cinemas. It had

- 36:00 free dance venues. One that we weren't allowed to go to. It was out of bounds. They said that's where all the prostitutes went. That was Sharey's Night Club. There was live shows. There was a skating rink. Sunday's there was ice hockey.
- 36:30 We were occasionally taken for route marches as far as Hove, and back. Other things we were given some lectures some Morse code practice. Taken to the Brighton baths, which was supposed to be heated but they weren't, for dinghy drill.
- 37:00 Brighton was a good place to be but I had my first romance in Brighton. Met this... We'd been to a lot of dances and you'd have a date for the next week and you'd turn up and the girl wouldn't, or
- 37:30 she'd go off with a higher ranking person and it was round about October and doing our Christmas cards so that we could get them home in time for Christmas. And taking them down to the post office to post and we heard music
- 38:00 from a hall opposite. It was Robertson Hall. It was a YMCA dance and the hall was next door to St Stephen's Anglican Church. Went in there and there was this lovely brunette with brown eyes that was serving supper. After supper I asked her for a dance and she said
- 38:30 "I'm just learning dancing," I said "That won't worry me." And we had a dance and I asked her could I accompany her home. And it was a long walk home and agreed to I think go to St Peter's Church on the Sunday and the romance started up. And then the
- 39:00 romance was stopped when I was posted to do a commando course up at Whitley Bay. And Whitley Bay, I met another girl.

Well, that's alright then.

And she was working in Woolworth's but she was on the women's underwear

- 39:30 counter and I didn't know... Had no excuse to stop there and try to buy anything. So I didn't see much of her till on boxing day there was a concert and she was
- 40:00 sitting with an older airman that was older than me. And thought too old for her but that's the next time I saw her and then I didn't see her again till new years eve. New years eve, a mate a mine who was quite a romeo said, "Do you want to go to the Victoria Hotel? There's plenty
- 40:30 a crumpet there. I never miss out." And so me other mate, Chip Pearce, we went to the Victoria Hotel and everyone was into it early, drinking and we were teetotallers. We thought she didn't like the look of any of the girls so we said we'd go to the Empress Dance and the Empress Dance
- 41:00 it was run by the RAF. As you got to the dance girls'd come up and hand you money and say, "Can you pay for us to go in?" Because it was only by... They had to be accompanied by an airmen. Well, I got into the dance and there was about twice as many girls as chaps. But anyhow,
- 41:30 amongst 'em was my little girl from Woolworth's. So I ended up taking her home and that's when a romance started.

Okay, I'll have to stop you there on that point because we've run out of tape.

Tape 6

- 00:31 **Finish that off. So the lingerie girl, the ladies underwear girl?**
- At Whitley Bay we used to do unarmed combat on the beach and taught to use a Sten gun out to the rifle range. Were told how to
- 01:00 use cover and on one occasion we were out and the chappie from the air force regiment that was in charge of us was saying, "Over there, there's a farm house. Germans are inside with Sten guns and
- 01:30 this and that and there's Alsatian dogs roaming the property. How would you capture it?" And the officer wanted us to more or less say about using cover and
- 02:00 that sort of thing. But Len Bodie, that had been decorated in the Middle East in the army, he said, "I know the answer." And the chap said, "What would you do?" He said, "I'd get an Alsatian bitch on heat and while the Alsations were tearing each other apart over the Alsatian bitch
- 02:30 I'd sneak around to the back while all the Germans were watching what was going on. Throw a hand grenade into the place and I'd capture them." Well, the chappie from the royal regiment wasn't very... Had stole all his thunder so he had us crawling on our
- 03:00 tummies for the rest of the day. Well, then to finish the course we were taken out on a route march going in different directions. And we got out I s'pose about twelve miles. There was no names on any of the places. They were all taken down because of the war, if the Germans got over there. We had our sandwiches
- 03:30 in a small colliery town and an elderly lady with a great big black kettle of water and tea came out and served us tea. And then the CO [Commanding Officer] said, "You've got to find your own way. You've just bailed out of an aircraft. You've got to find your own way back to headquarters. How? But you're not allowed to use a bus or anything like
- 04:00 that." And I thought, "This is me last night with Sheila at Whitley Bay. What will I do?" Then I realised that the commanding officer was a champion walker and I knew he'd know the quickest way back. So I followed him over ditches, through hedges, had to keep far enough back so he wouldn't see me. To run at other times.
- 04:30 And I followed him back to headquarters and I got in and he said, "How did you get back so quickly. Did you catch a bus?" And I said, "No sir." He said, "How did you do it?" I said, "By the sun, and cross-country, by sun." And then I suddenly realised that it was cloudy and there was no sun but he didn't wake up and saw that I was dripping with perspiration and he said,
- 05:00 "Crikey's, you've broken the course record by about half an hour." And I was back, shaved, showered, changed, into me best blues before any of the others got back. So I was able to take her out for the last night and I was encouraged to
- 05:30 have sex with her but the wind blew around corners that night and no chance a anything like that. So we weren't going by train till...

Just quickly, what does the wind blew around corners mean?

...the next night so I arranged to meet her after work and we went for a walk. But we sat on a bench in

- 06:00 the park but frost was everywhere. And we had to wipe the seat to get rid of frost so there's no chance of any hanky panky that night. So I said goodbye to her but on the train back I was wondering who I loved. Whether it was her. Whether it was the little girl from Brighton. Or it was the girl from Australia.
- 06:30 And when I got back and saw the lass from Brighton she looked so sweet and innocent I thought. Well, I ended up by taking her out every night o' the week. And on the Sunday, well, we went to church in the morning, then we went a walk through Preston Park had
- 07:00 a Devonshire tea in the restaurant there. Went and sat on the top of the cliffs by the sea at Brighton. Then I took her to the Sussex farm house dinner and then to the pictures. And we got back to her place a bit after ten o'clock when she had to be in. And
- 07:30 her father was there and he was dumb but he made all these noises. She knew what he was talking about. All I knew was he wasn't happy and she was grounded for a week. Wasn't allowed to go out for a week. But anyhow, I overcame that. I saw her at the wool shop where she worked and used to get bout half an hour off for afternoon
- 08:00 tea. About 4 o'clock and I used to take her to a dainty little tea shop with lace table clothes and Dalton china for crumpets and cucumber sandwiches and that sort of thing for afternoon tea. Well, her father didn't relent till the next Saturday night. He made her,
- 08:30 you know, not go out for the whole week. Well, we went to the pictures to see "This is the Army" in a theatre down by the sea front and we came out into a side lane right in the middle of an air raid. There was searchlights criss-
- 09:00 crossing the sky. Tremendous noises of the guns in the sea front and the air raid sirens waling and she said, "We better go into an air raid shelter." I said, "No, I've got to get you home by 10 o'clock." So up we walked past the dome. Past St Peters Church, and by that time the German planes were coming back from London and some of our own shrapnel was
- 09:30 starting to fall around us. So there was a cleared bomb site where there was an air raid shelter so I took her into that. I thought it'd be nice taking a damsel in distress down into the air raid shelter but it was far from romantic with wheezing old ladies and coughing old men and crying (smoke alarm - interruption). What's that?
- 10:00 **Smoke alarm? It's Okay continue.**
- And crying babies but it wasn't all without it's humour. There was a girl's voice I heard saying, "Oh Herbert you shouldn't a kissed me like that with all these people about." He said, "I didn't kiss you. I'd like to teach the one who did a thing or two." "Oh, Herbert, you couldn't teach him anything." Well,
- 10:30 the next day I had leave and through the lady rider scheme had arranged to go down to Cornwall. Well, before I boarded the train I used to walk up and down and wherever there was a pretty girl I'd go and sit next to her. And this occasion I sat next door to this lass and we
- 11:00 started to talk about the air raid the night before and she said, "Well, I work in a London hospital and I was working up on the third floor and we were taking patients down to the basement." And she said the matron's door was open and she was rummaging in her desk. And the medical superintendent came along to her and said, "Hop to it woman. There's an air raid on. What are you
- 11:30 looking for?" She said, "I'm looking for me false teeth." He said, "They're not dropping Spam sandwiches out there. They're dropping bombs." So that was the story. Had a lovely leave in this farmhouse down at Cornwall. Still write to the people concerned. And walked for miles along the beach at Newkie and
- 12:00 so that's as...The next place I went to was advanced flying unit in North Wales. Went up with Ken Jorgenson, a mate'a mine. He was a mate'a Bill Rowe's but Bill didn't like dropping bombs on people and asked could he join
- 12:30 flying sea planes but instead of that they sent him to the Middle East and he flew in Wellingtons over there. And then he flew in Stirling and was shot down and became a prisoner of war. But Ken and I went to North Wales. We
- 13:00 were stationed at a place called Llandurog not far out of Carnarvon.
- Just quickly, on the guy that didn't want to drop bombs on people. Was that unusual at the time for someone to say that or express those views?**
- Well, you wouldn't know really. I only know because he was a mate'a mine. But I don't suppose
- 13:30 it was unusual. Well, it wouldn't happen very often because in the air force you did what you was told all the time.

So you were stationed down at, what was the next camp you were at?

Llandurog in North Wales.

Yeah.

Carnarvon where there was a castle square and

- 14:00 the castle. Well, a mate and I, we reckoned we captured the castle but it was too draughty so we gave it back to Prince Charles. But that was just a joke. And castle square was where the girls used to bump up against you as you walked around and I said to Ken, "I'm sick a this. Let's go to the theatre to the cinema." And we went to
- 14:30 the cinema. Sat down and the girl next door to me started to play around with me knee. So anyhow, we left that. Didn't think much of the girls from North Wales. You could guess their surname in about three. It was Jones Thomas or Evans was. But one place that we did
- 15:00 like was a place called Llandudno. A very clean sea side resort and fact I visited there after the war and it was still clean. I don't think they allowed people to shops...to have take-away's or you know. To drop
- 15:30 papers from ice creams and that about the place. It was a spotlessly clean seaside resort. Well, up there I met a lass who was with the ministry of works. They'd been sent out of London. She was a typist because
- 16:00 of the bombing. Her name was Morely. That was her surname and her grandfather started the Morely Mills in Ballarat, the woollen mills. But that was only a very brief romance and she wasn't sure whether she'd go back
- 16:30 to London. And from where I flew it was take 2 or 3 days to travel to North Wales where she was. So that was the end of any romance there.

What training were you doing at this time?

North Wales was...

- 17:00 One interesting thing there was, on the ground we had instruction but this chappie that was in charge of us he had me sweeping out the classrooms every night and I said to him, "Why do you pick on me all the time?" He didn't give an answer but later on when I saw my records.
- 17:30 He said that I didn't like discipline. But I think up in Llandudno I must've pinched one of his girlfriends. I was friendly with a very nice girl in the WRENS [Women's Royal Navy Service] as well, but I just don't know. The pilots were nice to fly with. The meals
- 18:00 were terrible. You had Welsh rabbit for most meals, or you had potato with cheese in it and the meals were terrible. The weather was shocking. The wind either came off the sea or down off the mountains and no matter what direction the wind blew it was cold. But it was a very scenic part of the world
- 18:30 and there was a lovely place called Llanberis with a lake and you could go up Mount Snowdon, not during wartime, on a small train up to the top of Mount Snowdon. I was in there one day just was so lovely and quiet
- 19:00 I was enjoying it and a service policeman came up and wanted to see my leave pass and all that sort of thing. And I let him see the leave pass but I told him that he should be doing something more important for the war effort than worrying about someone that come over 12,000 miles overseas to fight for the British. And that probably didn't do me any good either.
- 19:30 And I didn't like the Welsh people. I was in a bus going out to Llanberis one day and they were all speaking in English, and I dunno, I said something and they realised that I wasn't Welsh and they all started to speak in Welsh. So I stood up in the bus and said, "I've come 12,000 miles to fight for you people.
- 20:00 Hitler comes over to England, he's not gonna stop at the Welsh boarder!" And I sat down. For our flying we flew... You had to fly over the mountains and that sort of thing. It was risky flying, a lot a fogs. Flew in Ansons. One of the
- 20:30 favourite runs was down over Blackpool and the tower and up the Irish Sea back. One day, because of fog we were diverted to the Isle of Man. There, I met a mate and I saw all these chaps and WAAAFs moving down into the air raid shelters and I said, "What goes on?" And he said,
- 21:00 "this is a"

Just one second Frank (interruption) Okay?

"This is a school for new intake of WAAAFs," and he said "They say that there's only one virgin left on the whole camp." And he pointed out a very beautiful girl and he said, "The other beauty about it. If you go into the Isle of Man you can get steaks.

- 21:30 They're not rationed." He said, "In the salvation army, on the base, you can get cream cakes with your afternoon tea." Well, I found out you could get cream cakes with your morning tea alright. But the next day I was praying that the fog wouldn't lift. But the next day it lifted and straight after morning

22:00 tea we had to fly back to our station in Llandurog.

How did you enjoy these flying experiences in wartime?

Well, they were...I didn't mind the flying or where we flew or what you could see but

22:30 you had to send so many messages and pick up the messages that were sent to you. And in the static it wasn't good flying conditions. A bit dangerous, what between mountains and fogs. So I wouldn't

23:00 say I really enjoyed the flying. And on the course the British had done 6 months on the Marconi equipment on the procedures and that. And the Australians had wasted 6 months on antiquated equipment and different

23:30 regulations back in Australia. So I found it...I was lucky I just passed the course and that was all. But strangely enough an Australian topped the course.

How did you get on with the English airmen?

The pilots, I thought they were great. They gave you every

24:00 encouragement under the sun. As a matter of fact I flew once with a Pilot Officer Petch and that was interesting. And in the course in, before me there was a Warrant Officer Petch doing his wireless course.

Did you feel in any...

24:30 **How did the English treat the Australians?**

Well, alright, there was no differences. As far as you were concerned you could've been English or any... No difference between where you come from whether it was Canada, New Zealand, or where.

Did the English look down on the other countries' pilots at all?

No.

They didn't feel they had more

25:00 **authority or anything like that?**

No. But there were, like in Australia or anywhere, there were different people that acted differently. Some of the high ranking officers

25:30 in the British air force, you know, you weren't wrapped in them. But...

Were they a classy bunch of people?

Some of them were. But mostly you're all

26:00 treated the same by high ranking officers and me a sergeant, there was no difference. In fact, over when I got onto the squadron, 550 squadron was in Scunthorpe, and there was snow on the

26:30 ground. And the bus wasn't running to go back and I went out hitch hiking and a very high ranking army officer picked me up in his chauffeur driven car and drove me back to the camp. And he treated me just like I was a mate and...

27:00 **At that time did a lot of Australians feel English?**

I wouldn't say that. We still thought we were Australians. But there was so little difference and we were fighting the one war. And I flew with an English crew or

27:30 five of the seven in the crew were English. So...

So at this point you've finished training? Have you finished training?

Yeah, finished training and we then went to operational training unit at Stafford and

28:00 you spent the first fortnight in class learning about what you had to do and what was required on operations. And then they had what they called was a crewing up dance where at the dance you met other chaps perhaps over a beer or something and crewed

28:30 up. Well, I had no success there. I was gonna crew up with young Mac from Ormond. Young McDonald, and on the way to the hanger where everyone was assembled for this crewing up he said to me, "I'm not crewing up with you Frank. They've got one navigator too many and I'm not

29:00 crewing up with anyone. I'm going get some more leave and enjoy myself while I can." But when he saw my look of disappointment he said, "But I'll introduce you to a really good navigator." And that was an understatement. He introduced me to...He said, "This is Bill

- 29:30 Mann from Sydney." A tall thin lad with sandy hair. But coming from Sydney I knew that he'd know nothing about Australian rules football. He didn't go dancing. And he didn't seem anyone that, you know, you'd be wanting to spend
- 30:00 all that much time with. But anyhow, he said, "I'll introduce you to the bomb aimer." I met him. We were both doing navigational training lectures together and he introduced me. Said, "This is Vernon Wilkes." And he introduced me to an English chappie that was so spick and span he didn't seem real. He had a little moustache just
- 30:30 dark. Just like Hitler and you could see your eyes in his polished shoes. And then he said to me, "Well, I'll introduce you to the gunners." So I met them while we were doing gunnery lectures, 'cause he had to man the gun in the front turret and he said,
- 31:00 "This is Danny Driscoll from London." And introduced me to a swallowed face young chap that was only 18. He looked that young that I reckoned he should'a been home with his mother. And he said, "Meet the other gunner,
- 31:30 Buck." And he was a sturdy lad with clipped speeches but very short speeches and that was the crew. But we hadn't anyone to fly us. And the navigator said, "I'll go off
- 32:00 and get an elderly pilot so that he can father us and look after us." And he went down. He thought before I go across to the officers mess I'd better have a couple of beers to give me some Dutch courage. And while he was having these beers this young chap had just arrived on the station, an Englishman, and was having a beer and
- 32:30 he asked the English chappie what he'd done. And he told him that he wasn't long out of school but he'd passed out with, in his flying, with an exceptional rating which only very few passed out. So he said, "Do you want a crew?" And Gordon said, "Well, I've got to fly with
- 33:00 someone." So he brought this young lad back to us in the group and we were sort of flabbergasted. We asked for an elderly pilot and virtually, we get is a school boy. And knowing that you only had one chance of two of surviving operations, well, I s'pose we would've been a thousand to one
- 33:30 that that wouldn't happen. And I flew first of all with Gordon in what was known as circuits and bumps. You'd take off fly around the circuit. Land. Take off again fly around the circuit. I had to be there in case fog came in or he wandered off the circuit and to get him back by what was known as QDMs [Magnetic Heading]. It
- 34:00 was you pressed your Morse key down and you got your direction you had to fly back to the air field. Well, he took to flying just like a duck takes to water. And I did a bit better at operational training
- 34:30 unit in my flying as a wireless operator than I'd done at advanced flying unit but I knew that there were six lives dependant on how I performed. So you had to pull your socks up a bit.
- 35:00 And we got through our daylight flying without any trouble. We got leave and I decided to go up to Edinburgh with me mate Ken Jorgenson, and young Mac, and some Canadians.
- 35:30 Well, young Mac and the two Canadians got killed during the war but it was around D-day and the only ones to get leave were air crew. Everyone else didn't get any leave so we had Edinburgh to ourselves. We used to go to the Canadian's Legions
- 36:00 Club for snacks and they had tins of salmon and tins of blueberries and different things that were real luxuries. And you were given invitations to go here and there and we
- 36:30 went out rowing with some university student girls and that was an interesting day. I know I challenged... There was navy chaps in one rowing boat and challenged them to a race and we won the race alright. And I
- 37:00 got friendly with an artist and we had a lovely time up in Edinburgh then.

How long was it before you flew your first mission?

Well, we had to do our night training at operational training unit then

- 37:30 and there we had two lucky escapes. We were flying up the north the Irish Sea flying north up the Irish Sea. And the convoy below opened fire on us and it was my job as wireless operator to push a Verey pistol up through the roof and shoot off the colours of
- 38:00 the day so they'd know that we were British. And I didn't know the knack of putting it up the. But anyhow, other aircraft around me fired off the colours of the day and we got back alright. But I soon learnt how to put the Verey cartridge up the...In where it fitted through the roof.

- 38:30 And then we had another night when we were dropping practice bombs on a bombing range when someone above us nearly dropped their practice bombs on us and we should've learnt a lesson there but we didn't. What happened on ops [operations]? Well, when we finished our operational
- 39:00 training in Wellingtons we then had to go to conversion unit and for the pilot to learn to fly a 4 engine bomber and there we flew Halifaxes. The place was called Sandtoft which had the nickname of Pranktoft because of the number of crashed. They were old Halifaxes
- 39:30 and a lot of them crashed. And one of the factors was that the pilots perhaps used to press on so that they'd finish their course when perhaps they should've returned. But my young pilot, if there was anything wrong, we flew back and landed instead of pressing on to do
- 40:00 our cross-country. Well, after we'd qualified in flying 4 engine bombers we then went to Hemswell where the Lanc [Lancaster] finishing school. And because of weather, put all the courses behind my pilot, was only shown the cockpit of the Lancaster and explained where things
- 40:30 were and told to take us off for a flight. So he flew a Lancaster without any dual training whatsoever. But he was a brilliant pilot. And from there we were posted to the Squadron.

Right. Do you want to stop there and we'll change the...

Tape 7

- 00:30 Just the first.
- Hold it. No sorry. Just that happens. Okay, yes your first operation.**
- The first operation. The detail would explain what most operations were like.
- Okay, well you can tell us about that.**
- Well,
- 01:00 we were one of quite a number of crews from 550 squadron that had to join crews from other squadrons from all over Great Britain at Redding. Where, according to my navigator, they went swish-bang-pop as they run into one another. And then we went down to Eastbourne, and from Eastbourne
- 01:30 across the Channel to France. Twilight came and it was eerie to see the grey shapes of Lancasters all around us. We had pride in the fact that we were in a such a fleet that we thought would eventually win the war over Europe, we had.
- 02:00 Well, the next thing it came pitch black and we could've been anywhere and occasionally we'd feel the reassuring bump from the slip stream of another Lancaster. Hoping that there wouldn't be a collision. After a while we hadn't received any bumps in the slip stream
- 02:30 but we knew...I knew we were on course because as I looked down below there was the silver ribbon of the Rhine River below. It had been an easy trip so far till the turn to the target when ahead there was a wall of search lights and flack that seemed that you couldn't penetrate
- 03:00 safely. I said to myself we'll have to be the same as the Anzacs at Gallipoli if we're going to press on and bomb the target. Just behind us another Lancaster hit the deck as incendiaries billing over a long area. It had fallen victim to a fighter. We knew the fighter could catch us up before we
- 03:30 got near the target. As we got closer there were gaps in the search lights and we flew through them using a blazing bomber as cover we proceeded on our way. The flack was both barrage and predicted. Barrage was flack thrown up to the height that they thought the aircraft'd be. Predicted was radar controlled and hit any aircraft
- 04:00 that they fired at. We saw several Lancasters. Saw one get hit turn on it's back and crash into the ground. Then we were making our slow run to the target and the bomb aimer said, "I've got a hang up skip." And the skip said "Well, we'll just go around again." He wasn't worried about
- 04:30 the flack or anything. If I'd been pilot I would've turned right to where the skies were darker. But he turned left and flew back in a parallel course. Lancasters were going swish, swish, swish, passing us on both sides missing us by inches. Evidently, wondered what silly fools were flying in the wrong direction. The bomb aimer had the best view of that
- 05:00 from his fish bowl in the front of the bomber. Just as we were about to turn to go back to our original course the grey shape of a German bomber flew overhead. I was standing in the astrodome and could see it's bold German markings. At the same time
- 05:30 the rear gunner spotted a twin-engine bomber German fighter and at that time the Germans often used two fighters. One to draw your attention and the other to slip in for a kill. But anyhow, we made our

second bombing run without any trouble. Got back. I thought the pilot

- 06:00 would've got commended for what he did but the flight commander reprimanded him for taking unnecessary risks and reminding him that a Lancaster bomber costs hundreds of thousands of pounds. And that the air crew all,
- 06:30 in their training of one air crew was enough to send three men to either Oxford or Cambridge for three years. And although the skipper was told not to do it again I think he must, unlike Nelson that had a blind eye he must o' been deaf in one ear. And that was our,
- 07:00 virtually our...When we got back there was a Canadian pilot that was almost finished his tour said, "You'll always remember your first whether it be a naughty or an op." And when he saw how young the crew was he said, "But they're not all as tough as that. You've been to the third most heavily defended target in Germany and survived and that all goes well for the future."
- 07:30 We then had a series of operations to... First of all we had to bomb airfields in Holland and at night and you had to bomb them before the German planes got up to attack you and then we had to bomb
- 08:00 the ack-ack [anti aircraft guns] positions on Vlissingen Island so that transports that were taking paratroopers would have a safe flight without being shot
- 08:30 down by ack-ack fire. But as we were making our run there, looked up and there was an aircraft above us about to drop its bombs. So we hadn't learned anything from experience at operational training unit. But we both weaved to the left and the bombs from the one above fell on both sides of us. And then
- 09:00 we didn't take any notice about flying lower because the next trip to Calais. We were ordered down to bomb from 3,000 feet and we bombed from 2,000 feet to ensure of accuracy. And we were pictured by another aircraft from another squadron flying so low.
- 09:30 Then we had a daylight to... Well, we had the trip to Paris that never. Not to Paris, to Calais, that never counted as an op. Although we flew in a hundred mile an hour gales and terrible weather, and was shot at over the target because we were told not to drop our
- 10:00 bombs, it never counted as an op. But it was one of the most dangerous flights we had during our tour of ops. We had a daylight to Emmerich where we flew in a gaggle just as geese fly at staggered heights. Saw a lot of our own
- 10:30 fighters shot down. Some German fighters shot down. Quite a few of our own planes shot down. We landed, we were diverted because of fog to a Polish squadron where we landed but we had a hang up. We had a 500 pound bomb on board. We'd hedge-hopped over France which was pretty bumpy getting there, but when we landed the bomb
- 11:00 aimer told one of the Irks that was there. He said, "We've got a 500 pound bomb on board. " He didn't believe us but when he saw it he took off on a bomber train. I've never seen one go as fast to get the armourer officer to come so that they could dismantle the bomb from the
- 11:30 plane. And on that occasion the intelligence officer was Polish. He had difficulty enough in understanding English let alone in understanding the arguments of the crew in what they saw and what they didn't see. Some of them got real annoyed.
- 12:00 But they didn't stop to think that not everyone'd be looking in the one direction at the one time. Well, then we come to a daylight to Duisburg. I'd never heard of Duisburg but Duisburg is on the junction of the Rhine and Ruhr River. And the river
- 12:30 system was the main transport system in Germany. It also had a rail transport links but it produced coke and synthetic oil steel works so it was quite an important target. But in daylight over the
- 13:00 target there was a Lancaster behind us that passed us as if we were standing still. I thought it couldn't have a bomb load but it got a length and a half in front of us and it was blown out of the sky. And then another Lancaster, flying almost wing tip to wing tip with us, got hit and out of the smoke and fire came half a body on a parachute. And I counted 12 Lancasters shot
- 13:30 down. I said as we left the target, "That's been a good prang." The bombing's been accurate but we were sent back to the same target that night. So we operated we were on duty for 28 hours. Luckily, on top of that we were given leave and the navigator and I went up to Edinburgh
- 14:00 where we talked about Australian hit tunes and everything and didn't worry about operations. Well, the first operation when we came back was daylight to Essen. And Essen was regarded by the experienced bombing crews
- 14:30 as the most heavily defended target in Germany. But luckily, when we flew to Essen there was cloud cover and it ended up rather an easy trip. Then we had three trips to Cologne. The first, a daylight on the 28th of December, my brother's birthday. It was a lovely sunny day and Cologne's a beautiful city from the air and it seemed a

15:00 pity to bomb it but they started firing at us so we knew that there was a war on. Couple of crews deliberately tried to bomb the cathedral which stands up so well and such a mark. But because of a bit of flack the first bomber weaved and it was inaccurate and the second bomber dropped his bombs short

15:30 and neither hit the target. We were to bomb the railway yards, which were a bit further on. The flack was much more accurate. Much more heavy down where we had to bomb. But we bombed alright but when we got back there was quite a lot of holes in our plane. We were then sent to Cologne the

16:00 next night. As I was getting in the plane I picked up the parachute by the ripcord instead of the handle and I didn't have a parachute. Danny said he'd take me down on his back if anything happened. So I flew to Cologne without a parachute. But there was cloud over the target and it was a fairly easy trip. The next night we were sent to Cologne again.

16:30 It was also cloudy but the Germans fired up that much barrage flack at us. They were a bit annoyed that we'd attacked them three nights in a row and when I was going down to see that the photo flare had dropped at the same time as our bombs, we were getting holed on both sides of us. It was just like

17:00 being in no man's land 20,000 feet above the earth. But quick flash of the torch and I saw that it was only fabric damage so I didn't bother to let the crew know. And the next day they were very surprised to see the amount of holes in the aircraft. Our next two trips there was

17:30 one to Dusseldorf but during the morning we had to do fighter affiliation. You go up with... You have a camera in the gunner's... Both have cameras and the attacking Spitfire has a camera and it's to see if he shoots you down. And the escape is Lancaster corkscrews

18:00 where it's like a corkscrew but no one did them faster or steeper and that than my pilot. And when you got back after doing them you felt, like I'd said in me diary, a washed out doll. I don't know what that felt like but you didn't feel too good at all. And then surprisingly we found that we were on a battle order for a night operation and when we got over the English Channel.

18:30 The gunners went to fire their guns and because of electrical fault they couldn't fire them but the skipper decided to press on to the target without the guns. We got to... As we got to the target we had to dodge a Lancaster that was doing evasive action that was being attacked by a fighter.

19:00 Well, we bombed the target alright but the route out of the target was one of the only times that I felt bomber command had made a mistake. They routed us between two defensive areas where if you got about a hundred yards one side or the other you were caught in search lights and had to escape them by

19:30 bomber command, by Lancaster corkscrews. Then for the first time on ops, when we got over France, the pilot put the Lancaster onto automatic control. And for some unknown reason he decided to take it off and we were flying through

20:00 murk and gloom when another Lancaster in front of us was flying straight at us and the pilot caused our aircraft to dive. I was standing in the astrodome and ducked. I thought I was gonna get me head taken off and the Lancaster that was going in the wrong direction run slap bang into a Lancaster behind us. And both hitting at over 200 miles an hour was an horrific crash. And my skipper

20:30 thought that that was the closest we came to death during the whole of our trips. Next raid was to Bochum and when we got it was at the back of the Ruhr... to the Ruhr. The skipper decided to fly around a searchlight belt that we were briefed to fly over. That put us

21:00 a little bit behind time and when we were getting close to Bochum there were two lots of searchlights. We're told to never fly between two cones of searchlights and the skipper decided to do that to catch up time. We got just between the two belts of searchlights when the blue master searchlight switched on us and we were

21:30 caught. Usually, if you got caught you got shot down by a German fighter from above or from radar controlled flack. The mid upper gunner said, "Blue searchlight skip." And the skipper already had our plane in an almost, a perpendicular dive flat out. We reached a speed of 410 miles an hour

22:00 which was over the stress factor for a Lancaster. Momentarily, I thought he wasn't gonna pull us out of the dive about 2,000 feet from the ground. And here we are over the heart of the Ruhr, most heavily defended part of Germany, flying at 2,000 feet and we had a work our way up dodging searchlights til we got to about 18,000 feet.

22:30 We saw what a lot would a thought was scarecrows. That was a device thrown up by the Germans to make it look like a bomber throwing, blown up, but they were mainly bombers blowing up. Well, just after we'd dropped our bombs,

23:00 over the intercom the skippers voice comes, "Oh my legs, oh my legs." We thought he'd been hit in the legs. And I got out into the passageway and there was the skipper sitting in a crouching position his seat has collapsed. He said, "Quick Ken, me seat's collapsed." And Ken the engineer fixed the seat up in no time. Well, the flight back to England was alright until we

23:30 got to our airfield and then the skipper said to Wilkie, the bomb aimer, "Lie down in front. I can't see out of the windscreen because of oil. Tell me when to land." The skipper made a perfect landing without any, well, without any advice from Wilkie. The next day when we had a look at

24:00 the plane there was ripples in the outside the fabric of the plane. When we got onto the plane there was a split in the main spar and the engineers said all this. And it was leaking turrets that caused the

24:30 oil on the skipper's windscreen. He said that was all caused by our dive to survive. Well, after that raid we'd done the 17 ops at 550 Squadron. We were posted to RAF [Royal Air Force] Hemswell to 150.

25:00 No, we were posted to Fiskerton with 150 Squadron. We were issued with another Lancaster. This we do to two. We weren't on the first op from 150 Squadron. We were on the second op which was to a place called Düren. We had to

25:30 bomb the city so that the army could go through the place without any trouble. I logged everything the master bomber said again and...Which means that I've forgotten one important op we flew early in the piece which was

26:00 to Vlissingen Island. Probably the most important op that the crew flew. But anyhow, from Düren the G-set [navigational device] had packed up and the navigator...I had to take loop bearings to find out how to get back. I took loop bearings from two different stations and where the lines crossed was where we actually were. The

26:30 navigator didn't like what I gave him so I had to take four more loop bearings which were all the same as me first. That gave the navigator an idea of where we actually were. So we were able to fly back to our station alright. But going back to

27:00 Vorkeran Island for our...We had to bomb a dyke wall that was only about 60 feet wide where there were about 4 anti aircraft guns whose gunfire was worse than what the,

27:30 more dangerous than what the dam busters had to face with just machine gun fire. We were in the tenth wave and there were tremendous lot'a bombers, hundreds of bombers that had bombed before us and the dyke wall was

28:00 still intact. We made 6 runs over the target. Every time we made a run a whisper of cloud'd get in the way and we weren't able to bomb but finally we got lower and lower each time. And finally we bombed from just below 4,000 feet and we got

28:30 buffeted by our own bombs. But we reached the dyke wall and the water started pouring into the island. When we got, was leaving the island I saw some ack-ack

29:00 fire was very close. And I saw a blue stream from an aircraft falling to the sea and we'd lost our hydraulic oil but I didn't know that at the time. When we got back to the Squadron we weren't able to put our wheels of the plane down.

29:30 The engineer used a couple of flasks of coffee that we hadn't used. Put them into the little tank between him and the pilot and that acted enough to get the wheels down. The

30:00 pilot then did some aerobatics to make sure everything was all right and then we found that we couldn't put flaps down and flaps, when an aircraft's going in to land, act as brakes. So we were diverted to an emergency airfield where the runway was about a

30:30 mile long and pretty well as wide as a normal runway. Along the... Where you're coming in to land there were wrecks of Lancasters. You wondered how they ever got them back but we landed. We took the whole length of the runway before we were able to stop. If the pilot had put on the brakes

31:00 he could'a tipped the Lancaster over. But anyhow, we landed. We went to the pictures that night. The engineer found out that the reason was we'd lost our hydraulic oil the pipe,

31:30 that had the hydraulic oil, had been pierced and they had to send back to North Killingholme to get another pipe. So we were there the next day and we went into Briglington,

32:00 unshaven, not regimentally dressed. We went to the amusement parlour and Danny was telling the girls that we'd bailed out and I was telling them we ditched and they reckoned they knew we were both pulling their legs. We ended up going to a little village dance and the service police was there and Buck said, "They'd like to arrest us but they're not game in case we're heroes. Just as well

32:30 they don't know we're just an ordinary crew." Well, anyhow they fixed the aircraft up and we flew back to North Killingholme. They thought we'd been, well, they thought we'd been bludging and we should've been back earlier. But, so they put us on a battle order

33:00 for that night and we flew on. The battle order down to the south of Germany. We were diverted to an American Squadron we were just given after having nothing for about 10 hours. We were just given a cup of coffee and given a blanket to sleep on the floor, hard floor of the officers mess. Got back to North

Killingholme

33:30 the next day and when they read my log book that recorded everything, the master bomber said we were all recommended for decorations. That never came about because there were other crews that had done two tours and a lot of ops. But that was way back at North Killingholme. How

34:00 how much do you want to go because?

No that's fine I've got a few questions to ask you. Stop for a second (interruption). What was it like to conduct operations in the day as opposed to operations in night?

Well.

Which was more dangerous?

That's difficult to

34:30 say. Daylight, the enemy fighters could see you. The ack-ack gunners could see you. But usually the targets weren't as dangerous.

35:00 **What about at nighttime?**

Well, most of them were at night so you got used to it.

What sort of German fighters did you encounter?

Focke-Wulf 190s. They were the one's that used to

35:30 be above the blue searchlights and come down on you. The Messerschmitts 109's, JU-88's [fighter plane] which, had a cannon that fired upwards. They'd get underneath you and in your blind spot and with an upward firing cannon shoot you down and you wouldn't know what hit you. You had to look out for those really.

36:00 **Did you ever encounter a JU-88 trying to do that to your plane?**

We saw a few JU-88's but none that were really underneath us ready to fire.

What about a ME-262 Jet Fighter?

Well, the only we saw jet fighters on

36:30 the Bochum trip where they looked like an orange streak across the sky. We saw them on a raid to Duisburg where they were just like a shooting star. And then they'd cut off their engines and glide onto the target because they'd be going too fast to see the bombers and would want to reduce their speed. And then on our 35th trip to

37:00 Pforzheim we were attacked by German jet fighters all the way from the target to the French border. But I haven't come to that.

Well, you can tell us about that.

Well, there's a lot a trips I could tell you about. There's Nuremberg, Munich.

37:30 **Which was the most heavily defended city?**

Well, Berlin, but we never had a go there luckily. Then there'd be Essen where we went in daylight. Then there'd be Frankfurt, which was our first trip. And Duisburg was always a nasty spot. We went there three or four times.

38:00 **Dresden?**

Dresden had nothing. They'd taken all the guns away to use as anti-tank guns for the army.

Dresden didn't have a proper anti-aircraft defence?

No.

Is that why it was easy to destroy?

No, it was...

38:30 probably why it was easy to destroy was that it had wooden buildings and the incendiaries caused fires. It was surprising to the air crew that bombed it that there was so much damage done.

39:00 **What types of flack did you encounter?**

Well, there were only two types that we knew of. Barrage that was thrown up to the same height as you were and there was radar controlled which usually hit anything they fired at.

That was known to be quite accurate was it?

Yeah.

What sort

39:30 **of altitude could it hit a plane at?**

Pardon?

What sort of altitude could it reach the radar guided flack?

Well, I would think normally it'd be about 20,000 feet but we used to fly at about 22,000 feet.

Did you fly higher than that to drop bombs?

We flew at

40:00 22,000 feet and dropped our bombs from that.

How often did you come across encounters where you almost collided with other planes? Was that a frequent occurrence?

Happened on pretty well every trip.

What percentage of casualties from collisions, from your squadron alone?

I wouldn't know

40:30 on percentages.

Well, on the flights you went on with your squadrons, with the respective squadrons, that you were with. How often did the collisions take place?

Well, you wouldn't know when you came back. And after briefing you wouldn't know what was the 'cause of a lot of

41:00 your planes not getting back. I know some, there were collisions in our own circuit because the stations were so close to one another that often a Lancaster from another squadron and your Lancaster would crash over your

41:30 airfield or in the vicinity of your airfield.

Well, we have to stop the tape now and change over.

Tape 8

00:30 **Alright, we're talking about your operations and stuff?**

Well, second trip from 150 squadron from Fiskerton was to a place called Vennikel. The weather was terrible. It was misty rain very hard to hear the wireless messages.

01:00 The Ruhr defences were blunted a little bit by the overcast sky but over the Ruhr we got shot at and not long after that the bomb aimers voice came over the intercom, "I've been hit Skip." Well, that frightened the lot of us. The skipper said to the engineer, "Go down and have a look Ken," and Ken's

01:30 voice came back not long afterwards, "It's only that his Mae West [life jacket] has blown up." What had happened, his Mae West had blown up and underneath the parachute it had gone tight and hurt where it shouldn't. And Wilkie, the bomb aimer, said he thought he'd been hit and the blood would come later. But

02:00 anyhow, that didn't stop him from bombing accurately at Vennikel which the target which the... All targets were always hard to hit. And it was hard to see it because of the gloom and that. But after we'd bombed there was a terrific explosion and we knew that our bombing had been successful. I'll press on to

02:30 we were posted back to RAF Hemswell and our first operation which was the second of the squadron from Hemswell was to Dortmund. And it was a daylight and we were routed over the Dortmund-Ems Canal which was just bristling with anti-aircraft guns. But we managed to get over the Dortmund-Ems Canal,

03:00 drop our bombs, and be away before anything happened. And other crews, when they got back, they were talking and they were asking us what we thought of the flack and we said it wasn't much. And they reckoned that FO [Flight Officer] Mark's crew would think that there was no flack unless it was thick enough that you could get out and walk on. But

03:30 then I suppose we were in a hurry. We were briefed to fly to Koblenz and it... The Germans had lit up a dummy target before

04:00 got to Koblenz but the navigator said, "That's not where to bomb." We got to the target early and we had to stooge around till the pathfinders had marked the target and bomb. Then we flew on New Years Eve to a place called Osterfeld. It was

04:30 virtually a suburb of Essen and we had to fly with the wing commander of the squadron to make up for the trip my skipper had flown as a second dickie. Then, on that particular trip we got the best aiming point of the whole of the group. And we got a

05:00 big write up in the squadron and everywhere because it happened to be the wing commander as the pilot. It was nothing new for us to get an aiming point but I can remember when we landed the wing commander was greeted by a girl dressed as a servant girl with long black

05:30 stockings and a white apron and that. She was dressed, she gave the wing commander a kiss and she was dressed up for the fancy dress ball or dance that night in the WAAF quarters. I said, "Lucky to be

06:00 greeted with a kiss like that." And he said, "If you were a wing commander you might get a kiss. And besides our wing commander's a very nice chap." But much as we would've like to have gone to the dance that night we knew that we only had a three operations to go so we

06:30 all went to bed. We were a very disciplined crew. There was another trip. We were briefed to go to Gelsenkirchen. Engines of plane, there was something wrong with them and it took a while to fix up and they weren't fixed up till just after deadline and the skipper took

07:00 tremendous risk. He decided to fly...Decided to taxi across the airfield and the airfield had luckily been frozen as hard as anything by ice and we were able to taxi across the airfield. We took off against a red light so that we could fly to the target and instead a

07:30 going the way that we were briefed, in all sorts a directions to fool the Germans, we flew straight to the target. We got to Gelsenkirchen early. It hadn't been bombed. The target hadn't been marked. So we flew straight across Gelsenkirchen, around and in at

08:00 the back of all the other aircraft and one of the last to bombers. But we flew home, direct to, and was one of the first home. Our last three trips, the first was to Nuremberg and as far as we knew Nuremberg hadn't been bombed since they lost over a hundred

08:30 aircraft and 700 airmen were casualties that night. There wasn't the usual frivolity with the crew going out to the aircraft. The only one that was his unchirpy self was the mid upper gunner. There was no impromptu

09:00 baseball games before we got on the aircraft and when I got on the aircraft and was tuning in the radio and that I said to meself, "Well someone's got to get back from this operation. If anyone get's back it'll be us." And we were taxiing off watched by the air officer commanding the whole group and the mid upper gunner said,

09:30 "Skip Danny hasn't spat on the tail plane." He used to spit on the... Spat on the tail plane for the first operation much to the teasing of the rest of the crew but he did it for every op and he'd forgotten. So the skipper stopped the aircraft and said "Danny get out and do so." Well, Buck and I helped him out the back door. It took 2 or 3 spits before he hit the

10:00 tail plane because of the slip stream. We helped him back on board and we took off and that sort of relieved the tension of the crew for the trip. Well, we flew out at 10,000 feet and just before we got to Stuttgart we had to climb up to bombing height of 20,000. Well, in front of us there was great big

10:30 cumulous clouds and we were told never to fly in them. But the skipper thought to be on time we'd better. So he flew through the cumulous cloud and it was just like being caught in a super natural grip. We couldn't go up or down. The engineer worked like a beaver with heaters and everything. And the pilot put the nose of the Lancaster down

11:00 and we're full power but strangely enough we broke through the top of the cloud. Then the engineer had to retune the motors. But we flew at a fast speed than we were briefed to do so. Which meant that we got to the target three and a half minutes early. Well, the skipper said, "I'm not hanging around a dangerous target like Nuremberg." He said, "I'll go down to

11:30 10,000 feet and bomb." Well, 10,000 feet over a target reputed to have such good anti-aircraft fire as Nuremberg was pretty dangerous. And we were told that if the target hadn't been marked, this was at briefing, just to pick out the biggest building and drop our bombs

12:00 on it because it was a raid against Nazi propaganda and that as well as hitting the rail yards and that sort of thing. And I thought that it was just like a Christmas scene down so low with strange banners flying from the windows

- 12:30 and snow on the ground. It seemed a pity to bomb such a Christmas like scene and I thought the bomb aimer was never gonna drop his bombs. And I said to him after the war, "My nerves must a been very bad that night," and he said, "No, I kept seeing a bigger building come up." Well, the lights of a far distant suburb was on when we dropped our bombs. It was like you pressed a switch and switched
- 13:00 off the lights. We were the first to bomb. Flying about quarter of a mile to the right of us was another Lancaster and it then dropped it's bombs. But that's not how the report come out for the squadron. They had us bombing early but I think they took the time that we
- 13:30 first arrived at the target. And Nuremberg is only one of two raids that gave me nightmares. Not because of what happened but what could've happened. And then our last raid to finish our tour of 30 was to Duisburg and I thought, "Fancy Duisburg."
- 14:00 Which is one target I didn't like to go to. But it was no worse than usual. But we saw a Lancaster get hit approaching the target and we were about 30 miles out from having bombed. And that was a crew that held a mate's mine,
- 14:30 young Mac or young McDonald, that I nearly crewed up with. We'd had dinner with his crew the night before. His skipper had only not long been married and married to a lovely girl and it was very sad to learn of that.

We'll just stop for one second Frank. (interruption) Okay.

Volunteered to

- 15:00 do five more. I didn't volunteer immediately. The skipper told me I'd be near me girlfriend in Skunthorpe. The navigator told me that we were more likely to get a promotion or a decoration. The bomb aimer told me that
- 15:30 there wasn't as much discipline on a squadron. The mid upper gunner told me the food was better. And then Danny, the rear gunner, properly put up the best argument of the lot. He said, "You mightn't be much of a wireless operator but we need you." And I said I'd go back to me bed and think about it and let them know at lunchtime. Well, I went back and laid down on the bed
- 16:00 and over the services radio program Vera Lynne was singing the White Cliffs of Dover and when she said, "And Jimmy will sleep again in his own little bed again." I thought, "Well, I'll join them in flying the extra ops."
- 16:30 We were told that we could pick our own targets and take a while in doing the operations but that's not as it turned out. Our first operation in our voluntary ones was to Dresden, which meant a 28-hour day. Nine and a half hour trip it was. The next night
- 17:00 to Schweinitz, almost as equally as long a trip and as long a day and we were the only crew from bomber command to get an aiming point at Schweinitz. Because all the crews were tired and there was cloud about and wind and they decided to drop sky markets to bomb on and the navigator knew where
- 17:30 the railway station was. And we pressed on and the only one to bomb the railway station. And then the next week we had Dortmund and Duisburg in the one week and they were two tough Ruhr targets. Dortmund, we flew home on three engines. We used the flight commanders
- 18:00 plane to fly to Duisburg and that was an interesting trip because we'd been briefed to go to Pforzheim. And when we got out to the aircraft the navigators were recalled and told that the target was Duisburg. Our navigator came back and the skipper said, "What's the target
- 18:30 Bill?" And he said, "Duisburg, but don't tell Frank. He doesn't like the place." So, and then we bombed Pforzheim, but the briefing was exactly the same as the night before for Pforzheim. And I
- 19:00 had an apprehension that things wouldn't...The Germans'd know what was coming and that was pretty. So we flew out. We were told to fly at 3,000 feet to prevent the German radar picking us up but we just skimmed the waves of the channel. Had to climb up to go over the cliffs of France.
- 19:30 Hedge-hopped over France till we got to Germany where we got up to 8,000 feet where we were to bomb. It was a bright moonlight night. You could see a tremendous distance ahead. The searchlights were already on and the Germans, were circling at about 22,000 feet above the target and we saw a
- 20:00 Lancaster get hit. Lose one engine, put the fire out, and still circle the target. Saw a fighter come out of cloud and put another engine out of action. And it still circled the target and we were seeing the early things that caused
- 20:30 the master bomber of the raid, Captain Edwins-Wales, received the Victoria Cross. He was the last airman to receive the Victoria Cross for the war. And when we saw a couple of Lancasters get hit and go on and airmen bail out of them as we were leaving the target I said,
- 21:00 "Thank goodness we've bombed. It'll only get worse and we should be able to fly home without any trouble." And they were words expressed too soon because we saw what I thought was rockets fired up

and the seven of them started to follow us in flight.

- 21:30 They attacked from... The three attacked from the rear and the skipper put the, after being told about it by the rear gunner, put the Lancaster in a bomber dive starboard and the...I thought they were rockets
- 22:00 but they were actually jet fighters. They went off past us to the left and then they turned very slowly to come in and again attack us from the rear and we were attacked by fighters either singly or more than one at a time all the way
- 22:30 from the target to the French border. It was funny at times. You'd see the all the navigators maps and that fly up to the ceiling and crash down. I found it very exhilarating but I knew that they were hell bent on destroying us. When we got o the French border
- 23:00 the attacks ceased but our dickie engine that had packed up on the Dortmund raid packed up again and we flew home on three engines. We were the first back on three engines but we were lucky that the engine had hung out long enough to survive the attacks by the
- 23:30 jet fighters.

How much fear do you have on an operation?

Pardon?

How much fear is there on an operation? Fear? Do you have fear on an operation?

Probably not. The only time I had, was had fear about an operation was the daylight to Duisburg when 12 Lancasters blew up all around us and

- 24:00 the raid to Nuremberg where I thought we'd be blown out of the sky at any moment.

When you see those bombers blown out of the sky around you is it luck, or skill, or chance that you survive?

Pardon?

When you see all those planes destroyed around you why do you think you weren't hit?

I think we had a guardian angel looking after us.

- 24:30 **When you're on an operation as well and you're bombing. Does the thought of the people you're bombing come to mind at all or how do you approach it?**

No. You can't see the people. It's not like in the army where you see the person you're going

- 25:00 to shoot or bayonet. You don't see the people so you don't think about them. You think more of the target you're going to hit. Whether it be marshalling yards an oil distillery munition works or whatever. That's all you concentrate on and you know that whatever you're doing's

- 25:30 going to end the war quicker or you hope it's going to end the war quicker.

Do you think that that physical distance that you're away from your target helps you in a way cope with what's happening on the ground?

I s'pose the distance. You don't see the people you bomb.

LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre] was a

- 26:00 **big issue. What are your thoughts on it?**

Well, LMF. If I'd had quite a number of raids in succession like the daylight to Duisburg and that, I'm not sure how I would a reacted whether I would've

- 26:30 gone LMF or not. So I have sympathy with the people that went LMF. And when I went to see Bill Wilkie the night after he'd bailed out over Cologne I saw his adjutant. And his adjutant, there's a lad on the station that used to stay at Wilkies when he was

- 27:00 at Number 1 WAGS [Wireless Air Gunners] in Ballarat. He said, "He's gone LMF. Seeing you're volunteered to do five operations will you try and persuade him to keep flying." Well, I had a talk to him. He'd just married a lovely looking land army girl. He was a bundle of nerves.

- 27:30 I thought, "Well, he'd be no good to any crew that he flew with because of his nerves." So I didn't try to persuade him to fly on operations.

How harsh do you think it was branding someone LMF?

Well, in a sense it wasn't harsh because the war was so close to Great Britain they couldn't

- 28:00 afford to have people going LMF. They had to have them flying. The Yanks were different. The war

wasn't as close to them. Their medical staff monitored the health of the air crew and if they looked like getting nervy they'd give them extra leave.

28:30 **With earlier you said you suffered nightmares after the war?**

Yes.

Can you go into that and what affects you had after the war?

Well, the Duisburg raid with half a body on a parachute coming out of the smoke, and fire, and twelve aircraft blowing up all around us

29:00 wasn't very pleasant. Well, that gave me nightmares but I had more nightmares about the Nuremberg raid where I thought the bomb aimer was never going to drop his bombs and we'd be blown out of the sky at any moment. And the nightmare still existed in 1970

29:30 when I married Molly. She knew that I used to wake up with nightmares at the time.

Did they affect your daily living?

Not immediately but towards the end of my...When I was getting near retirement

30:00 the pressure of work and I s'pose the fact of my life in the air force all had an effect. There is a book called "Terror by Night" and the chappie that wrote it was a very good pilot in Halifax but when

30:30 he was discharged from the RAF he wasn't able to accept the responsibility of a job. And they blamed that onto his war service and they said that there were other people that went a lot longer before it all caught up with them. And I think it didn't catch up with me till just before I retired.

At it's worst, how did it

31:00 **affect you?**

Well, had a heart attack to start with. But the heart attack was just after I got back from England. That was a world trip that was a pretty hectic trip and I was supposed to have another few weeks leave and I was recalled because the assistant manager wanted to go over

31:30 to America on a holiday. So.

Did you find it hard to adjust when you came home?

Adjust to work, yes, but not adjust to study. The first exam that I sat for was banking finance and foreign exchange and I got third in Victoria and one'a me other early exams

32:00 were company law and I got first in Victoria.

How did you feel about leaving the air force?

Well, you virtually had not choice and actually I was pleased to get home. I was a home loving boy and

32:30 it was great to get home to my mother's cooking and warm baths and sport and...

Did you miss flying?

No. I liked flying. I was given the opportunity to learn to fly at the aero club in Ballarat but

33:00 I thought I'd risked me life enough that there was enough you could do and you're bound to run out a luck at sometime.

On the planes that bombed Hiroshima, and so with the nuclear bomb, the atom bomb, a lot of those guys had a lot of emotional problems and

33:30 **so on. Can you understand that from what you experienced?**

Well, I s'pose some of them could. But I would've only been too pleased to drop a bomb on Hiroshima and ended the war quickly because that was gonna result in a lot of saving of human life both of the allies and the

34:00 Japanese. There would a been a horrific loss of life if they'd had to tackle Japan like they did on D-Day in Europe.

What do you miss most about the war?

The war?

34:30 Well, I don't think I miss anything about the war. I'm a peaceful person and I like to be home. The war would've... It upset my study, it upset my, well, it upset me getting married unless I married an English

35:00 girl and I wanted to get married and have a family and...

When you look back, were the war years the memories that stand out in your mind? Do you remember the war years most?

Yes, because

35:30 well, when you come close to death quite a number of times you must remember those times. And then I s'pose you remembered the good times, your romances and the happy occasions with the crew and that sort of thing, and the friends you made over in England. There were quite

36:00 a lot of things that were good.

Nowadays they have a lot of counselling for war vets and army personnel. Was that available during your time during the war and would you have taken it if they asked?

No, that wasn't available in my day. As a matter of fact with

36:30 the veterans affairs I thought you'd only had to apply and they'd give you a pension but I had to go before a tribunal and I was one of the first to get heart accepted because of stress during the war. But I had a

37:00 very good...I had Professor Burrows from Melbourne that gave a very good report and had a very good advocate from Ballarat Legacy that helped me.

How did you overcome your nightmares?

I think they just went as a matter of time.

But it took many many

37:30 **years?**

Yes. I s'pose as you got involved in other things. I s'pose getting married was one thing that helped me.

What were your emotions when it was all said and done in Europe and there was final victory?

Well,

38:00 my emotions on VE [Victory in Europe] day we were told about the cessation of the war by Wing Commander Doubleday at Litchfield Operational Training Unit and we were given leave. Well, I hitched, hiked up to Derby where the trains were stopped.

38:30 People had gone on leave. The buses were stopped. I wandered through Derby. I went through the quickest way in a straight line to go to railway station and went through a street and there were union jacks everywhere and garlands on the doors just like the soccer garlands of today. But

39:00 they were probably...It was the Derbyshire rifles regiment's colours. Got to the railway station and no trains. Couldn't hitch hike, ended up catching a late train. Got to Doncaster. Couldn't get to Skunthorpe that night to see the girlfriend. In Doncaster there was Jack Eustace or Jack

39:30 Useless as we called him. He was from the Sundee School He'd just was almost finished his course at Litchfield. He was already half drunk. He must'a got there early. Must'a had better ways of travelling than me and we were carried shoulder high through Doncaster. Then they did

40:00 ring a ring a rosy around us singing Waltzing Matilda. And then Jack went to a pub to meet his girlfriend who I said was an old crow. But they were getting stuck into the grog but I was a teetotaller and just had to have lemonades. But the pub was just really like a pub on a grand final night

40:30 for football these days. But everyone was on the same side so there was much excitement and revelry. And anyhow, I went to bed around I s'pose about 2 o'clock in the morning in the pub that I was at. And caught the train to Skunthorpe the next day.

41:00 And that night they had parties in the street. They broadcast into the street. Me girlfriend lifted a gramophone from an upstairs window. There was dancing. We went round to another street where they'd lowered a piano down from a top stairs room and they started dancing. But all over Great Britain similar scenes happened.

41:30 Well, me navigator, he went to a little village in

Frank we've only got about 10-seconds left. Is there anything you would like to say about anything you want?